THE VALIDITY OF CRAFT IN SPANISH DESIGN: VALIDATION THROUGH TRENDS
LA VIGENCIA DE LA ARTESANÍA EN EL DISEÑO ESPAÑOL: VALIDACIÓN A TRAVÉS DE LAS TENDENCIAS

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Abstract

From the beginning of industrial design craft has had an important role within this discipline, taking part in its evolution and, in some cases, being still in force. Most recently, trend books and catalogues by design companies highlight this relationship and make reference to neo-artisanal products or the recovery of craft in the industrial processes.

Historically, Spanish design has lacked identity; however, and in spite of globalisation, the irruption of craft in trend books as well as some reflections proposed by relevant authors, point to a relevant relationship in this area, which has led to demonstrate its validity and evaluate it as an identity feature of Spanish design. To this end, an analysis of the proposed trends by the country’s most relevant trend forecasting agency has been carried out and the proposed trends concerning craft have been validated through a study of the philosophy and the catalogues of the Spanish leading habitat-design companies.

Keywords: Spanish design, craft, identity, trends, habitat.

Resumen

Desde los inicios del diseño industrial la artesanía ha tenido un importante papel en esta disciplina, formando parte de su evolución y en algunos casos todavía permanece vigente. En los últimos años los cuadernos de tendencias, así como los catálogos de las empresas dedicadas al diseño remarcan esta relación, hablando de productos neoartesanales o de la recuperación de la artesanía entre los procesos industriales.

Históricamente, el diseño español carece de identidad, sin embargo -y a pesar de la globalización- la irrupción de la artesanía en los cuadernos de tendencias, así como algunas reflexiones propuestas por autores relevantes indican que existe una relación especial en este territorio, lo que nos ha llevado a

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demostrar su vigencia y evaluarla como rasgo de identidad del diseño español. Para ello, se ha realizado un análisis de las tendencias propuestas por el observatorio más relevante del territorio y se han validado las tendencias propuestas entorno a la artesanía con un análisis de la filosofía y de los catálogos de las principales empresas españolas del sector hábitat-diseño.

**Palabras clave:** Diseño español, artesanía, identidad, tendencias, hábitat.

1. **Introduction**

Spanish industrial design has been historically linked to the development of craft, splitting from it lately and approaching other territories\(^1\). Moreover, the historical development of the Spanish society has marked the evolution of a discipline that has witnessed how its acceptance and implementation developed in disadvantageous conditions. On the other hand, the lack of a discourse of its own together with its eclecticism, one of the few values accepted to understand Spanish design, has led to the analysis of whether the trend field could help to the interpretation any pattern defining a common identity.

Several authors state that the link between craft and industrial design still exists in Spain. A study of the habitat sector through its leading companies will allow to validate this association.

If a survey on the meaning of Scandinavian, German or Italian design was carried out, respondents might well answer pure or simple lines, functionality, experimentation, creativity or luxury respectively, but, what does Spanish design mean?

The aim of this article is to evaluate the validity of craft in Spanish design\(^2\). To that end, the most important companies of the habitat sector and their catalogues will be analyzed. This monitoring process will focus on trends, which will help to understand what Spanish design is like nowadays. Besides, it will allow to check whether those few accepted features are still forceful today.

1.1 **Trends and Design**

Traditionally, trends are a series of aesthetic attributes or codes that start implementing in certain sectors, and the fashion environment is where this term has a greatest tradition. From a strict point of view, trend refers to the direction taken by something causing a cultural, social or economic effect within its background. That said, the term trend must be understood as a different way of acting which is increasingly more accepted and has a foundation within a certain sector. As it happens in many other fields, this phenomenon is also present in the industrial design environment, as it is an important source of inspiration for the sector active members. In the same way, in the design field there are agencies, blogs, webs, media and specialists generating different pieces of information...
books, reports, trend-maps…) which are of great value for designers and producers3.

Generally, coolhunters are in charge of detecting understandable signals as trends4, organising them in such a way that they become susceptible to generate opportunities through their comprehension and application as they represent a key value in the strategy and innovation of a company5.

There are many agencies, blogs and research centres in Spain exclusively dedicated to the study, analysis and dissemination of trends, offering their services to their associates or local partners. It is important to highlight here that a trend usually corresponds to a local reality, although affected by a series of global phenomena6, that is, it shows in different ways depending on the regions, areas or countries. Thus, although the coolhunter offers a global view of consumers, this is always done from a point of view applicable to its immediate area of activity7.

In this paper, trend study and analysis is used to explain Spanish industrial design nowadays, approaching the evolution of the arisen trends and also of those incorporated by the sector. Thus, the main focus is set in the capacity of trends to understand the attitudes of a society, its consumption habits and the behaviour of the different collectives, observing repeating patterns.

2 Study Phase.

2.1 Historical discrepancy of Spanish industrial design

Spanish industrial design has suffered throughout history a discrepancy comparing with the main European countries and the United States. From the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, which reaches Spain a century later than the United Kingdom, the development of this discipline has been regarded suspiciously. In a predominantly rural society, the change of paradigm and the move from decorative arts and crafts to industrial design and industry respectively, are considered a challenge8.

This discrepancy has been constant throughout history (see Figure 1), especially due to the late industrialization and the tumultuous historical development: From wars suffered and a dictatorship from 1939 to 1975, to the economic growth and cultural boom in the late 70s and 80s. Consequently, industrial design was born and developed as a discipline lacking its own discourse and saw its expansion stopped by the above mentioned events.

Historically, styles, movements and trends have reached Spain with some delay, and designers and producing companies have introduced innovation from other countries without questioning their origin and motivations or analysing the discourse behind their acceptance. This was the case of innovations presented at the Barcelona World Exhibition9 in 1929 that caused an openness of mind towards rationalist and functional proposals in Spanish architecture and design10.
Fig. 1. Differences between the development of industrial design in Spain and the rest of the world, highlighting the most important milestones and historical events.
Even though it was a positive event, the German pavilion in architecture and the Barcelona chair in design became referents in their respective disciplines, the new rationalist discourse reached Spain 20 years after its creation, and under completely different circumstances.

Many representative authors and entities agree that, in spite of lacking a discourse of its own, and due to its link to both fine and applied arts, there are some common parameters, as an emotional component, and the intention to reflect a series of cultural values. Design has the capability of being an important cultural transmitter. This discourse, promoted by pioneer designers as André Ricard or Miguel Milà, tried to break with the popular imagery and show that design was beyond the creation of objects classified as typical Spanish, becoming an important tool for the development and growth of a country. This task, carried out in the late 60s, found multiple obstacles set by the dictatorship governing the country. Censorship and the control of the foreign market interrupted the development of creative processes and gave preference to a model favoring the copy of cheap, low quality foreign models. Nevertheless, the 60s represented the consolidation of the discipline with the apparition of the first schools and the creation of events related to design.

One of the motives explaining the lack of a proper discourse or identity in Spanish design is the absence of whys in the adoption of certain styles, trends and ways of understanding design. Once the dictatorship was over by the mid-70s, and in spite of the deep worldwide economic crisis, Spain lived an impressive cultural emergence that encouraged the development of industrial design. However, instead of following the basis stated during the 60s, when Spanish industrial design found its main features in cultural values, the vast majority of Spanish designers joined the radical movement created in Italy in response to the Bel design of the 60s. Spain adopted its aesthetic code without sharing its ideals. The term design was rapidly devalued and began to be identified with a sort of aesthetic whim, a lack of functionality or even discomfort in some cases.

From a political point of view, this non-conformist character turns into a boom during the 80s when some events changed the future of this consumption discipline. Spain joined the European Union and a common market was created. In this moment, a mismatch was produced in search of a better visibility instead of keeping on being a cultural capital. During the 80s and early 90s, with the Olympic Games in Barcelona and the World Exhibition in Seville, design becomes important in Spain to the point of producing expressions like “Are you designing or working?” Nevertheless, understanding industrial design was still something complex and developers put emphasis on explaining what was meant by design, trying to show companies and manufacturers how profitable it would be the addition of the component design to their businesses. Although the word was on everyone’s lips, this period, widely considered as the boom of Spanish design, put a brake in the role of this discipline, reducing its importance in the development and growth of the country.

There are certain common features or similarities in Spanish design throughout history. Even though new productions could respond to different
aesthetic approaches, the methodology used is generally the same. While in its
first steps Spanish industrial design was linked to applied arts, and, accordingly,
to the production of ad-hoc pieces, in some unique occasions, as the Spanish
design boom, projects had an experimental character leading designers to
consider their works as a means of expression. While eclecticism took possession
of Spanish design identity during the last decades of the 20th century, this
diversity can be argued to be necessary in order to achieve training that allowed
the development of its own programme, although not all the Spanish territory
had understood that eclecticism stemming from the acknowledgment of the
genius loci, that is, accepting the past as a lesson of history and a living
tradition\footnote{19}. Following another strategy, industrial design is considered as an
element of cultural development, as stated by Javier Gimeno-Martínez, as
creative industries are those that help to push the national identity in the last
third of the 20th century\footnote{20}.

The main goal must be to find an identity for Spanish industrial design, a
culture of design\footnote{21}, going beyond the concept of Spanish design as a mere visual
imaginary of products or projects carried out throughout history. As Viviana
Narotzky mentions:

“One of the main problems is often the necessary implementation of
a simplified –not to say simplistic- understanding of national identity,
drawing on shared stereotypes that gloss over the underlying
complexities that constitute the rich breeding ground of local
cultures”\footnote{22}.

This complex development has led to the following questions: What
happens with the identity of Spanish design? What would have happened if it
had followed a more sensible development?

2.2 Globalization, Trends and Spanish Design

Nowadays, Spanish society, as many others, is marked by globalization,
making it difficult to determine an identity in a discipline like industrial design:
Spanish designers move to other countries and develop products for foreign
companies or just for global societies. Are there any common patterns in Spanish
designs? Could it be detected any distinctive feature? Despite the interest for this
subject, there are very few reflections about this, which may be understood due to
the above mentioned globalization. Nevertheless, a recent study on Spanish
design\footnote{23} tries to show the key aspects that explain what industrial design is like
through an analysis of companies, designers and products. This analysis
highlights how some of the most relevant opinions referenced are reflected in the
conclusions and, also, how some topics are refuted (Figure 2).
According to this study, Spanish design is distancing itself from ornamentation and superficiality, breaking the image achieved at the end of the 20th century. Therefore, Spanish industrial design is more sensible than expected. Following this very same argument, journalist Anatxu Zabalbeascoa wrote in her analysis on the last Habitat fair held in Valencia that Spanish design had recovered sensibility at last leaving trivial matters behind\textsuperscript{24}. Taking into account that design is the conception and production of images and objects depending on both physical and psychic demands of society and industry, trends play an essential role when proposing this discipline, showing the road to be followed and treating industrial design as a living subject that observes the behavior of society.

Generally speaking, trends in design are those happening in catalogues, magazines and specialized fairs. Thus, magazines like Interni, blogs like Thecoolhunter or trend agencies like Promostyl predict the current or emerging trends for the upcoming season through different media. Nowadays, some of these predicted trends can become the symbiosis between art and design, the return of German rationalism or the release of neo-artisanal products, just to
name a few examples. These new trends affect the discourse of designers, manufacturers and companies around the world, but, how does it affect those established design identities? And, above all, how does the trend field affect the Spanish industrial design?

3 Methodological Phase

The analysis of the latest trends in the field of design has led to the analysis the acceptance and boom of neocraft in industrial design, especially in Spanish design, questioning the nature of trends, crafts in this case. Recapping those opinions reflected in publications on Spanish design and the last characterization, craft could become a key feature to identify Spanish design. Therefore, an analysis has been carried out on those main agents dedicated to trend research and promotion in order to confirm those observations.

It is very interesting to observe these agents in the proper area of activity; in this case the OHT trend books (Observatorio de Tendencias del Hábitat) have been thoroughly analysed as referents in the trend-design sector within the Spanish territory. Like many other trend books, OTH’s establish a relationship of sociocultural, geographic, and communicative factors through trend proposals that help both designers and companies to understand the surrounding background. Firstly, the structures of the proposed trends were analysed, checking that, in every case, trend books offer seven trends. Moreover, every book shows an analysis of the general situation of habitat, a trend evolution map and a summary of those assumed trends. Each trend is explained through a brief introduction completed with a series of images, an explanation on those key aspects in every trend, and data about those factors pushing that trend, its presence in the markets and acceptance. Three OTH books were analyzed, together with the evolution of the respective trends. There was a clear relationship among the trends of the three books.

Narrowing the research in craft, it could be observed that there was in the three books a similar trend with different names, but without almost any evolutionary change. This trend under three names (G) Local, Sublime by Hand and From Abroad with Love) belongs to the trend set named Identities, characterized by its presentation of environments with a common characteristic: craft processes, the use of natural materials or the imitation of their finish. Besides, these trends use past procedures and resources from different origins, updating or rescuing them from other cultures. Under these premises, the relationship between these trends and the situation of the Spanish industrial design was studied.

In order to validate those signals detected during the study of the trend books, a study of the main companies within the habitat sector in Spain was performed. An analysis was carried out on the catalogues of the main companies belonging to RED-AEDE (Reunión de Empresas de Diseño – Asociación de Empresas de Diseño Español), the association that joins the leading companies of the habitat sector.
First, the main goal of this analysis is to take out the values of each company and state the general characteristics of the sector, looking from the start for those links between the habitat companies and craft. Secondly, catalogues have been analyzed, searching for pieces that fit the analyzed trends. If these values appeared in a redundant basis, it could be started that those companies followed or assumed those trends. Besides, those variables which were repeated and accepted could be observed.

4 Results and discussion.

The analysis of the three trends selected (Figure 3) reflects how the evolution rate is lower than in the other trends proposed by OTH. The plot line is almost the same, and from their analysis the following trend keys could be taken out, keys that will be used as analysis variables in this research.

![Fig.3. Evolution of the Identity trends, carried out from the OTH trend books. It shows the acceptance degree by consumers in Spain.](image)

The resulting trend keys are:

V1. The importance of craft or of a handcrafted appearance.

V2. The creation of unique pieces, short production series with a high degree of customization.

V3. The reassessment of culture and tradition through industrial design.

Apart from the lack of evolution, it must be highlighted that, according the report, in every case, the selected trends have important acceptance percentages, with a remarkable affinity between the trend and the members of the sector within the Spanish territory. Returning to the bibliographic study, it can be observed how these key aspects coincide with some proposals made by significant creators, and also set some parallelisms with the final conclusions of the study characterising Spanish industrial design:
“In industrial design, the role of fine arts, applied arts and craft is outstanding”. VVAA27.

“There are strong emotional, nostalgic components rooted with tradition”. Quim Larrea28.

“Industrial design works as a transmitting agent of culture” Enric Satué29.

“Spanish industrial design is strongly liked with the craft world and the handmade product”. Juli Capella30.

“Technology can be provided by others, as Spanish design stands out in the fields of ideas and culture” Santiago Miranda31.

In view of the above mentioned coincidences, it is necessary to make a question: Can a trend active for eight years still be considered a trend? The fact that trends and their key values are repeated and accepted in Spain leads to the conclusion that those values could constitute something else, i.e., the characteristic features of Spanish industrial design.

Figure 4 shows the characteristics and the vision of design in the analysed companies. First, functionality, creativity and simplicity are highlighted as the most outstanding features, being common for what is known as good design32. Therefore, some other features like the cultural value, the importance of emotion or the scarce technological implication in their products, that is, the importance of handcraft and the simplicity of processes are to be highlighted since 43% of the companies analyzed remark the importance of craft in their processes, or the company’s craft tradition. It is interesting to highlight that craft is also related to a good finish, with quality products beautifully produced.

![Fig.4. Main values of the analyzed companies, all of them belonging to the network Red-Aede. These values have been taken from the study of these companies’ philosophy and the evaluation of their image and goals.](image-url)
While analyzed agents are expected to provide a positive vision of the activities carried out, no aesthetic values or stylistic discourses are noticed among the values reflected. The first analysis allows to consider the way companies in the habitat sector in Spain understand design. On the other hand, the analysis of catalogues lets tells whether selected trends in the methodological phase are reflected in their productions. Figure 5 shows a summary chart of the analysis carried out in which 24% of the catalogue products of the companies highlight their handcraft aspect, that is, there is still a close relationship between design and craft. Secondly, the study suggests that 16.51% of the catalogues opt for customization, short production and the creation of unique pieces. Finally, 10% of the catalogues remark the importance of tradition and the cultural value in Spanish industrial design, having been this the most complex variable to assess.

When performing the acceptance average of the three values analyzed, 17% of products in catalogues applied this trend. This means that this trend overtakes the application average of the proposed trends in the books, so it could be considered as an identity feature or characteristic of Spanish industrial design.

The results achieved also allowed to check different behavior patterns in the companies involved. For instance, the influence of craft goes beyond a mere aesthetic association, as the products manufactured by those companies can be aesthetically very different even when they follow the same approaches or methodological patterns. Similarly, in many cases, the transmission of tradition and culture is carried out through the planning of pieces created to fulfil a specific function in the culture of the environment, showing the Spanish, Latino and Mediterranean character of society.

Finally, as stated above, the life span of these trends implied that the proposed values were in fact characteristic features of Spanish industrial design, which matched with the publications selected, so therefore it can be stated that craft takes part in the identity of Spanish design, still topical.

**Conclusions**

Nowadays it is complex to talk about identities. We are living in a modern society, influenced by multiple factors, where a piece of news can be known in the other end of the world. From the point of view of design, France may be associated with luxury, Germany with rationalism or Italy with innovation, even though products from any of these countries may correspond to any of these characteristics. However, not everything in German design is rational or luxury in French design. Talking about identity in industrial design is also a complex issue, but it seems evident that there is still something of genius loci in this discipline, that is, some characteristic features that define that design. Spanish design must find its identity to become global, that is, as Spaniards we must know ourselves before accepting other approaches without merit: we should not reinterpret what others do. This study has shown how Spanish design is being...
determined by a strong eclectic character, and also that this should not be considered as a negative aspect. Spanish design is marked by a series of circumstances which have contributed to the manufacturing of simple, honest, basic products with a high emotional component.

Trends spread worldwide, as Francesco Morace proposes, but they are also useful to see how they develop in certain local areas. Their link with craft or handcrafted aspect and the recovery of handcraft techniques have been repeated in Spanish design for years. The trends related to craft presented in this article have been valid for eight years, and this indicate that they have been absorbed by the sector; accordingly, it can be said that there is a strong bond between craft and industrial design in Spain.

The habitat sector, the most representative in Spanish design, is clearly influenced by craft, and so is acknowledged by different companies. This highlights the importance of craft as one of the main values influencing their works. This handcraft character not only explains the presence of neo-artisanal products in catalogues, but also those steps taken by Spanish design: experimentation during the 80s, the searching for quality at the beginning of the 20th century, the proximity between Spanish designers and the manufacturing processes, the response in an almost not industrialized environment, the searching for alternatives for production during the dictatorship, or the transmission of cultural values telling what the Spanish society is like.

Trends are an important source of both inspiration and validation in the design sector, but the sector and its characteristics must be also checked. The analysis of catalogues leads to the conclusion that craft is still active within Spanish design, with 17% application of the analysed trends. In spite of globalization, this feature confirms that Spanish design has a strong handcraft component which validates many of the opinions referenced here. The achievement of an identity should be used first to get an understanding and a correct approach of the discipline. On the other hand, the case of Scandinavian design could be used as a key element when preparing promotion or sales strategies, in short, as a competitive advantage.
Fig. 5. Summary of the study on the acceptance of the proposed values (taken from the trend analysis), showing the acceptance percentage of each company and the total percentage for all of them.
NOTES

6 MORACE, Francesco, La Strategia del Colibrì. La globalizzazione e il suo antídoto, Italy, Sperling & Kupfer, 2001.
8 CALVERA, Anna, op. cit.
9 World Exhibitions were used by nations to showcase their modernity and the improvements of their respective societies and industry. SPARKE, Penny, An introduction to design and culture. 1900 to the present, New York, Routledge, 2013.
12 ARIAS, Juan, Maestros del diseño español: Identidad y diversidad, Madrid, Experimenta Ediciones de Diseño, 1996.
14 GALÁN, Julia, GUAL, Jaume, MARÍN, Joan M, OLUCHA, Jordi, TORRENT, Rosalía, VIDAL, Rosario, El diseño industrial en España, Madrid, Cátedra Ediciones, 2010.
16 TORRENT, Rosalía, MARÍN, Joan M, op. cit.
19 Catalonia and the Catalan design are the best example of a correct application of eclecticism: it considers all the historic elements from culture and design from an eclectic point of view, from Antiquity to nowadays in order to redefine and use them as both contemporary and universal.
25 With the goal of getting an overview of the current trends, reports published in the last years have been studied, that is, the habitat trend books 08/09, 10/11 and 13/15.
We could understand trends as an iceberg rolling slowly in iced water; this iceberg includes every trend but only shows those that are valid at a specific time. To complete this symbology, we could imagine how the different agents (society, industry, economy, media…) push this iceberg turning direction conveniently.

VVAA (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía), Diseño industrial en España, Madrid, Plaza y Janes, 1998.

LARREA, Larrea, op cit.

ARIAS, Juan, op cit.


ARIAS, Juan, op cit.

Dieter Rams Decalogue: 1. Good design should be innovative 2. Good design should make a product useful 3. Good design is aesthetic design 4. Good design will make a product understandable 5. Good design is honest 6. Good design is unobtrusive 7. Good design is long-lived 8. Good design is consequent in every detail 9. Good design is environmentally friendly 10. Good design as little design as possible.

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