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WORKSHOP REFLECTIONS

## ico-D Education Platform Meeting 2016 Art Centre Pasadena, California

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The strapline on the cover of the participant pack for the International Council of Design (ico-D) Platform Meetings 2016 reads: 'Design is Valuable' and for three hot August days at Art Centre Pasadena, 45 participants from 17 countries and six continents representing educational, professional and promotional members engaged in dialogue, debate and exchange, that explored the role and value of design. Whilst ico-D services the worldwide design community in a myriad of ways, for our purposes here, it is 'through initiatives that promote and represent design as a medium for progressive change', which underpins the Platform Meetings.

Launched in 2013, Platform Meetings provide an interactive forum to discuss the needs and aspirations of members and inform ico-D's agenda, with separate Professional/Promotional and Educational Platforms to address priorities and concerns. The inaugural Education Platform in Hong Kong organized in 2014, focused primarily on members sharing local knowledge and in identifying common areas of educational interest. In Pasadena, the broader objective of looking towards the 2017 Montreal World Design Summit prompted a structure centered around developing previously defined issues and reporting on the progress of established working groups via presentations, roundtable sessions and discussion forums.

While the Professional/Promotional Platform considered topics including national design policy and accreditation and certification, the Education Platform looked at the challenges facing design education; in particular, focusing on curriculum development. To provide a context, the opening speaker presentations illustrated initiatives and drivers of curriculum development in five institutions. Karen Hoffman (US) spoke about Art Centre's Experience Portfolio project that prepares Product Design students for emerging creative economies; Zhao Chao introduced the multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary design innovation ecosystem at Tsinghua University (China); ico-D Vice President Ziyuan Wang spoke of the changes in design education at CAFA (China) and the new role of design as part of culture and as a strategy for development; Lawrence Zeegen asked what we should be considering when designing a twenty-first-century design school and shared the principles informing an approach taken by Ravensbourne College of Design (UK). In my own, talk, I presented the recent curriculum redesign of Graphic Communication Design at Central Saint Martins,



**Figure 1.** *Nuts to Butter*; a sustainable design exercise workshop led by ico-D Vice-President, Professor Heidrun Mumper-Drumm, Pasadena Art Center (USA). Image courtesy of Alisha Piercy, ico-D.

University of the Arts London (UK) and how we responded to the challenge of designing curricula for unknown futures and uncertain times.

These short presentations illustrated a range of pedagogic approaches while also revealing common themes dominated by discussions on the role of curricula in preparing students for industry and professional practice. What was more surprising was the emphasis on the importance of equipping students with skills and knowledge that transcend narrow definitions of design – for example, how to teach transferable interpersonal skills that underpin confident collaboration and teamwork; how to provide meaningful interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary learning experiences; and how to foster enterprise skills to empower students to innovate and flourish in future economies. Curricula concerned with developing communication and human skills superseded technical concern with craft.

During the roundtable session members, who had identified their primary challenge as educators, directed the discussion towards individual issues that reflected regional and institutional nuance. Challenges of legislation and compliance, anxiety around gaps in tutor skills and knowledge in a digital age, the impact of political turmoil on educational freedoms, and raising awareness of design as a valid study option were among the issues that surfaced here, all of which defy simple solution. Yet, at a time when international politics appears to be signaling a populist desire for insularity, the participants in the Pasadena meeting demonstrated the value in coming together as a community to share experiences and gain valuable perspective and insight. The real challenge however, is what to do with this awareness and catharsis and how to translate words into action that is sustainable outside of these annual events.

The concluding activity of the Pasadena Education Platform Meeting provided clues to one possible model for how we might as a community achieve this. The *Nuts to Butter* sustainability workshop led by ico-D Vice-President and Art Centre Professor Heidrun Mumper-Drumm brought together Promotional/Professional and Education members to work in teams on a short exercise that explored a lifecycle-informed design method (Figure 1). This playful but serious activity resulted in tangible, if hypothetical design proposals, proving that through collective critical thinking and a facilitated workshop format we can produce provocative ideas and potentially actionable outcomes, within the constrictions and time-frame that Platforms provide.

This should be empowering. For while there is no shortage of desire or need for ico-D to pursue its agenda of cooperation, advocacy and knowledge exchange, the critical question remains – how do we realize the agency of ico-D and its community to impact understanding of the value of design? With the 2017 Montreal World Design Summit approaching, the proof of the success of the ico-D Education Platform will be in how we collectively progress and articulate not just our concerns, but also a vision and proposals for change on this global stage. *Design is Valuable* must be more than a truism and for our purposes become our rallying cry.

The ico-D General Assembly, Design Congress and Platform Meetings will be held during the World Design Summit Montreal 2017 (16–25 October).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

*Rebecca Wright* is a design educator, researcher and writer. She is Programme Director of Graphic Communication Design at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, where she leads undergraduate and postgraduate study across specialisms that include graphic design, design and interaction, illustration, moving image, advertising, typography, digital media and communication design. She was previously Academic Director of Communication Design at Kingston University and her other academic positions include Visiting Professor at Musashino Art University, Tokyo. Rebecca is co-founder of GraphicDesign&, a pioneering publishing house exploring how graphic design connects with all other subjects and the value that it brings. She is the Vice-President of ico-D (UK).