

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Design in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain

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ABSTRACT

Spain, and particularly Barcelona and Catalonia, have emerged in recent decades as laboratories for EDI practices in urban design, public spaces and policies. However, this institutional and legislative progress has not been equally reflected in Design education, where the integration of EDI remains fragmented and often superficial. This article contextualizes the findings of the EDIDesK project, which investigated the integration of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles into design education and practice in Spain. Focusing on Barcelona, Catalonia, and Spain, the article uses a historical analysis to show how urban design has served as a primary vehicle for implementing EDI principles, from early accessibility policies to contemporary intersectional feminist approaches. Our research reveals a significant disparity between Spain's progressive EDI achievements in urban design and the limited incorporation of these principles into Design curricula.

Keywords: Design Education, Urban Design, EDI, Policy, Barcelona.

INTRODUCTION

This article was developed as part of the EDIDesK Erasmus+ Cooperation partnerships in higher education (KA220-HED) project, which aims to improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) teaching in Design across the European higher education system (HEIs). Within the context of Design education, we align with the following definitions of EDI proposed by Rossi and Brischetto (2024), which originated from the EDIDesK project. Equality refers to fair conditions and accessible solutions that prevent harm or disadvantage, ensuring that designed artefacts do not perpetuate inequities during or after use (Garay-Rondero, Salinas-Navarro, and Calvo 2020). Diversity involves engaging with the cultural, social, psychophysical and economic differences of end users and recognising their varied needs and perspectives (Dong et al. 2015). Finally, Inclusion requires the adoption of methodological processes and practices that make design solutions universally accessible, thereby fostering socially conscious and empathetic designers who create for people of all backgrounds and abilities (Braga 2017). As part of Work Package 2 (WP2), EDIDesK mapped the current landscape of EDI teaching in Design and related subjects at undergraduate and postgraduate level in the participating countries of Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Spain. This article focuses specifically on the Spanish context, paying particular attention to Barcelona and Catalonia, not only because of being the geographical context of the researchers involved in it but also due to their historical relevance for both Spanish Design culture (Galán et al. 2010; Narotzky 2007) and EDI (Bonet i Martí and Serrano Miguel 2021).

Our desk research for WP2 revealed a lack of EDI-focused modules in Design degree programmes in Spain. Given the number of organisations working on EDI-related issues in

Spain, we had expected these principles to be more widely integrated into Design curricula. This discrepancy prompted us to investigate the context further. This article addresses two key research questions: RQ1) What is the broader context of EDI principles in relation to the field of Design in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain? and RQ2) What is the current state of EDI integration in Design education in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain?

The article begins by outlining the historical background to Design in Barcelona, Catalonia, and Spain, examining its relatively late development compared to other European countries, and tracing its particular trajectory through periods of political repression and democratic resurgence, where Design became a strategic cultural force (Narotzky 2007). We found particularly interesting to trace the roots of EDI in Design in Spain back to Urban Design, as it served as the earliest and most visible platform for EDI principles. Following the democratic transition after the end of the Francoist regime, reclaiming public space became a central societal demand. In Barcelona, the redesign of streets, squares, and urban furniture in the 1980s embodied this democratic ethos, reflecting the collective right to shape and inhabit the city (Narotzky 2007). This process of spatial democratisation, driven by progressive legislation and sustained public investment, paved the way for EDI-centred design approaches. From the introduction of early accessibility laws in the 1980s to the development of more recent intersectional feminist urbanism initiatives, Barcelona has become a key testing ground for the design of inclusive public spaces, influencing both local and national urban policy frameworks.

Finally, the article examines EDI in Design education. We first trace the development of Design education in Barcelona, Catalonia, and Spain, from its early institutions to the present landscape of higher education and non-higher education programs. We then assess existing EDI policies in higher education, analysing the presence of dedicated EDI modules across 79 undergraduate and 34 postgraduate design programs using the results of the study conducted within the WP2 of the EDIDesK project. The article concludes by discussing key findings and proposing practical recommendations to ensure Design education actively contributes to building more inclusive, diverse, and equitable futures.

1. DESIGN IN BARCELONA, CATALONIA, AND SPAIN

1.1. History

Spanish Design first emerged during the Modernist period (Campí, Baxauli, and Leslabay 2023). However, it only began to develop a distinctive identity in the 1960s, a late start compared to most other European countries (Campí 2020). Earlier efforts during Modernism (1880-1917) and the Second Republic (1931-1936/39), were marked by discontinuity and political turmoil (Galán et al. 2010). The Second Republic, briefly fostered a promising avant-garde Design movement through groups like GATEPAC, whose modernist approach – actively supported by the government of Catalonia through architectural commissioned projects – started to forged a distinctly Spanish Design identity (Galán et al. 2010). However, it was crushed by the Francoist coup and the subsequent dictatorship, which viewed Design as a subversive, intellectual pursuit. The 1960s marked a turning point, driven by architects and designers who embraced Design culture as a form of resistance. Three pivotal milestones emerged, all originated in Barcelona: the founding of Elisava, Spain's first design school, in 1961 (Narotzky 2007); the establishment of ADI FAD (Industrial Design Association) in 1960; and the launch of the Delta Awards under ADI FAD in 1961, giving visibility to Spanish Design

(Galán et al. 2010). Still, Design remained marginal until the 1980s, when it became central to Spain's post-Franco cultural revival. Catalonia, in particular, adopted Design as an expression of territorial identity. Through landmark exhibitions and urban transformations, design became more democratic and visible (Narotzky 2007). Urban planning, street furniture, and architectural interventions became tools to assert Catalan identity while improving the quality of life across the neighbourhoods. Firms and editors like Santa & Cole and Escofet 1886 began collaborating with renowned designers and architects to create distinctive urban furniture re-shaping Barcelona's public space (Galán et al. 2010).

1.2. Today

Today, the Spanish Design landscape is a dynamic and structured ecosystem. According to a recent report (BCD 2019), it comprises 91 key institutions, alongside 166 design schools and 210 festivals, awards, and museums dedicated to advancing design culture. The most concentrated design resources are found in Catalonia, the Community of Madrid and Valencian Community (Fig. 1, 3), by Catalonia leading by far (Fig 1): it hosts 23% of major design institutions, 13.8% of design education programs, and 19.5% of promotional activities. 60% of them are in the city of Barcelona: it has the highest concentration of design schools, universities, research centres, and promotional initiatives (Fig. 2). Although the Spanish Design sector has made significant progress since the 1960s, certain areas lag behind those of other western countries. Design research, for example, is underdeveloped in Spanish academia, partly due to design's late recognition as a university discipline, with formal accreditation only being granted in 2010 (Galán et al. 2010). Although no comprehensive national studies exist, a preliminary analysis of academic publications reveals significant disparities. Scientific publications indexed in Scopus and featuring the term 'design' appear less frequently and emerged later in Spain (12th country by number of publications) than in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany and Italy (Table 1, Fig. 4). This pattern highlights the delayed institutionalisation or evolution of Design as an academic discipline within Spain's higher education system.

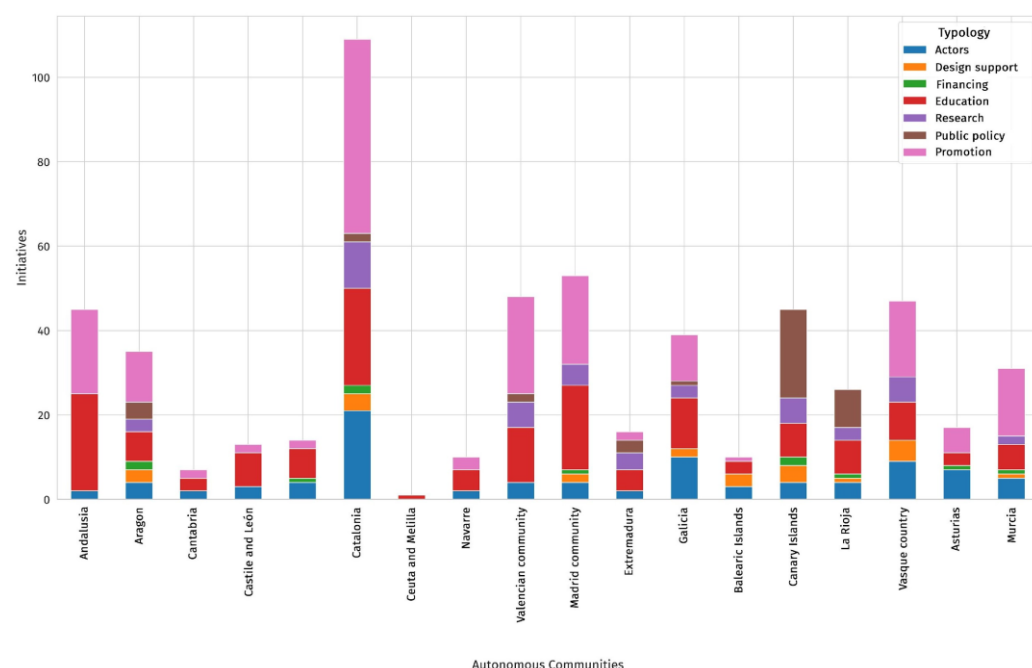


Figure 1. Distribution of the Spanish design ecosystem across its autonomous communities in 2019. Source: (BCD 2019).

Table 1: Scientific publications on “design” in Spain and other western countries (Source: Scopus. Query done on 08/05/2025).

Country	Query	Publications
All countries	TITLE-ABS-KEY (design) AND PUBYEAR > 1849 AND PUBYEAR < 2025	7,704,725
USA	TITLE-ABS-KEY (design) AND PUBYEAR > 1849 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "United States"))	1,928,985
UK	TITLE-ABS-KEY (design) AND PUBYEAR > 1849 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "United Kingdom"))	533,788
Germany	TITLE-ABS-KEY (design) AND PUBYEAR > 1849 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "Germany"))	385,340
Italy	TITLE-ABS-KEY (design) AND PUBYEAR > 1849 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "Italy"))	257,174
France	TITLE-ABS-KEY (design) AND PUBYEAR > 1849 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "France"))	228,629
Spain (design)	TITLE-ABS-KEY (design) AND PUBYEAR > 1849 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "Spain"))	186,939
Spain (design, diseño, disseny)	TITLE-ABS-KEY (diseño OR disseny OR design) AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "Spain"))	187,156

2.EDI PRINCIPLES IN DESIGN IN BARCELONA, CATALONIA, AND SPAIN

2.1. EDI principles in Design 1978-2015

Even before the formal conceptualisation of EDI, Spanish Design aimed to transform society. In the 60s, designers revived ideals from the Republican era, using their work to resist Franco's regime and improve everyday life (Narotzky 2007). Simultaneously, neighbourhood social movements made the "right to the city" their central demand, challenging Francoist urban model and advocating for more democratic and inclusive public spaces (Borja 2010).

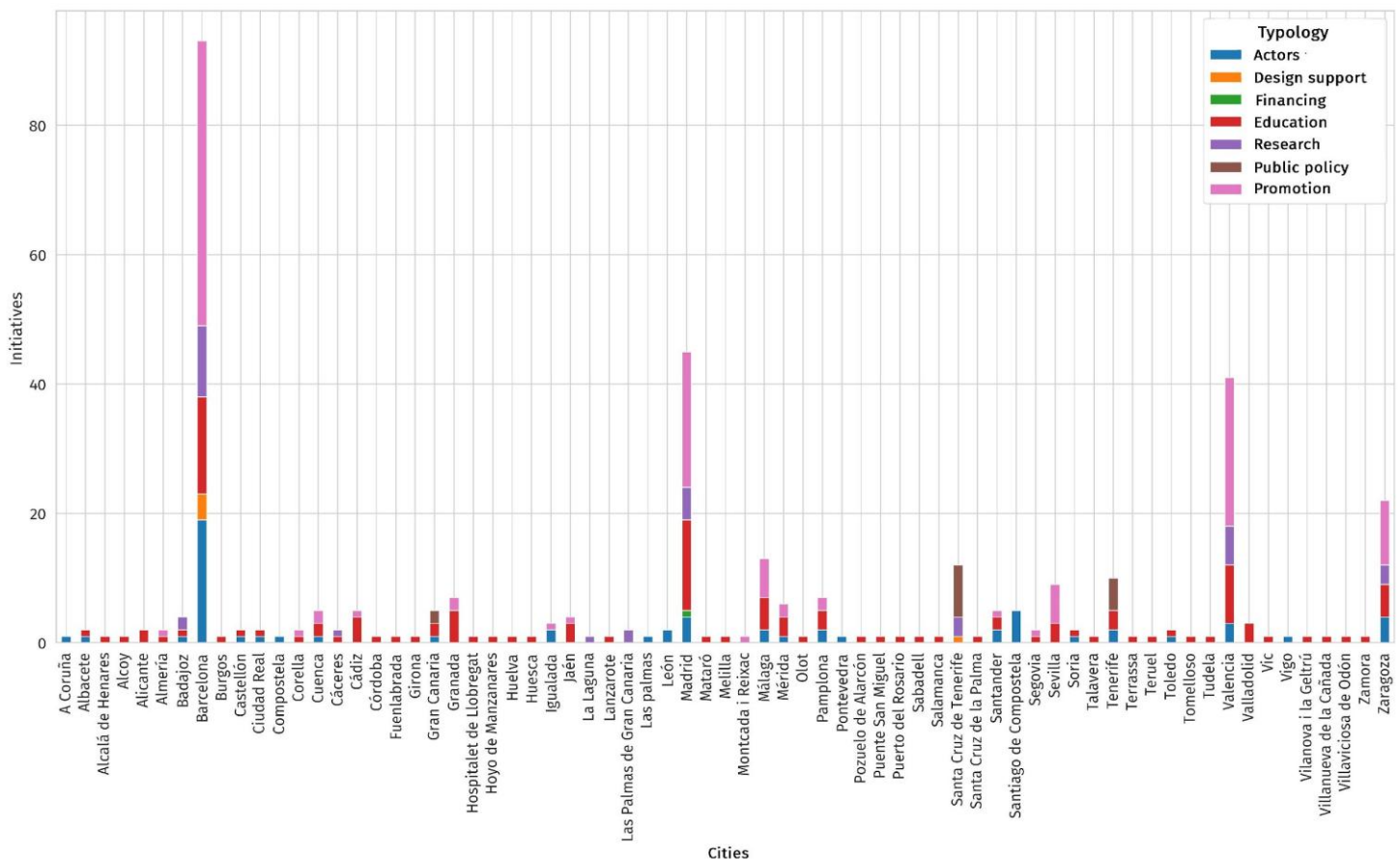


Figure 2. Distribution of the Spanish Design ecosystem across its cities in 2019. Source: (BCD 2019).

These developments in design practice and civic mobilization established critical foundations for later policy reforms and the institutionalization of inclusive design principles.

After years of neglect and repression, the democratic transition turned urban design into a political act, where the rebuilding of public spaces – from pavements to street furniture – became a means of reclaiming the city. As Hughes (2006:43) notes, post-Franco Barcelona sought to reclaim the city as a “space for strolling” symbolising regained liberty. The newly elected City Council in 1979, led by the Socialist Party, incorporated long-standing civic demands into its urban policies, using public infrastructure as a strategy for “city-making” (Esparza Lozano 2014). The council incorporated principles of inclusivity and accessibility into urban design, reflecting democratic values and collective ownership.

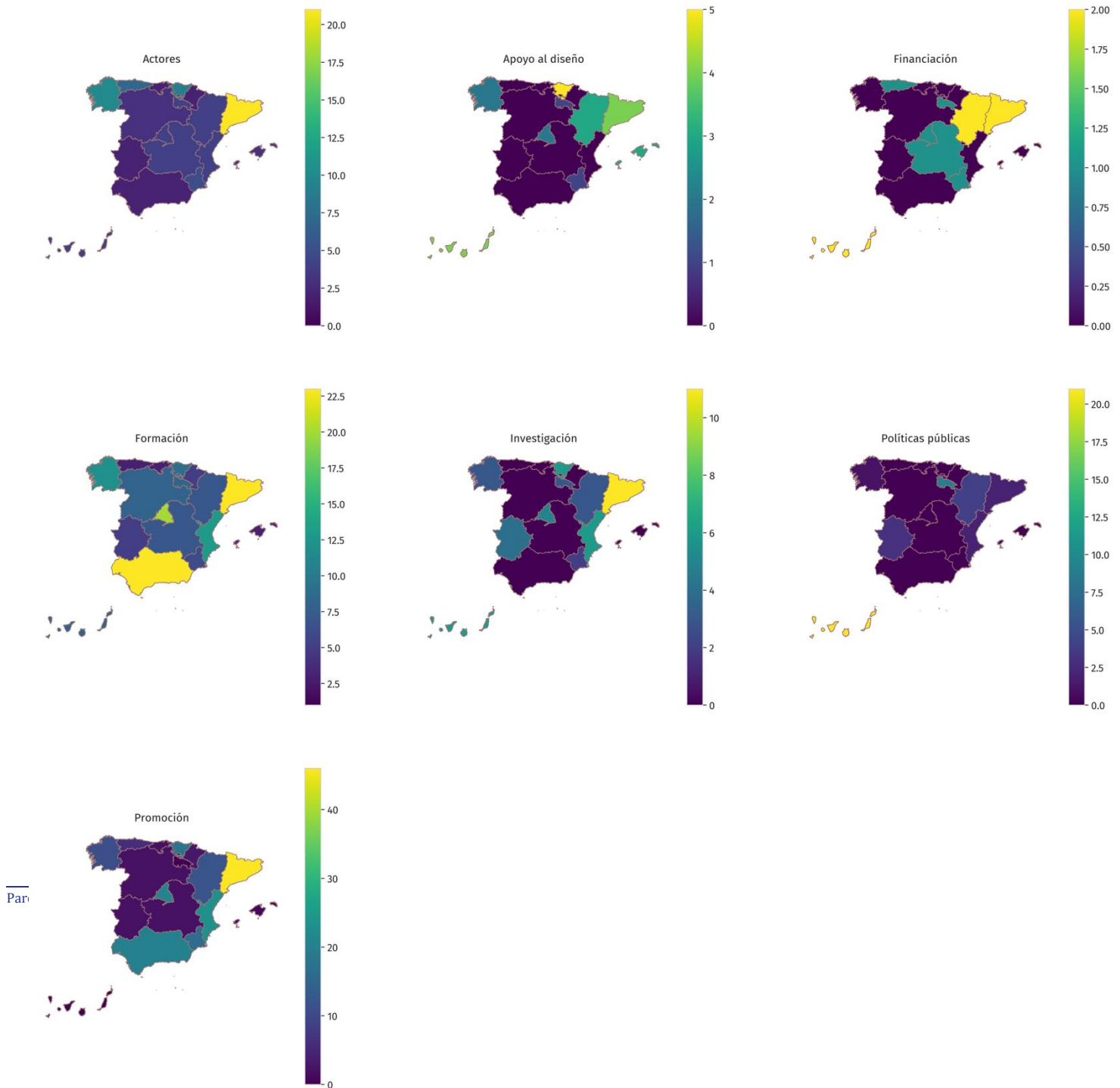


Figure 3. Distribution of the Spanish Design ecosystem across its Autonomous Communities in 2019. Source: (BCD 2019).

The city's 1979 Municipal Ordinance on the Elimination of Architectural Barriers (Ordenanza sobre supresión de barreras arquitectónicas en la vía pública 1979) was among Spain's first local accessibility measures. National progress followed: in 1982, the new socialist government of Spain enacted the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities Act (Ley 13/1982 de Integración Social de Los Minusválidos 1982) mandating accessible urban and architectural standards across regions. Later, Law 51/2003 on Equal Opportunities, Non-Discrimination, and Universal Accessibility, consolidated these measures, establishing universal design standards across the country (Ley 51/2003 de Igualdad de Oportunidades, No Discriminación y Accesibilidad Universal de Las Personas Con Discapacidad 2003). This legislative progress was shaped by disability rights organizations, including key representative bodies such as FEAPS (Spanish Federation of Organizations for People with Intellectual Disabilities), COCEMFE (Spanish Confederation of People with Physical Disabilities) or ONCE (National Organization of Spanish Blind People), which also played an active role in planning and managing the resulting policy programs (Jiménez Lara and Huete García 2010). The Design for All Foundation, founded in Barcelona in the mid-1990s, played a key role by promoting accessibility in design practice (Calvera 2018).

Feminist architects and scholars (Muxí Martínez and Ciocchetto 2011), highlight Catalonia's pioneering 2/2004 Neighbourhood Improvement Law (Ley 2/2004 de Millora de Barris, Àrees Urbanes i Viles Que Requereixen Una Atenció Especial 2004), which went beyond accessibility to explicitly mandate gender equality in urban space. The law was instrumental in the creation and establishment of key cooperatives for gender-sensitive urban planning, such as Col·lectiu Punt 6 (Colectiu Punt 6 2022). This framework was strengthened in the Spanish context through the Organic Law 3/2007 for the effective equality between women and men (Real Decreto 1393/2007, de 29 de Octubre, Por El Que Se Establece La Ordenación de Las Enseñanzas Universitarias Oficiales 2007), requiring public administrations to incorporate gender perspectives into urban planning and education. These laws marked a major shift in recognising design's role in either perpetuating or challenging inequality.

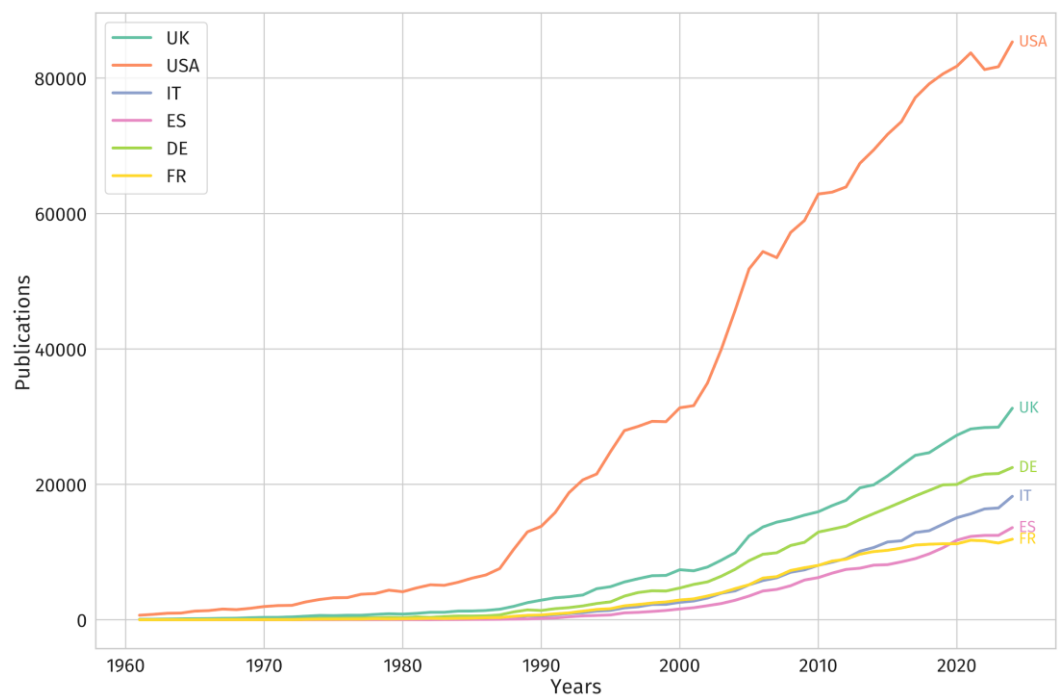


Figure 4. Scientific publications with “design” keyword in title, abstract and keywords. Source: Scopus.

2.2. EDI principles in Design 2015-2024

Although EDI legislation has often faced implementation delays due to institutional and academic resistance (Muxí Martínez 2020), the 2010s ultimately marked a turning point in Spanish urban policy. The 15M movement – which emerged from the widespread social distress caused by the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures – became a catalyst for reimagining urban governance through demands for social justice and participatory democracy (Bonet i Martí and Serrano Miguel 2021). The occupation of public squares across Spain functioned not only as a form of resistance but also as a site for new modes of politicization that redefined ways of designing and inhabiting shared spaces (Sánchez Criado 2017). In main encampments such as Puerta del Sol and Plaça de Catalunya, commissions focusing on feminist and functional diversity highlighted the role of Design in creating inclusive public spaces.

This paradigm shift crystallized after the 2015 municipal elections, when progressive platforms such as Barcelona en Comú, under Ada Colau's leadership, pioneered a municipalism of the commons that took plurality, diversity and differences in society as a starting point (Aguiló Bonet and Sabariego 2016) embedding EDI principles into urban policy. While various citizen-driven political parties born in the wake of 15M – Ahora Madrid, Marea Atlántica, Compostela Aberta, Zaragoza en Común and Por Cádiz Sí Se Puede – succeeded in winning local governments across Spain, only Barcelona and Cádiz secured sufficient political and electoral support to renew their mandates in the 2019 municipal elections. This continuity was essential for deepening and sustaining transformative policy agendas (Bonet i Martí and Serrano Miguel 2021).

After the EDI policy stagnation that had characterized the 2011-2015 period (Muxí, 2020), Colau's administration in Barcelona (2015-2023) introduced Spain's most ambitious intersectional feminist policies, beginning with the groundbreaking Gender Justice Plans (Àrea de Derechos Sociales, Justicia Global, Feminismos y LGTBI 2021; Concejalía de Feminismos y LGTBI 2016). These plans established comprehensive, cross-departmental strategies for inclusion from a plural and intersectional perspective (Gerència d'Àrea de Drets Socials, Editorials, and Recursos 2023). The administration's innovative approach manifested in several landmark initiatives: the LGTBI Centre (2019), the Care Democratization Program (2017-2020) addressing gendered labour inequalities, and, crucially, the Gender Perspective Urbanism Measure (2017), which embedded gender mainstreaming into all urban planning. These EDI measures were reinforced by the Universal Accessibility Plan (2018), which expanded accessibility standards to include cognitive, sensory, and communicational dimensions. Accessibility became a core design principle across public space, transport, and the built environment – earning Barcelona international recognition, including its designation as European Capital of Inclusion and Diversity in 2022.

A key feature of these policies was their participatory approach to implementation. While Barcelona's city council had already a history in citizen engagement (Gomà & Rebollo, 2001), this deepened with the 2017 adoption of a new citizen participation framework. For instance, the second Gender Justice Plan was co-created with residents (Gerència d'Àrea de Drets Socials et al. 2023). New tools – such as citizen initiatives and consultations – strengthened civil society's role in municipal decision-making. Notable outcomes included digital platforms like Decidim (Barandiaran et al. 2024) and a rise of citizen-managed facilities, which grew from 14 to over 70 (Bonet i Martí and Serrano Miguel 2021). By institutionalising co-design

with historically marginalised groups, these initiatives embedded community voices in urban policy, establishing Barcelona as a laboratory of EDI-driven urban design politics. Finally, these policies provided Barcelona's Design institutions with a framework to align themselves with societal changes. Over the past decade, the Disseny Hub Barcelona (DHUB) – a multifunctional design centre comprising a museum, archive and design associations – has developed initiatives focused on equal opportunities and diversity, including a festival exploring Design through the lens of disability studies (Guayabero 2018), and exhibition about women in Design (Bastardes, Cedonya, and Fernández del Moral 2023).

3. EDI IN DESIGN EDUCATION IN BARCELONA, CATALONIA AND SPAIN

3.1. Design education in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain

Barcelona's activism, legislative and urbanistic advances demonstrate how EDI principles can fundamentally reshape design's outcomes, from streets to urban furniture. Yet whether this transformative potential has reached design education remains unclear. Despite Spain's progressive urban policies, the integration of EDI into design curricula requires closer scrutiny. Elisava, Spain's first Design school was finally established in Barcelona in 1961 (Narotzky 2007), despite earlier attempts suppressed by Franco's regime and lack of resources. This marked a turning point, as Catalan Design played a pivotal role in shaping Spain's industrial Design history (Galán et al. 2010). Catalonia developed a diverse educational landscape, with both public and private institutions, though private schools emerged as particularly dominant in the region's Design sphere. Beyond Catalonia, until the early 1990s, design education remained fragmented across Spain. Some programs existed as specialties within Arts and Crafts schools, others as specializations in Fine Arts faculties, with additional non-official courses offered by private institutions. A major breakthrough came in 1991 when Jaume I University in Castellón introduced Spain's first official Industrial Design Engineering degree - a milestone that established industrial design as an independent university discipline (Galán et al. 2010). Still, it wasn't until the Royal Decree 633/2010 (Real Decreto 633/2010 Por El Que Se Regula El Contenido Básico de Las Enseñanzas Artísticas Superiores de Grado de Diseño Establecidas En La Ley Orgánica 2/2006 2010) that full Design degrees were formally established, reflecting a long struggle to legitimise design both as a profession and as a field of study.

3.2. EDI in Higher Education in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain

While in the Spanish context the Royal Decree 1393/2007 established foundational requirements for universal accessibility and Design for All principles in university curricula, the explicit mandate for the integration of gender equality principles across academic programs originates from Royal Decree 1393/2007 (Real Decreto 1393/2007, de 29 de octubre, por el que se establece la ordenación de las enseñanzas universitarias oficiales 2007). In Catalonia, Law 17/2015 (Ley 17/2015, de 21 de julio, de igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres 2015) reinforced this by requiring a transversal gender perspective in all higher education degrees. Organic Law 2/2023 (Ley Orgánica 2/2023, de 22 de marzo, del Sistema Universitario 2023) further strengthened this framework by requiring universities to establish dedicated equality and diversity units that evaluate gender mainstreaming across institutional activities and adopt inclusion and non-discrimination plans, that address

multiple dimensions of diversity including racial and ethnic origin, nationality, religion, age, and socioeconomic status. To support this, training manuals through the collaboration with different public and private entities were developed: from the “Libro Blanco del Diseño para Todos en la Universidad” (Rovira-Beleta Cuyás 2003) that aimed to embed Design for All principles into university curricula to the General Frameworks for incorporating a gender perspective in university studies from AQU (Agency for the Quality of University studies in Catalonia) to Xarxa Vives’ gender mainstreaming guides in HEIs, including one focused on architecture studies (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema 2019). Despite these efforts, studies reveal a persistent gap between policy and practice. For instance, regarding gender mainstreaming in higher education, Xarxa Vives (2021) found that only 16% of undergraduate and 7% postgraduate programmes in Catalonia included gender-related content, mostly as electives. One of the key challenges identified was the need for faculty training in this area.

Progress in accessibility and Design for All, however, appears more encouraging. In 2020, around 47% of degree programmes in priority disciplines include dedicated modules on accessibility and Design for All (Madrid López, García Fernández, and Campo Blanco 2020). In architecture, this figure rises to 86%, reflecting legislative advancements in built-environment accessibility in Spain. However, the approach remains outdated and is still rooted in the elimination of architectural barriers rather than embracing the more holistic and universal understanding of accessibility that is prevalent today.

3.3. EDI in Design education in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain

To assess the gap between institutional EDI rhetoric and activism and its professional and curricular implementation, this study adopts the standardized methodology of the EDIDesK project. It begins with an extensive desk analysis of 79 undergraduate and 34 postgraduate design programs to identify courses containing explicit EDI components, enabling a broad assessment of EDI implementation across Spanish Design education (Więckowska, Chmielarz, Lorenc, Piątek, Rzenno, Pawlik, Rudnicka, D’Onofrio, Massacesi, Čerešňová, Klára, et al. 2024). Following the project’s established framework, all identified EDI modules were documented and categorized according to their specific characteristics: module type, particular EDI themes addressed and the depth of EDI integration (Table 2).

The analysis revealed significant gaps in the incorporation of EDI principles across Spanish Design programs, where only 24% undergraduate programs (19) showed any evidence of EDI content (Fig. 5), with most offering just a single module. Only 1 program included 2 EDI modules, and another included 3. An additional 6 undergraduate degrees may have contained EDI-related content, but insufficient documentation prevented verification. At the postgraduate level, examination of 34 design programs demonstrated similar deficiencies, where only 17.6% (6 programs) incorporated any EDI components (Fig. 5), 4 of which structured their entire curriculum around EDI concepts. As with the undergraduate findings, 5 additional postgraduate programs could not be confirmed to include EDI modules due to limited available information.

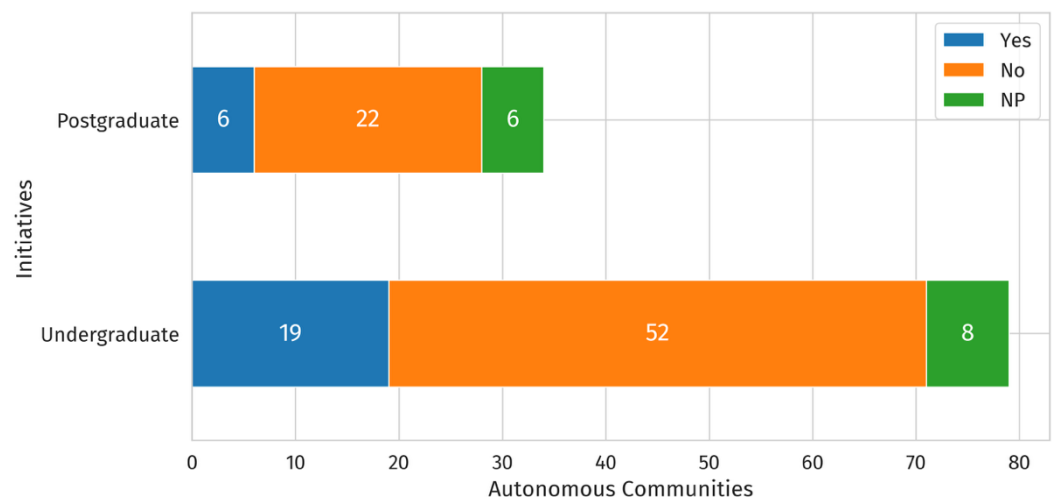


Figure 5. Chart displaying the number of programs with modules related to EDI.

After excluding modules with insufficient documentation, the study identified 22 EDI-focused courses across 16 Spanish universities. These included 17 undergraduate modules, 3 postgraduate ones, and 2 non-degree courses. Among these, 9 were non-compulsory subjects, all at the undergraduate level. In contrast, no postgraduate EDI courses were optional. The dominant thematic focuses among EDI modules were accessibility (9 modules covering ergonomics, design for all, and users with disabilities), inclusion (9 modules addressing user participation, inclusive design, ergonomics, user-centred design, adaptability, design for disabilities, wellbeing, and health), and diversity (4 modules engaging with gender, race, identity, culture, care and common good, design for diversity, inclusive design, and design for disabilities) (see Table 2). Notably, only one module explicitly tackled racial, cultural or gender diversity.

The depth of EDI integration varied across modules. Only 4 modules were classified as Level 1, covering selected EDI issues superficially; 7 modules reached Level 2, addressing selected EDI issues with some student work reflecting EDI principles. Another 6 modules met Level 3 criteria, where most student work engaged with EDI themes. Finally, 5 modules achieved Level 4 or 5 integration, characterized by extensive student engagement with EDI issues, often including external partnerships (Level 4) or complete curricular focus on EDI principles (Level 5).

Table 2: Design-related study programs with EDI modules in higher education in Spain.

Academic institution	Study program	Degree	Main domain	Level
Universidad de La Laguna	Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Diversity	2
Escola Massana	Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Inclusion	2
EINA, Centro Universitario de Diseño y Arte de Barcelona (UAB)	Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	3
ESDi	Interior design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Inclusion	1
UNIBA	Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	3
UDIT	Product Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	3
University of Navarra	Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Inclusion	4
UOC Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Inclusion	1
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya	Product Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Inclusion	3
ELISAVA Barcelona School of Design and Engineering	Design	PG - Master's degree	Diversity	4
ELISAVA Barcelona School of Design and Engineering	Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	2

ELISAVA Barcelona School of Design and Engineering	Design	PG - Master's degree	Inclusion	4
ELISAVA Barcelona School of Design and Engineering (Shifta)	Design	Short Course	Diversity	3
ELISAVA Barcelona School of Design and Engineering (Shifta)	Design	Short Course	Diversity	5
ELISAVA Barcelona School of Design and Engineering (Shifta)	Industrial Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Inclusion	2
Universitat Politècnica de Valencia	Architecture	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	3
Mondragon Unibertsitatea	Product Design	PG - Master's degree	Inclusion	2
Universitat Jaume I	Product Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	5
Universitat Politècnica de Valencia	Product Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Inclusion	2
Universidad de Cádiz	Product Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	2
Universidad de Málaga	Product Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	1
Universidad de Málaga	Product Design	UG- Bachelor's degree	Accessibility	1

Following the desk research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators from 6 Spanish design modules (4 undergraduate, 1 postgraduate, and 1 short course) identified as exemplary cases (Levels 4-5 in EDI integration). While their broader insights have been documented in the D2.1.1 (Więckowska, Chmielarz, Lorenc, Piątek, Rzenno, Pawlik, Rudnicka, D'Onofrio, Massacesi, Čerešňová, Macháčová, et al. 2024), we can highlight some key responses that provide deeper understanding of the implementation of EDI in the modules and the whole curricula.

Firstly, we need to point out that most subjects adopted a combination of theoretical and practical approaches, where theory was put into practice through the development of design projects: although all subjects included a project as an outcome, only one was fully project-based. Most modules had a strong research component, and three incorporated user participation, which made students learn from who they design for and engage directly with the communities affected by design exclusion. Users participated through testimonials or co-design methods. In 5 out of the 6 cases, students collaborated with associations, foundations, art collectives, health consultants and companies, integrating external expertise to the design projects and expanding the project's value. Project outcomes ranged from exhibitions and card games to apps, industrial objects, fashion collections, toolboxes, and protocols. In terms of the relation with the whole curricula, just one course could say that it was formally linked to other modules with EDI components. A recurring theme among the interviewed professors was the belief that EDI should not be treated as a standalone subject but rather as a transversal dimension integrated throughout the entire curriculum.

4. DISCUSSION

The empirical evidence reveals a striking paradox in Spanish Design education. While activism, practice and progressive EDI policies have been extensively developed and implemented in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain, the study shows that they remain weakly reflected in Design curricula. Our analysis of 113 programs shows only 19.5% include identifiable EDI content, with just 4.4% reaching advanced integration levels (4-5). This disparity suggests that Design education lags significantly behind professional practice and public policy outside of academia in addressing equality and inclusion.

Three key findings emerge from the data. Firstly, the strongest EDI implementations (all Level 4-5 modules) share common methodologies: participatory design approaches, community partnerships, and strong research components. This aligns with Barcelona's successful urban policies that similarly emphasize co-creation with marginalized groups. Secondly, accessibility dominates EDI content (40.9% of modules), while intersectional approaches addressing race, gender or class remain rare (4.5%). This disparity reflects historical trends in public space design, where accessibility was the primary initial concern. Thirdly, the optional nature of 40.9% of undergraduate EDI modules shows that EDI is still thought as an add-on, rather than a foundational and transversal design perspective.

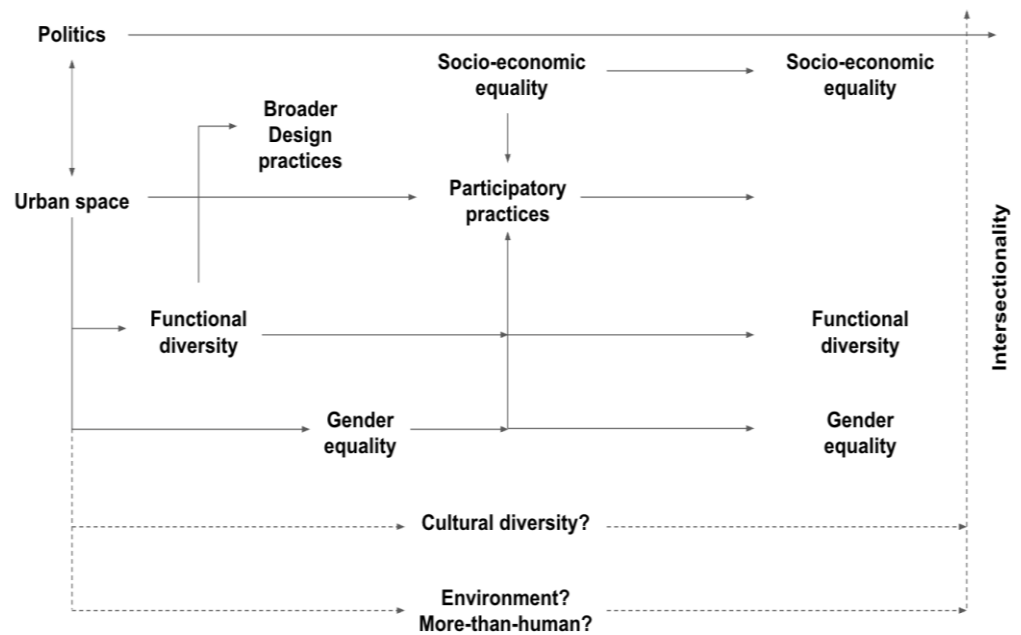


Figure 6. The evolution of EDI in Spanish Design: from accessibility to urban spaces to participation and EDI.

We acknowledge potential underreporting, as some educators likely integrate EDI principles in their teachings without explicitly referring to it in modules title and description. Our interviews revealed cases where professors adapt pedagogies for inclusion without formal curriculum recognition. However, even accounting for such instances, the overall integration of EDI in Design education remains alarmingly low compared to Spain's legislative framework and its urban policy and practice achievements. As the next generation of designers will confront growing inequality and diversity challenges, their training must equip them with more than technical skills – it must cultivate the ethical frameworks and participatory methodologies that Spain's own urban laboratories have proven effective.

5. CONCLUSION

Spain, and particularly Barcelona and Catalonia, has emerged in recent decades as a laboratory for EDI practices in urban design, public spaces and policies. From pioneering accessibility legislation in the 1980s to the intersectional feminist urban policies of Barcelona en Comú (2015-2023), Spanish urban design has progressively institutionalized EDI principles in the built environment. However, this institutional and legislative progress has not been equally reflected in Design education, where the integration of EDI remains fragmented and often superficial. Despite the Royal Decree 633/2010 explicitly recognizing Design as a driver of social equality and inclusion – stating that graduates should "value the dimension of design as

a factor of equality and social inclusion, and as a transmitter of cultural values" (Real Decreto 633/2010 Por El Que Se Regula El Contenido Básico de Las Enseñanzas Artísticas Superiores de Grado de Diseño Establecidas En La Ley Orgánica 2/2006 2010) – these principles have not been systematically embedded in Design curricula. Our analysis of 79 undergraduate and 34 postgraduate programs reveals that only a minority include dedicated EDI modules, with most offering minimal or optional content. Even when present, EDI is frequently treated as a supplementary rather than a foundational concern, reinforcing the gap between Spain's urban policies and its Design pedagogy.

This disconnect raises critical questions about the role of Design education in sustaining and advancing EDI principles. If Design is to function as a true agent of social transformation – as demonstrated by Barcelona's urban policies – its educational institutions must move beyond tokenistic inclusion and embrace EDI as a core disciplinary framework. To bridge this gap, we propose the following pathways for reform:

- Expanding university-community collaboration: Spanish Design schools should deepen engagement with grassroots organizations, civic centres, maker laboratories or public bodies that have been at the forefront of participatory and EDI design practices. By fostering partnerships with these entities, universities could integrate these experiences into Design pedagogy.
- Reclaiming the public legacy of Spanish Design: The 1980s-90s established Spanish Design's distinctive focus on public spaces – areas that have seen significant advances in EDI in recent years. However, while this approach has been more widely applied in architectural education, likely due to its collective and spatial nature, it has yet to be fully embraced in Design disciplines. This legacy should inform contemporary Design education. Rather than treating inclusion as an imported concept, curricula must reconnect with Spain's tradition of designing public infrastructures that inherently promote EDI and expand it to other Design disciplines.
- Formalizing non-institutional Design education: many inclusive Design practices currently thrive outside formal academia, such as civic centres, maker laboratories, and community-led initiatives. Universities should recognize and formalize these alternative pedagogies, integrating their methods into accredited programs.
- Strengthening Design research and funding: as a relatively young academic discipline in Spain, Design research remains underdeveloped, with most EDI-driven initiatives relying on European-funded projects. Greater investment – both national and European – is needed to support long-term research into inclusive Design methodologies.

The persistence of EDI as a marginal concern in Design education underscores a broader tension: while Spain has positioned itself as a leader in inclusive urban policy, its Design institutions have yet to fully internalize these values. Addressing this misalignment requires more than curricular adjustments; it demands a reimagining of Design education as a fundamentally political and social practice.

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