



SEE DESIGN

Sharing Experience
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

DESTER: Design and Territory

Experimental Centre for Furniture and Furnishing (CSM)

The DESTER (Design and Territory) project is run by CSM (Centro Sperimentale Del Mobile e Dell'arredamento SRL) as a sub-project in the framework of Interreg IIC EDDT, in cooperation with an Italian partner (Department of Technologies of Architecture and Design "Pierluigi Spadolini" / Course of Industrial Design of the University of Florence), a Portuguese partner (IPT-Instituto Politecnico de Tomar) and a French partner (ESBAM-Superior School of Arts and Crafts of Marseille).

The project is intended to bring research and formal innovation from universities (teachers/students) to the producers of the stone materials sector of the Siena region (Tuscany). It began in May 2005 and will run until October 2006.

The original idea from which the DESTER project was born is the general need and difficulty of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) of getting closer to the world of research. In this case, it was Italian companies but this also applies to European companies in general. Due to the lack of human and capital resources, the SMEs, on the one hand, do not find it easy to approach research institutes and universities and, on the other, the research institutes and universities are not able to speak the 'clear and material language' of the world of production and marketing.

The main aim of the project is to create a close relationship between the demand for and offer of innovation to enable SMEs to grow in terms of competitiveness. The sector concerned, stone and travertine materials, is characterised by difficulties in terms of its use of materials (almost 70% of the material is not used which means that there is an enormous amount of waste): it is important to be able to find the right way to use this part of the material preferably by using a design which will also increase the quality of the product.

The project is intended to promote formal innovation in the specific sector of stone and travertine in the Siena region thanks to the realisation of design projects generated by the cooperation between Italian, French and Portuguese students coordinated by teachers from the different universities under the supervision of CSM.

Students are asked to address the following subjects:

- there are few fields of use/application of the material, and these are always related to construction;
- the limited attitude of the sector to formal innovation;
- the problems connected with quantities of material and waste.

The enterprises in this sector are interested in developing new strategies and entering new production typologies which are more design oriented, for example, urban furniture.

During the initial stages, twenty students were selected (5 French students, 5 Portuguese students, 10 Italian students) and twenty companies were identified. These were all travertine enterprises from the Rapolano area (south

of Siena). A SWOT analysis of the stone/travertine sector was carried out – this was sent out to the students and teachers as a way to familiarise themselves with the sector – and the project's activities were defined. A technical/scientific group, with a representative from each partner organisation, was formed to organise the project's activities and to verify its progress.

The aims of the project will be achieved through a workshop in which the design students participate with the teachers and the CSM coordinators for the definition of design concepts on the basis of briefings accepted by the companies. A designer, artist and a marketing expert are also involved. This workshop was held in the spring of 2006, enabling the participants to meet together and to visit the enterprises concerned. During the workshop, the students worked with the teachers and other professionals to develop their ideas and concepts and at the end of the workshop, these ideas and concepts were presented to the travertine companies.

The next stage of the project involved the development of the design ideas. Between March and July 2006, the companies, in conjunction with the project partners, assessed the suitability of the projects in terms of realisation and applicability, awarding the five best projects with a prize of 500 euros.

By October 2006, CSM and the other partners will have organised a small exhibition in Florence of the students' design projects and will present them in a catalogue of the exhibition.

The cost of the project is 100,000 euros (this covers the period May 2005-October 2006). The project is part financed by the EU (54%), with the remaining finance coming from private funding and investment from the partners.

For CSM, the organisation of the workshop is the most important part of this programme and can lead to its success or failure (in this case it was a success). Depending on the way it is organised, the workshop can prove to be, as in this specific case, the most important moment of the total activity: 20 students of different nationalities, 5 teachers, experts in the sectors of design, innovation, marketing and product industrialisation and 20 companies have exchanged, created, evaluated and verified all the different aspects of 'innovate in the stone materials sector'.

On the other side, the main difficulties to overcome are related to the real application of the design projects to the sector and the interest of the companies in turning these 20 projects into prototypes and putting them into production.

Evaluation of the design products presented has already been received from the companies but real results will be verified in the end of the programme (October 2006). In any case the programme has already started to stimulate producers and students as young designers to produce and bring innovation to the stone materials sector.

The DESTER project brings fresh innovative ideas elaborated by students and teachers of different institutes in different countries to the travertine sector which usually sees a big lack of innovation and no different applications of the materials apart from those in the construction sector. Students have the chance to experience a new specific sector, that of stone materials, and to try to create innovation within it. Companies of the sector receive twenty design projects which come from the cooperation between students, teachers and experts of different countries and with different kinds of competencies.

This project has represented 10% of CSM's total activities during 2005. Thanks to this project CSM has been able to create relationships at European level and has given local enterprises the opportunity to join with an international networking system dealing in the field of design support.

For further information about DESTER please contact:

Irene Burroni at CSM

irene.csm@editnet.it

For more information about the students' projects, please visit

www.design.espace.esbam.free.fr/toscane/progressionline/index.htm