



Intertwining histories of design:

Portraying the map of present European design history through 10 ICDHS Conferences (1999–2014)

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Blucher Design
Proceedings
November 2016,
Number 1, Volume 1
<http://www.proceedings.blucher.com.br/article-list/icdhs2016/list>

Abstract

After the tenth anniversary of the ICDHS Conferences, this paper recalls and expands upon the European Province workshop held two years ago to address a transnational approach to reviewing the many histories of design that have emerged at these conferences. We have restricted the focus to Europe. This represents a first step in a wider research project aiming to rewrite the European history of design, comparing and intertwining all these peripheral histories that have emerged and, thus, establish the wider history. The project also assumes a previous task: to clarify what we actually mean nowadays by Europe. The aim is to draw the boundaries of a cultural, technical and aesthetic territory, a map of Europe based on what we have learned from the ICDHS conferences, and to think about it. This is the central argument of this paper.

Keywords

European Province, transnational history, Braudel, histories of design, ICDHS

Stage 1: History provides a way to present Europe

When a research project starts in the Humanities and Social Sciences fields, it is convenient to carry out an early task of clarifying concepts and defining the basic notions needed to achieve a comparison between different historical realities, whether local, national or regional. It is also convenient to provide ideas for understanding what might be shared within a large or multidisciplinary team. This is the process when a transnational approach is adopted to reviewing different histories of design already developed locally by national researchers that deserve to be compared to establish the wider history. We realised that while setting up a project of a compared study on European histories of design, we were applying a transnational approach to European history. As such, it is an ambitious and large project. In the planning, a series of connected issues reared up regarding the current map Europe and the conceptual boundaries outlining the Continent: what is Europe nowadays? How large is the European territory at present? How many different cultures, languages and ways of living comprise the current idea of Europe? In short, what are we talking about when we say “Europe” right now?

A related issue soon arose while researching the answer to the current economic and political reality as reflected by newspapers, general surveys and political press: are the administrative borders established politically by the 28 European Union (EU) useful enough for historical research? Do the existing borders outline Europe and its mental image? This is an old question: Fernand Braudel, for instance, in 1955, while writing in Brazil for a Brazilian audience, introduced many different worldwide regions calling them “Europes” (“*car il y a dans le monde cinq ou six Europe*”, Braudel 2001: 133). He mentioned zones culturally born and influenced by old Europe through colonization, but warning “*La vieille Europe don’t les limites à l’est sont à fixer*” (The old Europe whose boundaries east are still to be fixed [2001: 133]). More than fifty years later, as far as our research proposal progressed, east boundaries were blurring even more — Braudel was not strengthening the usual Eurocentric approach, but rather he encouraged these other areas to feel free, adopting a similar view to studying their own countries as this one adopted by European historians when they talk about themselves and their own history.

Assuming that a helpful frame to work upon may be sought in historical thought, last year we looked at a map of Europe embedded in exemplary works by Braudel and the idea of Europe bequeathed by him when he studied the world through the early modern centuries. In fact, this was just one hypothesis giving rise to the

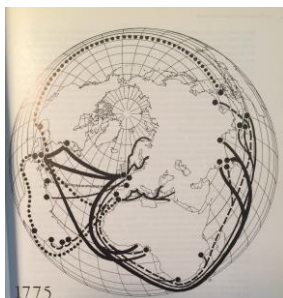
How to quote:

CALVERA, Anna; BARBOSA, Helena; "Intertwining histories of design: Portraying the map of present European design history through 10 ICDHS Conferences (1999–2014)", p. 145-151 . In: Wong, Wendy Siuyi; Kikuchi, Yuko & Lin, Tingyi (Eds.). *Making Trans/National Contemporary Design History* [=ICDHS 2016 – 10th Conference of the International Committee for Design History & Design Studies]. São Paulo: Blucher, 2016. ISSN 2318-6968, DOI 10.5151/despro-icdhs2016-02_016

research project mentioned above, “Intertwining European Histories of Design”. It might be the map that described Europe when the preliminary industrial revolution was already going on and, so, when modernity as a historical era started. This map should help us to avoid key questions, like the inclusion in the map of neighbouring territories such as Turkey, Russia and Israel, for instance, to mention only the most controversial countries, when considering the more restricted European area of influence. According to Braudel’s sense, current Europe can be defined as a world region because it can be identified as an area whose unity depends on the network of exchanges and relationships of all kinds, which gave her its constitution regardless of state sovereignty (Chartier 2001: 119-20).

Being very prudent, the main goal of this paper is actually to draw a first portrait of a map that may suit a transnational vision of the global region and its twentieth century history of design. Related aims are to understand how ICDHS international conferences profiled this map and are advancing a new vision of the history of design in Europe, checking the idea of a European Design as well. The former intention of the paper was to compare the two maps, the former that gave way to modernity, and the latter providing a way out.

Map 1: European presence around the world, 1775



Braudelian chart representing the pepper trade routes, made to visualize the growing potential of London and also traffic developed from the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal. For Baltic and Mediterranean seas, it conveys the more frequent itineraries (Braudel 1979 Vol. III, p. 19).

Map. 2: The way in: Europe’s shape inherited from history



Imitations of Versailles: another Braudelian map exemplifying the spread of cultural movements across Europe, 18th century. Note the buildings in San Petersburg and Moscow, and the void of the area still under the Ottoman Empire. Thus it is easy to define a European territory not dependant on current political borders (Braudel 1979, Vol. III, p. 53)

Map 3: The shape of Europe by its inhabitants: The east is clearly blurred



Map from Ortelius’s *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. Ortelius’s Europe was modelled after an earlier wall-map made by Mercator. It should provide a useful depiction of the Continent for merchants and statesmen of the time. Published in London, 1606.

Table 1. The way out: Who actually forms present Europe?

Table with the 50 countries of Europe according to the old State Nation									
Albania	Andorra	Armenia But physically placed in Asia, Middle East borders	Austria	Azerbaijan But physically placed in Asia, within Middle East and Persian area of influence	Belarus	Belgium	Bosnia & Herzeg.	Bulgaria	Croatia Organising design awards (BIO)
Cyprus ¿Both parts or just the Greek one?	Czech Republic	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	France	Georgia (north of Caucasus) A part of the old European USSR	Germany	Greece	Hungary Activities related to design practices even before WW
Iceland	Ireland	Italy	Kosovo	Latvia A designers association, design schools	Lichtenstein	Lithuania Almost 3 design high schools	Luxembourg	Macedonia	Malta
Moldova	Monaco	Montenegro	Netherlands	Norway	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Russia (West from the Urals)	San Marino No one university; no one school of design, the ISIA Urbino is the closer vocational high school of design
Serbia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	Turkey	Ukraine	United Kingdom	Vatican No one university; no one school of design

Schema created at the turn of 20th Century. It is a development made after the original table included in Jonathan M. Woodham’s paper at The European Province Workshop (Aveiro, July 2014, p. 715). Apart from membership to the UE, we considered their participation at ICDHS events. LEGEND: Written in grey: Countries of Europe (50); written in black Member Countries of the EU in 2013; written in italics, European countries that presented papers at one or more ICDHS Conferences. Smaller size: comments by the authors on these countries.



Fig. 1: ICDHS titles

Intertwining in the horizon

Ten years of regular meetings around the world amounts to a solid and significant background for a project on transnational history such as that which we decided to plan. Of these ten conferences, nine of them established in their motto, title or theme a call to propose aspects that would establish links and points of comparison, even collaboration, between the

many local and regional histories appearing as the conferences continued, and more people would join them (see Fig. 1): Guadalajara '04 and Helsinki '06 stated it clearly. Other mottos drew attention to all these other histories being added to the map of the discipline and its related scientific community. They gave way to issues previously forgotten or set aside in the old general history of design. Keywords used frequently include: the plural for history and the emerging of the others; the geography of design history and the need to observe the evolution of technical terms applied to design, recalling traditional words still active and relating to material cultures (Osaka '08 Beyond Westernisation, Brussels '10 Rescuing the Western Vision). All of them demonstrate a strong commitment to what is often called the ICDHS's inclusive spirit, evident since the first edition. It became consolidated because ICDHS's main aim in this first phase was to discover and meet new colleagues coming from all around the world. From that point of view, ICDHS performs the role of "loudspeaker" for design history developed around the world, using a metaphor proposed by Braudel a long time ago and referring to research done in peripheral areas (2001: 244)

Another interesting precedent for a transnational approach to Europe worth mentioning here is The European Province Workshop held two years ago at the 9th ICDHS. Planned to introduce the issue of reviewing the role of Europe in the usual version of the general history of design, the call invited thinking about two main topics, one labelled as domestic affairs, the second as foreign affairs. This was to consider, firstly, both the challenges and opportunities of writing the specific histories of European marginal areas; then, secondly, the role of current Europe in the globalised world of design and its culture. Some issues were then identified as unresolved. Considering a possible common history, the variety of very local languages appeared soon as a major obstacle both to researchers that wished to inquire abroad (this is the case of languages spoken across *Mitteleuropa* — to use an old-fashioned word — and the Baltic and Mediterranean neighbourhoods), and to local historians trying to disseminate their research outcomes abroad, and enrich the very well established mainstream ways of working. It is a path back and forth and, thus, a flux to inquire about while observing how a scientific and specialized community of experts is being built up whether across Europe or the whole world. Later, several self-accepted provinces reviewed the advantages and strategies used having taken this condition on. While Spain and Turkey reinforced the need for a comparative approach between local issues and a wider common history — a danger for regional historians is a lack of consensus on crucial issues, claimed Tevfik Balcioğlu — Denmark and Finland noted different ways of acting as a peripheral culture while building up their specific identity within the European map at the same time. Anders V. Much displayed three options to managing the peripheral character: to perform as an autonomous centre; as a voluntary chosen periphery or, rather, as a pure and sound province the result of self-exoticization — an interesting approach. From Finland, Pekka Korvenmaa raised the issue of provinces being culturally creative, innovative and original. He reminded us of the spread of Art Nouveau across many provinces of Europe, a hypothesis already proposed by Mireia Freixa too. Clearly it is also worth noting the spread of modernist ideals after WW2, having won the war against visual classicisms manifested in European fascisms. But we were also reminded of another phenomenon that is socially and culturally very interesting, and peculiar to post-modern times: the originality of young cultures emerging in urban suburbs, far away from the high cultured and well-established town centres. This happened when the first punks and their cultural output reached the cultural panorama all over Europe.

Mapping design in Europe through ICDHS

To carry out this task, we used ICDHS Proceedings and Abstracts books as a key source of information about the sort of European history of design that has taken shape in this specific scientific context. Here again, this is a first

step in a research process concerning ICDHS's legacy. It permitted us to gather enough data to draw several maps on the current situation of DH & DS. The study of ICDHS's concerns, participants, themes and contributions offers a lot of significant information regarding the evolution of the discipline of design history, but to comment all of them would go beyond the scope and purpose of this article. Here we focus just on papers related to European issues.

Table 2: Total participants at ICDHS venues (1999-2014)

ICDHS . European Participants of each Conference 1999-2014										total participants per country
	Barcelona 1999	Havana 2000	Istanbul 2002	Guadalajara 2004	Helsinki/Tallinn 2006	Osaka 2008	Brussels 2010	São Paulo 2012	Aveiro 2014	
Austria									1	1
Belgium				1	1	4	15	4	7	32
Croatia							1	1	1	3
Denmark			1	3	4		2		5	15
Estonia			1		2	1	1	2	1	8
Greece			3	3	1	1	1			9
Finland			6	3	17	5	4	3	2	40
France					1	1	3		1	6
Germany		2	3			1	3	1	2	12
Hungary			1							1
Iceland									1	1
Ireland			1						1	2
Italy	1		3		7	6	8	6	3	34
Netherlands			3				39	1	2	45
Norway					3		2	3	4	12
Poland			1	1						2
Portugal	2	2	10	5	4	6	2	6	117	154
Russia							2			2
Spain	48	20	9	4	8	14	9	3	10	125
Sweden					10	2	2	2		16
Switzerland			1			1	2		2	6
Turkey	1	1	42	5	2	4	8	5	12	80
UK	5	6	37	9	2	13	33	12	12	129
Total of participants										734
Total participants per conference	57	31	122	34	62	59	137	49	183	734
observations	9 Europe 48 Spain	31	80 Europe 42 Turkey	34	26 Europe 19 Scandinavia 17 Finland	59	83 Europe 39 Netherland 15 Belgium	48	66 Europe 117 Portugal	

Built after every venue. See www.ub.edu/gracmon/icdhs. We consulted that table and amended some data in preparing this paper.

Viewing the data rendered by ICDHS, it was important to realize which countries participated regularly and their representativeness. Being a conference that seeks to embrace global participation, and counting on the presence of 49 countries through to 2014, in this first phase of research we considered Europe as a starting point. But remember: what should be Europe at present? It includes the territory defined by physical geography as a continent: from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean and the Caucasus. It comprises 48 states and many more nations but excludes the Anatolian area of Turkey. However, looking at ICDHS's most frequent attendants, the territorial boundaries proposed by this study integrate some countries not belonging to the EEC: Iceland, Norway, Russia, Switzerland and Turkey. In the latter case, because of the frequent and continued presence of scholars coming from Ankara and Izmir, Turkey has been included in its entirety.

We know there are a lot of constraints in drawing a map that may undermine the credibility of information gathered just from the attendance data of a conference where peer evaluation of quality is active and powerful. There are other factors too that impede a real perception of what is happening at the European level just from these conferences. Economic policies of universities often prevent people from attending conferences held far away. It is known that there is widespread interest among many participants from different countries that were unable to attend due to lack of funding. On the other hand, accepting English as the only language of the conference raises another barrier; to attend depends on idiomatic skills while speaking fluently in a foreign language. It is easy to check this factor by the assiduous presence of countries accustomed to speaking English daily. These situations have a tremendous impact on the results presented. From participation at ICDHS events, we only gather information those scholars who, being able to express themselves in English, are often experts on Western issues. This means that the display of content offered by these maps always represents a fragmented vision of what has actually happened, whether in the past or the present, in so many places even in Europe. Nevertheless, the information collected is important to configuring a schema of what has been going on nationally in the field of Design History across the Continent since 1999. In fact, a similar approach to the information could be prepared locally, addressing the most

active towns and researching their relationships.

For a better understanding of this data it has been necessary to draw several different maps and illustrate specific situations. These maps indicate the epicentres of participation and production in terms of papers per conference and also by the total number of conferences. Let's consider some of them. Firstly, in two distinct maps and using concentric circles, we can see the face-to-face dimension of the presence per country at each conference (Fig. 2), and in the second map we can see the total number of participants at a specific conference (Fig. 3). We reproduce the maps for the Aveiro 2004 conference as an example. Similar maps have been produced for every venue. Secondly, the same procedure applies to the creation of two other maps, which show the number of papers presented per country (Fig. 4), identified by the number of circles, which is less than the number of participants compared with the previous figure, and the total number of papers presented at all conferences (Fig. 5).

This data gives us an idea of the actual representativeness of every country in terms of the number of papers presented, and allows us to identify who is in the map, at least during the period of existence of ICDHS (Fig. 6).

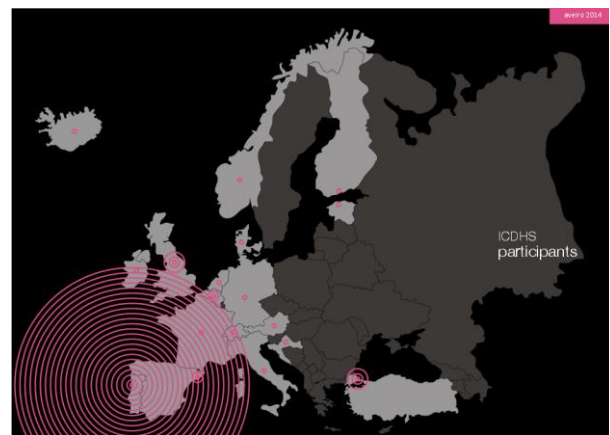
To visualize and compare the weighting of every community of scholars, we draughted a new map using the size proportion of every country, taking into account the number of participants. For example, the size of Spain grows 125% given its participation of 125 delegates. Similar percentages were applied to all countries based on the number of participants per conference (Fig. 7).

Fig. 2: Countries participating at the 1st ICDHS, Barcelona 1999



The international impact of the first event in Barcelona was high. Information about what happened was requested from many places overseas.

Fig 3: Attendants at ICDHS Aveiro 2014 / countries



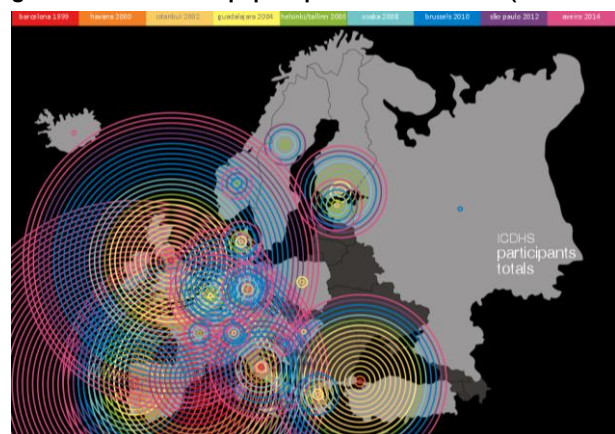
Legend: Each circle represents 1 to 5 participants

Fig. 4: Papers presented at ICDHS Aveiro 2014



Same legend

Fig. 5: Total number of papers presented at ICDHS (1999-2014)



Same legend

Reading the maps

Through this distort map, it is easy to appreciate that the countries highly present at the forum were Portugal, Spain and Turkey, all located in southern Europe. In addition, the UK and the Scandinavian countries clearly stand out. The

central part of Europe features a reduced expressivity but it is not totally non-existent. Some Croatian, one Hungarian and a couple of Polish scholars joined several conferences (3, 1 and 2 respectively). Italy and Switzerland were also there although occasionally. Hence, according to the statistical data and as seen from a national point of view, the portrait of current European DH & DS emerging through ICDHS's activities is unbalanced. Provinces around the perimeter look very active and have been quite regular, while there is some significant variation throughout the years. The resulting picture might be assessed observing towns, or rather strong universities, higher education schools or bodies supporting delegates. While it may be a coincidence – just a hypothesis— perhaps the implementation of the Bologna process in higher education might have led to increased interest in history and theory.

Fig. 6: Countries participating at ICDHS (1999-2014)



Fig. 7: Weighting according to ICDHS delegates



Highly significant is the powerful, constant and regular presence of the UK — remember the DHS collaborated with ICDHS many times. This case is unique, as the British DHS has a long history, together with a large critical mass of active teachers involved. This also explains why Anglo-Saxon ways of acting and standards of rigour increased progressively and subtly in that forum too.

Then, we must remark on the low presence of big Western countries with historically considerable national design industries. Both Germany and France hold a firm place in the European history of design. They have a critical tradition too. Does this imply that Design History is not a cultivated discipline there? The foundation of a Society of Design History in Germany (GfDG 2007c) was recent. It could be that GfDG have a narrow scope focused mostly on domestic issues. Concerning France, there is a very active community in both Design Management and Design Research fields. A few years ago the *Ateliers de la recherche* started up with a sturdy Francophone interest. Despite French emblematic museums — such as the Georges Pompidou — and the existence of collections closely related to design, and plenty of design high schools all across the country, design history seems still to be a marginal consideration.

So, to conclude, both the maps of design history and of the history of design varied significantly over these years. Recall the 1985 Boiler House Project: “National Characteristics in Design”. Countries considered were Britain, France, America (this is USA), USSR, Italy, Sweden and Germany. For the rest, to draw maps from the data of the ICDHS and propose a configuration of Europe through the eyes of these events, it is necessary to understand the already existing fluxes between countries. One further task to do is to survey and map the themes papers most often dealt with, in order to observe the convergence of interests and common issues. It would help to demonstrate the interesting hypothesis launched in Aveiro: the existence of very creative and innovative peripheries.

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ICDHS' Proceeding and abstracts books: <http://www.ub.edu/gracmon/icdhs/>

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Biographical note

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