Denmark has long been known for design. Now that sophistication is being translated into a broad agenda shaping social welfare in addition to corporate welfare.

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From the World's First Design Policy to the World's Best Design Policy

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In Denmark, design has been on the political agenda since 1997. National policy has gone full circle, from extolling design to cutting funds for it—and back again. Currently, politicians both in and out of power say their ambition is to develop the best design policy ever. Whether this will take the form of an isolated design policy or whether design will be integrated into a range of policies is yet to be determined. However, there is a clear political ambition to develop design policies that enable Danish industry,

as well as the public sector, to become more innovative and competitive through the use of design. Denmark also wants to maintain its international status as a "design nation," and to realize design's potential in the new century.

As Figure 1 (on next page) illustrates, Denmark has had three national design policies over the past 13 years, and it has experienced something of a rollercoaster effect. The country's first national design policy, which also was the world's

first national design policy, was launched in 1997 to increase design awareness in small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), as well as in the public sector. The Danish Design Centre (DDC) plays a central part in carrying out these national design policies. The DDC was established back in 1978, and has from the beginning focused on promoting design and the value of design for Danish industry; in fact, it played a key part in the creation of 1997's design policy. In 2001, the DDC

THE DANISH DESIGN POLICIES

FIRST: 1997

Examples of policy activities at The Danish Design Centre

Focus

Increasing the awareness of design among SMEs and in the public sector – including promoting the value of design.

A building for design in the heart of Copenhagen. The DDC opens in January 2001. The building is partly financed by interest-free loans and private sponsors.

The DDC manages the Design Icebreaker Scheme 1998-2001: 450 SMEs design projects supported by government grants in order to experience the value of design.

SECOND: 2003

Focus

- Develop the DDC into a national center for design and innovation.
- Enhance interaction between designers and businesses.
- International branding of Danish design.

DDC Designpartner program: Innovation, What's design got to do with it? A program for large companies, focusing on integrating design in innovation processes and in business strategies

Innovation: What's design got to do with it?

Launch of the INDEX: Award honoring design that improves life by giving one million euros to five different solutions.
The INDEX is a subsidiary company to the DDC.

THIRD: 2007

Focus

- Improved functioning market for design services; DDC work has to be industry specific.
- Design of public sector services.
- Commercially oriented and international design.

DDC develops a series of business cases illustrating the economic effects of design. Cases used for extensive industry campaigns and workshops.

First Copenhagen Design Week by the DDC was launched in 2009. As with the INDEX:Award, this will be a bi-annual event.

Figure 1. In Denmark, design has been on the national agenda since 1997; the country has formulated three national design policies over the past 13 years.

got a new building in the center of Copenhagen, giving design even higher visibility.

That same year, however, a new government initially intended to eliminate all public funding for design. Funds for the Danish Design Centre were also scheduled to be cut. Fortunately, over the next two years, the DDC, which was carrying out a comprehensive survey of design's economic effects, was able to show design's positive impact on export, revenue, and job creation, and that, along with intense political lobbying, changed the government's mind. But the DDC was hardly the only organization to take an active part in the lobbying. The Confederation of Danish Industry, Denmark's largest trade organization, had established a design network that included the heads of development from the country's largest and most design-driven companies. The purpose of the Confederation of Danish Industry is to establish and take part in debates on the future of Denmark and to work determinedly in order to influence political decisions around job creation and workplace improvements. The design network, therefore, developed a number of policy proposals focusing on design as a business tool rather than as simply craftsmanship. The proposals took the slogan From

Beauty to Business—implying a move from design's traditional role in styling consumer goods to an additional mission of integration into business strategy with the purpose of strengthening national competitiveness.

In 2003, a new national design policy was finally launched, providing the DDC fully financial funding from 2005. This allowed the Centre to carry on with its work. Efforts to "bring more design into business" during this period also resulted in the establishment of the prestigious INDEX Award, which is given by a Danish nonprofit organization (a subsidiary of the DDC) to honor "designs that improve life." (The INDEX Award is international in scope and is worth 500,000 euros to the winner, making it the most lucrative design prize in the world.)

Four years later, in 2007, the Danish government launched a new design initiative, which among other things focused on supporting the Danish design industry. At the time, approximately 90 percent of that industry was represented by one-person companies. The new initiative aimed at creating larger design companies with multidisciplinary competencies to better meet industry demand and increase export activities. The 2007 design policy also focused on promoting design in specific indus-

tries. Companies in industries that are not known for their use of design do better following the lead of other companies in the same industry. The Danish Design Centre thus worked harder at developing industry-specific case studies and campaigns.

User-driven innovation

The 2007 initiative included a comprehensive program to promote user-driven innovation, allocating 100 million DKK ($16.5 million) for projects to develop and test user-driven methods. This program is the result of a political ambition for making Denmark a pioneer in user-driven innovation.

The program supported more than 80 projects, from public-sector institutions and universities to large and small private companies (see Case #1 on next page for an example), and has been characterized by the government as a resounding success. (A full 50 percent of the money spent on the program went to economic grants to individual organizations.) The projects involved a large number of SMEs, which was one of the program's goals. Evaluations show that the majority of participating organizations and companies acknowledged the value of the program in helping them develop new competencies and new insight into users. Most of these

companies had previously lacked the knowledge that would help them integrate user-centered methods into their development processes. All the organizations learned how to use focus groups and ethnographical methods (observation, personas, and pattern analysis) to identify possible new products and new lines of business based on unmet user needs.

We believe this initiative has had a significant impact on the mindset of Danish companies and on public sector institutions, as well. In general, the majority of projects demonstrate that user involvement represents a major, untapped potential. Indeed, we think the user-driven approach is an area in which Danish companies are particularly suited to achieve innovation, thanks to a national psyche that values holistic thinking, humanism, and care.

Currently, the Danish government is launching a campaign around the user-centered projects, as well as a comprehensive guide to methods and tools for user-driven innovation—scaled to a range of company sizes and experience levels, and presented in a simple and accessible way.

Service design in the public sector

The user-centered innovation program was not the only initiative put forth in 2007. That was also the year

Case #1: The Patient Lift (a project supported by Denmark's user-driven innovation program)

The number of extremely overweight people is growing worldwide, causing problems not only for the individuals themselves, but also for healthcare staff, who shoulder (literally) an increased risk of job-related injuries when they transport heavy patients. Existing patient lifts are costly, and because they have to be mounted from the ceiling, they are not an option in some hospital wards. They are also cumbersome to maneuver; they have to be pushed manually, which is difficult for some health workers. More important, they are not designed for extremely heavy patients. They do not help position the overweight patient properly in the hospital bed or in a wheelchair, which may result in injury to the patient and may even put him or her at risk of falling out of the bed or the chair.

These were the challenges to be faced in this project, which is partly financed by Denmark's program for user-driven innovation.

A team of users (patients, obese people, and hospital staff), anthropologists, engineers, and designers was gathered by the lift-producing company Borringia. The original idea was to redesign an existing lift. But telephone interviews, video observations, and ideation within this multidisciplinary team (which, note, included users) made it clear that there was a need for an entirely new lift based on new technologies.

The result is the XXL lift (Figure 2)—a self-propelling unit assisted by a small engine rather than by sheer manual labor, which also means that obese patients no longer have to feel embarrassed by the inconvenience they cause the staff. The XXL lift can both lift and transport patients with a weight of up to 325 kg (715 pounds).

Figure 2. The XXL lift helps hospital workers transport overweight patients without injuring themselves or the patients.

the Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority launched a program aimed at demonstrating the value of service design in the public sector. The purpose was to motivate the public sector to cooperate with the design industry to develop better public service.

Service design can contribute to solving many of the social-welfare challenges we are facing in Denmark, including a rapidly aging population, a big decline in the labor force, and growing expectations of public service, partly based on the country's high level of taxation. The need for welfare services is growing, even as the number of people available to carry out these services dwindles. From an economic point of view, therefore, it makes sense to develop innovative service solutions that both save on labor and increase citizens' satisfaction with the public sector—as well as their quality of life.

In 2008, four demonstration projects were carried out within the field of senior services and disability, and in 2009, four demonstration projects were implemented within the field of healthcare. Case #2 on the next page offers an example of one such project. All of these projects involved a public organization (a hospital or a municipality) and a design company, and were financed by the government program.

Case #2: The Good Kitchen (a demonstration of service design)

Many senior citizens do not eat enough. As a result, they not only miss the benefits of good nutrition, they also suffer a decline in quality of life. A study involving Holstebro Municipal Meal Service, a meals-on-wheels food service based in northern Jutland, examined the possible causes of this lack of appetite, and proposed solutions to heighten the mealtime experience and the quality of meals, and thus increase the elderly citizens' appetite (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Good Kitchen serves senior citizens in Holstebro, and does so by offering them some of the choices and input they might expect from a regular restaurant.

Hatch & Bloom, a design company, carried out the project, funded by Denmark's service design demonstration program, in order to develop a solution for an improved meal service in Holstebro Municipality, and in the process demonstrate how service design as a discipline can improve the service standard, as well as the quality of life for seniors, and reduce costs in the bargain.

The project began with user observation—of the kitchen staff, as well as in the private homes of senior-citizen users—and continued with a series of user workshops that included kitchen and transport staff, as well as senior citizens, their families, and local politicians.

One early and crucial discovery was that senior citizens often have needs that go beyond the simple delivery of a meal. Some, for instance, get little enjoyment out of a meals they consume alone, because they are reminded of their isolation. But in other situations—in front of the TV, for example—eating can be enjoyable. This discovery prompted the researchers to suggest expanding the menu to include snacks, or smaller meals, that users can order with the idea of spreading their nutrition throughout the day.

Another idea that surfaced during the study was to require drivers who deliver the meals to complete a first aid course, enabling them to handle situations in which a senior may have fallen and broken a hip, for instance.

Hatch and Bloom also suggested changing the name of the service from Holstebro Municipal Meal Service to The Good Kitchen to summon up visions of a restaurant rather than a meal service. The Good Kitchen is a demanding name to live up to, and it encourages the kitchen staff to try their best to meet user expectations. For example, they now seek to describe meal ingredients in a way that gives users a sense of the taste. Most important, senior citizens in Holstebro now know who shapes the meatballs and seasons the gravy in the municipal kitchen, because they have engaged in a dialogue with that kitchen. This fosters satisfaction and responsibility for both the seniors and the kitchen staff.

In many ways, The Good Kitchen illustrates how modest modifications can lead to significant improvements through service design in the public sector. In themselves, the solutions may seem obvious. The innovative element, even if the innovation is merely incremental, lies in identifying all the touch-points and linking them together in a new and more efficient and satisfying way. That is what service design is all about.

Current challenges

The Danish Design Centre continues to work with private industry in its effort to promote design. However, in 2008, the center felt it was time to adjust its strategy. In a development that owes much to the success of earlier design policies, the emphasis is no longer on why companies should use design. Instead, the focus has now shifted to how companies use design and how design can be integrated into a company's business strategy. Essentially, more and more Danish companies have adopted the message about design, and they are increasingly looking for specific tools to either help them get started or to help them reach new heights.

Over the next five years, the Danish Design Centre will concentrate on helping large and small companies identify their design potential. The DDC will provide companies with the tools they need to incorporate design strategically and to develop design briefs and manuals, and it will help them identify methods with which they can include users in the development processes. These activities will be key to the effort to bolster the Danish Design Centre as a centre for design and innovation that is fully

available to companies and organizations looking for knowledge and tools to improve their use of design in order to develop their businesses and enhance their competitiveness.

For both companies and Danish society in general, there are obvious competitive benefits for promoting design in the private sector, but it is also important to ensure that design is used as a tool for innovation

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in the public sector, in the form of service design or user-driven innovation, or in public-private innovation partnerships. There is a strong need for product development based on new technology. There is also a huge potential for design in improving services and systems.

One of the challenges typically faced by design companies trying to spur innovation in the Danish public sector is, simply, organization. Organizational structures are sometimes complex, and there is a silo mentality that goes along with that complexity that is not conducive to developing seamless processes for citizens, for example, or for facilitating the implementation and roll-out of projects.

One project that is fighting this mentality is a joint project begun in early 2010 between the Danish Design Centre and the UK's Design Council. Called Independence Matters and funded by the Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs and the UK Technology Strategy Board, the project seeks to encourage innovative services and products for senior citizens, as well as for people with chronic diseases, such as obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, and dementia. As a first step, the DDC has decided to develop a model to ensure that design thinking is used in the implementation of social-welfare projects. These efforts are informed by what has been learned from the user-driven innovation program and the service-design projects carried out since 2007. We know that designers are capable of developing innovative solutions to many of the challenges facing society, and we believe that involving designers in a project enhances the accuracy of its implementation and the development of solutions that can be rolled out and implemented in other contexts—in other regions or municipalities, for example, or even in other countries.

In addition, the Danish Design

Centre also focuses on the capacity of design as an innovation competence to address crucial challenges in the areas of waste management. For example, the Centre cooperates with the Keep Denmark Tidy organization on the development of tools to reduce littering. One of the focus areas in this effort is littering from cars, which is a big problem for municipalities around the country. The design process will address concepts for mobile waste solutions in cars, consider lay-by design, and develop communication tools to promote a change in motorist behavior.

Building a new design policy: Questions to be answered

In determining the content of a new design policy, it is important to consider design's current role and its potential for the future. One way of exploring this is to consider some key questions: What is good design? In what contexts should design play a role? And where is design headed?

What is good design?

The answer to this question has varied over time. That's because design is not a fixed entity but a variable factor that is constantly shaped by technol-ogy, culture, and the spirit of the times. Design as a concept, as well as design competence, have expanded in context and have a far broader presence in society.

From a Danish point of view, good design still contains elements of the old virtues from the golden age of the 1950s and '60s, but over time—and especially within the past two decades—it has acquired new quali-

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ties. As the Danish Design Centre might put it:

- *Good design is innovative.* An innovative design can be a breakthrough product or service, but it can also be a redesign of an existing product or service. A breakthrough product offers the market and the user a new, previously unseen function and added value, while a redesign improves an existing product.
- *Good design is honest.* An honest design communicates only the functions and values it actually offers. It should not manipulate buyers or users into thinking it offers more than it does.
- *Good design is functional.* A func-tional design solves a problem, and in its design it optimizes a given function.
- *Good design is durable.* In a society characterized by excessive consumption, good design is based on durability in the sense that the design and materials have staying power rather than representing a fad. Waste and excessive consumption are not aspects of good design.
- *Good design is aesthetic.* An aesthetic product has an inherent power of fascination and an immediately accessible sensuous quality.
- *Good design is responsible.* Responsible design accounts for environmental concerns, for example. It may contribute to a cleaner and more sustainable world, one in which materials are highly durable and may even be recycled in new contexts.
- *Good design is intuitive.* Intuitive design is self-explanatory and often presents no need for a user manual. It is obvious how the design should be used, perceived, and understood. The design explains the function.
- *Good design is shaped and styled.* Shape and appearance are essential aspects of good design;

they are the basis for creating and designing. Shaping and styling ensure an attractive, sensuous quality and an added value.

· *Good design is user-oriented.* It focuses on the user and aims to improve a given situation for the user. User-oriented design provides an added value, whether material or immaterial, and thus increases the user's satisfaction and life situation.

In what contexts should design play a role?

In design history, the past 10 years mark a particularly interesting period. Design has developed in entirely new directions, mainly as the result of digital and technological developments and new channels of communication, such as social media. New methods have been integrated into the design profession, and design increasingly incorporates methods from anthropology, user-driven innovation, marketing, and engineering. Thus, today we may add service design, interaction design, sustainable design, and strategic design to the more-traditional disciplines. Over the past couple of years, it has become clear that design competencies can also be used to address broader challenges in areas such as social welfare and the environment. The full scope and diversity of design

competence have really only unfolded in the current millennium.

Where is design headed?

Of course, it's difficult to predict the future, but it is possible to identify some design disciplines and trends that are characteristic today and will probably continue to be dominant in the future. A common feature is that trends and disciplines are more anchored in challenges at a societal level than they were in the past. Green design, digital design processes, experience design, and user-aided design are some trends that are likely to become mainstream in the future.

Denmark as a design nation

Denmark is known around the world for its design prowess and for names such as Jacobsen, Wegner, and Panton. But it is also known for putting design on the political agenda.

The country has already seen three design policies implemented, and the current Danish government has taken steps to develop a fourth policy to further strengthen the area. The policies of the past 13 years have laid a foundation we can build on. They offer a unique opportunity to take design competence to a new level.

Today, design and design thinking are internationally recognized as key drivers of change processes in

companies, systems, and societies. Countries that have embraced design as a driver of innovation will have considerable competitive advantage. We believe our new policy must aim to establish the right conditions for turning Denmark into an innovative society through design.

Up until now, Danish design policy has been anchored in the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs. In recent years, the Danish Design Centre has carried out several collaborative projects with the government ministries responsible for science, technology, climate issues, the environment and, of course, culture. And in a unique development, in spring 2010 design was included in the Danish government platform that describes the country's political vision and strategy for the next 10 years.

We look forward to a design policy that will be part of other policies— schemes for growing business, ideas to manage globalization, and plans to achieve new innovations in both the private and the public sector, because design and design competence are just as useful and valuable in the social area as they are in relation to economics and business. Only then will it be possible to bring design competence into play in new areas and to raise the level of achievement throughout our country. ■