

MTic-design research project, hypothesis

The MTic-design research project aims to answer several questions related to the effect of intercultural cooperation on design. The most challenging question is whether it will be possible to measure the effect of intercultural cooperation on innovation. For this purpose an hypothesis is defined. This document elaborates the theory this hypothesis is based on.

Intercultural creation: taking co-creation a step further

The nature of the program, intercultural cooperation in product design, is in fact co-creation. Nowadays, service and product development more and more results from co-creation that manifests itself in a variety of shapes: collaborating teams of producers with customers, public and private parties working together, project teams consisting of several disciplines, etc. Co-creation can be faster than the usual linear development processes. But more important, in the case where supplier and customer co-create it reduces the distance between them, herewith better fulfilling customer's needs.

Co-creation also has the potential to create more innovative products and services because of increased interaction between team-members who approach the issue from a different perspective. This innovative potential of co-creation can be enhanced by including people who live in different contexts, from other places in the world, with different cultures. Intercultural creation therefor is expected to take co-creation a step further in its innovative potential. Co-creating in the same discipline and on an equal educational level makes it possible to test the added value of culture on innovation. The posed hypothesis for MTic-design is:

Mixing cultural practices will lead to design-driven innovation¹ when adequately utilizing the different cultural points of view from the sociocultural and technical context of people. The results (prototypes of products) of the design process will show whether this hypothesis is true.

This hypothesis is derived from the above theory about co-creation and the definition of design-driven innovation as well as the ingredients needed to achieve it, as explained by Professor of Management of Innovation Roberto Verganti in his book *Design Driven Innovation, Changing the Rules of Competition by Radically Innovating what Things Mean*.

Co-creation for design-driven innovation

Roberto Verganti explains what he means by Design-Driven Innovation² as *radically overturning dominant meanings in an industry*, or: giving different meanings to products, or inventing new meanings. For example Italian manufacturer of household items Alessi is world-

¹ Definition of Design Driven Innovation by Roberto Verganti

² Roberto Verganti, *Design Driven Innovation – Changing the Rules of Competition by Radically Innovating what Things Mean*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009

famous for giving new meanings to products. Before 1991 kitchen-utensils were only considered useful tools to hide away in a cupboard when not in use. Alessi transformed them in playful objects.³ Utensils from brands like Alessi are now often proudly present on a visible place; tools became decorative toys.

Verganti 's message is that radical innovation is based on research of the sociocultural and technical context of people (p11). By understanding those contexts one can address human needs and generate ideas that fit those needs. The MTic-design project builds on that theory. In different parts of the world the local contexts fulfill human needs in different ways. Mixing these contextual practices means introducing new ways of satisfying people and probably strengthen satisfaction. To summarize: innovation and more satisfaction by intercultural creation.

On page xi of the book Verganti states: 'Creativity is culturally neutral. ... Research on meanings is intrinsically visionary and built on the researcher's personal culture.' Related to this statement we will consider human creativity as means for creation, while cultural understanding and differences are means for innovation.

MTic-design research project

The MTic-design research project won't delve deeply into researching the local contexts but is based on the hypothesis that mixing cultural practices will lead to design-driven innovation.

The contribution of culture in the design-process then needs to be addressed. This will be one of the primary questions in the research.

The intercultural creation of MTic-design is meant to produce innovative products utilizing the different geographical and cultural contexts of the participants. This approach differs from the contemporary co-creation approaches with customers. Verganti: 'Radical innovation of meanings doesn't come from user-centered approaches. ... it is instead making *proposals*, putting forward a vision... it is a push strategy... They end up being what people were waiting for, once they see them. ... Firms that develop design-driven innovation step back from users and take a broader perspective.' (p10/11) That's precisely what we are going to do with MTic-design.

³ Verganti, page 40