

Connecting Design and Industry

More collaboration between industrial designers and Slovene industry, a path towards innovative and competitive products

On Thursday, November 10, 2011, the conference *Connecting Design and Industry* took place at the Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Centre alongside the Ambient Fair. The conference was organised by the Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region (RDA LUR) within the framework of the international project 'Creative Cities'. Before a full auditorium, local and foreign industrial designers, representatives of manufacturing enterprises and educational institutions discussed the unexploited potential of the interdisciplinary association of industry and industrial designers, as well as other experts who may jointly create innovative and competitive high added value products.

The introductory speech was given by Ljubljana's vice-mayor **Dr Janez Koželj**, who stressed that the association of industry and the design profession was essential for achieving market competitiveness. "Design-oriented thinking is indispensable, because it is holistic, analytical, associative and directed towards development. Our commitment to sustainable development creates numerous new development challenges which we can face successfully only if we create opportunities for creative professions to perform well," emphasised Dr Koželj.



Lilijana Madjar, M.Sc, director of RDA LUR, said that stimulating the development of creative industries in the Ljubljana Urban Region may contribute to solving the current challenges in youth employment and industrial innovativeness. "RDA LUR therefore actively participates in the international project 'Creative Cities', which is intended to stimulate the development of creative industries and establish connections with other branches of the economy in order to achieve greater innovativeness and economic success" explained Lilijana Madjar.



The participants were also greeted by **Mr Ville Cantell**, first secretary of the Embassy of Finland in Slovenia, who said it was necessary to stimulate the interdisciplinary association of industry and creative sectors, which together may achieve an innovative breakthrough. In Cantell's view association between countries is also needed.



Next year in LUR: Centre of Creative Industries and a pilot model to connect industrial designers and industry

Tina Pezdirc Nograšek, RDA LUR, in her introductory presentation, defined the concept of creative industries and the involvement of the 'Creative Cities' project in the European policies of promoting creative industries. The Institute for Economic Research did a detailed research of the situation of creative industries within the framework of the 'Creative Cities' project. "The results of the analysis show that industrial design is a discipline with unexploited potentials in Slovenia. This is why we decided to carry out, in the following months, **a pilot project connecting** industrial designers, industrial enterprises and marketing experts who may jointly develop high added value products," explained Tina Pezdirc. Besides the pilot model of connecting, in the course of the next year, RDA LUR will establish a Centre of Creative Industries which will act as a hub for knowledge, information and connections in the field of creative industries at the regional level. The Agency will also carry out an information campaign called 'Creative Ljubljana'.



Design and architecture are part of Finnish identity

The renowned Finnish designer Ilkka Suppanen (<http://www.suppanen.com/>) from the progressive design team Snowcrash Design Co-operative, which is active within the framework of the Studio Suppanen firm, presented the Finnish experience of collaboration between industrial design and manufacturing enterprises. This collaboration is good, as the innovative potential of the design discipline is appreciated. For more than sixty years, the state of Finland has systematically encouraged the development of this discipline and its collaboration with industry. "Finnish design and architecture are composing parts of the identity of the state of Finland, and because of their successes, they rank among the most important factors in promoting the state abroad" explained Suppanen.



A comprehensive approach to the development of new products opens up ways to success on domestic and foreign markets



Jure Miklavc (<http://www.miklavc.si/>), head of the Studio Miklavc and teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design (ALUO), Department of Industrial Design, which is engaged in designing products for Slovene companies, presented a successful example of a comprehensive approach to the development of Alpina's **Binom** footwear. A team of designers and marketers developed footwear and a trade mark which became recognisable both in Slovenia and abroad. Some 10,000 pairs of shoes are sold annually, and buyers usually return. The success of Binom footwear and other products, in which Studio Miklavc has been involved, demonstrate that by the strategic inclusion of design and marketing expertise in the production of new products great success can be achieved.



Industry does not recognise designers' innovative potential



After a break, the lectures were followed by a roundtable where the participants discussed the causes of the poor collaboration between design and industry, the opportunities good collaboration brings about, the role of education and state policies. The speakers called attention to Slovenia's managers' poor knowledge of industrial design and innovations. **Jernej Repovš**, SMJWT, engaged in marketing management, brand management and the strategic management of companies, said the approach of Slovene companies was immature, and managers were not sufficiently skilled for the innovative operation of companies. So the role of industrial design is often confined to the visual image of products, while the innovative potential of industrial designers remains unexploited.



Saša J. Maechtig, Academy of Fine Arts and Design (ALUO), drew attention to the lack of competitive spirit in industry and lack of end products we offer in Slovene and international markets. Slovene politics, according to the speakers, has no clear strategy for the innovative development of the Slovene economy that might be comparable to those of Finland, Denmark, France, Great Britain etc.



All the participants agreed that the crisis period should be seen first of all as an opportunity for us to eliminate bad practices and direct our working momentum to new approaches based on strategic interdisciplinary collaboration. In the view of **Miloš Ebner**, Trimio d.d., the future holds success for those manufacturing enterprises that recognise their development opportunities in design and interdisciplinary innovation processes.



Participation in the pilot model of connecting design and industry

The innovation process of creating new products that will be a market success requires the involvement of industrial designers, marketing, branding and sales experts. Through developing a model of connecting the R&D departments of commercial companies, designers and marketing experts, RDA LUR will establish new forms of collaboration which will contribute to enhancing the innovativeness and competitiveness of the Slovene economy. Activities following the conference will bring about **connection mechanisms and methodologies** acting as interfaces between manufacturing enterprises and designers.

At the beginning of next year, **project groups will be organised** to define starting points and goals for shaping a pilot project. Creative individuals and students from design fields together with the representatives of manufacturing enterprises will take part. The project groups will probably meet twice in January next year; at the start of the month, a working process will be established in which, besides the main stakeholders, project managers and marketing experts will also participate. The first part of the pilot projects is likely to be concluded in May 2012 **with an exhibition of conceptual drafts** serving as a basis for the implementation of manufacturing and marketing.

We invite all interested industrial designers, manufacturing enterprises and other experts who might wish to join the pilot project to subscribe to **notifications of future activities of the project** by email at tina.pezdirc@ljubljana.si.