

ico-D

International
Council of Design

Open Forum Report

Johannesburg, South Africa

Who was there

ico-D (*International Council of Design*) conducted an **Open Forum in Johannesburg** on 25 February 2015, following an ico-D Board Meeting in Pretoria.

The event was hosted at SAB World of Beer in Newtown, Johannesburg, and was attended by 40 ico-D Member and non-member delegates from the professional, educational, and promotional design sectors from South Africa and abroad. The participants represented a good cross section of the South African design community with representatives from all design disciplines.

The following entities were represented by one or more delegates:

Blueprint Design
Brand Council of South Africa
Design School of South Africa
Flow Communications
Gauteng Dept. of Education
Greenside Design Centre
HKLM
Inscape Education Group
Institute of the Interior Design Professions
Morning Star Design
Redhill School
Design Forum Gauteng
SABS Design Institute
Stellenbosch Academy of Design and Photography
TBWA Hunt | Lascaris
Tshwane University of Technology
University of Johannesburg
University of Pretoria

Open Forum | 25 February 2015

ico-D Present Elect David Grossman opened the meeting, describing ico-D's recent strategic shift to a multidisciplinary organisation, highlighting the potential benefits and larger impact this shift might have for improved future collaboration and sharing between ico-D and the entities it serves. Along with a review of the new structure, the introduction highlighted resources, now readily available to members and non-members via the new ico-d.org website.

SUMMARY of ico-D overview

- transformation into an multi-disciplinary organisation
- determining the value of design
- accreditation and evaluation
- sharing of resources, curricula, syllabi, publications, resources
- national design policy, influencing government
- faculty development
- design research
- sustainability

What was discussed

David Grossman invited the audience of design practitioners and educators to comment on the state of design in South Africa, and especially on its needs and expectations from an international organisation such as ico-D. During the informal, open discussion delegates highlighted the following issues:

A need to harness youth-centered design and improve design education

Students in SA today are among the first to study in a post-apartheid climate, representing a new generation of youth who did not at some point attend a segregated school system. From the discussions at the Open Forum, there was a sense that there are significant differences between the current student body and students studying pre-1994, and that the response to the socio-cultural shift has inspired a need to make education institutions and programmes more reflective of a civic order that favors transformation and development through unity.

There is a trust that design education is the avenue for harnessing the positive aspects of these generational differences, especially when it comes to attitude and outlook towards affirmative action, initiative, capacity, and empathy in design thinking, and a renewed ability to collaborate across disciplines.

One of the topics that came up among ico-D members at the Forum, was not only an expressed need for empowerment through an improved sense of *design value*, but the notion that design should be a tool for building and sustaining leadership skills and roles for SA youth. To achieve this, what is required is better, standardized educational funding similar to funding of STEM programs, more opportunities for design-focused research, youth-centered design pedagogy, and contexts that better facilitate cross-disciplinary conversation between students and faculties.

What was encouraging was the presence of successful internship initiatives, and a unique SA take on the 'entrepreneur' with an understanding of the importance of design 'process' for better understanding how design and social development will be linked to making a better future in SA.

Governance and Policy

In SA, key frustrations and controversies are currently affecting professionals who bring goods and services to the South African consumer, revealing that SA is undergoing a 'design rush' – a proliferation of design-led projects in response to the post-apartheid economic shifts.

The need for professional standards and best practices, where speculative practices have no foothold in the market, or by extension, in industry, was addressed as part of the need for SA to reinforce national development priorities that would foreground the *value of design*.

Engagement and Access

ico-D was asked about its role in lobbying governments and industry to advocate for design given its new role as an international Council supporting multidisciplinary. The Council was commended for its evolution and identity shift, and Members said they felt reassured that the alienation now existing between stakeholders and designers, and also between professional designers themselves, could be more easily bridged by having a common point of international access to information, resources and activities.

The advantages of having ico-D's support included the promotion of diversity, access to case studies from other countries for solution-building and creating local empowerment; access to standardized design policies (such as Best Practices) and access to international strategies, platforms, and discussions that would be responsible for overseeing ever-changing global patterns to facilitate better analysis and responses at the local levels.

Solidarity in Leadership

Delegates expressed a need for more conversation between design disciplines, with government and industry. They also wanted an improvement of professional standards and described how this could lead to better and more equal employment opportunities for all, with a particular interest in maintaining diversity and gender parity, emphasizing that design solidarity should be a national policy given that South Africa could be a valuable model for design leadership in Africa.

Outcomes

So what does the future hold? An optimistic view...

The meeting concluded with a sense of optimism, and a suggestion that the future of design in SA would be led by a new wave of energy that is visibly streaming in via the next generation which recognizes SA as being in a state of great challenge but also unique opportunity.

The Department of Basic Education reported developing a new strategy that will commit to the incorporation of early design education and programming. Greenside Design Centre offered to share information and help coordinate with other design groups to carry out activities such as design workshops. Other encouraging programmes included IFI's WING: World Interiors Next

Generation, an initiative to involve more young people and teachers in the professional management of design, and *Thinking Schools*, a unique educational SA initiative.

In conclusion, the Open Forum was an enriching experience that led to a deeper understanding of the challenges facing South African designers across all design disciplines, providing local insight for ico-D to assess, and ultimately work with, to provide better value and service to the design community of this region.

While SA has great challenges to overcome, it also shows enormous uncharted potential to become a model for design leadership for the rest of Africa.

The Open Forum in Johannesburg will serve as a case study for future ico-D regional outreach efforts. Moreover, it is a part of ico-D's ongoing strategic development of both international and regional-specific insights, which are being collected through direct member outreach.

The next round of **ico-D Platform Meetings**, set to take place in Gwangju alongside the **ico-D 26 General Assembly** and the **International Design Congress** (17-23 October 2015), will continue developing the Council's International Design Agenda.