

Consortiums Open Doors

The Danish Centre for Design Research has provided support for four consortiums in the fields of textile, fashion, furniture and strategic design in the schools of design and architecture. The consortiums form the framework for a collaboration of design researchers, research institutions and companies and thus help to generate synergy and promote the exchange of knowledge with the business sector. They lay the groundwork for future design research by building valuable networks for the exchange of knowledge and ideas and facilitate the identification of new key areas for design research.

By Trine Vu

A few years ago, Joy Boutrup and Vibeke Riisberg, both associate professors at Designskolen Kolding, had the chance to test a brand-new loom that is more economical in its use of materials at Lindauer-Dornier in Germany. Later, they were able to experiment with a new plant-based polyester yarn, Biofront, developed by the Japanese fibre manufacturer Teijin.

Both experiments were a part of the research project *Regulering af dagslys i offentlige rum* (Regulating daylight in the public space), which aims to find methods for making better use of daylight in office environments and thus reducing energy consumption. Both experiments were possible because the Textile Con-

sortium, which has Vibeke Riisberg as one of its driving forces, has opened the doors for new partners both in Denmark and abroad for herself and her colleagues.

Consortium Benefits Innovation

The loom and the Japanese fibres are far from the only examples of the potential benefits of a consortium for design research and innovation.

“We have been able to generate completely new knowledge via the network that was created with the Textile Consortium. We are being invited to join interdisciplinary projects, and when the business sector discovers that they can use our research, we’ll have a basis for new projects. For example, the textile manufacturer Kvadrat has taken out a patent from one of our projects, which they were involved in. The consortium collaboration offers a good framework for the exchange of knowledge and the communication of Danish and international textile research to industry, designers and the educational institutions. The consortium also generates a huge amount of inspiration and goodwill,” says Vibeke Riisberg.

Research Adds Seriousness to a Field

When design researchers, businesses and students within the same field find a platform for the exchange of knowledge, they generate essential synergy.

Julie Sommerlund, associate professor at The Danish Design School, is head of the fashion consortium MOKO, and she



What are the mechanisms that make a particular accessory or a dress a must-have? And why is it that one style comes to define a trend, while another does not?

These are just two examples of the knowledge that is disseminated by the fashion consortium MOKO. According to Associate Professor Julie Sommerlund the demand for knowledge is so great that the consortium is unable to fully meet it. Photo: MOKO

also sees the synergy effect as one of the key benefits of the consortium.

“The point of MOKO is to convey our research results to the fashion industry, among others, and we have discovered a very positive side effect of this effort. The fashion world can be very

“Getting together around the table to cooperate offers both more resistance and more assistance – and design needs resistance; it’s good for innovation”

hard to dive into when you’re an insider, and that makes personal relations particularly important. For example, when we present our knowledge in seminars with panel debates and international guests, we are often able to establish exactly the sort of personal contacts that enable us to call people later and get the interviews we need, for example, and that makes a huge difference,” says Julie Sommerlund.

“There is a big demand for more knowledge-heavy fashion

communication. People are keen to hear about fashion on a higher level than in the women’s magazines, and the industry is very interested in being studied and shown the same attention, for example, as art historians show art. After all, it helps upgrade a field when researchers take an interest in it. It raises it to a more serious level, and that is of strategic interest,” says Julie Sommerlund, adding that naturally there is also considerable interest in the aspect of design research that businesses can apply in a more direct way in relation to the bottom line.

That is the case, for example, with Ph.D. scholar Maria Mackinney-Valentin’s project on trend mechanisms. Assistant Research Professor Erik Hansen-Hansen’s Ph.D. dissertation on luxury fashion and the global fashion cities also received substantial attention from the industry.

“Research lets the industry see itself in a different light and offers it a new perspective on here-and-now, everyday routines,” Julie Sommerlund explains.

Resistance and Assistance

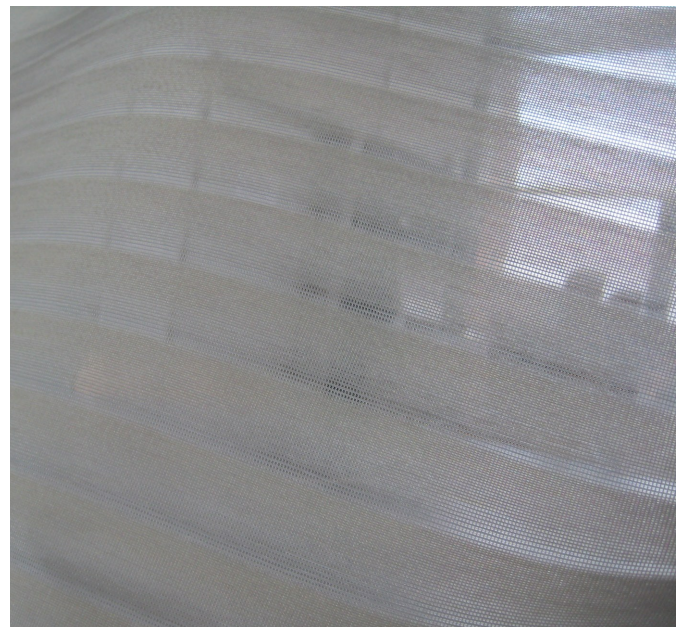
There are rewards all the way around when a consortium combines the forces in a particular field.

Professor Anders Brix of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, is behind the Furniture Consortium, which was established in 2008.

“Getting together around the table to cooperate offers both more resistance and more assistance – and design needs resistance; it’s good for innovation,” says Anders Brix and explains that the Furniture Consortium has two tracks: an academic track and a business track.

On the business track, in his research project *Innovation og design i den danske møbelbranche* (Innovation and design in the Dan-

When the sun pours in through the office windows, often the Venetian blinds come down. But then the room usually gets so dark that it is necessary to switch on the lights. In their research project “Regulering af dagslys i offentlige rum” (Regulating daylight in the public space), Associate Professors Joy Boutrup and Vibeke Riisberg experiment, among other things, with light screening in new materials – here a fabric woven from yarn sponsored by the Italian yarn manufacturer Torcitura Padana and the Japanese fibre manufacturer Teijin. The fabric diffuses the daylight and thus prevents glare etc. without making it necessary to turn on the lights – and that saves on energy. Photo: Vibeke Riisberg



ish furniture business), which receives support from the Danish Centre for Design Research, Anders Brix interviewed the directors of seven of the most design-oriented furniture companies, and a report is underway.

“One of the conclusions in the report is that we have to trust our senses when we assess high-level design, because in the end it’s artistic quality that we’re competing on. Another conclusion is that even though the companies have an international mindset they are also very conscious of being Danish companies, resting on a Nordic tradition,” he says.

The academic track of the consortium is an international working group, Interior, where so far 10-14 design researchers from universities in Sweden and Australia, among other places, exchange knowledge and ideas about furniture and rooms, and Anders Brix’ vision in that field is that in the future, furniture and rooms will become much more fused.

“Today, for example, the furniture factories take a rather narrow view of things: A table is a table. But perhaps, even the way we live in the rooms can change, and the furniture industry is interested in that too, because there’s a big potential here. The global population keeps growing, but in the Western world more and more households use a huge amount of space – after all, a normal house is empty most of the day, so maybe we need to develop new strategies for the way we live,” says Anders Brix.

Strategic Design

At the Aarhus School of Architecture, a consortium for strategic design is in the pipeline; last year the school received a grant for a pre-study, and the head of the Department of Design, Associate Professor Jørgen Rasmussen, says:

“The goal is to upgrade this field. The first step is to define the concept of strategic design from the designer’s point of view. We have also begun to consider what partners we need, and we’ve begun to identify focus areas. For example, we expect that one of the new areas of strategic design is going to be change design – that is, organizational processes of change. One of the goals for the consortium is to address conceptual clarification as any research process. The overriding goal is to work with research institutions and interesting companies, both manufacturing companies and design companies, but also with NGOs because they work with services and have special access to self-organization.”

“One focus area is education. Today, there are no educational materials for strategic design. We have to create materials that can form the basis for education and develop this field,” Jørgen Rasmussen explains.

The fashion consortium MOKO is a partnership between Designskolen Kolding and The Danish Design School under the auspices of the Danish Centre for Design Research and the Danish Museum of Art & Design. MOKO was founded in 2006 and has 8-10 researchers attached. The head of MOKO is Associate Professor, Head of Department Julie Sommerlund. The purpose is to collect, generate and disseminate knowledge about fashion through research, conferences, a variety of media and the web. Last year, MOKO hosted two large-scale international seminars. Another concrete result of the consortium efforts is the publication of reports, including *Dansk mode: Historie, Design, Identitet* (Danish fashion: history, design, identity) by Marie Riegels Melchior and Nikolina Olsen-Rule, which is now used as teaching material in several educational institutions. Additionally, a report on partnerships between fashion education and industry is on the way.

MOKO

See the article, *The Story Gives Fashion Products Added Value*, Mind Design #17

The furniture consortium is based at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture and is headed by Professor Anders Brix. The consortium was established in 2008 and has a business track and an academic track. A report with conclusions from the business project on creativity and innovation in the furniture industry is underway.

See the article, *Research Promotes Innovation in the Danish Furniture Industry*, Mind Design #11

The textile consortium originated at Designskolen Kolding. The consortium was founded in 2005 and is headed by Head of Department Mathilde Aggebo. The purpose is to develop textile research as a focus area at Designskolen Kolding, and among other achievements the consortium has helped initiate three Ph.D. projects in the textile field and held seminars. Excursions to Sweden and England have generated knowledge about the way in which other educational institutions cooperate with industry. The project *Regulering af dagslys i offentlige rum* (Regulating daylight in the public space) has received support from the Danish Centre for Design Research, KVADRAT and the Danish Ministry of Culture.

The consortium for strategic design is located at the Aarhus School of Architecture, which in November 2009 received a grant for a pre-study concerning a consortium for strategic design. Associate Professor Jørgen Rasmussen, who is also head of research in the Department of Design, is the head of the consortium. Irene Lønne, who recently completed a Ph.D. dissertation on the potentials of strategic design, is working on the pre-project.

See the article, *Strategic Design Tools*, Mind Design #18

Cover illustration: Vibeke Riisberg.

DANISH CENTRE FOR DESIGN RESEARCH

The Danish Centre for Design Research DCDR comprises the design researchers at the Aarhus School of Architecture, The Danish Design School, Designskolen Kolding and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture. The DCDR aims to contribute to establishing a strong design research environment in Denmark and to strengthen the exchange of knowledge about design research and facilitate the identification of potential areas of collaboration for researchers, schools and enterprises, on a national as well as an international level.

MIND DESIGN

Mind Design, DCDR Webzine is published once a month and features articles and interviews about current Danish and international design research. Mind Design aims to present design research and research findings from researcher to researcher as well as from researchers to design practitioners in general. The webzine is free of charge. Please see www.dcdr.dk/uk/minddesign

Danish Centre for Design Research
Philip de Langes Allé 10
1435 Copenhagen K
Denmark

+45 32 68 63 68
dcdr@dcdr.dk
www.dcdr.dk