

Design_Hub. A Social Innovation Arena for SME's design innovation.

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Abstract

The fast and fluid changing market place in a competitive globalized context (Bauman, 2002), the increasingly aggressive competition and the high variability in the usage and mixing of products and services impose to Italian companies, especially SMEs and Craftsman Firms, the development of new abilities, in order to generate visions and interpreting the signs of these transformations. Looking from this perspective, design is becoming essential as value of the product-system.

In its latest definition (even if not yet univocally established) design has definitely evolved from the status of "applied-art" or "artistic-creative" discipline, thanks to its multi-disciplinary core, as well at economic and managerial level, as possible or even unique way to innovate the system of Italian SMEs.

The paper presents a specific and sustainable tool (Design_HUB) that aims at creating a permanent meeting place to exchange knowledge and generate innovative projects changing the relation between young designers and SMEs design unconscious. The tool aims to define a virtually shared arena, a place to generate collective intelligence (Lévy 1996), supported by both University and Entrepreneurial Associations as trust generators (Fukuyama 1996).

Design_HUB capitalises on the potentiality of Web 2.0, where users can be editors, consumers, distributors and generators of content. Conveniently set, these characteristics create an open source creative arena, low cost and low impact, to be used both from enterprises and young users, previsionsing new cooperation's scenarious.

This project represents the systematization and the rationalization of two years experiences and concrete experimentations within the project DAC Design for Arts & Craft, based upon the action-research framework and implementally developed by a group of researchers of the INDACO Department of Politecnico di Milano.

DAC exploited the mechanism of the design knowledge and technology transfer (Tasch A.F. 1995) through the physical transfer of innovation agents (newly graduate designers) into companies, developing product, service and communication projects together with the companies themselves.

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The achieved results (38 projects realised with 34 companies on all levels of the production chain) and the success obtained witness the value of this model, nevertheless finding a visible limit in the irregularity of the event.

Therefore Design_HUB aims at structuring this kind of meeting, consolidating its results, starting and sharing new innovation processes through shared innovation.

In conclusion, the Design_HUB challenge is multi-layered:

1. Shortening the gap between Design, SMEs and Hi-Tech Innovation by communicating how a low risk strategy based upon Design can produce long-term profitable results;
 2. Using Technology itself (Web) to Communicate innovation through new and empirically effective way of communication (social networking);
 3. Strengthening the relationship between Young Designers, University and SMEs through the Sector Associations' channels;
 4. Offering a service able to interpret the needs of young designers according to the constantly changing professional context, granting them a future after Graduation;
 5. Defining an online format synthesizing all these aspects into a usable and useful device:
- Design_HUB shows at last that shortening the gap between SMEs and Technology through Design means shortening the gap between SMEs and Design in a sustainable way.

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