

Mind the Map

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2008

Izmir/Turkey

History sometimes writes its own history. What is interesting in relation to writing about history is that these texts have the potential to retain their importance and validity as time passes. It is because their subject does not deal with current issues and ephemeral subjects (with some exceptions, of course...). This is the reason I have finally dared to publish some papers from the Mind the Map conference six years after the event, they are germane and valid, many with original views and some of historical value. Although a few of them have been previously published in various journals, republishing them within the context of the conference provides a wider perspective and framework.

Let me remind you how we have proceeded to this point. Havana hosted the second International Congress on Design Studies and Design History in 2000. At the end of this conference, both, Anna Calvera and Lucila Fernandez, the first and second conference organisers, asked me to initiate the third event in 2002. There was one condition though, it would take place in Istanbul. As I was living and working in the UK at that time, their request was not an easy one to fulfil. The approval and the support of two Institutions were essential: Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD then, now it is part of University College for the Creative Arts) where I was working at the time and the Istanbul Technical University (ITU), where I had intended to use facilities and to form a partnership with its Department of Industrial Design.

Luckily, both Institutions supported the project. KIAD contributed financially and enabled me to organise almost everything from the UK. The Department of Industrial Design and ITU undertook the groundwork, offered its venues and facilities, and made available staff and students for various activities and essential services for the conference, which took place in Istanbul from the 9th-12th July 2002.

The conference was well-received and 174 registered delegates and speakers represented thirty countries. Adding the invited audience, observers, press and students who were helping during the presentations, about 250 people in total actively participated in this conference, which proved successful, and perhaps the biggest one of its kind at this time.

Keynote speakers, Bazon Brock from Germany, Tim Benton from UK and Dogan Kuban from Turkey raised significant theoretical and historical issues whilst two international Turkish Designers, Sevil Peach Gence (London) and Defne Koz (Milan, then, now Chicago, Milan, Istanbul) presented their design work.

During the opening speech I outlined the purpose of the conference and attempted to define the scope. If I were to rewrite it, I would alter a few words and repeat the rest as follows:

“We are here to share ideas, present the outcome of our research, exchange views with constructive criticism, develop cooperation, establish links and net work, initiate joint projects, increase support, share problems and turn the academic solitude to solidarity”.

Design history as a recently developing discipline falls into the intersection of cultural identities and the dilemma of globalisation. Within the boundaries of this sensitive threshold it is particularly significant to see the emergence of an international design history community, ready to challenge the difficulties with investigative powers and without compromising its own differences.

Design is on the agenda of Turkey and will continue to be so. I am of the opinion that within the political and economic turmoil often dominant in this country, design has become one of the flourishing sectors. The currency lost half of its value overnight in 2000 and Turkey was devastated by a terrible earthquake in 1999 where about 20000 people died in accordance with official records. Despite its chaotic scene, disasters and inexplicable list of political instabilities, design has remained as one of the areas offering a strong potential for economic and social prosperity.

The indicators are visible: the number of design companies, offices, events, exhibitions, design journals, publications, and even visits of well established international designers has increased considerably although the market has never fully recovered and continued to suffer a recession after 2001.

Therefore it is especially meaningful that a high number of international design scholars, educators, researchers, and experts are overtly contributing to the advancement of the discipline but also covertly supporting the slow but maybe irreversible rise of design in Turkey in this conference

Knowing that many participants travelled thousands of miles to join the conference has changed the nature of this meeting. Without being modest one could claim that this is more likely a design history congress than an international conference. Therefore, the idea of establishing a formal international society of design historians has emerged from this union. To support this, I call the conference Don't Mind the Map: Design Historians Beyond the Borders and I hope we will all cross many borders, all borders, more often than ever until they disappear.'

Well, we have crossed many borders since then, the Guadalajara conference organised by Héctor Flores Magón and Oskar Salinas-Flores in 2004, followed by Helsinki and Tallinn organised by Pekka Korvenmaa and Krista Kodres, and finally this year, the Osaka Conference by Harohiko Fujita which have all proved substantial to the establishment of an international community of design historians with excellent academic credentials.

This obviously gives us another powerful reason to archive the proceedings of this conferences carefully, regularly and systematically for the future of the discipline as well as for prospective researches. In the light of all these developments, I wish and hope that readers will welcome and appreciate the publication of Mind the Map at least with sympathy.