

POLICY REVIEW

Brazilian design – a diagnosis

Gabriel Patrocínio

Design Policies Lab – DPLab, IFHT/UERJ (University of the State of Rio de Janeiro), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The Brazilian Ministry of Development launched the Diagnostic Review of Design in Brazil in June 2014. It is the most comprehensive study ever made on the design sector in Brazil, and should support future actions of central and regional governments in the country. This review discusses its historical precedents, as well as its references, breadth, importance and consequences.

KEYWORDS

Design policies; Brazil; design management; design sector diagnostics

The Brazilian Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade (MDIC) launched in June 2014 the *Diagnostic Review of Design in Brazil*,¹ a study commissioned by the Brazilian Trade and Exports Agency (APEX-Brazil), and developed by the Brazilian Design Centre (CBD). A study with such breadth and depth on Brazilian design has never been done, and the team at CBD was certainly the most qualified Brazilian institution to perform this task. Their ability and commitment resulted in a historical reference work for Brazilian design, which will set the ground for other studies to come. Notwithstanding its merits, a review in such scale of a virtually untouched sector will always be limited. It is virtually impossible to achieve 100% comprehensiveness in such fragmented and diffuse sector, not to mention the territorial extension of the country. The study is partial because the metrics to assess design are still being developed. It is partial also because it dared to be the first, and to introduce and experiment new metrics to seek to understand the sector.

What is the content of the study?

Structured in four sections, the study initially makes an assessment on how Brazilian companies understand and use design, followed by an overview of the design sector in the country, continuing with an examination of international benchmarks for the sector, and it closes discussing a set of possible future scenarios.

Starting with a simple and clear methodology, the study uses advanced tools for analysis and management of design and innovation to draw a portrait of design in Brazilian industry, from a standpoint of nine selected segments. This allows establishing an initial understanding of the use of design for such diverse sectors, and by extension, reveals a lot about the use design in Brazilian companies. Data analysis allows to compare the situation with other

Latin American (Uruguay and Colombia) and a few other countries in the world, allowing a preliminary assessment of Brazilian design competitiveness.

By analyzing the Brazilian design market, it points out weaknesses as the 'low formalization and lack of organization of the sector'. It also points out an insufficiency of studies on how design acts on the market, resulting in an acute shortage of data to allow proper reflection. However, the study provides an excellent overview of the design insertion in the country, the growth experienced by the sector in recent years, and government actions that seek to support this growth. Business models adopted by design market, the relationship between design and new technologies, and the components of design's supply chain are also detailed in the study. Analyzing patent deposits, the study raises troubling data regarding the low number of applications by Brazilian companies in face of those by foreign companies – among the 10 largest industrial design patent applicants of in the country, only two are local companies.

Another major contribution of the study is the profile of design professionals, their education and the skills demanded by current and future markets. Some of the topics covered are education, publications, relations between academia and market, production of knowledge, and an analysis of regional distribution.

Along the report different design segments are usually considered as a whole, and not very often is possible to pinpoint specific information regarding communication design fields – even though it mentions graphic, digital, web and game design, packaging, and others. While dealing with the specialty fields covered by Brazilian design companies, it is evinced that the highest concentration occurs in graphic and communication design, which, together with digital design and multimedia, are responsible for 60% of design activity in the country.

Also demands reflection the theme of existing structures to finance design in the country – which will undoubtedly exceed the expectations of readers. Perhaps the design industry should be better prepared to make use of the resources being mobilized, and demand greater clearness and adequacy of such programs to national or regional realities. To compare market demands, professional offer, and availability of resources is an exercise that needs to be done, and the study widely provides data for this purpose. Another issue of current debate in the country, the study also highlights the importance of regulating the professional activity of designers within the Brazilian context, where the majority of professions are regulated by law.

At the end of the study, three hypothetical scenarios for design in Brazil are drawn: conservative, moderate and optimistic. The first is actually very pessimistic, as the study establishes a clear evolution of the Brazilian design industry over the past few years – it is highly implausible to move backwards after so many achievements. The hope expressed in the optimistic scenario is to reach a sustainable growth where Brazilian design achieves better positions internally, in the context of international competitiveness and in the development of the country.

How should this study be used?

Design researchers, students, institutions interested in Brazil and Latin America should benefit from the data, knowledge, tools and outcomes of this study. It should also be considered as a driver to set a more frequent use of design as tool for economic, political and social transformation. A good start would be to promote discussions on its content and on how

it relates to other realities. What do designers want? How far should design go? What role design intends to play in society? Are designers prepared to exercise this role? What are they missing?

There seems to be a lot missing. Bonsiepe² says, since the 1970s, that designers should learn to communicate properly with government, while Heskett³ states designers should learn to deliver in political terms – and politics is a completely different world from design projects. Learn to deliver in political terms means learn to give in, to seek consensus, to make it possible, without having to give up ideals. Finally, one should understand that, in political terms, you cannot reject everything that does not perfectly fits the ideals. Even because one's ideal may not be every other's.

Finally, it is fair to say that the *Diagnostic Review of Design in Brazil* starts a new era of understanding design as a tool for development and innovation in Brazil. Designers should learn to use these new management tools to establish collaborative processes with the government, the market and society. Designers cannot expect only the government to do its part – they also need to understand very well their responsibility in this process, and proactively engage in to promote the changes that they believe design can bring to society.

Notes

1. BRAZIL. MDIC – Ministério de Desenvolvimento, Indústria e Comércio Exterior; APEX-Brazil; Centro Brasil Design. *Diagnostic Review of Design in Brazil*. 2014. Available at: http://www.cbd.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2014_11_26_Diagnostico_diagramado2.pdf (accessed Sep. 2015).
2. Bonsiepe, G. (1973). *Development through Design – A working paper prepared for UNIDO at the request of ICSID*. Vienna: UNIDO, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (p.18).
3. Heskett, J. (1993). *Taking the Next Steps to Washington*. In I.D., March–April 1993, pp. 32–33. (p.33).