Europe has always had a reputation for being design-forward but this is often associated with the old idea one has of design, one that concerns itself with mere aesthetics. For some years now, a number of organisations have laboured to stress the importance of design as a tool for innovation and a catalyst for competitive growth. As such, design has been fully integrated into the EU's innovation strategy since 2010 with 15 of the 28 member states having included design in their national innovation plans. Here we speak with **Isabel Roig**, former president of **BEDA**, the **Bureau of European Design Associations**, who has heralded a number of these endeavours and initiatives.

Building a framework for European Design

Interview by ———— Angelina A. Rafii

Could you talk to us a little bit about yourself and how you came into your presidency at BEDA?

I am the CEO of BCD Barcelona Design Centre since 2000; this is my fulltime job. And I was president of BEDA from March 2013 until just recently in June 2015, after being vice-president for two years.

With degrees in both Tourism Business Administration and Marketing, how did you find your way into heading two important Design institutions?

Promoting design value to businesses and governments needs big doses of strategic marketing. Now I am a design activist! We also promote Barcelona, as a fantastic city to live and work in, and design has a lot to do with it.

What would you say was your primary mission as president of BEDA?

The president, together with the vice-president and nine board members run the association. During my presidency we were working on the BEDA Strategic Policy Plan for 2021, which was presented to the members at the last General Assembly in Milano at the beginning of June.

Last year, we ran for a European Call from the Directorates General of the European Commission Culture, under the Creative Europe Programme. We subsequently won the call and launched a 3-year programme co-funded by the European Commission with the aim of strengthening the BEDA network and its members and to fulfil the strategic objectives of the organisation.

What milestones would you mention for BEDA since its inception in 1969?

There are many, of course. But the most recent ones I can think of are meeting with the Commission President José Manuel Barroso in 2007; the inclusion of design in the innovation policy for Europe, the Innovation Union; the launch of the European Design Innovation Initiative with the aim to support design projects for an amount of 10 million euro, and the Action Plan on Design Driven Innovation.

Could you walk us through the EU initiatives in terms of design?

The European Design Innovation Initiative, the Creative Europe Programme, the Action Plan on Design Driven Innovation and the Horizon 2020 Programme are the ones taking design on board.

What are the aims of each of these programmes and initiatives you mentioned and more significantly why do you think they are important?

They are important because they position design at the core of the main European policies on innovation, research and the creative industries.

What is the current state of affairs in design in the EU in general?

BEDA's vision is for design to be embraced in Europe as a driver of growth and prosperity. In that sense, BEDA maintains a permanent dialogue with the European Commission and its DG's [Directorates General of the European Commission] regarding the inclusion of design in EU policies for innovation, culture and education, research, environment, etc.

The European Design Leadership Board, with both the president and the vice-president of BEDA as part of it, has been working on proposals to the European Commission about the role of design. The 21 recommendations

"Design can improve citizens' lives; can transform public services and businesses, offering better user experiences. With design methodologies we can address the major challenges we are facing today such as an ageing population, healthcare systems, sustainable economic models, environmental challenges, jobs creation and so on."

can be found in the document *Design for Growth & Prosperity.*

This year, the European Commission is reviewing the package for the Circular Economy strategy and BEDA is aiming to exert some influence on the role of design in Circular Economy. We are preparing a BEDA Position Paper on this topic, which will be launched in July.

That's the vision of BEDA, but what is the current landscape of design in Europe today?

I don't really have all the data points that would allow me to compare one country to another in Europe. But what I can say is that design is a hot topic everywhere. Whether it's in Europe, Japan, North or South America.

Can you tell us more about how BEDA thinks design can have a positive impact on Circular Economy, and if you cannot share BEDA's position as of yet, what are some of your ideas on the subject?

BEDA believes that it is important to strengthen the role of design in public policies that boost Circular Economy, both in product and services. And that it's important to create new circular business models.

The amount of resources and energy used by a product during its entire lifetime are directly determined during the design phase. This is why ecodesign strategies are so important.

Last year the Commission published a Circular Economy package, and some legislative proposals for reviewing recycling and other waste-related targets in the EU. Both mentioned the role of design in order to enlarge the useful life of products and their recyclability. The European Commission officially withdrew these policies in March 2015 with the commitment of approving a new package by the end of the year. A wide stakeholder consultation has been announced, and BEDA is willing to participate in this process.

How are design strategies tackled in the different nation states across Europe?

BEDA has 45 members. They consist of promotional entities and professional and trade associations in 21 member states. Plus Switzerland, Norway, Turkey and Serbia. Obviously, the situation is diverse in each of these 25 countries, some have Design Policies, others have design embedded in different policies, some members have support from Economic or Trade Ministries, others from Culture, some from national governments, others from regions or cities.

Do you find that the source of the support has an influence on the end result? To clarify: do you think it makes a difference whether design initiatives are more successful if they are supported by Culture versus Economic or Trade Ministries?

It depends on the objectives of each initiative. Design is transversal, so it is not a question of better or worse, but about the aim and the audience of what we want to achieve with a programme or project.

How open and understanding is the public in regards to design? Are there any cultural differences in what makes one country more in tune with design than another? Scandinavian countries, for example, tend to have a more design forward reputation?

Yes, there are cultural differences among the 25 countries according to their tradition of design and creativity, and how embedded design is in society.

When you talk about design being embedded in society — what are the catalysts: education, tradition or something else?

Education and tradition for sure.

In your experience as someone who has worked as a product and brand manager, what are some of the experiences you can think of which proved that making sound design choices and integrating design management was good for business?

We have a very good local example, Lékué, a company that reinvented itself through a great design strategy with the help of a local design agency, Nomon Design, and now they are selling in more than 70 countries around the world, with a turnover of around 28 million euro.

In your experience interacting with the political class, what arguments do you have to make for decision-makers to come on board and understand that it can have a positive impact both politically and economically to embrace design?

Design can improve citizens' lives; can transform public services and businesses, offering better user experiences. With design methodologies we can address the major challenges we are facing today such as an ageing population, healthcare systems, sustainable economic models, environmental challenges, jobs creation and so on.

Certainly on a more micro level, entrepreneurs may think that implementing design strategies will cost both time and money without having guarantees as to its efficiency?

Losing customers or users of products or services that don't provide a great experience is most expensive at long term.

If design associations in different countries want to have an impact at the political level, what should they be doing and what language should they be speaking?

Each region, country or territory has to know which are their strengths and their weaknesses and try to address these and make proposals. You can learn from other countries and look at what they have done and compare but in the final end it really depends on the assets of each region and country.

Here we can talk about the Smart Specialisation strategy. It's a new way that the European Commission has adopted to distribute structural funds to the countries. So what they have asked all the regions is to do an exercise where they list which are their strengths, and then make proposals and strategies on how to spend the structural funds on that basis.

So it's not about what I want to do, but rather what I can do based on the assets of my region.

Design organisations have to adapt depending on their challenges. It's also about how they get organised, how they are funded. It's difficult since normally they are not-for-profit organisations, but because they are working with public programmes they need public funding, so it's really a mixture. Sometimes it's a very complex mixture. Because they are doing public things but also private things. The *modus operandi* in these organisations is often difficult because they lack the resources and they have to find a way to make it work.

EU funding

— Horizon 2020, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Euro Research Council
— € Design — Measuring Design Value (European Commission)
— IDeALL — Integrating Design for All in Living Labs (EC)
— EHDM — European House of Design Management (EC)
— SEE Platform — Sharing Experience Europe — Policy Innovation Design (EC)
— DeEP — Design in European Policies (EC)
— REDI — When Regions support Entrepreneurs and Designers to Innovate (EC)
— Design for Europe — European Design Innovation Platform (EC)
— SPIDER — Supporting Public Service Innovation using Design in European Regions (INTERREG IVB)
— PROUD – People Researchers Organisations Using Design for co-creation and innovation (INTERREG IVB)
— DAA — Design-led Innovations for Active Ageing (INTERREG IVC)
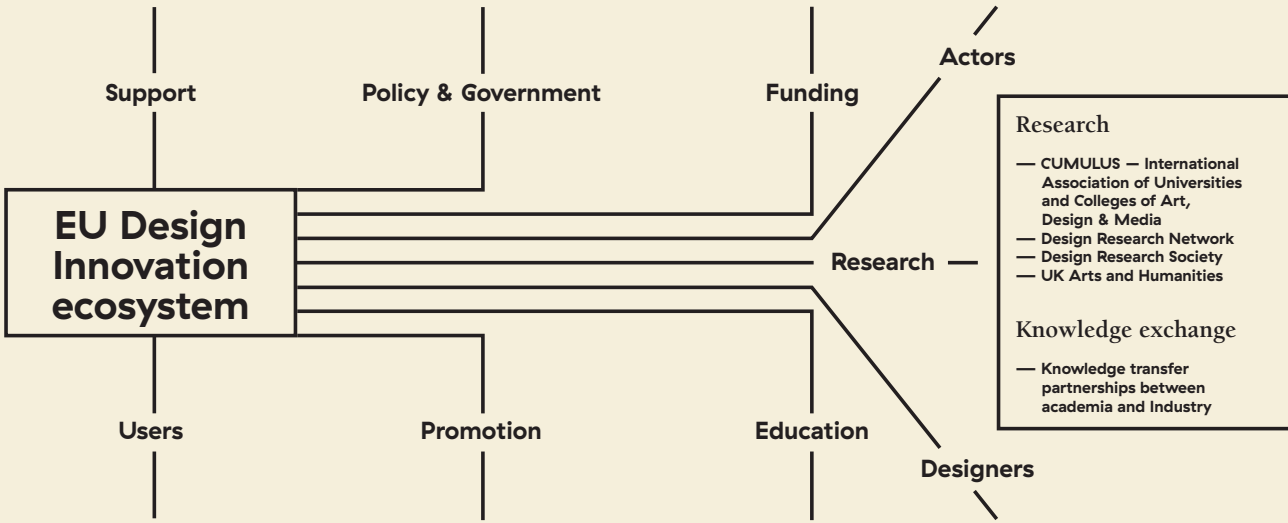
National funding

— Tax credits & innovation vouchers

Centres

— In 2014, 18 EUMS had a design centre

Networks

— BEDA — Bureau of European Design Associations (46 members in 2014)
— SND — Service Design Network
— ERRIN — European Regional Research & Innovation Network
— ICSID — International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (153 in 2014 globally)
— CUMULUS — International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design & Media
— ICO-D — International Council of Design
— DME — Design Management Europe
— EIDD — Design for All Europe
— ENEC — European Network of Ecodesign Centres
— ECIA — European Creative Industries Alliance
— UEAPME — European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

Mentoring & subsidy support (private sector)

— 12 programmes in 2014: ReDesign (AT, HU), SME Wallet (Flanders, BE), Design for Competitiveness (CZ), Design Boost (DK), Design Bulldozer (EE), Design Feelings (FI), Design Innovation Tax Credits (FR), Extraversion (EL), Design Business Profit (PL), Design Leadership (UK)

Mentoring support (public sector)

— Design of Public Services (EE), Public Services by Design (UK), Supporting Public Sector Innovation in European Regions (Flanders, Northern France, Western Ireland & Wales)

Policy

— Design policies in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France & Latvia
— Design in innovation policies (15 EUMS in 2014)
— Smart Specialisation strategies (9 regions in 2014)
— Action Plan for Design-driven Innovation (European Commission, 2013)
— Innovation Union (EC, 2010)
— Ecodesign Directive (EC, 2009)

Government

— MindLab (DK), Experio (SE), Government Digital Service & Cabinet Office Policy Lab (UK)
— European Commission Interservice Group for Design
— European Design Leadership Board

Support

Policy & Government

Funding

Actors

Research

— CUMULUS — International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design & Media
— Design Research Network
— Design Research Society
— UK Arts and Humanities

Knowledge exchange

— Knowledge transfer partnerships between academia and Industry

EU Design Innovation ecosystem

Research

Users

Promotion

Education

Designers

Private sector

— Companies using design strategically: Austria 9%, Denmark 23%, Estonia 7%, France 15%, Ireland 15% & Sweden 22%

Public sector

— National government investment in design: Denmark 0.0016% of GDP, Estonia 0.0199%, Finland 0.0032% & UK 0.0006%

Initiatives

— Design weeks, festivals, exhibitions, campaigns, museums, trade missions, conferences, awards, social media & publications (28 EUMS have design promotion activities)
— ICSID World Design Capitals (Turin 2008, Helsinki 2012)
— UNESCO Cities of Design (Bilbao, Dundee, Helsinki, Turin in 2014)
— ERRIN Design Days
— Design for Europe (European Design Innovation Platform) & European Design Innovation Initiative

Awards

— Red Dot Award, iF (International Forum Design) Design Award, Design Management Europe Award, Index Award, European Design

Higher Education Institutions

— In 2014, 38 top design schools in EUMS including 9 in Italy, 5 in France, 4 in the Netherlands, 3 in Denmark, Portugal, Sweden & the UK, 2 in Germany & Spain, 1 in Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland & Slovenia
— In 2014, 20,000 students at top 38 design schools.
— CUMULUS — International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design & Media

EU design sector

— Approx. 410,000 professionally-trained designers in Europe, generating an annual turnover of €36 billion (EU Design Action Plan, 2013)
— Design Industry Insights (UK, 2005, 2010, 2015)

Sector support

— Professional Standards for Design (BE, EE, UK)

Denmark it seems has been successful because it has several strategies and programmes running simultaneously. So the overall outcome has been more positive because it has more horses in the race so to speak.

Well it all depends; there are many examples of programmes that have been successful with public funding and others that have been less successful. Some countries also clearly get more support from their governments. In the UK for example they have had and still have a lot of support from public money. Here in Barcelona, we don't have that support for example. But we are running other programmes. In Asian countries also they have a lot of public money. Korea for example has always had a lot of money from the government to run design policies.

How we measure this success is complicated sometimes.

Sometimes it's through economic promotion agencies but focused on design, which is my case. We deal with what design can do for businesses but also for public services. In terms of social and public affairs, being involved in the city council and in the government. So it's not only restricted to one area, but it's design as a transversal way of dealing with challenges and problems and finding solutions for many different initiatives. Basically, there's not one recipe. You can't necessarily apply what works in Denmark in Cataluña. It all depends.

Another example is Silicon Valley, which is focusing a lot on design. They are introducing design and buying design agencies.

So one might think "*Ok, maybe this is a good moment and can serve as inspiration to my policy makers here. If Silicon Valley was a good example five years ago for a very technological approach, maybe it can be a good inspiration for more design-driven initiatives.*"

We are always looking at what others are doing, but then you have to adapt what others are doing to the situation in your own country. Of course with more money you can do more things and reach a larger audience.

In what ways has the EU actually been leading and can it be a key player in the worldwide creative industries. And where does it lag behind in comparison to other nations and geographic areas?

One way is through the Creative Europe programme which aims at helping the cultural and creative sectors seize the opportunities of the digital age and globalisation; enabling the sectors reach their economic potential, contributing to sustainable growth, jobs, and social cohesion and giving Europe's culture and media sectors access to new international opportunities, markets, and audiences.

When BEDA talks about implementing design thinking in political policies. What does that mean concretely especially since the associations that are represented by BEDA cover a wide spectrum and may have different targeted agendas (from industrial design to interior design and graphic design). How do you find a common voice?

Each member has its own political agenda according to the priorities of its country or region, but in general terms they include: promoting design as a tool for user-centred policy-making and integrating design processes into strategy and planning within local, regional and national public authorities. As far as the common voice, the associations are represented by board members who work to implement design policies. Once these policies are adopted it is up to each member state to apply them regionally. So what Europe proposes is then up to each member state to implement in their own countries. Sometimes it's not so evident.

To give you an example, in 2009 we were able to include a code for design (74.10) in the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community. But only 8 out of the 25 member states are actually using this code, because in the final end it's up to their national statistical agencies to decide whether they want to implement or not.

How does BEDA engage the political class in understanding that design is an important tool for change?

Demonstrating by example what design can achieve for economic, social, cultural and political good. This is part of our action plan.

What are some of the important goals of BEDA going for-

ward and what do you think should be on each nation's design agenda?

BEDA has 5 strategic objectives in its Strategic Policy Plan to 2021.

The idea of understanding the value of design is really important because it means leaving behind the obsolete idea that design is only related to aesthetics or furniture and objects. That's a very narrow vision. So understanding what design can do for social, for economic and cultural needs is crucial. The other idea is that the design sector we have has to be updated. There has to be permanent training. In Europe the design sector is mainly formed by micro organisations and small companies, with some exceptions in the UK and elsewhere. They need to prepare and strengthen their capacities to meet these future needs. If design is going to be everywhere we will need a lot of designers, working for governments and public services. Then of course you need to build this capacity amongst businesses so that they understand that they have to invest in design. They have to understand that design methodologies can help them provide better products and

services. The same for public services. We are all users and we want to have a good experience, whether it's in transport or health services, etc. And finally all of these ideas have to be incorporated into policy making.

You have talked about BEDA's role, some of the goals of the organisation, some of its milestones and achievements in implementing design thinking into political policies. But in dealing with the Commission and trying to get some of your objectives through what have the challenges been that you have had to face? Where have you found opposition?

Policy issues take time, changes are not implemented from one day to another. The European Commission is a big and complex organisation. This is why we have an action plan with short-term and long-term proposals. As an example, the € Design – Measuring Design Value project that, I mentioned before, ended with a proposal of questions about the impact of design to be introduced in the Community Innovation Survey which measures innovation across all member states.

But this is not immediate. The decision of accepting our proposal has to be taken by Eurostat and the OECD and that will take time and effort.

One of the main challenges of implementing design strategies is the idea that it's difficult to measure the drivers and ROI. What are your thoughts on the subject?

There are many researches and a lot of literature about the topic. The *Danish Design Ladder* has become a reference framework for investigating companies' use of and spending on design. Overall, companies that invested in design register a growth in gross revenues almost 22% higher compared to companies in general.

Mr Rhea, president of LPK design firm, once mentioned that you need three main ingredients to establish design strategies in companies: a visionary leadership, collaborative culture and a willingness to invest. What would you add to this mix?

A willingness to provide great experiences to the end users.

Creative Europe Programme
Creative Europe is the new European Union programme for the cultural and creative sectors, set to last until 2020. It has a budget of €1.46 billion.

European Networks
Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency.

Innovation Union
Innovation Union is the EU strategy to create an innovation-friendly environment that will allow ideas to be more readily turned into growth-enhancing products and ideas.

Action Plan on Design Driven Innovation
The EU's action plan on exploiting design's full potential to increase innovation, growth and job creation.

Horizon 2020 Programme
Horizon 2020 is the financial instrument implementing the Innovation Union, it is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme with €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020).

Circular Economy
The Commission's aim to present a new, more ambitious Circular Economy strategy late, to transform Europe into a more competitive resource-efficient economy, addressing a range of economic sectors, including waste.