

Oslo 2013 – Design Learning for Tomorrow

Reflections on the 2nd International Conference for Design Education Researchers

Liv Merete Nielsen

https://doi.org/10.21606/drs_lxd2021.13.318

The 2nd International Conference for Design Education Researchers was arranged 14-17th of May 2013 at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (now Oslo Metropolitan University). The thematic focus was *Design Learning for Tomorrow. Design Education from Kindergarten to PhD*, and it attracted 278 delegates from 43 countries. Researchers from more than 74 universities conducted a rigorous, double-blind review process of 225 full papers, from which 165 were selected for presentation at the conference and included in the four volumes of conference proceedings (Reitan et al., 2013). After the conference some papers were further developed and published in special issues of journals, including *FormAkademisk; Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education; TechneA; Design and Technology Education* and *Studies in Material Thinking*.



Figure 1. The first evenings 'come together' included an exhibition of chairs design by Peter Opsvik and Terje Ekstrøm.
Photo: Blæsterdalen



This work is licensed under a
[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>



Figure 2. Meeting colleagues. Photo: Blæsterdalen

Design learning for tomorrow – building design literacy

The conference theme, design learning for tomorrow, was challenging. With the strap line ‘Design Education from Kindergarten to PhD’, it was possible to embrace a broad interdisciplinary approach. With the underlying idea that sustainable design solutions should include both professional designers and the general public, cooperation was at the core. Real cooperation demands however some kind of common understanding. From the perspective of moving in the direction of a greener and better tomorrow, design should also be included as a core component of general education. Educating the general public to be ‘conscious’ consumers and decision makers with responsibility for quality and longevity, was seen as a way out of a ‘throw-away’ society. The importance of moving education and research in the direction of a better and greener tomorrow was of particular focus. The high profiled keynote speakers contributed with advanced insight on the conference theme, among them professors Halina Dunin-Woyseth, Fredrik Nilsson, Tim Cooper, Jim Gleeson, Jill Franz, Ingvild Digranes and Astrid Skjerven.

In the call for the 2013 Oslo conference, we invited papers dealing with design education from the kindergarten to PhD levels, especially those that included design education for the general public in schools. In their positions as consumers and decision makers, the general public has great potential power to refuse to buy things they do not need and to promote the movement toward longer lasting, locally made products. Since 2013, young people’s interest in securing a greener tomorrow has expanded, as can be seen with the rise of, among others, Greta Thunberg.

The papers from the conference contributed to building our knowledge of design education challenges around the world. The following ten tracks, including the numbers of approved papers in each of them, indicates interest from researchers within the design research community.

- Philosophy of design education (18)
- Design curriculum (19)
- Design knowledge (17)
- Design education for non-designers (26)
- Research informed designed education – Design education informing research (18)
- Multidisciplinary design education (18)
- Challenges in design education methods (31)
- Assessment (8)
- eLearning and Design Education (5)
- Internationalisation of Design Education (5)

It was no surprise that the track with the most papers was *Challenges in design education methods*. Education has, for far too long, been associated with different educational methods. All education is rooted in a philosophical meta level, but such ideas are not always clearly articulated and discussed. Often, the philosophy of design education is unarticulated as a hidden value, and unarticulated traditions and values in design education have the potential to confuse educational discussions across different cultures.

As the call for the conference was focusing on design education for non-designers, it was no surprise that the track of the same name had 26 papers presented. This inclusion of non-designers and the general public was fortuitous for the Norwegian organisers who had been promoting such ideas for many years. It was nice to see how these thoughts were accepted in the design research community and have been followed up at the coming DRS Learn X Design's, but also at other design conferences, such as *Engineering and Product Design Education* (E&PDE Oslo 2017), *Design Research Society* (DRS Limerick 2018) and *Academy for Design Innovation Management* (ADIM London 2019).

Issues related to consumption and environmental challenges are at the core of design; therefore, they are also at the heart of design education. But we all know that designers need to find jobs, and increased consumption has traditionally been more important for companies than producing longer-lasting products and promoting slow consumption. As long as economy rules, designers will neither have the position nor power to change consumption patterns to make them greener and slower. Consumption is, however, dependent on consumers—and consumers have potential power. Educating the general public on design has emerged from this perspective. When Joanna Boehnert reviewed the conference, she concluded: 'Overall this conference was a timely reminder of the importance of making time for research to strategically address challenges facing design education' (2013).

In 2013, cooperation between DRS and CUMULUS (the International Association for Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media), was on the agenda, and the agreement was signed in Oslo. This is mirrored in the logo for the Oslo conference, 'DRS//cumulus Oslo 2013'. The next conference, in Chicago, introduced, LearnXdesign as title.

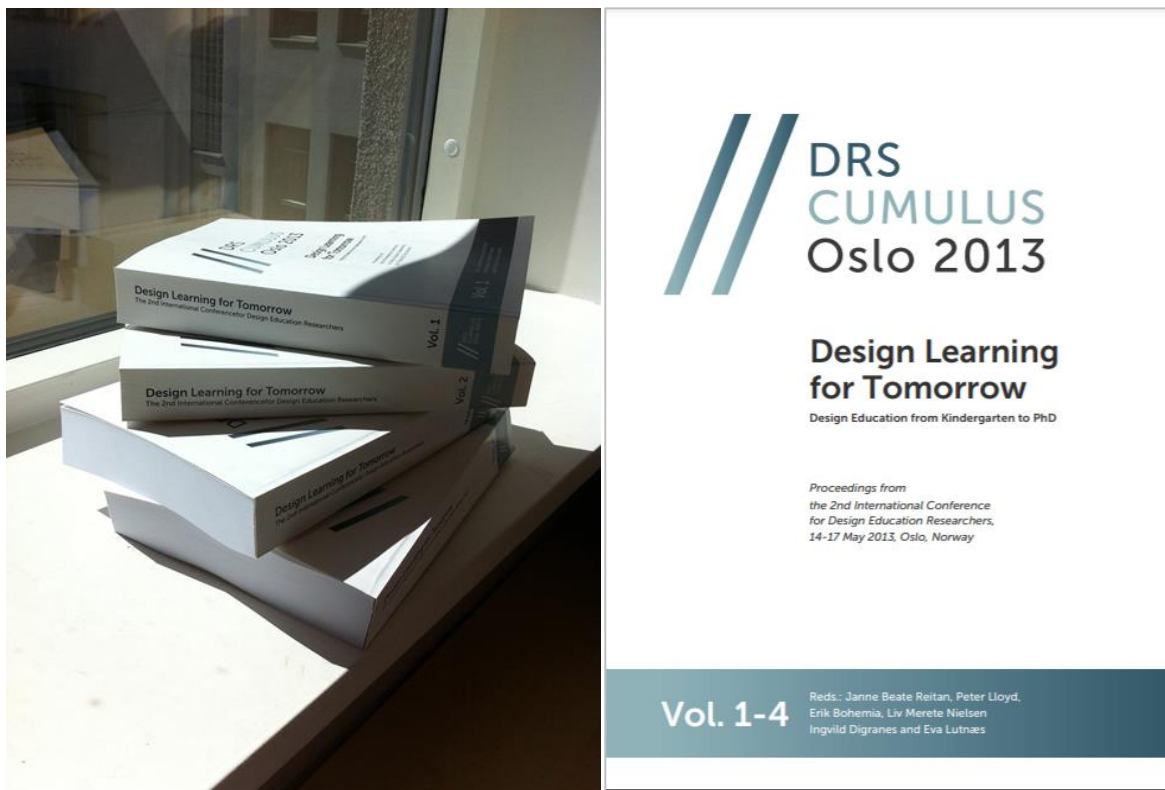


Figure 6. The four volumes of the conference proceedings are available at the conference webpage <https://uni.oslomet.no/drscumulusoslo2013/> and at the DRS digital Library <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/learnxdesign/> Photo: Reitan

Workshops and social interactions

There were seven workshops held on the first day of the Oslo conference. The value of these workshops should not be underestimated, as small groups encourage closer relations and deeper discussions. Their outcomes are friendship and cooperation across borders. Sometimes, outcomes include common applications for funding and research projects. The topics of the workshops in 2013 were:

- Design history in the design education curriculum
- Defining goals through collaboration using design thinking: Project team building consensus
- What is/could/should a design PhD be?
- What can K-12 age students learn from designers about promoting social responsibility and improving the economy?
- Assessment criteria that meet an internationalisation agenda
- Deep diving with design students: Using immersive, participatory design as a tool for generating design solutions
- Design Literacy - from primary education to university level. Applying for EU funding for the project

The Design Literacy workshop (Nielsen & Brænne, 2013) might serve as an example of how international researchers can meet and continue to develop the field of design knowledge. In 2019, some of the same researchers from this 2013 conference established the *Design Literacy International Network* (DLIN). This network gathers design education researchers for digital events on the first Tuesday of every month. Under the title 'Engage with ideas', researchers from all around the world meet virtually to share ideas in which they are engaged. This provides a sense of continuity, and sometimes we are able to get deeper into the philosophy of design education.

Besides workshops the conference included opportunities for social interaction during breaks, a 'come together' the first evening, reception at *Oslo Town Hall*, exhibition at *Norsk Form*, visit at the sculpture park, *Vigelandsparken*, and a conference dinner by the sea at *Aker Brygge*.

A touch of 17th of May in Oslo

The final day of the conference was the 17 May, which is a very special date for all Norwegians. We celebrate our independence with a children's parade up to the Royal Castle. The conference location was close to the castle, so all the delegates could move out onto the streets to watch the children and parents in their national costumes. Hopefully, this was a memorable day for all in attendance.



Figure 4. Members of the Programme committee; Ingvild Digranes (left) and Janne Beate Reitan (right) dressed up in their national costumes on the 17th of May - the last day of the conference. The rest of us enjoyed the ending of a nice conference. Photo: Blæsterdalen.

Thanks to Design Research Society

My colleague, Janne Beate Reitan, and I were determined to participate when the 1st International Conference for Design Education Researchers was arranged in Paris in 2011. We had been looking for international arenas where design education research was at the core. In Paris, we met with conference chair Erik Bohemia,

Michael Tovey, leader of DRS/PedSIG and Peter Lloyd, now chair of DRS, and we expressed our interest in arranging the next conference. Lucky for us, we were entrusted to host the 2nd International Conference for Design Education Researchers in Oslo 2013. However, we could not have managed without help from Erik and Peter. Peter agreed to serve as the chair of the scientific committee, and Erik was co-chair for the whole conference. They were both involved as editors of the proceedings. I would also like to thank Janne Beate Reitan, Ingvild Digranes and Eva Lutnæs at Oslo Metropolitan University (former Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences) for their great effort before, under and after the conference. Thank you.

References

- Boehnert, J. (2013). *Review of DRS//CUMULUS Oslo 2013 – 2nd International Conference for Design Education Researchers*. <https://uni.oslomet.no/drscumulusoslo2013/conference-review/>
- Nielsen, L. M., & Brønne, K. (2013). *Workshop 7: Design literacy – from primary education to university level: Applying for EU funding for the project. DRS//cumulus Oslo 2013. The 2nd international conference for design education researchers, Oslo*. <https://uni.oslomet.no/drscumulusoslo2013/workshop-7-design-literacy-from-primary-education-to-university-level-applying-for-eu-funding-for-the-project/>
- Reitan, J. B., Lloyd, P., Bohemia, E., Nielsen, L. M., Digranes, I. & Lutnæs, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Design learning for tomorrow. Design education from kindergarten to PhD. Proceedings from the 2nd international conference for design education researchers, 14–17 May 2013, Oslo, Norway* (Vols. 1–4). ABM-media. <https://uni.oslomet.no/drscumulusoslo2013/proceedings/>

Liv Merete Nielsen

Oslo Metropolitan University – OsloMet, Norway
livmn@oslomet.no

Chair of the DRS//cumulus Oslo 2013 conference and chair of the International Scientific Programme Committee of DRS LearnXdesign, Jinan 2021. Nielsen is professor emerita at OsloMet. She is the founder of Design Literacy International Network (DLIN) and a member of the convening group for EdSIG/DRS. She has had a leading role in developing national curricula for design, art and craft. Nielsen is honorary member for the national organisation *Art & design in education*. She is editor and author for several books and journals.