What makes IIID "world leader in information design development"?
A policy paper of the IIID director, March 2010, updated September 2014

Abstract
The paper starts with a brief historical review, touching on IIID's achievements and relationship to UNESCO, the OECD and Icograda, continues with well-founded considerations about the USP (unique selling proposition) of information design, the necessary interdisciplinary basis and the likewise needed body of knowledge encompassing subject knowledge and methodical and social competence. To develop the potential and impact of information design on the basis of the decision of the 2009 IIID General Assembly, Paris, to list research on top of the IIID agenda, current and envisaged IIID lines of action are:
a. Developing relevant R&D
b. Capturing and presenting already realized exemplary results
c. Building a body of knowledge
d. Developing and supporting education in information design.

1.   Looking back

IIID has pioneered the subject since 1986. Its statutes read: "The association's main objectives concern the researching, disclosing and the developing of possibilities of designing information in order to enhance the conveying of information in all social, cultural and economic areas. Special attention is paid to the potential of graphic design with regard to overcoming educational and language barriers."

IIID started to explore the field with:
- Conferences on definitions
- 15 "Vision Plus" international symposia in Austria, the USA, Japan, Great Britain, France and India
- Expert Fora on Manual Design, Financial Information, Knowledge Presentation and Traffic & Transport Information Systems in Sweden, the USA and in Austria
- Summer Academies in Austria, Italy, Japan, the USA, and the Cape Verde Islands
- Conferences focusing on special themes like the International Conference on Inclusive Growth through Mobile Applications", with IITB (Indian Institute of Technology Bombay) and MSSRF (M S Swaminathan Research Foundation), supported by the UNESCO Participation Programme 2010 –11 and IL&FS Education, which took take place from 15 to 17 September 2011 at Chennai, India.

IIID became an Affiliate of the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA). It teamed up with UNESCO which passed a resolution in 1995 recommending IIID as a partner organization for worldwide cooperation on matters of information design and, thanks to the efforts of Board Member Veronika Egger, was accepted as an Associate of the OECD hosted Global Project on "Measuring the Progress of Societies" in 2009.

IIID coordinated idX / information design exchange ("Development of International Core Competencies and Student and Faculty Exchange in Information Design"), a project within the EU/US Cooperation Program in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training, initiated

by Prof. Jill Dacey, University of Idaho, involving three European and three American Universities. IIID's developing knowledge base also profits from first hand information relating to cutting edge design and research in the field submitted for publication in the Information Design Journal (IDJ). At the same time the journal helps to promote information design as an innovative discipline in the service of understanding and beyond.

The IDJ is the only peer-reviewed journal of its kind worldwide. It is published by John Benjamins, Amsterdam http://benjamins.com/#catalog/journals/idj.17.1/main. Having decided to step down as IDJ General Editor I was lucky to identify Carla Spinollo of the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil, as a most competent successor.

Despite the efforts of the founders and editors of the IDJ, its contributors and the many initiatives taken by IIID and its members, I believe that information design is still in its infancy. We have succeeded in getting in touch with many of those highly interested in the development of the subject. However, considering the approx. 1.580.000.000 hits offered by Google for "information design" (as of 10 December, 2012) it was a good decision to break new ground by inviting information designers worldwide to submit examples of their best work to compete for **IIID Awards** offered in 15 categories, ranging from Wayshowing to Sustainability and involving information design experts from 10 countries as jurors. The successful winners of the first IIID Awards, organized by IIID Board Member Martin Foessleitner, were announced within the frame of the 2011 Taipei Global Design Expo.

2.   The USP / Unique Selling Proposition of information design

Information design aims at transforming data into high-quality information to empower people to attain goals. The idX project made us aware that high-quality information must serve a **purpose**. Or more precisely: it must help the recipient(s) of the information to attain set **goals.** In combination with the concept of "**empowerment**", a term referred to by Richard Saul Wurman as ">the word of the new century< and the result of inspired instructions" (**1**) this induced me to create the motto: *High-quality information empowers people to attain goals*. It is prominently displayed on the start page of www.iiid.net – with a link to theme specific explanations.

When we speak about "**high-quality information**" we should have the attributes of high quality in mind (**2**), as excerpted from the idxPublication.pdf (downloadable from www.iiid.net):
- Accessible
- Appropriate
- Attractive
- Believable
- Complete
- Concise
- Errorless
- Interpretable
- Relevant
- Objective
- Timely
- Secure
- Understandable
- Valuable.

"Empowering people to attain goals" is multi-dimensional. Information designers need to have the goals of the intended addressees in mind (and the tasks they wish to perform), balanced with the goals of the commissioners, in specific cases also considering their employees and suppliers, and – last but not least – their own, individual goals. Information designers need to anticipate a common denominator before they proceed to "scoping", an activity, defined by David Sless (Communication Research Institute, Melbourne, Australia) as step 1 in the process of information design project development.

3.   Information design needs an interdisciplinary basis

Information designers should be fully aware of the recommendations from experts of three universities (Prof. Michael Twyman, University of Reading; Ron Easterby, University of Aston in Birmingham; Prof. Ryszard Otreba, Academy of Fine Arts, Krakow) who assisted me more than thirty years ago – at a time when we still spoke about "Communication Graphics" – to draft principles of design related research. The experts advised on an interdisciplinary structure involving graphic communication, linguistics, cognitive psychology and computer science. At that time they felt that "all research projects involve at least two disciplines".

Today I am convinced that every information designer who aspires to be successful in strategic thinking – and designing – towards an estimated goal must be able to draw from a multidisciplinary knowledge base. Dr Bibhudutta Baral (National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad), quoting Louis Pasteur, reminded me at the IIID Summer Academy 2005 in Bozen/Bolzano on the need of such a knowledge base: "Chance favours only the prepared mind" (you might like to know that, a couple of years later, I also found this citation displayed in the staircase of the Design Council at Bow Street, London).

4.   Overcoming resentments of clients

Many of us, on occasion, have experienced clients that disbelieve in the abilities of a designer to successfully assist them to attain their goals. The more specialized a client is, the more likely a designer encounters such a situation and I think about clients in fields like legislation, financial information, transport (especially transport telematics) and health care information. However, there is not much of a difference among clients of other fields.

Clients often have problems with clearly spelling out their needs with regard to the expected quality of design. They like to resist explaining what they think might be critical to the design and estimate that the designer, not familiar with their domain and inexperienced in the solving of complex problems, won't understand. To reassure themselves they ask for at least three design variants, hoping that one of them might prove acceptable.

Whenever an information designer can project subject knowledge, things will be different from the start. And whenever he/she knows to convince the client with a methodical approach, resentments will give way to successful collaboration.

5.   Establishing an information design body of knowledge

Like most professions, information design needs a body of knowledge that disburdens information designers from evaluating attained results in areas where approved procedures can be applied.

Every design must be regarded as being more than its assembled parts. As such, I attribute successful design to a sound knowledge base that can make the difference between appropriate, often unexpected, results and such that just meet the thankfully received, though uncriticized brief of a client. If creativity plays a role – I guess, there is no doubt about it – and if it can be developed best through lateral thinking (a term coined by Edward de Bono) then its outcome will depend on the various spheres the thinking can draw from. The spheres creative thinking and acting can draw from are: subject knowledge, methical competence and social competence.

6.   Subject knowledge

In design education subject knowledge is often considered dispensable: most projects done in schools deal with matters taken from everyday life that do not require any special subject knowledge and allow for the assumption that addressees are familiar with the content. Therefore it is felt, all that matters is the visual expression of the design.

Information design, however, wants to *empower people to effectively cope with tasks in order to attain anticipated goals.* Thus the designer needs to understand the tasks, the goals and the frames of reference governing the usefulness of the information to addressees he/she is expected to design.

It is a challenge for information designers to acquaint themselves with fields beyond everyday life, especially such in which decisions largely depend on the availability and quality of information. Familiarity with a specific subject area, its relevant laws, regulations and standards, enables information designers to understand the applicable frames of reference and to communicate with subject savvy clients. Designers with prepared minds will discover incredible opportunities for improving information and, more often, by closely working together with their clients, of developing more adequate information systems that *empower people to effectively cope with tasks in order to attain anticipated goals.*

7.   Methodical competence

A few methods can help get the wheels turning, e.g. the "two things", Edward de Bono considers essential: provocation and 'movement' (**3**) or even more so the "Six Thinking Hats", proposed by the same author (**4**).

In a workshop on information design methods, organized by IIID towards the end of 2009 and chaired by Prof. Wibke Weber of Media University Stuttgart, over 60 other methods were discussed. Many of them I consider appropriate to constitute an information design rule set. We plan to adequately describe the methods, to structure them and to add even more methods. For the time being, regretfully, IIID doesn't have a taxonomy that would make it possible to check off methods for attending to the many attributes of high-quality information, to further investigate other suggested methods and to identify uncharted territories in which hit and miss methods are the only option.

8.   Social competence

"Information design isn't necessarily about databases, spreadsheets, or even infographics. It's about process – designers and clients working together to solve problems and convey complex

information through design systems that are functional and beautiful." What Ann Senechal (**5**) touched in an article "It's all in the PROCESS" in 1997 is of even greater relevance today. Not only did she disprove an all too limited concept of information design, by referring to 'processes' and 'designers and clients working together' she underlined the very condition of successful design: teamwork involving both designers and clients, plus, I would say, called in experts whose competences can facilitate decision making. This type of teamwork should also be considered in project work done at universities.

To successfully contribute to teamwork or even to successfully lead a team, David Sless has defined the social dimensions of information design core competences as the 5P's (five essential principles): politics, position, parsimony, politeness, and performance. (**6**)

9.   Developing the potential and impact of information design

2009 the IIID General Assembly convened in Paris and voted for an amendment of the statutes which now defines research as the prime goal of IIID.

R&D projects allow IIID to demonstrate the potential of information design to achieve unchallengeable results. Such might extend into areas information designers are usually not confronted with, implying multicultural and multilingual concerns, impacting on emotion and enabling unique experiences and/or sounding new technologies like augmented reality.

All IIID R&D projects must involve ambitious and competent members who are invited to initiate and to contribute to the launch of future IIID R&D proposals.

10.   Next on the agenda

To promote information design as the discipline that transforms data into high-quality information to empower people to attain goals, IIID develops the following action lines:

10.1   Developing relevant R&D

by initiating adequately funded projects and coordinating IIID expert members in the elaboration of exemplary results.

Recent projects:

- **SOMS (Substituting/Optimizing (variable) Message Signs for the Trans European Road Network)**, developed as part of IN-SAFETY (Infrastructure and Safety) within the 6th EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. One of the results was a new road alphabet which subsequently got (partially) implemented in The Netherlands. In Austria its use became obligatory for all road signs with verbal elements.

- **Safeway2school / Integrated system for safe transportation of children to school**
  a 7th EC Framework programme collaborative project, coordinated by VTI Statens väg och transportforskningsinstitut, Sweden, with IIID contributing to Activity 1.3 "Benchmarking and SOA database" and leading Activity 5.5 "Surrounding traffic info and warning".

- **IC-IC: "Enhancing interconnectivity of short and long distance transport networks through passenger-focused interlinked information-connectivity"**: submitted by IIID in 2010 in response to Call FP7-TPT-2010-RTD-1 of the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, the proposal was evaluated second best out of 52 submissions. It is planned to be officially finished at the end of 2014.

10.2 Capturing and presenting already realized exemplary results

Giving opportunities for gaining and/or extending subject knowledge, meeting colleagues and potential clients and making the latter aware of capable designers ready to contribute to theme specific projects:

- On the IIID website: illustrating the diverse professional activities of IIID Board Members
- In the publicity of the "IIID Awards" and the award's ceremony
- In IIID symposia, expert fora and other events, such as:
    - IIID Expert Fora Traffic & Transport Information Systems
    - IIID Expert Fora Health Care Information; under discussion / in preparation
- In the peer-reviewed part of the Information Design Journal and in its "Hot topics in information (research and) design" section.
- Recently: Special issues on Traffic & Transport Information, Healthcare Information, Financial Information, DD4D Data Designed for Decisions

Of all these and subsequently indicated activities those with a focus on research and education will be further developed by IIID's "daughter" IIIDre (International Institute for Information Design Research & Education), founded 2013.

10.3 Building a body of knowledge by:

- Updating and deepening the source material compiled by the IIID Traffic & Transport Expert Network: http://www.iiid-expertforum.net/ SourceMaterial.aspx
- Extending the already compiled source material into other information design application areas
- Organizing workshops on information design methods, building on the results of the initiating one, chaired by then IIID Board Member Prof. Wibke Weber of the Hochschule der Medien / Stuttgart Media University

10.4 Developing and supporting education in information design through:

- Establishing theme specific post-graduate educational courses and units in co-operation with university and industry partners. The first one, an MSc in Traffic & Transport Information Design, was offered in cooperation with a University of Applied Science, located in Austria, but failed to attract the required number of applicants. It is expected that ongoing discussions with a potential new partner, namely the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente, Cali, Colombia, will soon enable IIID to better and more successfullyaddress the issue.
- Setting up a database on information designers ready and capable to support educationalinitiatives in advisory and/or teaching capacities.
- Developing IMPACT (Information Mobilizing People to Accomplish Critical Tasks) as a concept to provide information on what (potential) users of a product/service need to know

for making decisions on buying, using, maintaining and discarding/terminating a product/service. The most indicative examples are planned to be presented at an anticipated IIID Vision Plus event organized jointly with the HKDI (Hong Kong Design Institute).

11. Looking forward

Thanks to the support of its members, IIID/IIIDre is gaining momentum by engaging in research, promoting relevant projects, stimulating education, building a body of knowledge and advertising representative results. Let's look forward to a shared and prosperous information design future under my personal motto:

High-quality information empowers people to attain goals

Peter Simlinger
IIID Director

(**1**) WURMAN Richard Saul: INFORMATIONANXIETY 2, p 191; Que Publishing, 2001
(**2**) adapted from WANG, Richard Y. and STRONG, Diane M.: Beyond Accuracy: What Data Quality Means to Data Consumers. Journal of Management Information Systems. Vol. 12 No. 4, Spring 1996, pp 5–33
(**3**) DE BONO, Edward: I am Right – You are Wrong / From this to the New Renaissance: from Rock Logic to Water Logic, p 90; Penguin Books, 1991
(**4**) DE BONO, Edward: Six Thinking Hats, p 90; Penguin Books, 1990
(**5**) SENECHAL Ann: "It's all in the PROCESS", pp 34; Adobe Magazine (US edition), Spring 1997
(**6**) SLESS David: Theory for Practice / Theorie fuer die Praxis; Vision Plus Monograph 12 E/D; International Institute for Information Design; 1997