

Results of the public consultation on design as a driver of user-centred innovation (October 2009)

Summary

- The public consultation on design and innovation attracted 535 formal and a number of informal replies.
- 91 percent of responding organisations consider that design is very important for the future competitiveness of the EU economy; 91 percent consider that initiatives in support of design should be taken at EU level.
- 96 percent think that initiatives in support of design should be an integral part of innovation policy in general, 74 percent think that design should be part of EU innovation policy.

1. BACKGROUND

On 7 April 2009, the European Commission published the Staff Working Document on “Design as a driver of user-centred innovation”. On the basis of this document, and with the purpose of finding out if more should be done at a European level to support design in the context of innovation policy, Directorate Enterprise and Industry (unit D.1, Innovation policy development) launched an online public consultation on the topic. It closed on 29 June 2009. Below is a summary of the results.

The consultation was open to organisations as well as to private persons. The quantitative analysis is mainly based on the responses of the organisations, but the replies of individuals have also been taken into account in the general conclusions. In addition to the online responses, the Commission also received a number of direct responses which have been taken into account.

2. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The response to the public consultation on design as a driver of user-centred innovation was very good. Through the online consultation, the Commission received 535 replies in total, 309 organisations - whereof 197 non-profit, 112 commercial - and 226 private persons. Most replies come from Germany, Netherlands and Spain, closely followed by the United Kingdom and France – see table below. In total, 7 organisations and 8 individuals from outside the EU replied.

	Country	Total replies	Replies by organisations	Replies by individuals
1	Germany	68	52	16
2	Netherlands	62	35	27
3	Spain	52	28	24
4	United Kingdom	38	22	16
5	France	35	22	13
6/7	Portugal	34	4	30
6/7	Slovenia	34	14	20
8	Italy	33	15	18
9	Belgium	30	23	7

10	Finland	29	17	12
11	Sweden	16	12	4
12	Norway	12	8	4
13	Ireland	11	6	5
14/15	Denmark	10	8	2
14/15	Luxembourg	10	9	1
16	Austria	9	5	4
17	Czech Republic	7	6	1
18/19	Poland	6	2	4
18/19	USA	6	3	3
	Other	33	18	15
	TOTAL	535	309	226

Table 1: Location of responding organisations

The profile of the responding organisations is varied, with a good balance between professional associations, higher education institutions, national, regional and local government, and chambers of commerce among the not-for-profit organisations. 16 national ministries/departments replied, mainly Ministries of Enterprise/Industry and Economy.

The commercial organisations are dominated by design businesses, but with a surprisingly important share (42 percent) from other sectors. The majority of responding businesses are SMEs, but a number of large, well-known companies also replied.

3. RESPONSE TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

3.1. The importance of design for competitiveness

91 percent of organisations consider that design is very important for the future competitiveness of the EU economy. Among the organisations stating that design is very important for competitiveness are e.g. 13 out of the 16 national ministries/departments, 82 percent of the not-for-profit organisations *not* specialised in design and 74 percent of the commercial organisations from other sectors than design. In other words, there is agreement on the importance of design also outside of the design community.

Respondents were asked to describe why design is important for the future competitiveness of the EU. Many respondents refer to the necessity for Europe to compete on quality and sustainability as opposed to price, and the important role of design as a differentiator. The design of products (goods, services, experiences) is considered an essential driver of technological and non-technological innovation as it increases the probability of market success of a product, shortens time to market and potentially cuts cost. The role of design as the bridge between technology and the market is frequently referred to.

Many respondents insist on design as a tool for socially responsible and environmentally sustainable innovation. Some respondents refer to design as part of the increasingly important creative industries, and to the key role of design in the emerging “experience economy”.

3.2. Main areas for EU level initiatives

Among the organisations, “awareness raising and design promotion” is the area where public initiatives in support of design are considered the most useful (82 percent). It is followed closely by “design education” (75 percent) and “design research” (74 percent). 68 percent consider that “design support to organisations” is useful – see table below.¹ Only one percent of organisations consider that public initiative in support of design is not useful.

¹ This is one of the few questions where the replies of the organisations differ from that of the private persons. The private persons consider design education most useful (80 percent), design research second (76 percent) and awareness raising and design promotion only third (69 percent).

Area	% of organisations
Awareness raising and design promotion	82
Design education	75
Design research	74
Design support to organisation	68
Other	19
None (public initiative in support of design is not useful)	1

Table 2: Replies of organisations to the question “What are the main areas where public initiative in support of design could be useful, if any? (Multiple replies possible)

96 percent of organisations consider that initiatives in support of design should be an integral part of innovation policy in general.

91 percent of organisations consider that initiatives in support of design should be taken at EU level in addition to Member State and regional level. 8 percent think that such initiatives should only be taken at Member State and/or regional level.

Respondents were asked in what main areas EU level initiatives could add value to the own initiatives of Member States and their regions.² A common reply is to facilitate the exchange of best practice, experience and knowledge sharing across Member States and regions. Different means are suggested, such as the organisation of an annual European design event or conference, the organisation of an annual European design day/week/festival, and the set-up of a website, portal and/or other forum/network. General awareness raising is mentioned by many respondents.

A number of replies refer to the role of EU institutions in coordinating statistics and economic data across the Union. In this area, it is suggested that the definition and measurement of design is developed at EU level, to enable international comparisons and benchmarking. A common wish is that EU institutions should support the development of evidence on the economic, environmental and social impact on design and, more concretely, to the development of measures and tools to evaluate the rate of return of design investment.

It is furthermore suggested that EU institutions, with its initiatives targeting SMEs, could help improve the understanding of SMEs of design, and potentially help better integrating design into innovation support measures. Specifically promoting the better use of design in the new Member States is also mentioned as a potential area for action.

The role of Europe in supporting design research is frequently mentioned, as well as the role of Europe in the education domain. More European-funded research on eco design, design for all/universal design and user-centred innovation is an explicit wish of many respondents.

² The answers to the question about in what main areas EU level initiatives would add value to the own initiatives of Member States and their regions (question 7) overlap with the answers to the question of what could be done at EU level to lift the barriers to better use of design identified (question 19d). The reply to both questions are analysed here.

In the area of education, many respondents support the idea that Europe should encourage inter-disciplinary education, as well as better integration of aspects of sustainability, user-centeredness and strategic design (design thinking, design management, etc.) into design education, to upgrade the skills base of European designers.

The idea is expressed that Europe could support experimental environments, “exploring spaces” for design innovation, e.g. labs that provide a space for different disciplines to work together on innovation projects. It is also suggested that improved mobility of designers would be beneficial to build the right design competences.

Demand-side measures such as labels, standards and awards are frequently mentioned, particularly to support eco design and design for all/universal design. Among the labels suggested feature “designed in the EU” (or “in Europe”) and “good design” (“good” as in socially responsible and environmentally sustainable design).

The potential role of Europe to support public sector innovation through design was also mentioned. A better integration of design requirements and design standards into public procurement is suggested.

A number of respondents mention the role of European action in the fight against counterfeiting and the importance of copy right and design protection.

A travelling European design exhibition is suggested to promote European design worldwide.

It is considered that a pan-European profile and vision for design and innovation should be formulated at EU level, and that design – considering its importance for innovation and competitiveness – should be part of the future European strategy, beyond the current Lisbon strategy.

Several respondents call for a European action plan for design. A small number suggest the creation of a separate department within the Commission with responsibility for design and/or the appointment of a high level “design ambassador” within the Commission (c.f. the SME envoy).

4. RESPONSE TO THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

4.1. The definition of design

People associate design with different things. To the question what is the first thing that comes to mind when hearing the word “design”, 39 percent of organisations reply “a designed object or the design of an object”, 26 percent reply “design as an activity in an organisation”, only 5 percent reply “an intellectual property right”. 28 percent reply “other”. Among the suggestions under “other” are included e.g. the process of design, design as a methodology or way of thinking, strategy, business, beauty, meaning, communication, service design, “the use of logic, creativity and intuition”, “the interface between arts and technology”, and “interpreting actuality”.

The following definition of “design for user-centred innovation” is suggested in the Staff Working Document:

“Design for user-centred innovation is the activity of conceiving and developing a plan for a new or significantly improved product, service or system that ensures the best interface with user needs, aspirations and abilities, and that allows for aspects of economic, social and environmental sustainability to be taken into account.”

78 percent of the organisations, 86 percent of the private persons, agree with this definition as the basis for integrating design into European innovation policy.

Among those that do not agree, a number of respondents feel that the definition suggested is too long. A majority nevertheless suggest adding elements to the definition, notably design as a holistic and visionary process, the role of design in delivering a product (e.g. in the case of a craftsman’s work), the user aspect (e.g. design as user-lead or co-created), the role of design in making products more aesthetically pleasing and the benefits of design to society as a whole.

4.2. Design for social and environmental objectives

Respondents were asked about the role of design to achieve social and environmental objectives. 71 percent of organisations, 80 percent of private persons, consider that design is very important to achieve social objectives. 72 percent of organisations, 75 percent of private persons, consider that design is very importance to achieve environmental objectives.

When asked how EU policy can promote socially responsible and environmentally sustainable design, respondents suggest e.g. the development of standards, initiatives to upgrade the skills of designers, more targeted research, awards and labels, awareness raising and the inclusion of design considerations into public procurement.

4.3. Design policy targeted at SMEs, low-tech and service organisations

The Staff Working Document suggests that there may be untapped potential for the use of design especially in SMEs, low-tech companies and the service sector where design usage is comparatively low. 84 percent of organisations consider that there is a need for more targeted policy for SMEs, 79 percent that there is such a need for low-tech organisations and 78 percent for service organisations. 78 percent of organisations think that such a targeted policy should exist at EU level.

4.4. Design in the context of crisis

77 percent of organisations say that the current economic climate affects the relevance of design. The explanation is generally close to what is often being said about innovation in times of crisis, namely that it is important not to stop investing in the future and in quality due to an economic downturn, when innovation is needed the most. Design is considered by some to be a proactive response to the crisis, a powerful problem solver and a solution that is “sustainable and fast to apply”.

Design is by some respondents considered a relatively low cost innovation activity which, by quickly bringing new products and services to the market, has a shorter pay back period than many other investments in innovation, and hence is suitable in times of crisis.

4.5. Design as part of European innovation policy

Although 96 percent of organisations think that initiatives in support of design should be an integral part of innovation policy in general, only 74 percent of organisations think that design should be part of European innovation policy. 20 percent think that it should be a separate policy. Those who support an integration of design into innovation policy do so with the simple argument that design is part of innovation.

Those who speak against an integration of design into innovation policy argue that design is related to innovation but different, that it is wider yet more specific. The idea that design would not be sufficiently visible as part of innovation policy, that it would not get the attention that it deserves, is voiced by many respondents. Some respondents say that it can only be part of an innovation policy that is not purely about competitiveness, but also aims at reaching social and environmental objectives.

A group of respondents say that it should be part of innovation policy, as well as of other policies, but that it should also be a separate policy, to ensure visibility and respect for the uniqueness of design.

Respondents were asked how other EU policies or initiatives – for example in the field of internal market, research, social inclusion, education and culture – could be instrumental in supporting design. A number of respondents feel that the question should be the inverse, i.e. how design can be instrumental to support other policies. In general, respondents suggest that design has some role to play in most of the policy areas cited, as well as potentially in others.

When asked about the best forum to discuss policy on design for user-centred innovation at EU-level, 58 percent of respondents suggest a new forum, 20 percent an existing forum. As regards the question of who should be part of the new forum, most suggestions are very inclusive, proposing that e.g. business, policy makers, designers, professional associations, regions and design schools/universities should be part of the forum. Some existing international design organisations are suggested as existing fora to discuss design policy.

The Council working group for competitiveness and growth, and the European Policy Group, where innovation matters are normally dealt with at EU level by Member States, are frequently mentioned by Ministries as existing fora where design should be further discussed.

4.6. Barriers to better use of design in Europe

Respondents were asked about the most serious barriers to the better use of design in Europe. Multiple answers were possible. The most important barrier is considered the “lack of awareness and understanding of the potential of design among policy makers” (78 percent of organisations; 76 percent of private persons). The second most important barrier is considered the “lack of knowledge and tools to evaluate the rate of return on design investment” (64 percent of organisations; 62 percent of private persons). The third most important barrier is considered the “lack of awareness and understanding of the potential of design among potential design customers, i.e. private and public organisations” – see table below.

Barrier	% of organisations
Lack of awareness and understanding of the potential of design among policy makers	78
Lack of knowledge and tools to evaluate the rate of return on design investment	64
Lack of awareness and understanding of the potential of design among potential design customers, i.e. private and public organisations	63
Lack of design skills and understanding among other professions	50
Lack of awareness of design among end-consumers	46
Lack of statistics and statistical analysis on design	44
Lack of common definition of the word 'design'	43
Lack of research in the area of design	43
Lack of public support to use design in organisations	41
Lack of designers/design companies with the right skills and/or capacity	22
Lack of high quality design education in Europe	20
No barriers exist	0.3

Table 3: Replies of organisations to the question “Which are the most serious barriers to the better use of design in Europe, if any? (Multiple replies possible)”

The least frequently selected barriers are the “lack of designers/design companies with the right skills and/or capacity”, and the “lack of high quality design education in Europe”, indicating that there is not a lack of skilled designers in Europe. This conclusion is however partly contradicted by some respondents who suggest that Europe lacks designers with professional skills such as management, marketing and communication. This is described as a problem for designers in their communication with potential clients. Several respondents added that business managers, in particular in SMEs, do not understand design and that, due to this lack of understanding on both sides, designers and their potential customers “do not speak the same language”.

According to some respondents, there is also a need to upgrade the skills of European designers in increasingly important schools of design thinking, such as design management, user-centred design innovation and eco design, for Europe to tap the full potential of design.

Other barriers suggested include the crisis (and the ensuing lack of resources), a lack of cross-disciplinary and cross-fertilising policies, lack of effective design protection, lack of organisation among designers, lack of important design institutions - such as design centres - in some Member States, the perception of design as “arty” and/or as expensive

and superficial, a lack of large design companies in Europe where young designers can learn business skills and a lack of design as part of support to SMEs.³

4.7. A vision for design in Europe

The Staff Working Document suggested the following vision for design in Europe:

“To build on our existing strengths and our heritage to make Europe a reference for design excellence, whether for research, education and skills — attracting and retaining the best talents, for high-end design and excellence, and for breadth and depth of design usage in private and public organisations.”

74 percent of organisations, 79 percent of private persons, say that this is a good vision for European collaboration in the area of design. Some respondents suggest that the word “high-end” to describe design is out of place, other that Europe should be “the” reference for design, not “a” reference. Others suggest that the vision should be focusing more on business and innovation.

Some respondents suggest that the vision is too generic and hence void of meaning, others suggest a broader and more ambitious vision which mentions the purpose of design, i.e. a more competitive Europe with sustainable growth and improved quality of life. Others point out that the suggested vision is too backward looking in mentioning existing strengths and heritage, and that it is equally important to build new skills and strengths.

For further information about the consultation, please contact the unit D.1 “Innovation policy development” at the Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry at the European Commission at the following e-mail address: entr-innovation-policy-development@ec.europa.eu

³ Respondents were asked what could be done at EU level to lift the barriers identified (question 19d). As the response to this question overlaps with the main question about EU level initiatives analysed above (question 7), the results are not repeated here.