



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**

Turkey

Industrial Design for SMEs Project

Department of Industrial Product Design, Istanbul Technical University (ITU) and Istanbul Chamber of Industry (ISO)



The project aims to introduce industrial design to Turkish SMEs, which are members of Istanbul Chamber of Industry (ISO), and have with no previous experience of industrial design. Design service is delivered through senior industrial design students at Istanbul Technical University (ITU), Dept. of Industrial Product Design, who are enrolled in EUT 492 Graduation Design Project course.

The project began in 2002 as an off-shoot of the ISO initiative of publishing an industrial design guide book for Turkish SMEs. The "Endüstriyel Tasarım Kılavuzu - Industrial Design Guide", the first of its kind in Turkey, was written by Alpay Er, Özlem Er (both ITU staff) and Serhan Baser (ISO expert) and the first edition was published by ISO in 2003. The ISO-ITU project was originally planned for the verification of the design and development process for SMEs as proposed in the guide. Due to its success and popularity among SMEs, the "ISO-ITU Industrial Design for SMEs" project has run every year since 2003.

The project has two main objectives. The first one is to introduce industrial design and to show how industrial design can be used by SMEs to differentiate their products, and to support their competitiveness in the market. The second objective is to introduce SMEs to senior industrial design students at ITU by giving them the opportunity to experience a product design and development process in a real life context.

The project methodology was developed by staff members of the ITU Dept. of Industrial Product Design. The project does not have a dedicated budget, although the participating companies have to commit their support to students for developing the project, including the building of the prototypes. This is the first programme aiming industrial design support to SMEs in Turkey and the collaboration between the University and the Chamber of Industry has been

crucial for the success of the project mechanism.

Each year ISO announces to its member companies how many positions are available, depending on the number of students in the ITU graduation project. The students and companies are matched by the ITU staff, considering factors such as the students' earlier performance and the location of the company. The design project brief is written by the assigned company, together with the student. The brief and the project plan are later presented to the ITU staff, and periodically checked during the development process. The project takes about 16 weeks, and ends with the graduation jury at ITU, where representatives of SMEs are also part of the review panel.

Approximately 30 companies are included in the project each year, and so far more than 120 SMEs have participated in the project between 2003 and 2006. The sectors from which the participating SMEs come range from furniture, lighting, medical equipment, electrical goods, industrial machinery, metal accessories, plastic kitchen utensils, automotive spare and auxiliary parts to jewellery.

The ISO-ITU "Industrial Design for SMEs" project can be considered as a good practice because through this project the companies have had the opportunity to live through the product design and development process with the contribution of senior industrial design students, and under the guidance of

ITU staff. As the project has developed in a controlled environment, this means lower risks for SMEs with their limited resources. In addition it is a very useful experience for senior year industrial design students to experience SMEs for which they may work professionally upon their graduation. This project does not require financial support, and has been realized in a country where no official design support and promotion programmes for SMEs exist.

Among the results achieved, reaching more than 120 SMEs to introduce industrial design by practice should be mentioned in the first place. Some of the projects designed during the programme were developed further by the companies and have been taken to the production and commercialisation stages. Another outcome worth mentioning is the job offers made by the companies to those students they have worked with. The ISO – ITU project gives SMEs the chance to work with student designers without bearing the costs that would come if it were on a professional level. It also strengthens the self-confidence of young designers to work with or for SMEs.

A good dialogue between the company and the student is essential to the success of the ISO-ITU projects, especially because the two parties have rather different backgrounds. Companies with a lack of experience in the industrial design field need informing about what industrial design really is, just as students have to be informed about business realities and the capabilities of SMEs. Overcoming cultural barriers between the SME and the designer is crucial. Time and managerial support committed to the project by the SMEs are also crucial to its success. All these problems need to be resolved through a shared vision for innovative product development culture in the Turkish manufacturing industry.

Two surveys with the company owner/manager are conducted each year, one before the start and the other after the completion of the project. The surveys aim to measure the differences in the perception and understanding of the industrial design service. Research has shown that most of the company owners/managers had a totally different idea about what industrial design was about, and what an industrial designer could do to improve the competitiveness of their businesses before and after the project. The impact is clearly positive. Almost every company expresses their intention to continue to work with designers in the future projects.

The early project outcomes were presented at the ICSID Educational Conference in Germany (Er and Er, 2003). The project was covered widely by the Turkish press in 2004 and 2005, and exhibited in 2003 and 2006 on different occasions.

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For a brief summary of the project in Turkish, including some examples of the project, please visit: www.tasarim.itu.edu.tr/kobiler-icin-tasarim.html