Politecnico di Milano

Doctoral Research in Design
Towards the Designerly Way

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Faculty of Design
INDACO Department
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Abstract

Design research has recently witnessed a significant growth in all its research areas. This is mainly due to new educational challenges, new job demands, and new research needs. As a consequence, in the last ten to fifteen years, a rapid development in doctoral education in design has taken place worldwide. Many institutions have established their first Ph.D. programmes in design, and doctoral research in design is regarded as a new field of inquiry.

The international debate about doctoral education in design began in 1998 with the first *Doctoral Education in Design* conference. Many other events have followed, with the aim of continuing this open debate. The relative literature revealed that a coherent picture of doctoral research in design does not exist, but rather various perspectives and many debates about the practice-based approach to doctoral research.

The main issue addressed in this research concerns the nature of doctoral research in design, whether it should be modelled on already existing research approaches in the sciences and humanities, or on a distinct approach that reflects the nature of design and serves the future of design discipline better. To investigate this, two empirical works were developed. The first was the case study of ten Ph.D. programmes in design. The second was the case study of doctoral research processes, including design projects. The combination of the empirical works and the review of literature constituted the methodological approach of this research, and the movement back and forth between the theoretical and the empirical analyses guided the research process.

Three approaches to doctoral research in design have been individuated and described:
The sciences and humanities research approaches to the Ph.D. in design;
The practice-based approach to the Ph.D. in design;
The practice-centred approach to the Ph.D. in design.
It is also argued that the practice-based approach, also known as “research through design,” represents a distinct approach to doctoral research in design, a kind of design’s own research paradigm, i.e. a designerly research, based on the particular nature of design, and on the characteristics of “the designerly ways of knowing.”

The movement towards a designerly approach to doctoral research in design necessitates further study. Also, the practice-centred approach, the most debated, criticised, and problematic approach, requires further developments and understanding.

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