

Product design matters. A Sight Towards a New Generation of Romanian Designers Shaping a Contemporary Trend.

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Abstract

"The Romanian designers are starting to prosper as a group of creators, producers, beneficiaries, marketing promoters and planners of events in social life. They are a visible community of dynamic people who define their professional group and generation featured at a national and international scale. " The acknowledgement above is based on simple preliminary findings regarding the recent years of Romanian design, driven by the curiosity and interest we share with the field. In the current period, design tends to become a co-creative process in which not only professionals of different specialties interact but also various social groups that are subordinated to the same design realm in order to find a solution to a problem. This inherently leads to most varied interactions whereas less conventional solutions are based on fast communication and information. Given the fact that a brisk adaptation (to the natural, social and economic environment) could be a challenge of the present, authors question how much we can talk about a certain kind of continuity of the previous stages, and what are identity traits that should persist. There are questions that design-oriented professionals face every day whereas authors relate as case studies. We have focused on Romanian product design over the last 5 years, by analyzing case studies by criteria we considered relevant while the evolution of design in Romania in the second half of the 20th century is given as a theoretical basis necessary for such approach. We can discuss the comparative analysis of three contemporary design studios inspired by local culture and tradition. Deltacraft is a team based on craftsmanship and local traditions while Ubikubi or Prototip Studio is looking for innovation. Each case study overcomes different aspects of the current Romanian design. Authors emphasizes on that effervescence and the large number of design related events of recent years is not just a boom of optimism but a proof that design has due to academia and due to a wider social interaction. The design matter is helped by the young generation of designers that seek to link the shortcomings of a national industrial structure while supporting and inspiring Romanian product design sphere.

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Rezumat

"Designerii români au devenit o comunitate de creatori, producători, beneficiari și promotori de marketing, organizatori de evenimente în viața socială. Ei sunt o comunitate vizibilă, de oameni dinamici care își definesc o identitate de grup și de generație sesizabilă la scară națională și internațională". Concluzia de mai sus a pornit de la simple constatări preliminare privind manifestările ultimilor ani din designul românesc, curiozitatea și interesul pe care îl împărtășim față de domeniu. În perioada actuală, designul tinde să devină din ce în ce mai mult un proces co-creativ în care interacționează nu numai profesioniști din diferite specialități dar și grupuri sociale diverse care se subordonează aceluiași scop final, de a găsi soluția unei probleme. Aceasta conduce implicit nu numai la interacțiuni dintre cele mai variate dar și la soluții mai puțin convenționale, care se bazează pe o comunicare și informare rapidă. În condițiile în care adaptarea rapidă (la mediul natural; social – economic) este o provocare a prezentului, se poate pune întrebarea în ce măsură mai putem vorbi de un anumit gen de continuitate cu etapele anterioare, în ce măsură persistă trăsături identitare reale. Sunt întrebări care au preocupat mediile profesionale orientate spre domeniul designului în general, constituind o temă de studiu și în cazul nostru. Ne-am focalizat așadar asupra designului de obiect din România în ultimii 5 ani, prin analiza pe studii de caz prin criterii pe care le-am considerat relevante, evoluția designului din România în a 2-a jumătate a sec.XX fiind o baza teoretică necesară oricărei demers de acest gen. Putem pune în discuție analiza comparativă a trei studii-uri de design contemporan inspirate din cultura și tradiția locală. Deltacraft este o echipa ce se bazează pe relația cu meșteșugurile și tradițiile locale în timp ce Ubikubi sau Prototip Studio caută inovarea. Fiecare studiu de caz în parte surprinde aspecte diferite ale designului românesc actual. Am sesizat că efervescența și numărul de manifestări al ultimilor ani nu este doar o explozie de optimism ci o etapă care s-a dezvoltat datorită școlilor superioare de profil și a interacțiunii sociale mai ample la nivelul unei generații care încearcă să suplinească lipsurile unei structuri industriale naționale care să fie suport și motivație pentru designul românesc de produs.

Keywords: Romanian product design, manufactures, design suppliers, craftsmanship

1. Foreword

Human society is confronting new challenges in a brisk flow, where social reality and planet Earth are adjusting each other in order to fit urgent requirements. A slow global shift is taking place, where people who share a common lifestyle and organization are starting to reconsider their settled social behavior, their attitude, their concerns as well as their social interplay and collusion. This social shift is taking place on a broad term as well as on a small term. In this way, the global information flow can help structures in order to give them a social value to a personal or local identity. This scheme involves professionals and contributors who are committed to readjusting in order to target new professional prospects.

Design, can be a broad process, which was defined in the twentieth century by a mean of serving tangible reality; also, it can be a domain that has adapted to specific customers' needs. Design can be pointed out as a domain and a work process and also concerning our range of interest it has grown into connecting human synergy and other key features. In order to serve the purpose of the foreword, authors give information on the theory of design. This is pointed out by several professionals (such as Victor Papanek and Ezio Manzini) who have their own opinion on design, touching the last five decades. What is design? Who and how it's made? What drives its field of action, purpose and how it has developed as well as what is its key individuality? – The answer to

those questions gave a purpose that aimed the interest of the last decades of the twentieth century to beginning of the millennium.

Part of Victor Papanek assertion has been pointed out since the last century in his first and second edition of his book *"Design pentru o lume reala : ecologie umana si schimbare sociala"* [1] where design matters are given validation in the context of today's social life habits, economics, and political spectrum. On his assumption, "Design is defined as a creative process based on intuitive awareness put into creating a significant order, where all humans could have their own description of the design process starting from the concept to an easy to foretell result – therefore all human are designers." [1, 29-30]

"Design must grow into an interdisciplinary, innovative and ingenious field that needs to give an answer to embody human needs." [1, 10]

In the last decades the design theory and research shifted due to late challenges and specific issues. In the past, industrial design used to be product oriented, whereas nowadays designers face social issues and organisational programmes while designing interactive and experimental products. New demands are social and political oriented and they require a competent background. [2, 8]

Previous concerns regarding a theoretical and experimental basis for the design world are enriched in recent years by focused articles based on precise studies and books that point out late design matters. Ezio Manzini features in his book the idea that "he is looking for a contribution to the design culture, that professional or amateur designers should embrace and make use of it" [3, 17] whereas authors sustain this previous belief that serves the purpose of a professional design practice. Manzini also outlines few design assumptions that can give to the world of design a prospective buildup.

1. The author lectures on the "design and social shift in a connected era in transition towards sustainability: a world where every individual is supposed to designs its own existence whether he likes it or not". [3, 13]
2. In this shifting process of the current society "a design scenario can be built on a local and global structure based on the idea that production can be closer to consumer culture". [3, 14]
3. In the struggle of everyday life, people rediscover the power of collaboration and organization, while producing elements that can give solutions to common problems. [3, 15-16]

Contemporary context of Romanian design. While changes are taking place in different fields such as social structures and in the territory scale, the authors ask for an answer if previous general and precise aspects can be found in Romanian design space. On this line, several preliminary observations can be highlighted.

Romanian design features a diversity of professionals such as designers, architects, graphic designers, engineers, and other competent workers from different fields. Romanian design aspects targets more than the finished product while pointing out different social interactions. The design good is not strictly related only to the finished product, but it has been perceived as activism (such as some local initiatives *"La Terenuri"*, *"Somes Delivery"* and other). The product design process is a professional and age intrusion where the customer – designer aspect can get multiple valences. The large number of design professionals is confirmed by the large number of design graduates and also by the fact that design has gained interest. Numerous theoretical concerns are focused on marking some representative milestones in Romanian design expansion starting from the twentieth century to present time such as doctoral thesis, written articles, numerous exhibitions and other design related events that emphasize the glowing part of late five years of design.

This is the purposeful and innovative time span that authors describe as relevant, presented in contrast with an analysis on previous times design matters.

1.1 Romanian design between 1970 and 1990

For a better discerning of Romanian design matters a short retrospective from 1970 to present times will be taken into account. How was design perceived in Romania? Who was designer professional in Romania and what was his professional background? What is Romanian design? These are a couple of questions that art historian Mirela Duculescu gives answer in her doctoral thesis submitted in 2014 named "*Designul românesc între problematica designului democratic și practica socialistă (1970-1990)*" [4] (doctoral thesis supervisor: PhD, professor Ruxandra Demetrescu), National University of Art Bucharest, Art History and Theory Faculty. This current thesis touches the matter of Romanian schools of design and design practice in the Socialist Republic era. The theory of design in Transylvanian schools remains an authentic issue given by the following titles: "*Designul românesc în cautarea identității*" (author Mihnea-Dulfu George Ciprian – doctoral thesis supervised by PhD professor A. Alamoreanu, at Art and Design University of Cluj-Napoca in 2014), "*Designul de produs în România. Contribuții la dezvoltarea învățământului de design*" (author Brad Sorin Ovidiu - doctoral thesis supervised by PhD professor A.Chiriac, at West University of Timișoara in 2017).

As Mirela Duculescu points out, design in 1970 used to be perceived as a characteristic fact of living "in close connection with industrial production, [...] a rationalizing factor, [...] related to research, innovation, originality and progress, even modern life" [4, 116], as a cultural educator, in the service of society [4, 102], but also as a combination of art and industry, thus contradicting the design profession and the discipline of design [4, 114]. We are witnessing the shaping of a new field that slowly gets its recognition. Between the years 1970 and 1990 we can point out ten Design exhibitions held by foreign designers in Romania [4, 231] and 34 Romanian exhibitions held by design fairs [4, 231]. During the same times, we can point out 9 journals that touch design matters.

Design schools in Romania – the motion of the period 1970-1990. Although Design Schools are founded in this period, we can witness the first attempts of professional development in this field, long before, in the Architecture or Fine Arts Schools. Concerning the stage of training of Romanian design professionals, it is necessary to follow the establishments of the Design Departments during 1970-1990, whereas architects or visual artists established the specific field of education and founded professional organizations (Commission and Design Section of the Union of Fine Artists, Romanian Design Center); they also have defined the activity in the field, from academic education to practicing in factories, industrial enterprises or research institutes [4, 136]. The first Academic institution having a technology department was Faculty of Wood Engineering, Brasov, first established in 1959. [5] This faculty is currently oriented towards training specialists in the field of product design. In 1970s Romanian Design Departments have been established. The relevant data can be seen in a timeline graph pictured in Figure 1. In 1969, the Industrial Forms Section was established at the Institute of Fine Arts in Bucharest (by architect Paul Bortnovschi and painters Ion Bitzan and Vladimir Setran [6]) and in 1971 the Section of Industrial Forms was established at the Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj. In 1990, the Design Section of the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, "George Enescu" University of Arts, Iasi, was established [4, 180] and at the beginning of the 1990s, two Design Departments were established in Timișoara: at the Faculty of Arts and Design, West University of Timișoara and as well as Faculty of Design at Tibiscus Private University, Timișoara (1991-1992) [4, 222-227]. Graduates (about 9-10 per year from the Department of Industrial Forms Design at the Nicolae Grigorescu Institute of Fine Arts in Bucharest [4, 235] and about 6 or 7 at the Industrial Design, Design Department at the "Ioan Andreescu" Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj [4, 240])—were involved in all branches of industry such as automotive, furniture and electronics. We practically witnessed, until 1990 a purposeful design process. After the 1990s, however, we notice that the industrial branches in Romania gradually become less numerous, although the design education institutions are substantial (as we will see below). With the disappearance of some industrial branches, designers are focusing on other design fields such as interior design, product design (lighting, furniture, textile), graphic design, web design and other.

1.2 Romanian design after 1990 - Educational Institutions and Professional Associations

As far as the professional training in the design field is concerned, we have noticed that since the beginning of the 1990s three Design Departments have been newly established in Timișoara and Iasi. Later, in 2003, at the "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, the Faculty of Interior Architecture is established, which currently comprises three departments: Interior Architecture, Product Design, Furniture and Interior Design. We are witnessing the training of young professionals in the design field and besides wood industry specialists and design graduates; architects are now stepping into the design world. However, authors mention that at the Department of Industrial Forms at the Institute of Fine Arts in Bucharest (1969) architects and visual artists laid the foundations for the design education. In Cluj-Napoca, architect Virgil Salvanu was the one who has established the Industrial Forms Section. After the 1990s, various professional associations were established in the field of Design such as: RDF - Romanian Design Foundation (1996-1998), Focus Design Foundation in Cluj, SPDR - Society of Professional Designers in Romania (2005) and The Union of Plastic Artists [4, 179-180].

DeSIGN Buletin. For a better understanding of the period between early 1990s to the early 2000s in terms of Romanian design, DeSIGN Buletin (one of the few magazines with a particular interest in design), a quarterly issue established from 1996, published for nearly eight years is an interesting source to investigate. A scroll through the articles published in the magazine can give us a picture of the Romanian design of that moment:

- issue 1/1999 pictures the design and architecture of the 90s, concerns about Bucharest's success on the market through a design management, Emil Răgușilă - product designer [7]
- issue 2/1999 outlines an interesting article concerning the Form Forum 99 initiative - the first international design summon in Romania after 1990 (organized by Detaeye Media and Art Association, in partnership with DeSIGN Buletin from Brașov, with participants from Canada, Germany, Belgium, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and Romania), one of the most important design events in terms of scale and aims. This summon concerns education and design perspectives in the context of Central and Eastern Europe; other issues touched by this event are: Audit in Design, design models and academic projects, ambiental design [8].
- issue 2/2004 brings the editorial Design Made in Romania where author points out some important ideas that reflect the moment of 2004 and their next intentions - those who opt for the career in the design grow, organize events, create brands - they are seen as being the signs of a change for the better while being supported by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design and the Ministry of European Integration. It is noted that Romanian designers participate at international design salons, aiming the success of the local design; another article analyzes the Design Contest in BIFE 2004. [9]

Overall we can notice an openness of the publication and designers' interests to all fields - product design, graphic design, automotive design, ambiental design in Romania and other countries as well; with a focus on specific problems such as ways of studying the domain, presenting international bodies, legislative provisions of interest and young designers at design competitions. If DeSIGN Bulletin magazine offers certain design information over the last 5-6 years we witness a great variety of promotional platforms, blogs, magazines (see Chapter 3.2) that touches design field. We also witness a moment when actual design problems are discussed, while general issues are being much more nuanced.

While pointing out some preliminary conclusions on the moment, we notice that the ideas presented back in 2004's editorial have reached their purpose, even if industrial enterprises are less present.

Nowadays there are several higher education institutions and a higher number of graduates. Young designers have a large number of online platforms where they can expose their work or where they can relate to each other or potential customers, so marketing concern is greater. There are a greater number of design competitions participants and also more design projects involved in design competitions.

CONTEMPORARY DESIGN TIMELINE

AN OVERVIEW OF PRODUCT DESIGN-RELATED EVENTS, UNIVERSITIES AND MAGAZINES IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

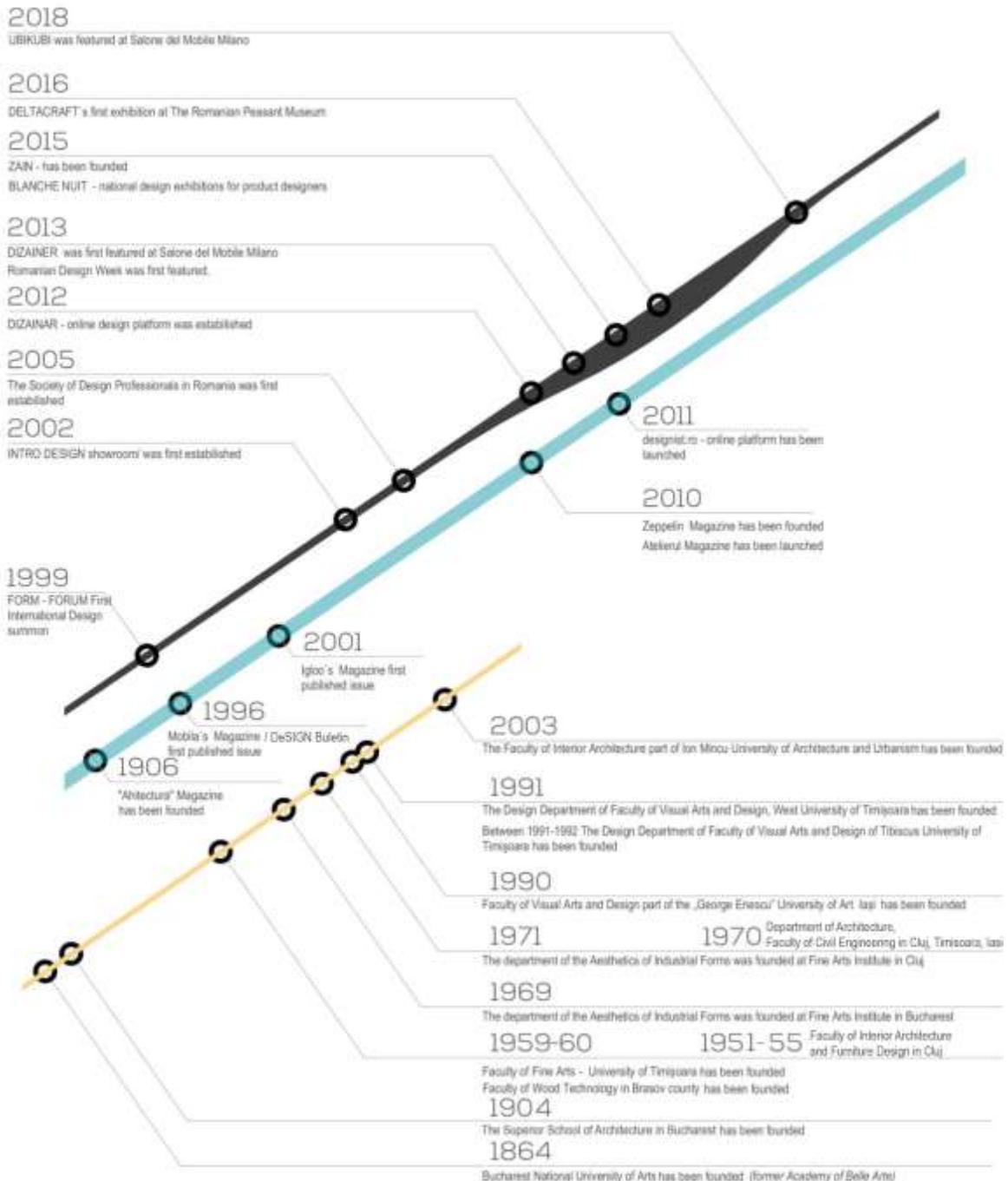


Figure 1. Design related milestones

Objects designed by Romanian designers are varied, but they have a small scale of production. Designer products have high production costs and this fact is reflected in more expensive items made of common and affordable materials such as wood, plastic, metal, and less recycled materials. Regarding the local product market, we can notice remarkable aesthetic differences between a consumer market and the product design of young Romanian designers, the latter having a more evolved aesthetic standard.

The figure above shows the previous observations, through a graphic synthesis organized in three determinant criteria - subject of evolution of the Romanian design in starting from 1970s up to present times: (pictured in orange) the establishment of the superior design schools, (pictured in gray) the emergence of the main publications in the field, and (pictured in turquoise) events, promotion platforms - milestones in design development.

2. Definition of interest extent

Analyzing the events unfolded by the past 3 decades, as graph above shows, all the events that supported the development of Romanian design, in the last 5 to 6 years had a decisive role in the importance of the design phenomenon at the moment.

Design matter touches product design, a domain that refers to a range of products that represent the result with a palpable and immediate physical purpose whereas professionals such as, designers, architects or entrepreneurs can be involved. Thus, the article details Romanian product design of recent years through case studies.

The extent of divergent Romanian design. Where is Romanian product design now? Mihnea Ghilduș (designer and entrepreneur, founder of online platform Dizainăr) and Mihai Gurei (designer and entrepreneur, co-founder of Intro Design and Curator Product Design Section of Romanian Design Week 2017) are two recurring names from the design field. Mihnea Ghilduș pointed out back in 2016 that by associating manufacturers to product designers, the design field has will get a beneficial economic support. [10] This idea is currently new, but the example of Bucin Mob's collaboration with designers for launching a new collection in 2017 at Cologne IMM can be expanded. Emphasizing the upsurge of Romanian product design of the recent years, Mihai Gurei underlines the importance of Romanian Design Week "design process has become recognized even in the media. Also, local market got an appetite for furniture design Made in Romania. This is how the first buds of a local industry have appeared while brands are starting to export their manufactured design. Step by step, brands and factories or workshops specialized in various technologies link together. "[11]

From available online sources, it is clear that the current trend in Romania is conference, workshop and event oriented, such as Romanian Design Week (annual event, launched in 2013), or ZAIN (annual event, launched in 2015). Design competitions launched by the help of printed or on-line advertising platforms are becoming more and more numerous; considering the well-known online platform Dezeen [12], Romanian design number of issues is raising, starting from 1 article in 2014, 2 articles in 2016, up to 3 articles in 2017. Another aspect worth noting is that at Salone del Mobile Milan, Romanian exhibitors have become more present (in 2015 - 2 exhibitors [13], 2018 - 19 exhibitors [14]). In this context, we continue to identify some directions that define the current Romanian design.

3. Case studies

The following case studies will highlight three leading factors that sketch the image of made in Romania design: (a) creators and manufacturers (the manufacturer / designer); (b) promoters (design suppliers platforms) and (c) design suppliers. Of course, these three categories (as we will see below) do not function as independent entities, but they intertwine thus defining a key feature of the Romanian design concept - the essence of a community.

The following case studies have been chosen to be discussed in terms of their design particularity. Each has distinctive features whereas their own self-promotion design will be taken into account for a more enlarged aspect of the development of Made in Romania design.

3.1. Designers and manufacturers

The criteria taken into account for the following product design case studies is given by the originality of the products, the concept, their purpose, the back-story of the products (such as Deltacraft team), the innovation, and by the evolution (the Sezi team) (using mainly wood - for example, Silva Artis, Wood be nice, Slender Tree, Sezi). These benchmarks were inspired by the position of Modern Design Review editor, Laura Houseley in the selection of examples of the new generation of designers in The Independent Design Guide [15, 6-7]. The chosen examples define two seemingly divergent directions: Deltacraft is a team based on the relationship with local crafts and traditions while Ubikubi and Prototip Studio are looking for innovation. Each case study includes a brief presentation of the studio's design concept, their range of used materials, the type of products they design, how they are made, their way of promotion as well as pricing concerns.

3.1.1 Deltacraft. Resourcefulness design

Relevant for the analysis of designers oriented towards a contemporary culture through craftsmanship is Deltacraft studio. The design team is a fusion of architects, designers, artisans and non-governmental organizations aiming an innovative approach by revising traditional crafts in the Danube Delta area. Their unique procedure is put into a contemporary design, inspired by local culture and natural heritage, tradition and local crafts. The design studio is anchored in a network of craftsmen and creative nonprofits organizations that operate under the principle of Fair Trade (ecoPolis, KraftMade and ICEM Tulcea). Designers, together with local artisans, are constantly looking for new practical solutions that are effective regarding the sustainability matter. [16]



Figure 2. Deltacraft exhibition

[image source: <https://adelaparvu.com/2015/12/04/mesteri-populari-din-delta-si-traditiile-lor-reinviate-prin-proiectul-deltacraft/>]

Collaborative design approach: Deltacraft starts with a series of local analyzes (a local database) in the Danube Delta, resulting from the collaboration of 10 artisans, 3 designers, 2 curators carrying out a craft research, looking for customs and decorative elements of local workshops in the Danube Delta. The purpose of the Deltacraft studio is actually to pinpoint the character of the area through the cultural and natural heritage of the Danube Delta. The Deltacraft Design Collection sketches artisans' talents in the art of local materials in the area. Their designed products represent a symbol of community power and the place heritage.

Their design resources involve locally sourced materials such as willow driftwood, woven bulrush, beehive, raw oak, wood cowhide, leather, even stone and earth.

Design scale: Their creative minds are illustrated in small decorative objects, cut by a CNC router, up to seating furniture or large wooden partitions.



Figure 3. Willow driftwood from the Danube, iron / Water filter, designer: Ciprian Manda [image source: <http://deltacraft.ro/>]

Pricing is undisclosed at the moment.

Self promotion design: The environmental NGO Ecopolis, together with KraftMade and "Gavrilă Simion" Institute of Ecomuseology Research Tulcea (ICEM), competed to promote sustainable solutions promoted by Deltacraft design. The brand also receives the support of Ubikubi platform by associating with designer Dragoș Motică for the design of 6 household products. This was made possible by the help of several artisans from Letea, Tulcea.

The promotion of the brand rooted in local traditions was first fortified by participating at Vienna Design Week 2015, and a year later at the Romanian Design Week for the object design section: The product design portfolio is also exposed at Mesteshukar ButiQ in Bucharest. Under the name of "DELTA CRAFT Craft + Contemporary Design" young designers exhibit their design portfolio consisting of 13 works for the first time at the Romanian Peasant Museum, supported by the Center for Sustainable Policies Ecopolis. In mass media, the KraftMade interview. "or how to give power to the hands" published in Igloo Magazine enhances brand promotion in the online and offline environment. [17]

3.1.2 Ubikubi design studio

The second case study is focused on the relationship between design and production. The Ubikubi brand was initiated in 2014 by two designers and entrepreneurs: Robert Savu and Dragoș Motică. Their original belief was that design has to be affordable, sustainable, made with respect for the environment while using local materials. The essence of the Ubikubi design is in-house prototyping. The establishment of Ubikubi was driven by the designer's firm belief that he can fulfill his creative potential and to give coherence, unity and continuity to his creative mind. A broad definition of Ubikubi products is given by contemporary cork furniture, individual home

accessories where molded wood and cork prevail. [18] [19]

"Reputation was fueled by a simple but effervescent manifestation: designing an object of activity, tested, materialized and commercially validated from volatile exhibition concepts" [20]

Their design resources involve raw materials such as varnished oak, ash, natural cork and plywood. Ubikubi's design portfolio also exposes some materials that offer an industrial image of products such as: concrete, reinforcing wire and climbing rope.



Figure 4. Marco stool, bench, cork, designer Dragoş Motică

[image source: <https://www.beut.co.uk/furniture/dining-room-furniture/designer-stools/ubikubi-marco-cork-stool.html> , <http://www.dragosmotica.ro/portfolio/marco-bench/>]



Figure 5. Slash Lamp, concrete and cork, Ubikubi

[image source: <http://www.dragosmotica.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1-16.jpg>]

Pricing. Ubikubi's initial branding suggested a range of high quality yet affordable, domestic products. Design objects are achieved by combining craftsmanship, innovative technology and future-oriented design. However, some products such as furniture pieces in the Atelier collection whereas foldable parts are involved, exceed the 1500 euro price range. Prices vary from product utility, starting from 30 euro for a juicer up to 1890 euro for Atelier Arm Chair or Workshop Table inspired by a painting easel.

Design scale: Ubikubi philosophy aims the smart use of materials and techniques, ranging from office supplies to large pieces of furniture.

Self-promotion design: Ubikubi Young Designers Award (UYDA) is a competitive platform for promoting Ubikubi brand. This is an object design contest opened to young designers, architects or design enthusiasts who want to see their artistic vision turned into reality. UYDA aims to become the main landmark in the design competition area in Romania. Likewise, another series of collaborations between Ubikubi and Dizainăr led to Romanian Design Yard Sale - a concept store

event for Ubikubi products. The made in Romania brand received recognition by the online platforms and magazine magazines that appreciated the Ubikubi start-up. They also collected many positive reviews from aesthetic related figures and platform such as Igloo, Dizainăr, and Glamour Romania.

To further acknowledge their design, Ubikubi submitted the concept of the concrete lamp project ("/" Lamp) to Dezeen platform. The lamp prototype became a real success by the means of online platforms that spread the news of the design of an atypical lamp, which you have to break with a stone in order to personalize it. Internationally, brand promotion is also due to numerous press appearances. Among these authors can mention the following online promotion platforms: Dezeen, DesignMilk, Domus Italy, Culture Trip, Contemporis, Design you trust.

"I would define the brand Ubikubi as I would like it to become: a home and deco brand, but simplicity is the ultimate form that defines it." Dragos Motică, Forbes Romania- January 2018. [18]

3.1.3 Prototip studio – creative studio



Figure 6. Local pencil, Wooden Headphones, Prototip Studio

[image source: <http://prototipstudio.com/portfolio/local-pencil/>,

<http://www.bucurestifm.ro/2015/05/15/design-arhitectura-muzica-new-media-prototip-studio/>]

Prototype Studio is an architecture and design office that runs in Cluj-Napoca. The projects so far are touching product design, furniture design, interior and exterior design. The creative studio approaches an interdisciplinary vision where it seeks the equilibrium from of both the spatial dimension and the temporal dimension of the created objects. The prototype of the studio was given by Bogdan and Ioana Goția in 2013. Since then, they have been producing product design, art, architecture, poetry and new media. "Prototip Studio is an architecture and design studio, based in Cluj from 2013. The projects realized until now touch different type of design: from product to furniture, interiors and exterior spaces and approach an interdisciplinary vision aiming to become the way of equilibrium in the spatial and temporal dimension" [21] [22]

Design materials: the creative studio uses mainly wood for their design such as: raw bamboo, beech plywood, roots of oak and walnut and birch treated with natural wax - for the eyewear products.

Wooden Headphones: "We had the idea for a long time, especially since one year ago we were releasing the first prototype of wooden Headphones that we were carrying on all the time. In April, the time has come to in order for us to shape our idea. "[23] Wooden Headphones are the result of several prototypes. They had few design restrains; given by the fact that wood became a case study to experiment the acoustics of various wood essences. Also anthropometric studies were the groundwork of the headset geometry called "Base Headphones". After a series of attempts, designers have managed to find the optimum strength and flexibility of the whole ensemble.

Pricing: Wooden Headphones retail for a price between 50 and 80 euro.

Design scale: The vision of Prototype Studio is illustrated by small decorative objects cut by a CNC router, up to custom-made seating furniture or even urban furniture.

Self-promotion design: Promoting the Prototype brand was first powered by participating in the Vienna Design Week 2017, and a year later, at the Romanian Design Week at the product design section. The Prototype Studio practices direct promotion - through its products. Thus, OO Eyewear, the collection of wooden glasses, was presented at various national design fairs, including Vienna Design Week. The ludic, physiognomy given by the glasses attracts a young audience who is looking for authentic products, in detriment of those produced in series.

Exposure to the media: Exposure using online platforms: the Institute and Designist.

3.2. Promotional Platforms

Promotional platforms whether they are on-line or printed, are not only a way of displaying products to the public but are the real tools of portraying Romanian design. Among printed periodicals, authors mention Igloo magazine with issues published for 17 years, journal supplement Banchiza urbana published quarterly since 2015, that promotes architecture, design, various events (in the fields of design, theater, cinema), architecture related journals such as Zepellin, Arhitect or Arhitectura that point out specific subjects such as product design or other events in the field. "Revista Mobila", "Revista Asociației Producătorilor de Mobilă din România" presents industry-specific issues and "Arta" magazine addresses a lesser extent of Romanian design.

Designist.ro website - "concentrat de idei fine" launched in late 2011 published interviews of designers or architects, interior design proposals from Romania or abroad, products of notorious contemporary designers, graphic design and other design related topics. Launched in 2010, "Revista Atelierul website. | Inspiratie, design & handmade", brings to light handmade design and also sustains media as a partner for several events in Bucharest, Timișoara, Cluj, Brașov and Iași.

3.2.1 The Institute promotional platform

The Institute platform is one of the most extensive platforms in terms of the Made in Romania design. The Institute is a design culture, branding related magazine, as well as a coffee shop dedicated to the formation of a community from all branches of the creative industries. The Institute is described as promoter of all the creative industries in Romania (entrepreneurs, professionals and freelancers) that organizes events that contribute to building a strong infrastructure for the development of creative entrepreneurship in the country while increasing and diversifying the audience of workshops, designers, small businesses, agencies and manufactures. They also promote creative entrepreneurs and professionals both nationally and abroad. [24]. Thus, articles touching subjects as architecture, advertising, design, performance, digital, lifestyle, visual arts, film and journalism are published on the Institute website. Launched in 2010, the Institute concept starts the 2013 at Romanian Design Week. Designed as an annual festival for all Romanian creative industries, Romanian Design Week is conceived as a core, having a central exhibition and other collateral events organized by other teams under the concept of Romanian Design Week. Fields promoted from the beginning of the platform were advertising, architecture, digital design, fashion, graphic design, interior design, and photography and product design. [25]

As far as product Design is concerned, in 2014 Andrei Borțun, Founder of The Insitute, notes that "the vast majority of people have no information on Romanian design" [26] However,

retrospectively, Romanian Design Week public grew exponentially: from 10 000 visitors on the 2013 edition, up to 30 000 visitors in 2018. [27] At the 2013 Product Design section, there were 11 participants (including: Silva Artis, Ana Botezatu, Care? Cutare, Agnes Lucacs, 201 Design Studio, Atelier A4, Dragoș Motică), but the field is much more important in 2016 when we meet 35 participants (201 Design Studio, Agnes Lukacs, Centrul pentru Politici Durabile Ecopolis, Ciprian Manda, Corvin Cristian, Dare to Rug, Delta Craft, Eliza Yokina, NOIDOI, Ubikubi, Woodish), and in the 2018 edition there are 24 participants (such as ABRUPTARHITECTURA, Agnes Lukacs, Atelier MASS, Ceramic Sparrow, Ciprian Manda, Meștешukar ButiQ [MBQ], Prototip Studio, Ubikubi). At the 2017 edition, we get to see a new concept whereas highlighting identity and traditions becomes an exhibition on the subject of ReDesign & Crafts. In this way, contemporary designers and craftsmen collude.



Figure 7. Romanian Design Week, 2016

[image source: <http://www.romaniapozitiva.ro/bucuresti/start-inscrieri-romanian-design-week-2017/>]



Figure 8. Romanian Design Week, 2016

[image source: <https://attilakim.com/Romanian-Design-Week-2016-Expozitia-Centrala-Main-Exhibition>]

"One of Romanian Design Weeks' priorities is to discover and promote design projects that could stand out at an international level by capitalizing on Romanian local specific, be it in terms of materials used, techniques or functionality. ReDesign Crafts, organized together with ING (partner since the first Romanian Design Week) this year's flagship Romanian Design Week exhibition, focuses on traditional crafts' presence in contemporary design by showcasing how innovation could preserve traditional techniques. "[28]

Considering The Institute platform, authors notice that in addition to promoting Romanian design through printed articles or on-line media, design related events such as exhibitions, conferences (Romanian Design Weeks verging events) promotional platforms have the effect of coagulating ideas and shaping opinions on Romanian design subject. Most importantly, we are witnessing the formation of an audience that gradually gets to know and recognize the Romanian design beyond consumerism.

3.3. Design suppliers in Romania

While establishing a market for Romanian designers, an important point of view is how producers sell their products. Beyond their own promotion and marketing, we further notice that design suppliers are an important part not only in the relationship between the producer and the customer, but also in supporting and promoting designers. At the moment, two major distributors are distinguished regarding product design – Romanian design or international design.

Who are they? How do suppliers present their retail goods? The commercial space opened in Bucharest, near Cişmigiu Park and the website *dizainar.ro* (founded by Mihnea Ghilduş, launched by late 2012) is a concept store dedicated to Romanian design that presents itself as a place "where originality and unconventional are at one. We are the concept store exclusively dedicated to product creation in Romania." [29] *Intro Design* is a showroom devoted to design objects created by established designers or emerging designers, opened in 2002, in the central area of Bucharest (founders: Mihai Gurei and Claudia Chirilescu). Although the Romanian design is less present at Intro, the founder says, "since the inception of Intro, we have designed to support local product design initiatives and we are proud to be able to offer our customers today 100% Romanian design that comply to standards of reputable international brands." [30]. In November 2015 Intro Design launched the Ubikubi collection.

Design suppliers. Both Dizainar and Intro Design are organizing many other events, besides the commercial matters. For example, Dizainar store organizes various launches, exhibitions, thematic evenings several times a month (27 May 2018 Barbecue, art & design, on 20 May 2018 Dizainar garden meet-up featured by Ubikubi at Romanian Design Yard Sale, 19 May 2018 District Party by Dizainar & Ioana Ciolacu). Intro Design is also organizing workshops, Fairs (Christmas, or other occasions), brand launches. Their events are also promoted through a blog platform – that offers information to the public, clients or people interested in the field.

Design Services. Beyond the commercial side, the two suppliers promote a range of services related to the domain. Dizainar offers services in the field of Graphic Design (logo, website, brand visual identity, specific applications), interior design (concept, project, furniture advice, materials, finishing, project consulting) or product design, 3D visualization, prototypes, production tracking, product photo) [31]. Intro Design, having an extensive background on the market, benefits from a substantial portfolio that includes - offices, pubs, restaurants design in Bucharest and across the country (Fratelli, Energiea, Casa di David, Biutiful, Tears and Saints, Phill, Le Bistro (Le Club), Crush Wine Bar, Corks, Curtea Berarilor, OAR headquarters). [32]

Traded products. How do they get promoted? Objects marketed by the two suppliers include furniture pieces, lighting fixtures, mural wraps, accessories, jewelery, children's items, books and illustrations. Intro Design's portfolio includes predominantly furniture pieces, lighting fixtures and interior decorations from famous designers such as Charles and Ray Eames, George Nelson, Verner Panton, Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, Jasper Morrison, Konstantin Grcic, and Donna Wilson. Both Dizainar and Intro Design, are visible in the online aspect. The events described above (presentations, exhibitions and design debates) are another facet of self-promotion. An interesting aspect of Dizainar is its activity expansion outside Bucharest. "The Romanian design moves to the Castle! At Banffy Castle in Bontida - Cluj, where every year the Electric Castle festival invites the most famous artists of electronic music. Of course, Dizainar will go with the designer-mobile that many of you already know, following the poetic message "Design is like the dessert. There is always room for it." [33] Also in Cluj, in 2015, team Dizainar organized a temporary commercial space in a central area, next to Unirii Square.

Authors notice that even though product palette is different, products of some local designers or from international designers have a similar attitude towards the retail market yet both distributors are promoting intense collateral events that complement their portfolio. In fact, analyzing both promotional platforms and distributors, we notice that in the last 5 years there was an abundant demand for Romanian design yet the potential of these Made in Romania products is currently increasing.

4. Conclusions

In the last ten years, emphasized by the design events from last 5 to 6 years, authors grasp a great effervescence in the field of Romanian product design. There is a growing concern for highlighting a national identity, while many young designers are addressing this issue by establishing a relationship between traditional crafts. Product design remains an area where designers work independently or together with architects and other professionals or artisans from different cultures, thus establishing an interaction between different creative groups.

In spite of the fact that the material and technological support - industrial is currently less consistent, the object design market is quite large - various creators and producers benefit from good visibility in the external environment (national or abroad) while maintaining a competitive quality standard. In recent years, we can notice several participations of Romanian products at various trade fairs: Koln, Stocholm or Milano (Bucin Mob at IMM Cologne 2017, Mesteshukar ButiQ at Stockholm Design Week in 2016 or Ubikubi at Salone del Mobile Milan in 2018).

Highly positive effects have occurred since the development of product design. These effects are due to the information flow, leading to the formation of a wider community in which manufacturers, traders and beneficiaries overlap constructively. As a result, customers of Romanian products have access to a complex information database, currently increasing.

The Romanian designers are starting to prosper as a group of creators, producers, beneficiaries, marketing promoters and planners of events in social life. They are a visible community of dynamic people who define their professional group and generation featured at a national and international scale.

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