

# ULRR

## Redesigning Ireland

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Alex Milton / Programme Director for Irish Design 2015

# Redesigning Ireland

Given some of the momentous and unprecedented transformations currently convulsing the globe – from the challenges raised by globalisation and the renewed interest in provenance and heritage, to the spread of social media and the evangelising over 3D printing – what does the future of design look like?

The global design industry has undergone enormous change in the last decade, with roles being redefined, processes reinvented and hybrid forms enabling new design directions. The most creative contemporary designers are taking on multiple roles and transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries through the freedom provided by the digital age, while at the same time reconnecting to analogue craft skills with an altogether new mindset. Designers are increasingly questioning their purpose and re-defining their roles for the 21st century.



Alex Milton

As a result, design has begun to focus on engaging stakeholders at all stages of the research process, from shaping initial questions, through developing methodologies, to sharing findings and recommendations. As a result, design has moved beyond the creation of artefacts and environments, and embraced the realm of services and experiences. This is a significant moment; design today is demonstrating how it can achieve substantial impacts on public and institutional policy.

Designers are becoming engaged with social, environmental and political agendas, and are recognising that they can apply innovative creative processes and transferable design skills and thinking across a spectrum of settings. This has resulted in a dramatic rise in collaborative activity as designers - designing 'with' rather than merely 'for' users - prepare to meet the radical design challenges of the coming decades.

It is within this context that Irish Design 2015 (ID2015) came into existence, as a pivotal moment for reflection on where Irish design had come from, where it is now and how it can engage with this dynamic global dialogue around the possibilities design affords, projecting a brighter future for the sector, and indeed the country.

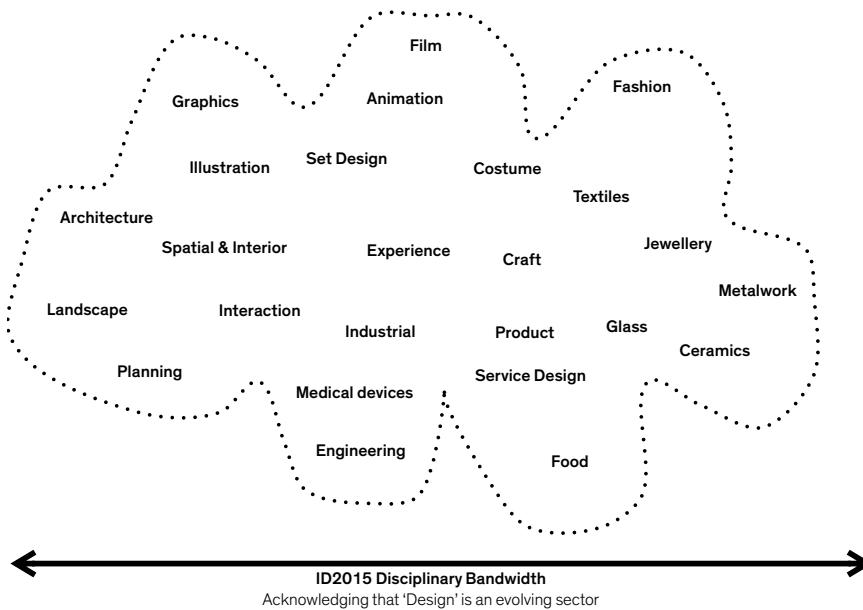
Ireland is home to a vibrant community of design thinkers, doers, makers and educators. The island's creative practitioners have consistently explored emergent fields, unbound by disciplinary convention or commercial silos. This has enabled Irish designers to continuously rebuild and

remodel their practices through design thinking, helping respond to the challenges of past economic downturns while playing a key role in driving Ireland's rapidly expanding creative economy and future prosperity.

This defiance of disciplinary boundaries makes trying to reduce Irish design to a single leitmotif a foolish undertaking, as the characteristic strength of the sector is due in no small part to its diverse range of influences. From the socially mediated popular culture of the street to Irish craft heritage, and from Scandinavian modernism to Georgian neo-classicism, Ireland has benefited from a fusion of indigenous creativity with the influx of wave after wave of international inspiration. As such there is no 'Irish design' style, but rather a vibrant community of 'design in Ireland'.

With a breadth of creative disciplines ranging from the tech start-ups of Dublin's silicon docks, through to architectural innovation and medical device design, the Ireland of today tells a fascinating story of design on the edge and design between the boundaries. The Irish are innate storytellers, keen to address and resolve the big issues of today through passionate conversation and debate. As design continues to evolve and transform, it increasingly seeks to create holistic experiences and narratives; Ireland is well placed to play a significant role in twenty-first century design, helping to meet the design challenges of tomorrow, and adding a new chapter to the story of global design.

2015 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Kilkenny Design



Workshops (KDW), the world’s first multi-disciplinary, state sponsored design consultancy, and the last truly significant Irish government design initiative before Irish Design 2015.

Before it ceased operations in 1988, KDW’s aims were broadly to strengthen and develop the sector by both providing a context for innovation within the discipline, and encouraging links between design and the national and international business communities.

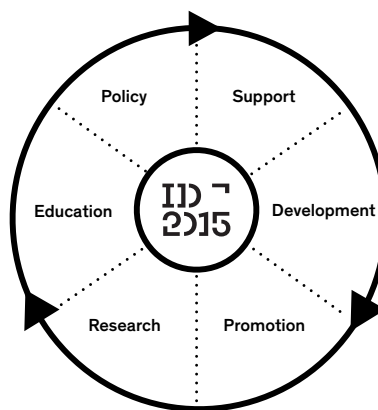
Looking back over half a century, ID2015 was an opportunity to critique and evaluate the development of the Irish design sector since KDW, learning from the past to develop a contemporary platform that address the infrastructural shortfalls within the sector, builds upon its often hidden strengths, and creates a sustainable Irish design eco-system.

ID2015 was a collaborative effort undertaken by the Irish design sector and community, across different disciplines and backgrounds. The final programme and its activities and achievements were the result of a fantastic creative synthesis and highly significant collective design effort.

As Programme Director, it was an exciting and challenging remit to harness this creativity to meet the ambitious targets set for the year, working with Karen Hennessy, CEO of ID2015 and a talented team to devise, develop and implement a programme that met the unfettered aspirations of the Irish

design community and diaspora, establishing Ireland as ‘the design island’. As such, ID2015 should be understood more as an evolving platform than a singular proposition; or more precisely, a platform as proposition.

In Ireland, as in many other Western countries, resources for new investments are scarce. An economic crisis, an aging population, and a growing demand for better welfare services have led to tighter



ID2015 Strategy  
A Catalyst for Design

fiscal constraints. However, the very promise of design as a driver of innovation and economic and cultural development is in its ability to “do more with less”.

The highly ambitious ID2015 programme was developed after benchmarking against national design strategy and recent policy precedents from countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and

**ID2015 Programme Components**

**Design Support** - providing design thinking and training for industry and the public sector

**Design Development** - raising the capabilities of Irish designers and establishing the critical network, infrastructure, information and research required to support the development and culture of the Irish design sector

**Design Promotion** - creating a greater appreciation and demand for design

**Design Research** - commercialising research through design led innovation and new Intellectual Property creation

**Design Education** - providing design thinking and training for pupils, students and lifelong learners

**Design Policy** - providing the contextual framework, critical to decision-making in the development and promotion of design through policies and strategies

Singapore, and in consultation with the design sector and representatives from Irish industry, and sought to involve all the relevant stakeholders.

While it is clear that Ireland can learn from the design policies of other countries, it was important when creating the ID2015 programme that we respected Ireland's nuanced and multi-faceted design culture and heritage. As such we designed a bespoke programme appropriate for the Irish design landscape that could grow sustainably, rather than merely parachuting in ready-made 'add water' solutions from abroad.

Since 2010 when design was first integrated into the European Commission's Innovation Union policy, the international policy landscape for design has been transformed. The €5 million investment in ID2015 demonstrated a strong political commitment to design, and increasing recognition across government that design is an invaluable tool to create economic growth, support businesses and improve the effectiveness of the public sector.

What differentiated ID2015 from other international design promotion and policy initiatives was the setting of ambitious economic targets for job creation, design export growth, PR value and start-ups founded; enabling the initiative to demonstrate and evidence on an international stage the true economic impact of design.

Aiming for the establishment of a sustainable Irish ecosystem meant the development, implementation and evaluation of a number of fundamental programme elements.

At the core of the programme, an exciting series of events explored a number of themes including a sense of place, sustainability, creativity and well-being, as they relate to design and the wider society. Both national and international in its focus, the programme stimulated a national conversation whilst raising awareness of the benefits of design in everyday life and the growing importance of design-led innovation to Ireland's culture, society and economy.

Through ID2015, we fostered innovation in business and public services, and encouraged

debate into what design was, is and could be. We created educational toolkits, authored case studies and piloted projects that aimed to provide people with the advice, practical tools and knowledge to achieve positive changes in business, government and local communities through design.

At home we focused on raising awareness of the importance of design in creating commercial success and economic growth, highlighting how it adds value to a product and drives innovation. Our aim was to inspire a paradigm shift in business culture nationwide that will see companies on the island of Ireland embracing design principles as a cornerstone of their organisations in the future.

We helped reinforce the Irish design sector by building the critical networks, infrastructure, and research evidence and findings required to support the development and culture of the Irish design sector. ID2015 helped provide the context critical to decision-making in the development and promotion of design, and a key outcome of the year was the creation of a new policy framework for design in Ireland.

Design can help established businesses to diversify, enter new markets and grow a share of existing markets. Through a series of training programmes, workshops and events that promoted the use of design in non-design intensive sectors we helped businesses to exploit ideas, accelerate routes to market and develop design thinking skills proven to lead to success.

The programme aimed to encourage both investment in design and the use of design as a methodology to enhance other disciplines or domains. Design is a powerful tool for research commercialisation, particularly during the critical early stages of research and development. It provides structure and focus to the innovation journey by generating new insights for market applications, communicating these clearly to investors and helping teams plan routes to market. A series of events and projects explored, debated and supported the Irish design research community, and helped build interdisciplinary networks that can create new intellectual property through design.

In addition to activities that promoted the 'business of design', we also sought

to highlight the importance of design in enhancing our lives, the environment and society, ID2015 supported a range of design activities and initiatives across the island of Ireland through funding calls. The small, highly committed ID2015 team coordinated this ambitious year of design, targeting the business community, the design community and the general public, and ultimately delivering over 650 events.

In parallel with this national agenda we built on the international reputation of Irish designers through an extensive suite of international exhibitions and trade missions helping to grow sales and export opportunities abroad. In particular, the business model of showcasing Irish design through targeted exhibitions and events proved highly successful in developing international trade and establishing strategic partnerships. Tasked with exhibiting new products, experiences or processes, the programme sought to showcase work that resonated with a diverse range of audiences across the world, but was indicative of the modern Irish design community. Commissioned projects moved between global market and local space, public use and private value, work and home, commerce and culture to foster creative collaborations across design disciplines, addressing the internal tensions within Ireland's historically disconnected design disciplines.

In addition to the hundreds of events, a further integral component of the ID2015 project was establishing a series of collaborative relationships from which emerged a number of new projects, products and partnerships. Collaboration demands a level of trust and openness; there can be unknowns, surprises and unintended outcomes. It is a collective process made and remade, revised and reiterated, reinterpreted and reimagined. Design - whether in the studio, factory or street - is likewise an evolutionary process, researching, presenting, archiving and transforming new processes, methods and concepts. ID2015 explored and revealed the process, and indeed the poetry of design, in Ireland, in all its many fields. It built a platform to better understand and improve the products, services and systems being collaboratively designed.

Collaboration with over 80 public and private partners, both in Ireland and abroad, was

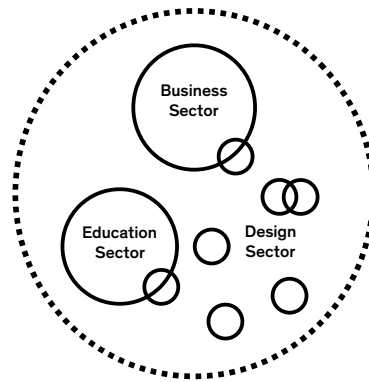
central to the planning and delivery of the programme, and without the unwavering support of our stakeholders and partner organisations the year would have been a more modest story.

The programme and its major, international flagship exhibitions also acknowledged the curatorial challenge of appealing to a wide, non-specialist domestic audience whilst simultaneously conversing with a specialist international design audience, challenging stereotypes, avoiding well-worn narratives and giving a voice to the entire Irish design sector.

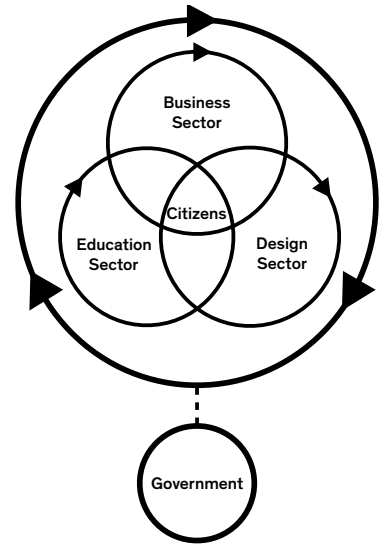
Design is a global culture and discourse, and helping position Ireland within this community was a key objective of the year. The establishment of a number of cultural partnerships with leading international design agencies and institutions including the Design Museum London, Chicago Design Museum, Vitra Design Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) has helped connect Ireland to this global design debate. It also helped lay the foundation for high profile ID2015 cultural projects such as The Ogham Wall landmark installation by Grafton Architects and Graphic Relief at the V&A as part of the London Design Festival.

Irish Design 2015 was about harnessing the power of design and working to support the island of Ireland in making design matter. We exceeded all the economic and audience targets set, generated a tenfold return on investment with €53 million of direct economic impact and clearly demonstrated that design can make a real difference. The success of ID2015 has led to design being embedded into Government policy, most notably through the publication of the first Design Policy Framework for Design since the 1960's, and the recognition that design led innovation will be a vital driver for the future.

Innovation is essential to the sustained prosperity of Ireland. Design is by its very nature innovative: it involves examining how things work and how they can be improved, a process that continually generates new ideas and combinations. As a driver of innovation, design can help companies develop new ways of making and selling products, environments and services. It can provide tools to develop new business models and



Historic Design Landscape  
Static and Disconnected Silos



Current Design Landscape  
Dynamic Integrated Eco System

ways to deliver value to customers, and commercialise new technologies by making them accessible to users. Investment in the design sector and design education is essential to ensure that this creative mindset can contribute to driving innovation across disciplines and throughout the Irish economy.

The Irish design sector continues to evolve rapidly. Research indicates there has been a significant increase in the number of new design studios. Larger, more established studios have found ways to move forward by engaging with emerging disciplines and domains, and there has been a steady and strong growth in the number of freelancers. The contribution of the Irish design sector to the wider economy has now been calculated and recognised as a vital component in its own right as well as being a key driver of innovation within the Irish economy.

Armed with such research the Government's 2016 Action Plan for Jobs features a number of specific actions relating to the development of design in Ireland which build upon the legacy of ID2015 including:

- Strengthening Ireland's design capability and performance through Enterprise Ireland and DCCoI supports such as Regional Collaboration Funds, Start-Up Funds, International Trade Promotion, Clustering initiatives, Technology Gateways, Incubator initiatives and regional and sectoral networks
- Exploiting opportunities for Ireland to win EU design collaboration funding

- Expanding the 'Design 4 Growth' Initiative launched as part of ID2015 and led by Dublin City Local Enterprise Office, bringing small firms and designers together
- Continued promotion of Irish design through our Embassies abroad and through Enterprise Ireland's export promotion activity
- Enterprise Ireland will work with DCCoI in promoting design thinking to their clients as a strategic element of business management
- The Government's Future Skills Group will look at current provision of design skills and scope out future skills needs

ID2015 has helped instill a sense of pride and created a unified and compelling story about Irish design, enabling Ireland and the global design community to re-consider and re-define the concept of Irish 'design'.