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CONFERENCE REVIEW

## Envisioning futures: design education in Latin America

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**X Encuentro Latinoamericano de Diseño + VI Congreso Latinoamericano de Enseñanza del Diseño**, Universidad de Palermo, 28–29 July 2015, <[www.palermo.edu/encuentro](http://www.palermo.edu/encuentro)>

**BDSÑ (Bienal Nacional de Diseño) + II DiSur (Congreso Latinoamericano de Diseño)**, FADU UBA, Buenos Aires (Argentina), 10–15 August 2015, <[www.bienal.fadu.uba.ar](http://www.bienal.fadu.uba.ar)>

July and August 2015 were golden months for the field of design in Argentina, with the two most important academic and professional events in the country being held. The agenda began with the double *Encuentro Latinoamericano de Diseño* and *Congreso Latinoamericano de Enseñanza del Diseño* (Latin American Design Meeting and Design Education Conference), both organized by the University of Palermo (UP), the private university with the largest number of design students in Argentina. With a yearly-sustained ability to summon, this double edition has turned into an important Latin American gathering, with staggering numbers: more than 350 papers presented in the academic part of the Conference – selected from a call for papers through a peer-review process – more than 2000 presentations in the professional Meeting – with unrestricted enrolment, unlike the previous edition – and close to 5000 participants in total. Over a period of 10 years, UP has remarkably set up one of the most relevant spaces of exchange and debate on Design in Latin America, and is now regarded as the main Latin American conference on Design with a focus on education.

In August, the University of Buenos Aires School of Architecture, Design and Urbanism (FADU UBA), where six design university courses are taught alongside architecture, organized the second edition of the National Design Biennale (BDSÑ). The success of this event surpassed the expectations and it closed with a master conference by Pedro Gadanho (architect and curator of MOMA, NYC). In workshops alone there were over 9800 participants in the Biennale six venues. The numbers are impressive: 30 professional awards, 50 roundtables and over 130 workshops. One of the particularities of this issue of BDSÑ is that it also hosted the Second Latin American Design Conference (DiSur), organized by a network of design courses from Latin American public universities. The guiding themes of the DiSur Conference were the performance of design in emerging economies, design in the creation of citizenship and design in regional economies.

Both conferences put in evidence the main areas of interest and research in the region. The double Latin American Design Meeting and Design Education Conference is supported by a network that includes some of the most important private universities offering design

courses in Latin America. Education is the main focus of those events, and research is presented to support it. In the case of FADU UBA National Design Biennale, the research presented focused on the universality of access to design and the way it is inserted in industrialization and import substitution programs, as well as on programs for the development of small and family businesses which generate the greatest quantity of jobs. This second conference accounts for the relationship between design and citizenship, and also the relationship between design and social inclusion – given that a growth in employment leads to an improvement in social rights. These themes are important since social inequality is common ground in Latin America. In particular, the papers on design and visual communication presented in the conference, were developed within the framework of programs of primary education oriented towards universal access to digital culture.

The reader might be wondering how it is possible to come to have such a large number of activities, speakers and attendees. The reasons are varied and they account for the way in which the field of design education was built in Argentina and Brazil. Both countries were pioneers in Latin America in the creation of design university courses in the mid-twentieth century. More than 60 years of teaching have contributed to developing a clear and early awareness of the profession and the discipline. Furthermore, university courses in Argentina are massive, with over 300 new students a year in each of them. Cities like São Paulo and Buenos Aires offer clear signs of design in their urban culture, surely product of an early presence of designers in this environment. Another explanation for the scale of participation in these conferences and meetings is that, in both cases, it offers free attendance. How is it financed, then? It is financed by the universities. In the case of UP, a significant amount of their revenue is used to support this activity, and in the case of the University of Buenos Aires, it is funded by the national government's budget aimed at helping the dissemination of design in its professional and academic aspects.

This funding cannot be fully understood unless the long history of free higher education in Argentina is taken into account. It began with the first public universities in the





seventeenth century, and continues to this day. This precedent brought about a culture of free higher education that is seen as a universal right. Private universities, then, even if they charge fees, incorporate this concept and understand that the university must have activities that are free of charge for all. This proves expensive, but, undoubtedly, one of the best investments a nation can make.

### Notes on contributor

**Verónica Devalle** holds a Master's degree in Cultural Sociology (IDAES, UNSAM, Argentina) and a PhD in History and Theory of Arts (UBA, Argentina). She is an Associate Professor of Communication and a Professor of Design and Cultural Studies at the University of Buenos Aires. She holds positions as researcher at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET, Argentina) and as researcher category I at the Argentinean National Accreditation System. She has published the book *La travesía de la forma. Emergencia y consolidación del Diseño Gráfico (1948–1984)* (*The journey of form. Emergence and consolidation of graphic design 1948–1984*), co-edited *Visualidades sin fin. Imagen y diseño en la sociedad global* (*Endless visualities. Image and design in global society*), and published articles in international journals of design. Recently, she edited the 43rd edition of the journal *Anales del Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas Mario J. Buschiazzo* (*Proceedings of the American Art and Aesthetics Research Institute Mario J. Buschiazzo*), con el tema 'Relatos del diseño' (*Design narratives*).