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on Design Support  
for SMEs

## **Case Study of Good Design Support Practice**

This case study is a snapshot of activities taking place during the lifespan of the SEEdesign project from 2005 to 2007. For updated information please contact the organisations directly.

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**PROJECT PART-FINANCED  
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Italy

# Ceramics workshop in Tunisia

Experimental Centre for Furniture and Furnishing (CSM)

This ceramics workshop, coordinated by the Centro Sperimentale Del Mobile e Dell'arredamento (CSM), took place in Sousse, Tunisia in 2007.

The result of cooperation between partner regions involved in the home/habitat section of the Interreg IIB Euromedys programme, the partners were from the University of Florence, Industrial Design (Tuscany), University of Naples (Campania), ESBAM – Ecole des Beaux Arts – Marseille (France), and Ecole des Beaux Arts – Sousse (Tunisia). The workshop focussed on formal innovation within a traditional sector and involved 5 students from each college as well as teachers and assistants acting as coordinators from each country.

The workshop, held from 3–11 March 2007, took several months to prepare. 30 design proposals were created during the week, 10 of which were then developed as prototypes by Tunisian artisans. These were exhibited in Florence alongside home and furniture products by famous designers from some Southern Mediterranean (Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria) and Northern Mediterranean countries for one week from 5 July 2007.

The overall objective was to develop formal innovation scenarios for companies working in the home and furniture sectors. Specifically, the participants looked at a traditional design sector and collaborated to produce innovative designs which could then be developed by artisans and manufacturers in Tunisia.

The workshop encouraged traditional manufacturers and makers to reinterpret their products, to innovate and activate competition. For the students the aim was to reconsider traditional design standards and stimulate innovative approaches. Consideration was also given to the consumer's understanding of euro-Mediterranean products.

The Euromedys project, which represents about 10% of CSM's work, is run by them on behalf of the government of the Tuscany Region. It is considered

an important part of their work because of the cooperation content and the workshop methodology that they applied. One of the most important aspects is finding ways to innovate in traditional sectors, not only in Italy but also abroad.

There were 4 stages to the process:

1. Selection of 5 students per school
2. Introductory training in
  - ceramics in the Mediterranean area
  - forms and functions
  - ceramics and food
  - ceramics and innovation in design
3. 1 week workshop
  - Preliminary meeting to define the objectives of the workshop
  - Meetings with artisans
  - Definition of concepts and elaboration of projects
  - Collaborative realisation of models by students, teachers and artisans
4. Creation of prototypes of selected products during the months following the workshop

The workshop contributed to the networks of the euro-Mediterranean partnership and produced results that go beyond the project itself or the products realised, by bringing very different cultural realities into a creative collaboration. It offered the opportunity for the participants to meet each other from a cultural point of view before working together on the design projects. The collaboration enabled



them to discover new needs and different methods of production, instruments, tools and results. It also increased awareness of needs and possibilities as a result of the opportunity to compare approaches, ideas and more. 5 out of 130 ceramics producers located in the area of Moknine, Sousse were involved and directly benefited from the formal processes to stimulate innovation and activate competitiveness. The students gained experience of working cross-culturally in a group and were able to experiment with the possibilities that arose from the cross fertilisation of ideas which stimulated innovation and re-evaluated tradition.

The diversity of origin, background, education and culture of the participants contributed to the success of the project – stimulating the exchange of ideas and the resolution of differences. The communication difficulties could be considered a barrier but in some cases acted as a useful tool, opening up helpful informal communication.

Due to the pressures of time, there was a risk that participants would not fully understand the workshop context or manufacturing limitations. However this same pressure quickly pushed the participants to open up new and interesting design scenarios which didn't necessarily produce definitive designs but rather proposals or concepts for projects which could be developed. It did mean that it was almost impossible to understand in a deep way all the economical and commercial aspects of the resulting products and it was vital to have some experts in the group able to evaluate the sales possibilities and markets at which the products were targeted. For this purpose HabitatMed – experts in design, marketing, communication and trade – formed part of the Scientific Committee that decided how the project would be run. Any products that are released commercially will be launched under the HabitatMed label. This label and the products were in turn assessed for their viability on the international market by a group of consultants from Milan, VVA – Valdani & Vicari Associates.

The overall cost of the workshop was in the region of 50,000 euros.

For more information please contact:

Irene Burroni

irene.csm@editnet.it