

Design Research in the Netherlands

A Symposium on the State of the Art

Preface to the Symposium

Design Methods Group (GOM) + Information Technology for Architecture (BI)
Eindhoven University of Technology

The objective of the symposium was to provide a forum within which the participants might present their research activities and interests to a diverse group of researchers in the field. As an initial goal, we considered this a unique opportunity to gauge the breadth of activity in the Netherlands. Cutting across disciplinary lines, the symposium would also provide a locus for discussion among an intellectually heterogeneous audience sharing a common interest in design research. After consultation we assembled a list of researchers and groups which appeared to us to be comprehensive, and sent out the first announcement. In most cases, the response was positive and immediate. Design research appeared to be ubiquitous.

Beyond the initial objectives of communication and information exchange, there is a significant underlying agenda. From a historical point of view the field appears to have reached a plateau. It is well-founded, diverse and active. There are venues for international meetings as well as for scientific publication. Among these, Design Studies, and Nigel Cross have to be singled out as one of the contributing factors in the self-awareness of the research field as well as in its growing definition and maturity.

What now appears to be necessary is the development of overall objectives for design research. The term 'design science' seems to hover in the background to imply the emergence of a rigorous design discipline. What are the next steps towards a science of design? How can the multi-disciplinary state currently characteristic of the field contribute to its realization? Will the new initiatives of the Graduate Schools of Design currently in stages of inception at both Eindhoven and Delft provide new incentives? Can we now enter a cycle of 'knowledge-based design education' in which what we are learning about design through research can be applied to teaching? Might the Netherlands play a unique role both in research and design pedagogy?

The symposium was intended to provide an initial step in enhancing discussion and interchange on these subjects. We were fortunate to have Professor John Gero of the Department of Architectural and Design Science of the University of Sydney as a guest speaker. We are very grateful for his contribution.

Robert Oxman, Thijs Bax, Henri Achten

