REPORT on Erasmus+ Scholarship (Milan, Italy September 2014 – March 2015)

To Whom It May Concern:

Dear Committee,

First of all, I would love to express my gratitude and honor for providing me with this unique opportunity to conduct a fruitful and exciting research. The fieldwork conducted based on the resources provided by Erasmus+ proved to be more fruitful than planned: 1. it crowded out my preliminary chapters from my dissertation, focusing on the data gathered in Milan at the end of the day, and 2. it opened the path for future research based on the contacts obtained and the information gathered that lays the basis for further investigations in the field. Moreover these results if contrasted, can bring about important lessons to learn from in my local context of design-driven industries, in Budapest, Hungary.

I was awarded the Erasmus+ scholarship at Corvinus University Budapest for dissertation writing purposes. I was kindly hosted by Mr. Luca Solari at the Department of Social Sciences and Political Studies, University of Milan. The purpose of my visit to Milan was to conduct fieldwork for my dissertation on Innovation Patterns in the Design-Driven Industries, in Milan, Italy. I had fruitful consultations with Mr. Solari helping my work in Milan. The infrastructure provided by the University of Milan has largely contributed to my research.

The dissertation project was designed, accepted and supervised by my supervisors at Corvinus University Budapest (Doctoral School on Sociology) dr. Zoltan Szanto, and Trento University (Doctoral School in Local Development and Global Dynamics) dr. Ermanno Tortia. Preliminary data-mining, and theoretic framing was conducted before and during the fieldwork.
Innovation scholarship measures innovation through technological, qualitative change, and change in organizational routines and capabilities. Despite the vast literature on measuring innovation activity in different sectors of production, creative industries challenge scholars in this respect. As my focus falls on open innovation and modularity I draw on the empirical and theoretic scholarship in the next chapters, where the adequate references are indicated.

The research was an explorative one that implied an extensive fieldwork required for mapping and deeper understanding the players and mechanisms at stake. Field research also focused on data-mining in order to gather an abundant sample of cases to select from to draw on case studies included later in the dissertation. Theoretic frames were fine-tuned based on the available literature in the libraries in Milan and shaped by the discourse tapped on field. I researched extensively the discourse on design by analyzing and mining data at the Library of Universita di Milano, Politecnico di Milano, Archivio di Triennale, and the Design Library Milano.

The fieldwork covered the following activities:

- literature review based on resources available at local thematic libraries, and bookshops
- participant observation (visiting events, maintaining a diary)
- interviews: non-structured, and semi-structured
- field visits (factories, companies, design/ enterprise museums)

The objectives were to:

- map the players and tap the discourse on design-driven industries based in Milan, Italy.
- to find cases to select from and to draw on
- to fine-tune the theoretic and methodological approach.

My approach thus relied on observation, unstructured conversations, and constant reading at the first phase, followed by a more target-oriented data collection based on primary and secondary literature, and semi-structured interviews in the second phase. After mapping a series of cases, I narrowed my attention toward some of
them, which are included in this book. The choice on the cases to be included and analyzed was backed by how they fit the line of argumentation. Specifically, I was looking for cases illustrating and at the same time stretching the empirical findings presented in related scholarship. I focused on examples of collaboration, open innovation, as well as I intended to highlight different colors: from makers to established companies of production. The chosen case studies illustrate a phenomenon analyzed and to reveal a process (Siggelkow 2007). Moreover, we know, that atypical cases offer opportunity to learn (Stake 2003, p. 152). As already said, I rather focused on grabbing various cases than searching for the general. The fieldwork also covered various and colorful fields ranging from the world of fablabs and digital fabrication toward institutionalized companies, trade fairs, factories, galleries to exhibition venues and museums. I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with scholars active in the field of design and economics, designers, managers and journalists.

The theoretic framing relied on scholarship of three main strands of institutional economics and organizational science:

- innovation (with a special focus on open innovation)
- theory of the firm (organizational behavior)
- modularity

In addition to this skeleton of main three theoretic inputs I draw on further fields to complement the understanding of the notions this study deals with:

- design-driven industries
- technology and management

In the discussion part of my dissertation I illustrate, dissect, abstract and suggest a frame where the real focus is not the agents themselves but on the dynamics of innovation, where core concepts evolve, processes open up, visual or dramatic elements interact with production forms, and platforms create ecosystems, where innovation flows across players, contexts and disciplines.
The structure of my dissertation (which I have submitted successfully) in a nutshell is as follows:

- mapping the discourse
- theoretic framing (modularity/ division of labor/ open innovation)
- mapping design-driven industries (ecosystem, players, the role of the designer/ value creation/ modular design for innovation)
- case studies (evolution of design/ open design/ knowledge-intensive business services)
- conclusion (strategies for design and innovation/ democratizing design/ the role of experimentation)

The presented findings of the research are currently being extended and elaborated on, as I opened doors for further discussion. I intend to explore this discussion in-depth in further essays illustrating them with abundant examples, however in the dissertation I am streamlining the argumentation to lead the reader through a lean architecture. Many of the cases, which could have not been included into the dissertation to the merited extent due to reasons of constraints deriving from lean structure and architecture of argumentation are being elaborated on currently in form of publishable articles and papers following the line of argumentation and theoretic frames exposed in the dissertation. Moreover, the findings of the research will have larger implications drawing on cases, planned to be covered in the Hungarian context. Currently, I am looking for funds to stretch the research presented in the dissertation by adding cases, re-shaping the approach.

In sum, the contribution provided by Erasmus+ for this dissertation had not only made possible to conduct an interesting research presented in my dissertation, but furthermore, it has lay the foundations for further research and collaboration based on the contacts obtained and the thorough analysis provided in the dissertation opening new paths of investigations.

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