The years when Swedish design research took off thanks to the Swedish Faculty for Design Research and Research Education

Design research for new approaches, innovation and sustainable growth
This publication is a summary of the Swedish Faculty for Design Research and Research Education’s activities between 2008 and May 2014 as we are seeking funding for our continued existence. The summary is published by the Faculty, a national centre for design research based at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Our aim here at the Design Faculty is to develop design research based at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Our aim here at the Design Faculty is to develop design as a discipline in order to make it possible to respond to social, economic and technological challenges in society in a sustainable, innovative and aesthetically aware manner. Just over 50 doctoral students are currently participating in our research school. They come from our many member universities and colleges around Sweden. 19 have already achieved their doctorates.

A useful calendar on the website

At designfakulteten.kth.se you will not only find news, minutes of board meetings, details about supervisors and information about all our doctoral students, workshop events, internats, courses and member institutions. You will also find a calendar with important dates and activities, ranging from when our students are defending their theses and notifications that new internship positions are open to applicants, to when various conferences are being held and other information that may be of interest to anyone interested in design research.
A successful programme whose future must be secured

There is no doubt that design and research about design are vital to the major problems of society that exist today. The Design Faculty has vitalised this field following funding from the Swedish Research Council but the funds run out by the end of 2014/ beginning of 2015. A future for this work must now be secured.

The Design Faculty’s Graduate School was launched in 2008 with funds from the Swedish Research Council. The initiators were 19 third-level institutions with research ambitions in the field of design together with the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID). The faculty was based at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, and the funding of five million kronor annually for five years came after a Riksdag decision as a follow-up to the 2005 Year of Design in Sweden.

At that time design was still a relatively clear-cut discipline with its roots in the applied arts and industrial product development. However, the design professionals and the institutions’ instructors lacked an academic anchor. The need for a developed knowledge base was further highlighted by the fact that design applications began to broaden at an increasingly rapid pace. The development of new information and communication technology played a key role in this. Users’ ability to influence developments had become more and more important, and the design sector’s experiences of development processes with broad participation had gained particular relevance. People began to talk about interaction design. Design’s strategic importance to companies also began to attract ever-great interest in the management field.

There were more than 70 doctoral students at the school has been operating, significantly more – 71 in total – have been registered. Of these, 19 have so far received their doctorate. In 2014 about 10 new thesis defended will be written. The second challenge is to make use of the expertise of the new graduates. Many of them will leave academia to work in industry and the public sector. Others will be in demand to teach within academia.

Competency development needed

The application to the Swedish Research Council predicted that 15 doctoral students would be interested in participating in the graduate school at any one time. However, during the seven years that the school has been operating, significantly more – 71 in total – have been registered. Of these, 19 have so far received their doctorate. In 2014 about 10 new thesis defended will be written. The second challenge is to make use of the expertise of the new graduates. Many of them will leave academia to work in industry and the public sector. Others will be in demand to teach within academia.

If competency development is to be broadened and deepened, however, the opportunities to do continued research must also be secured. It is not clear how this will be done. One possibility is instructor jobs with time to do research. But the tough competition for faculty funding makes it difficult to quickly achieve a critical mass. The same holds true for funding from the research councils as long as the design field is not recognised as an independent discipline with great potential. Here new initiatives are needed to gain support from both the EU’s design programme and from industry and the social sector.

The Design Faculty’s strategic planning for the next operational period from 2015 has resulted in the following programmes:

1. The national graduate school continues with the same organisation as before, with a basic course and in-depth courses. However, the responsibility for course planning and implementation is split between the member institutions in order to limit the central costs.

2. To coordinate a more developed collaboration over initiating research, a group of senior researchers from the member institutions was appointed. The core of this group was drawn from the now-active Nordic cooperation within the Nordes framework via the exchange of courses. This complements previous cooperation in organising an international research conference every second year and a summer school for doctoral students in the intervening years. The second challenge is to make use of the expertise of the new graduates. Many of them will leave academia to work in industry and the public sector. Others will be in demand to teach within academia.

3. Collaboration within the Nordic association for design research, NORDDES, will be deepened. In addition to the international research conference and summer school in alternating years, there are plans for Nordic courses in fields where the base in each country is too small or where some institution has special expertise. As a start, a catalogue of Nordic courses is being produced and this will also include the field of architecture.

4. An activity for postdocs and other holders of doctorates in the field of design will be initiated. The aim is to develop the network and create new areas of cooperation. As part of this activity there are plans for annual seminars, support for special subject groups, and a mentorship programme. In the longer term there are plans to expand the network to the rest of Europe, the US and other countries.

5. An international secretariat is being set up to build up contacts and create research collaborations. Work has already begun with a survey of a number of relevant current EU programmes. The plan is that in the next few years this will work will result in a number of EU projects involving several member institutions.

6. Funding for the Faculty’s future work is being sought from both research councils and private foundations, in order to maintain a stable foundation, a basic organisation is being created, which is funded by the member institutions. This organisation will primarily ensure the implementation of the courses in the graduate school and coordinate the initiation of new research programmes and projects in cooperation with researchers in other disciplines, the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID), and other concisely interested parties, and to work towards the funding of these programmes/projects.

Peter Ullmark, professor at Chalmers University of Technology and former director of the Design Faculty
Design is society's biggest cultural sector!

Design research creates knowledge about the areas of design and is focused either on design work or on the contexts within which designed products, services and systems are used and experienced. In other words: everywhere.

Since 2012 the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation has worked to develop a design agenda with the aim of making possible the increased use of design in society. We have worked with the needs of design and design research in order to develop a design agenda with the aim of making possible the increased use of design in society. We have worked with the needs of design and design research in order to be able to communicate what the future can bring with it with regard to efforts in these fields.

Almost everyone in Sweden needs to come into contact with the Swedish Social Insurance Agency at some time in their life. For an operation like the Agency’s it is important to use design to facilitate our clients’ encounters with us. User-centred design and research into it are necessary in order to create an easier everyday life and a better life for people – and thereby contribute to a better society.

Good design is the best contribution we can make to sustainability because design is the opposite of wearing out, throwing away and wasting things. Only things that are good enough aesthetically and functionally can live a long time. A good society is unimaginable without good design. Neither technology nor politics suffice – they must both have a design which means that their results can be used and be liked!

Swede Sörlin, professor of environmental history, KTH

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Erika Mayer, service design/art director, Digital Channels, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency

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Examples are projects, jobs, future funding of the Design Faculty, and various innovation programmes. Today we can see that decision makers at all levels are becoming more and more aware of the need for creative, interdisciplinary collaborations between multiple parties in order to solve both local and global challenges, but that they perhaps do not yet see design as a method for doing this. It is therefore extremely important that the Design Faculty is driving the development of design research in Sweden.

The mere fact that the Faculty is a collaboration between 17 universities and colleges over such a broad topic as design is unique and something we should be very proud of in Sweden.

Eva-Karin Andersson, program director, the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID)

For ModigMinoz, a change think tank that is fostering sustainable development via increased innovativeness, design is a method for and an approach to processes of change and development. Design helps society’s stakeholders to shape new solutions that better meet the real needs of both our selves and future users. By combining empathy, rationality and systematic work, design-based methods create good conditions for attacking complex “wicked” sets of problems and producing solutions that cut across established boundaries between areas of knowledge and responsibility, industries and social sectors. Systematically exploring design practice and its underlying conditions is important in order to better understand how we humans can together shape solutions for tomorrow’s society. That is why design research is needed.

Sara Modig, co-founder and senior partner, ModigMinoz

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Nordes summer schools
In the Nordes network, which includes the Design Faculty, the Nordic countries take turns arranging a conference every second year and a summer school in the intervening years. In 2014 it is Finland’s turn to organise the summer school for the first time. The school is very popular among our students. Aalto University is responsible for the theme, “The Perceptive Body”, and the school is being held on 18–21 August in Helsinki. In 2012 the theme was “Design on the Move” when the students met at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) in Oslo and in 2010 the summer school was held in Pukeberg, Nybro, Sweden on the theme “[The doing of] Design Things”. In 2008 the school was held at Krogerup Folk High School in Copenhagen, and on that occasion, which was also the first, the theme was “Research and Design Experiments”. More info at nordes.org

Senior lecturer, chair and alumni
Åsa Wikberg Nilsson is currently a senior lecturer at the Innovation and Design division at Åbo Akademi University of Technology. She is also chair of D&R – Swedish Design Research Network, member of the Design Faculty’s board, and one of our alumni. In February 2012 she successfully defended her thesis “Rethinking designing”, which aimed to develop practical tools and guidelines for workplace design based on a reflective design tradition. Her theoretical research contribution can be summarised as the connections between theories and concepts such as change, learning, gender and design in norm-creative design research. At the time of writing, she is also participating in the Genuslab (gender lab) project with Marcus Jahnke and Karin Ehrnberger, who she met at the Design Faculty’s graduate school. The aim of the project is to create a workshop-based process and methods for norm-critical innovation. The project is commissioned by Vinnova and the work is being done in collaboration with about a dozen organisations, including Veryday, the Karolinska Institute, Snickers Workwear, Experio Lab and Restaurangakademien.

Award-winning and value-adding service design
Design and service innovation are fields that often deal with similar tasks. But how can they understand each other better? In spring 2014 Katarina Wetter-Edman successfully defended her thesis “Design for Service: A framework for articulating designers’ contribution as interpreter of users’ experience”. The thesis aims to understand and facilitate precisely this form of communication, partly via the new Design for Service framework. The central issue in the thesis is how we can understand the industrial designer’s knowledge/practice and its function when it is integrated into other fields than traditional product design – and how can it then contribute to the innovation of services?

In 2011 Wetter-Edman received the ‘Anna Dahlins scholarship’, which aims to encourage and foster interdisciplinary research. In presenting the award the jury said: “She creates the conditions for how industrial design can create value and contribute significant knowledge in a new field of application.”

Think in new ways!
Marcus jahnke’s thesis project
“Meaning in the Making – Introducing a Hermeneutic Perspective on the Contribution of Design Practice to Innovation” is about how design can contribute to strong innovation work in companies with little or no previous design experience. In an experimental study done in collaboration with SVID, five designers “intervened” – each in one of five companies. Using a series of workshops, the designers involved the multidisciplinary groups in a creative process in which conversational and practical work were interwoven. The result was many innovative concepts that challenge the prevailing ideas about the company’s products. By interpreting the processes using inspiration from hermeneutics, Jahnke shows that these can be understood as an activated creation of meaning through design. This differs from how, for example, design thinking is often described as a process for problem solving.

Haptic interaction design – a new research field
The Design Faculty’s ninth doctor of design, Gemille Moussette, was the first at Umeå Institute of Design and therefore “a milestone for the institution and its research”. His aim was to develop haptic, the science of the effects of touch, from a design perspective based on human needs. In his thesis “Simple Haptics: Sketching Perspectives for the Design of Haptic Interactions” he explores how interaction designers can use the science of touch to develop interfaces and experiences that go beyond traditional visual- and form-based aesthetics. Products that feel right as opposed to products that look good give the designer both new challenges and new possibilities. In his thesis Moussette uses concrete examples, guidelines and recommendations for how an interaction designer can work to develop touch-based products. The thesis is in response to the fact that users are increasingly interacting with products via touch.

Outreach activities
The Design Faculty sometimes organises open seminars, partly to tell the world about our development and partly to invite people to topics we believe should interest more people in the field of design research. Recently a full-day event on the theme “Designing Publics, Publics Designing: Design roles in social innovation” was held at Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design with the help of, among others, Miljöcentrum Social Innovation (Miljöcentrum Social Innovation, KTH Royal Institute of Technology and Interactive Institute. Previously we were at the Architecture and Design Centre in Stockholm for a half day with the theme “The Design Faculty – what’s up?”, when topics included the current situation and challenges. In spring 2012 a large audience gathered to take part in a full-day design research conference with lectures, workshops and panel debates on this theme. The activities are listed on the website.

Sweden’s first doctor of service design
Cognitive scientist Fabian Segelström has become Sweden’s first doctor of service design with his thesis “Stakeholder Engagement for Service Design: How service designers identify and communicate insights”. He studied how service designers work to create understanding for customers and others who are affected by a service – partly in order to develop services that better meet their needs. For several months he followed at close quarters service designers and their clients – various service companies in Sweden, Germany and Australia. One of his conclusions is that when a service designer goes into a company, its various departments often discover they have a lot to gain by working together more. Another conclusion is that service designers offer a holistic view, which their clients often lack. The designers see and can define the whole process, from when the need for a service arises through to when it is supplied and the need is met.
The statistics

What kind of background do students have at the Design Faculty? How many have attended the graduate school between 2008 and spring 2014? And, above all, in what areas are they conducting research?

When the design faculty saw the light of day in 2008, some individuals had already begun their doctoral studies in design. This helped the Faculty’s graduate school rapidly achieve the expected number of between 15 and 20 doctoral students. The large influx of new doctoral students was both unexpected and pleasing, and it has continued unabated ever since, so that the students now number almost 70. Many of them have a background in design but the breadth of education that the students have before they start is great. This, combined with the fact that the students come from many different countries, leads to many fruitful discussions and insights. The focus of the students’ theses is often relatively practical without therefore being applied. The various practices provide a basis for reflection and the further development of theories and approaches in which design is put in relation to people, society and technology.

Educational background

Many students have a design background but they have a broad range of studies before they start. Most commonly, they have a master’s of industrial design from an art and design institution but there is also a large group of engineering designers. Together with the doctoral students who have an international background in interaction design, these students comprise about two-thirds of the total. The remaining third come from many different fields, which contributes to many fruitful discussions within the resulting broad field of design.

Focus

The students’ focuses are often relatively practical without being applied. Various practices provide a basis for reflection and the further development of theories and approaches in which design is put in relation to people, society and technology. In broad terms, four different focuses commonly characterise the students’ work:

- industrial designers and others who work with participatory design research,
- service designers who focus on critical design management research and social science,
- critically engaged designers and artists who explore the public’s involvement and (new) political and theoretical fields of design research, and
- interaction designers who research into and via (new) ways of living with technology.

Bo Westerlund, director, the Design Faculty

Geographic distribution

The students come from many different countries, which contributes to an inspiring international research environment.
Design for a desirable future

The realisation that design drives everything from innovation to solutions of societal challenges is growing ever greater, for example within the EU. For this reason the work of the Design Faculty is vital to further developing Sweden’s position as a leading actor in design research. In this article some of our members give their view on this issue.

Further development of critical mass

**INNOVATION IS THE KEY** to bringing Europe out of its current crisis. This is the starting point for the EU’s strategy entitled Europe 2020, which makes clear the need for a broad and balanced view on innovation. In a Europe characterised by both economic decline and large social and climate challenges, we must think in new and different ways. We must become better at cooperating across boundaries – between countries and between disciplines; between universities and companies, between the private and public sector spheres.

The EU’s Innovation Union initiative defines innovation as the ability of individuals, companies and entire nations to continually create a desirable future. This definition clearly singles out the importance of design research in the transition towards a Europe based on innovation and competitiveness. The aim is to create a European platform for mapping out the importance of the creative industries in Europe.

Within the framework of the Business & Design Lab at the University of Gothenburg we are leading one of the largest European research projects in the field, DESMA. This links four universities, eight companies and twelve doctoral students, who together are exploring how design can act as a driver of innovation and competitiveness. The aim is to create a European platform for developing the field of research into design management. We are also leading the design-related part of another EU-funded research project, Unveiling Creativity in Europe, which includes 11 leading European universities that have joined forces to map out the importance of the creative industries in Europe.

In these projects we at the University of Gothenburg provide most of the expertise in design research. These experiences have reinforced our view that Sweden has great potential to take a leading role in the transition towards a Europe based on design-driven innovation. We have a tradition of interdisciplinary collaboration and a management tradition that is relatively easy to link up with a design logic. But perhaps most important of all, we have come significantly farther than our European colleagues in developing design research and thereby being able to take advantage of both scientific and practical methods that are based on design practice in innovation contexts.

The Design Faculty has been a prerequisite for establishing this position by creating a critical mass for driving third-cycle (doctoral) studies in design and for creating a common forum for developing design research as a separate discipline. I hope that we can now take advantage of this unique experience and find new opportunities to further develop both this common platform and Sweden’s position as a leading actor in design research.

Anna Rylander, project manager DESMA and researcher, Business & Design Lab, the School of Design and Crafts at the University of Gothenburg

New design practices for new needs

**DESIGN TODAY PLAYS** a significant strategic role in many different types of development and innovation processes. By continuously responding to new and emerging needs, industrial design has developed over time from originally focusing mostly on the formation of physical objects for industrial mass production to being about process and production, use and experience, in a very broad sense. When it comes to industrial design as it is practised today, Umeå Institute of Design is recognised as being very much a leader. Our educational programmes are ranked among the best in the world and our students regularly win prizes in international competitions. It is against this background that we are now working with the question of what role design research can play for our own and our discipline’s future development.

Our research and third-cycle (doctoral) training programmes are based on two basic premises. The first is that knowledge development within the design discipline will continue to depend on a number of different strategies, and that the emerging research must be regarded as being one part of a greater context of knowledge. Unlike most other academic subjects, the design discipline has not historically based its knowledge development on academic research but rather on a number of different approaches, with the common characteristic that the focus is on the actual design practice. The development of design as an academic discipline has been done in the form of artistic development work, and, in the case of industrial design, to a great extent within professional practice.

The second basic premise is that the main reason why research in particular has become an ever-more important aspect of design is not primarily due to the emergence of new technology, new applications and the like. Rather, it is due to the strategic necessity of investigating changes to the cornerstones of our discipline that are very difficult to address with the strategies we have mostly used to date. If we look at the development, and, not least, the expansion, of the design field, it is clear that designers have been able to tackle new technology etc. with great success: new design practices are constantly emerging in response to new needs and sets of problems. The primary task of design research is to develop whatever is making such a development of design possible in the future as well.

As we move towards areas and work methods that are farther and farther from what were previously typical processes aimed at mass production for mass consumption, it is more and more important to develop the artistic, theoretical, and methodological aspects that constitute the basis of design work. For example, industrial design rests on an artistic foundation that was to a large extent formulated in the light of early industrialisation and thereby based on a fundamental logic that today is far from being as self-evident as it once was. By critically investigating, developing and challenging the discipline’s foundation in ways that professional practice simply cannot do, design research can deepen the foundation required for design to be able to continue to develop towards new fields, collaborations and new needs. For the same reason, third-cycle (doctoral) training becomes a natural continuation of previous design education, an answer to the needs for further in-depth study of the subject and new skills. Accordingly, the most important task of our research is not about present applications but about further development of our design practices.

Johan Redström, professor and research leader at Umeå Institute of Design, Umeå University
Design research as a bridge builder!

We are becoming more and more aware that the social, technological and economic systems of the future will require special competencies which include the skill both to take advantage of more specialised expert knowledge and to work between different disciplines. This has created challenges for traditional scientific disciplines. It is not that specialisations have become less important but rather that they need to be complemented with the ability to develop forms of collaboration across disciplinary borders, to use design methodologies and to strengthen innovative ability.

The cause of this development is that we are facing previously unknown and complex sets of issues in both our society and the private sector. Design research and the design discipline offer experienced-based work methods and approaches which have proven to be able to make a powerful contribution to the development of concepts for totally new types of solutions and work methods and approaches which have proven to be able to make a powerful contribution to the development of concepts for totally new types of solutions and proposals. Research to develop the body of knowledge within this field has been established in recent years via Sweden’s national Design Faculty, which was set up in 2008. Through the DI research school, doctoral students and researchers/instructors have found an arena for development and learning which has had an inspiring influence on the educational programmes in which the doctoral students are registered. Sometimes these are pure design-focused programmes but just as often they are art, economics or technical subjects.

In recent years the international funding system has been developed. There has been a range of calls for funding applications by Swedish and international research funding bodies which focus on highlighting issues of design and innovation within larger projects. One such example is Horizon 2020 with its main focus on the major challenges facing society.

For a long time now much of the research and education at KTH Royal Institute of Technology has been linked to challenges in the world at large but there is still potential for improvement. There are many (good) reasons why we are organised so that, for example, the Built Environment, Industrial Management, Product Design and Computer Science are not always in direct contact with each other. One of the important bridge builders between various parts of KTH now and in the future is design research and design thinking and their link to sustainability issues. Our participation in the Design Faculty has allowed a large number of doctoral students to have a fruitful discussion with colleagues from many different academic institutions in Sweden. In its turn, this has meant that a critical mass in design research has now finally been achieved in Sweden.

KTH regards research and education in the field of design – linked to our various schools – as a long-term important contribution to the ambition of being a university which creates desired futures.

Margareta Norell Bergendahl, professor of Integrated Product Development and Vice President for Cooperation at KTH Royal Institute of Technology

Alternative futures

In a constantly changing society in which innovations capture contemporary attitudes, design has always played a central role. It is a role that both formulates alternative futures and makes links to historical development processes, and always with human beings and their abilities as the building blocks. Design research is therefore multi-faced, with questions driven by curiosity and development – that focus on what is happening with design knowledge at a time of transition between new disciplines, what mechanisms lie behind the adaptive ability of design, why some design is perceived as good, how old technological solutions become new creative tools, why organisations succeed or fail at integrating design, what fundamental principles govern design solutions, and so on.

Within these dynamics Linköping University’s design research has been a leader, from the interaction design of the 1990s up to today’s research into service design. Design research has been a self-evident component, together with successful educational programmes and courses on topics like handicrafts and the applied arts, furniture design, graphic design, interaction design and technological design. With this diversity as a starting point, the university established the network, or college, LIU design, across disciplines, faculties and departments, with support from the Design Faculty. We have reciprocally been able to act to both strengthen Swedish design research and get it to grow, both in and of itself and within specific fields.

Now, at a time when the EU as a research funding body is starting to open its eyes to design research, as a separate discipline but also as a support for other research and innovation, Swedish researchers have an advantage in the existence of the Design Faculty as a well-established network of leading design researchers. We also have a long tradition of design thinkers and design researchers from the late 19th century up to today. This research stems from a design-driven, human-centred perspective and formulates alternative futures.

Stefan Holmlid, docent, Department of Computer and Information Science, Linköping University
The glocal creation of meaning

IS “DESIGN” THE ZEITGEIST of our age? Many people would immediately say yes. Certainly in the sense of designing the appearance of applied arts products, design has been developed into an economic means of competition that cannot be ignored. At the same time, many years have passed since design was only about adding value to products in the strictly commercial sense. Today the concept of design is also used in broader terms, often with the meaning “transdisciplinary inventiveness”, which is essential to all transformative and innovative activities.

Design can also simply be translated as “creating meaning”: a fundamental activity of society about which we still know far too little. All material and technological design has a communicative dimension, which determines how an object, a transport system, a work environment or a social service functions, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, how these, as “design products”, succeed in contributing to a more desirable, equitable, attractive, healthy or changeable everyday existence. This type of complex connection between humans and the environment, resources and possibilities comprises the field of design research. Here are new border areas and knowledge gaps, which design researchers are currently identifying and filling out. Design researchers do not take “design” for granted, and are not satisfied with regarding “good design” as a mythical stroke of luck. By means of applied research collaborations in various fields, design researchers instead are coming to grips with systematic experiments, testing and evaluating new, integrative methods, concepts and strategies that can support design processes in a variety of fields.

Since the start in 1998, Malmö University has been one of the driving environments within design research in Sweden and the Nordic region. As a partner within the Design Faculty, the university has also played an active role in the development of the training programme for design researchers. At Malmö University design research is being done primarily within the research profile “New media, public spheres and forms of expression”. This profile focuses on studies of digitally enhanced, mediated communication and interaction; on multidisciplinary and practice-based experiments with new technologies; complex systems and multimodal forms of cooperation or coordination.

One important task is to explore the technological development and media usage that is occurring outside the context of academia, in everyday, entrepreneurial or “subcultural” contexts. Today the relationships between producers and consumers, between professionals and amateurs, between developers and users, are different, and this also influences the methods and issues of research. Sweden, with its tradition of cooperative and participatory processes, is far ahead from a global perspective. This creates a good foundation for an expanded investment of effort and resources into the exploration of concept development, complex processes, and collaborative creation. Today expectations of design research are rightly high, and we are prepared to tackle the challenges.

Maria Kistler Boerner, professor of the theory and practice of design at Malmö University, director of studies at the Design Faculty"
Award-winning alumni share their stories

Of the 19 doctors of design who at the time of writing have participated in the Design Faculty’s graduate school, five have won awards worth SEK 10,000 kronor and our Design Research Award for the best thesis. Here they talk about their experiences of the Faculty’s graduate school, about how the view of design research has developed, and about what they are doing today.

**Four questions**

1. What was your experience of the training offered by the Swedish Faculty for Design Research and Research Education?
2. What did the graduate school give you?
3. What are your thoughts on how the field of design research has developed in recent years, its status and future?
4. What are you doing today?

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**Otto von Busch**

1. The Design Faculty has been a fantastic meeting place and very inspiring. There are so many ways of approaching design, and because the topic is so new, it is really fruitful to bring together the resources and be able to access many perspectives.

2. The workshop events in particular helped make it possible to talk about methods in a freer way, to be able to seek support from other designers who are working with similar issues. Otherwise it’s easy to make one’s research “technique heavy”.

3. Design is becoming more and more established as a research field, especially in the Nordic countries, and design research here also has a clear link to social issues, politics and philosophy, which I think is beneficial. It means that the research can really raise the field up and not be primarily technical.

4. I am now a professor of textile design at Konstfack and most of my research is on fashion and politics.

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**Mette Agger Eriksen**

1. D! is a very important cross-institutional faculty with strong international connections. Especially for the PhD scholars involved, it seems to become a platform enabling continual interaction with other new and senior scholars broadening perspectives in relation to the home institution. Additionally, D! has been a strong actor and voice in establishing a Swedish network, acknowledgement and vocabulary of practice-based design research.

2. To me D! becomes a platform enabling continual interaction with other new and senior scholars broadening perspectives in relation to my home institution at Malmö University – and in addition to Danish environments and networks I also engaged in as a PhD scholar. Particularly the thematic seminars/internats played an important role to me, in terms of pushing me to explore new theoretical areas related to design research.

3. Parallel with the time the Design Faculty has existed, in my view the field of design research has generally matured rapidly – both in Sweden and internationally. The faculty’s close integration with the Nordes design research conferences and summer schools has surely been a part of making this happen here in Scandinavia. Thus, currently design research (e.g. practice-based, programmatic and with experiments and design work at its core, etc.) is in my experience increasingly recognised within design education and research institutions. These approaches are also increasingly recognised as important in various funding calls/programmes. However, in the future there is still lots of work to do in terms of encouraging the broadening and acceptance of design research practices in other research domains as well.

4. I currently have a postdoc position at Malmö University (Sept 2012–Sept 2014) – in many ways continuing and building upon the research interests and topics of my doctoral studies (materiality and co-designing practices). However, now I am doing this in relation to public and especially municipal sustainable urban transition practices – which nicely matches with my background in architecture.

**Martin Avila**

1. I appreciate D!’s general framework that delegates the theme and organisation of each meeting to the schools/companies involved, even though they fall within a yearly strategy from D!. I have always enjoyed, and have tried to be open to the variety of agendas of each meeting.

2. Logistically, with the possibility to travel, meet people and perform work. Intellectually, with stimulating discussions that often took me outside of my own practice and frame of work and study. It made it possible for me to meet other design researchers and educators, and participate in conferences, and also gave me access to information on funding. It has always been important for me to be part of D!’s activities because as a foreigner in Sweden, D! has been my window to the national landscape of design education and research.

3. I believe that design is going through a very productive crisis (one that stretches far beyond the “design field”) and that necessarily leads to the reassessment of the field and to more diversified practices. In my view, the future of design research lies in being capable of producing transversal (across disciplines) and integrative proposals that are difficult to make in traditional specialised research.

4. I hold a senior lecturer position at Konstfack and am responsible for design for sustainable development at the industrial design department. At the moment, however, I am living in Argentina and working on an international postdoc financed by the Swedish Research Council entitled Symbiotic Tactics. Design Interventions for Sensitizing to Ecological Complexity. The project will be developed through collaborations with research institutions in Sweden, Argentina and South Africa.
Camille Moussette

1. My experience of the DI activities has been very positive. I started my doctoral studies in Umass as the only PhD student at the department, and had few reference points and other perspectives with which to tackle my design research activities. The DI network and its members provided a forum to share challenges and activities. The D! network and its members reference points and other perspectives studies in Umeå as the only PhD student been very positive. I started my doctoral project. Overall, D! network allowed for postgraduate studies, and ultimately allowed PhD students, and ultimately develop an understanding of design research and its practitioners: who is working on what, how the research is done or present research projects or publications. Evaluation of design activities can be fairly loose and subjective in general. Assessment of good or great research endeavours is also often very tricky. When mixed together, the result can often be very diluted, substandard or even lame. I feel we ought to be more demanding and preoccupied by the quality of the work that we do in design research. I have seen a lot of very remarkable and thorough design research works out there, but there is also a massive amount of subpar or crappy projects around. It is hard to argue or convince people of the value of design research when the work doesn’t radiate quality, professionalism or just passion!

2. The research school helped me connect with many professors, researchers and doctoral students from outside my own department is precious. You discover how design research and doctoral studies are framed and realised elsewhere in Sweden, Scandinavia and across the world. The encounters are organised around relevant themes, with readings, presentations, workshops and discussions, so that participants have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge.

3. It’s challenging to try to answer this question briefly. In short, I feel the design research field is maturing and establishing relatively solid foundations despite its short history. Elementary concepts, ideas and processes of design research have been examined for 10-15 years or more, and have been shared and tossed around intellectually by many so they have become fairly recognised, and somewhat robust overall in the community. While the “designerly ways” and activities of design research are generally accepted and valued by its core community, there is still a long way to go before it is adequately recognised by the larger design community and other academic disciplines. We, as a community, have to continue demonstrating that design research and its activities can produce knowledge that is unique, rigorous and relevant. Personally, moving forward, I would like to see an increased level of self-criticism and tighter measures of quality for design research projects or publications. Evaluation of design activities can be fairly loose and subjective in general. Assessment of good or great research endeavours is also often very tricky. When mixed together, the result can often be very diluted, substandard or even lame. I feel we ought to be more demanding and preoccupied by the quality of the work that we do in design research. I have seen a lot of very remarkable and thorough design research works out there, but there is also a massive amount of subpar or crappy projects around. It is hard to argue or convince people of the value of design research when the work doesn’t radiate quality, professionalism or just passion!

4. Since January 2013, I’m working at Apple in California, in the Input Devices group. We refine existing input devices like the keyboard and mouse, but we also prototype and develop new interfaces for people to interact with technology in various ways.

Bo Westerlund

1. The activities have led to incredibly valuable encounters between researchers and doctoral students in design research and adjacent disciplines.

2. Among other things, the graduate school has shown how broad the field of design research is. The school also provided opportunities to come into contact with extremely relevant and important encounters with other disciplines, which have so much to contribute to the understanding of design research and also design work. The encounters are organised around relevant themes, with readings, presentations, workshops and discussions, so that participants have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge.

3. Design research has absolutely become better known, at least among certain groups like designers, colleges and universities, but also among a number of research funding bodies.

In brief

Cooperation with SVID

At the time of writing, the Design Faculty and the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID) are developing a joint project for launch in June 2014 – www.designresearch.se. The website is a search page for design research and is aimed at researchers, students and business people in design. Visitors will be able to search for all types of design-related research by author, subject, key words, type of publication and more. The aim of designresearch.se is to raise the profile of design-related research and show how it is developing society in many different fields, and providing new knowledge and new solutions.

SVID also publishes the journal Swedish Design Research Journal twice a year in both Swedish and English editions. The Faculty’s students can participate in this journal with such contributions as research articles. The journal can be downloaded or ordered via www.svid.se/designresearchjournal.

Congratulations Martin Avila, our alumnus and senior lecturer in industrial design at Konstfack and the holder of a doctorate in design from the School of Design and Crafts at the University of Gothenburg. Martin is the first person to be awarded an international postdoc position by the Swedish Research Council in the field of artistic research specialising in design. The project is entitled “Symbolic Tactics.” Design interventions for understanding and sensitizing to ecological complexity and a collaboration with the Multidisciplinary Institute of Vegetal Biology in Córdoba, Argentina and the African Centre for Cities in Cape Town, South Africa. The aim of the Swedish Research Council’s funding is to promote international mobility for newly graduated researchers who hold a Swedish doctorate.

Design research with breadth

The great breadth of subject matter being addressed by student and Design Faculty can be illustrated with the cases of Noor Adila Mohd Rugi and Martin Bergman. Noor Adila has a background in jewellery design and is doing research at Lund University’s Department of Design Sciences in the field of practice and knowledge creation in jewellery design. Her work is partly about identifying what types of knowledge the practitioners have, how they gained that knowledge, and how it is transferred into creative and innovative jewellery designs. Martin has a master’s degree in product development with an industrial design specialty. He is now doing industrial design research, focusing on functional surfaces and how emotions are linked to surface design. In other words, he has modified the world-famous methodology of Kansei Engineering to also include surfaces, which means that he is currently at the forefront of the field’s development.

Lisa Lindstrom, chairman of the board of SVID and CEO of the Swedish design agency Deberman

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Workshop events are a source of knowledge

The workshop events ("internat") form the backbone of the Design Faculty’s graduate school and are held four times a year. They provide an introduction to the various methods, theories and fields of design research, and give the doctoral students the opportunity to build networks and gain an overview of current design research.

The Design Faculty is thus a national centre for design research. Its aim is to develop design as a field of knowledge in order to respond to social, economic and technological challenges in society in a sustainable, innovative and aesthetically aware manner. Most of our work therefore involves operating a graduate school which currently has more than 50 doctoral students, all registered at one or other of our member institutions throughout Sweden.

The basic course provides an introduction to the various methods, theories and fields of design research, and gives the doctoral students the opportunity to build networks and gain an overview of current design research both in Sweden and abroad.

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The basic course is planned and led by the graduate school’s management group and is held at various member institutions throughout Sweden. It gives each institution the opportunity to present its own research. Sometimes, a workshop event is held abroad; for example, we have studied social innovations in Citerna in Italy, “Transdisciplinary and collaborative learning processes in design” at Parsons’ The New School in New York, and “Social Innovation and Critical Design” at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl, graduate doctors of design whose joint thesis is entitled “Patchworking Publics-in-the-Making, Design, Media and Public Engagement”, say that the workshop events provide the space to explore and deepen pre-existing interests and contribute to decisive impulses for continued work, sometimes at a very concrete level.

As an example, the workshop event in Citerna led us in our thesis work to continue exploring how an invitation is formulated without presupposing what the problem is, but rather allowing the invitation to take shape in an interaction between the participants.

Advanced & summer courses

As a complement to the basic course, the Design Faculty also offers advanced courses in special research fields, methods or theoretical contexts. These courses are given by the member institutions, at their initiative or on recommendation by the faculty. It is also possible to start projects or special interest groups, which can then receive funding from the Faculty. In addition to these courses, every second year a summer school for doctoral students from throughout the Nordic region is held in cooperation with the Nordes network.

This might involve a context where we explore dreams, problems, issues or conflicts.

Focus on social innovations

One of our latest workshop events focused on social innovations, an increasingly important field of design. To shed light on this, and above all to underline the possibilities of design, an open full-day seminar was arranged, entitled "Designing Publics, Publics Designing: Design Roles in Social Innovation". In addition to the Design Faculty, the organisers included Mötetsplats Social Innovation (Meeting Place Social Innovation) and the Department of Industrial Design at Konstfack.

Judging by the audience’s size, there is great interest in this topic. The topics of the lectures and panel debates covered everything from the role of the designer and researcher, the possibilities and challenges, to who defines the problems and what various types of cooperation might look like. The entire seminar is documented at our website.

The day before the seminar, Otto von Busch, professor of textiles at Konstfack and assistant professor of integrative fashion at Parsons’ The New School for Design, began with a much-appreciated workshop session on the theme “The Purgatory of Social Design”.

Presentations by the doctoral students are always part of the workshop events. This time it was the turn of Helena Kräff at the School of Design and Crafts at the University of Gothenburg, who presented her research project “A designerly approach – in place development”. Andrew Whitcomb, from the same school, researches design methods and spoke about “Exploration in Collaborative Design”. The workshop event concluded with a lecture by Anna Rylander, researcher at the Business & Design Lab at the University of Gothenburg, on the theme “Design Experiments & Pragmatism”.

Schön in Tranås and Latour in Malmö

Another example of workshop event themes is “Design practice – knowledge production and knowledge need”. Some 20 students met in the town of Tranås at a company called Materia, which was founded by one of them – Kersti Sandin, now professor at Carl Malmsten Furniture Studies, Department of Management and Engineering at the University of Gothenburg, on the theme “Participation as an Act of Innovation” at Aalborg University, gave a lecture, there were discussions on the topic of “Reading Latour” and a workshop was held on “Mapping controversies” with design researcher Alex Wilke from Goldsmiths. In addition, PhD students Zeenath Hassan and Henrik Svarrer Larsen presented their respective projects “Participation as an Act of Mediation” and “Tangible Participation; Prognostic Design Research and Design Engagements in a Pedagogical Praxis”. Since the Design Faculty began, 31 such workshop events have been held, the latest at the Swedish School of Textiles in Borås on the theme “Materialities”.

PHOTO: LOUISA JOHANSSON-SZUCS

Our director of studies, Maria Heltonniemi Reimer, teaches at Malmö University, where she arranged a workshop event on the theme “Re-Assembling the Social”. The event was devoted entirely to Bruno Latour, a French sociologist known for his studies of knowledge building and the philosophy of science. With this focus, Professor Torben Elgaard Jensen, who researches in user-driven innovation at Aalborg University, gave a lecture, there were discussions on the topic of “DNA. In another session we were guided through the American organisational theorist Donald Schön’s works with the help of design theorist Erik Stolterman.

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The Need to Think Big – and Internationalise!

Doctoral education in design is in a formative stage all over the world. Sweden, the Design Faculty, has had a unique and strong position in developing doctoral education in design, which is reflected in its exceptional growth and results since its founding in 2007.

Around the World there are differences in approaches to the subject of design, in methodologies for carrying out research, and in experiences with industrial and societal applications. There is also an increasing amount of examples, theoretical depth and recognition of the subject and its contributions across academic, industrial and public sectors. This provides new horizons for the future development of the Design Faculty.

Knowledge exchange on an international basis is necessary to further develop doctoral education in design. A networked organisation and knowledge exchange across institutions, faculty and students increases the critical mass and quality within the new but rapidly developing field. Knowledge and experiences are generated relevant to multiple contexts, cultures and beneficiaries of design research, which contributes to the competence and competiveness of doctoral students and their future employers. The Design Faculty demonstrates this across Sweden and, increasingly, on a Nordic basis, through the bi-annual summer doctoral school organised with Nordes – the Nordic Design Research Network – and a planned common doctoral course.

International secretariat and future development

The Design Faculty’s strong position and network of institutions, graduates and results represent a unique contribution to developing doctoral design education not only on a Swedish but on a Nordic, European and international basis. This has been a motivation behind creating an international secretariat for the Design Faculty in 2013. A further motivation has been the increasing call for and funding for such developments in Europe.

In the EU research and innovation programme Horizon 2020, there are more opportunities for design research and doctoral education than in any previous EU funding programme. Launched in 2014, it will distribute €80 billion over 7 years to research networks, projects and platforms. Design is mentioned specifically in the Horizon 2020 topic ‘Societal Challenges’, along with related interests such as “sustainable and inclusive environments”, “social innovation and creativity” and “new forms of innovation”, and doctoral education and networks are targeted through the dedicated funds. More than previous programmes, Horizon 2020 emphasises characteristics of design research including interdisciplinarity, demonstration, public participation and industrial and societal application.

Doctoral positions and research are increasingly coordinated, centralised and funded on a European level. Swedish, Nordic and EU funding programmes are increasingly aligned. Responding to and shaping the topics in Horizon 2020 represents an unprecedented opportunity for future development of design, doctoral education in Sweden and the Design Faculty.

Ramia Masi, International Secretariat