



## Berlin design reactor (Germany)

### Summary

"*Berlin design reactor*" is a multi-disciplinary R&D project based on the cooperation between Berlin University of Arts and SMEs specialising in trades, materials and technologies, producing over 300 new ideas and 57 prototypes, and leading to 10 new products for the market and five patents pending. The innovative approach of this project was that it worked on product and marketing strategies simultaneously, improving the efficiency of the R&D process and early promotion of the product identity. The project also served as an experimental platform for the Berlin University of the Arts in order to maintain exchanges between different disciplines and fields of activity as well as to promote cooperation and synergies with external economic actors.

### The project

*Berlin design reactor* aims to encourage innovative co-operation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and designers in order to investigate strategies and prospects for post-industrial development in Berlin.

The project organised a series of workshops, with a duration of two weeks, to establish experimental links between designers and SMEs specialising in trade, materials and technologies. These events produced hundreds of new business cooperation ideas that were assessed by a panel of experts according to their feasibility and market potential. Furthermore, 52 products of wide varieties were developed in close cooperation with the participating companies. As a result of the project, six patent applications were made.

#### Sector(s) covered

##### Main sector

Arts & Creative Industries

##### Other sectors

Business & Entrepreneurship

Technology, Science and ICT

Society

Education, Training & LL

### Approach

*Berlin design reactor* brought together 81 students from six academic disciplines and nine research teams working on fashion and product design, digital design, strategic communication and planning, communication design, photography and video.

This experimental but practical project approach was built on the following key features:

- Hands-on approach;
- Multi-disciplinary *modus operandi*;
- Fostering expertise in interdisciplinary fields;
- Dynamic project management;
- Communication, commitment and market relevance; and,
- Personal initiative and the multiple relationships that spring from it.



This multi-disciplinary approach offers new potential for future collaboration in research and development (R&D) between the Berlin University of the Arts and partners from the world of business.

### Element of innovation – the process

Traditionally products are developed first and then attention is turned to the development of communication strategies and means of distribution. The innovative approach of the project was that it worked on all these aspects simultaneously, improving the efficiency of the R&D process and promotion of the product identity. To position the products in a niche between “the experimental” and “the commercial”, the *Berlin design reactor* included a professional elaboration of strategies for marketing, communications and distribution.

The *Berlin design reactor* facilitated creating very innovative products in a very short period of time. Furthermore, it created a lot of interest towards the various new forms of interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary cooperation. The project made possible the combination of established technical and manual knowledge with new strategies for promoting creative industries.

The *Berlin design reactor* became a very successful approach for promoting cooperation between universities and the private sector. The innovative aspect of the project manifested itself in:

- The combination of scientific, technical and economic methods with creative strategies;
- The synergies between “old” and “new” economies; and,
- The cooperation between university and SMEs in inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary sectors.

### Key successes

#### (outcomes, results, impacts)

During the two-week workshops 80 students cooperated with 52 companies and 30 experts. Together they developed 300 ideas for new products. Furthermore, 100 ideas were presented by a panel of experts, and 57 were developed into prototypes. As a result 10 new products were placed on the market and five were awarded a patent.

The project served as an experimental platform for the University of the Arts in order to maintain exchange between its different disciplines and fields of activity as well as to promote cooperation and synergies with external economic actors.

The representatives of *Berlin design reactor* were invited to several exhibitions in Germany and abroad and the products developed have received various international design awards.

The main success factors of the *Berlin design reactor* project are as follows:

- Covering interdisciplinary sectors and branches;



- Quick visualisation and materialisation of product sketches through an open innovation process;
- Creation of a sustainable network through common work experience;
- Knowledge transfer between science and economy through push-pull situations; and,
- Use of design as an interface discipline.

Information about the project was regularly distributed to its participants and the media. At the end a publication was printed about the project in 1,500 copies.

### Transferability and sustainability

The approach developed by the *Berlin design reactor* seems to have the potential to be transferred to other contexts. In fact, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs has currently commissioned a similar project in the field of intercultural exchange.

### Special Highlights

The “Berlin design reactor” has been a success in bringing together designers and SMEs in order to find creative ways to stimulate the development of the post-industrial economy in Berlin.

### Key characteristics

<b>General purpose of the practice</b>	Promoting creative and innovative solutions to society problems
<b>Target group</b>	Students, teachers, experts from the fields of design, chambers of commerce and crafts
<b>Type of learning</b>	Formal and informal
<b>Level of implementation</b>	Regional and local
<b>Funding</b>	Public: Berlin University of the Arts and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
<b>Time frame</b>	March 2007 - November 2008
<b>Leading organisations</b>	Berlin University of the Arts, Architecture, Media and Design College, Institute for product and process creation (Universitaet der Kuenste Berlin, Fakultat Gestaltung, Institut fuer Produkt- und Prozessgestaltung)



## Further information

**Website of the project**

[www.design-reaktor.de](http://www.design-reaktor.de)

**Contact person**

Prof. Axel Kufus

[reaktor@udk-berlin.de](mailto:reaktor@udk-berlin.de)