

Via BNO

Heading towards the future



Policy Plan 2014-2016

General outline

With a view to current trends in society and in the design discipline, this plan outlines BNO's current position and the path it aims to travel over the next three years. Today's circumstances present a combination of stormy weather and new opportunities. We need to adapt to today, while we must simultaneously prepare for a future that will be fundamentally different, and inevitably so. Given the urgent issues that confront us, this plan has a short horizon. Focusing on the next three years it presents a short-range view, rather than a long-range view.

BNO's policy goals are: member support, consolidating the collective, and the further development and positioning of design in the broadest sense of the word. These goals translate into the following priorities:

- 1 Supporting our member designers and agencies in terms of business operation and professional discipline remains the top priority.**
- 2 Training courses and other activities relating to entrepreneurship and professional development will become more demand-driven and will facilitate the transition to tomorrow's design professional.**
- 3 We shall focus more specifically on stimulating mutual contact among our members through networks across the country, specific platforms, and peer-to-peer communication.**
- 4 Given the significance and the effectiveness of the collective, we shall invest extra energy in member recruitment.**
- 5 To further profile and position the discipline we shall start utilising the ambassador's and broker's role that designers and affiliated professionals can fulfil.**
- 6 We shall devote attention to significant developments in terms of design and societal trends and their implications for designers.**
- 7 Jointly with relevant partners, we shall continue the national and international (lobbying) work aimed at adequate regulations, commissioning, pitches and tenders, copyright issues, and so on.**

As of 2017, BNO has become more visible. Its value as a professional association for the 21st century has been demonstrated (once again), given how members and stakeholders perceive BNO as a professional, ambitious, proactive and inspiring organisation. For the new and younger designers, agencies and affiliated stakeholders who recently joined us, BNO is as attractive as for those who have been members for years or even decades. Today as much as ever, creative professionals highly value inter-collegial exchange and loyalty. They continue to benefit from the long-term impact of a professional association and from the clout that results from having a large and robust collective.

With a view to a more distant horizon, there are some matters of principle that require a longer preparation. First, BNO's professional scope needs to be reviewed on the basis of a revised vision on the design discipline. This may also lead to new mergers. Parallel with the efforts concerning copyright, there is the principled debate on the matter of intellectual property. The way the quality assessment is conducted should also be reviewed: assessments by educational programmes, the educational programmes themselves, the route via the Board of Supervisors, and other models. BNO also wants to examine alternatives to the contribution model; although the option was not chosen in the past, a more specific fee system may yet offer an answer to the varying needs of member designers and agencies. The following paragraphs will take a brief look at the social context, to then zoom in on the creative sector and the design discipline, BNO and its mission, strategy and priorities. Finally, we indicate a number of framework conditions and how we foresee the further elaboration of our policy.

Societal context

Our society is changing fast. There are countless challenges regarding sustainability, health, ageing, social provisions and migration. Digitisation, the worldwide web and social media are omnipresent and have a profound impact on processes of production and consumption.

There is a growing awareness that we need to work towards more harmonious combinations of 'people, planet, profit'. The call for unconventional, creative visions on the part of scientists, administrators and entrepreneurs is gaining urgency. Solving the issues that confront us today requires technological innovation, as well as behavioural and organisational change. Ideally, all parties will work together to build a creative economy in which material and immaterial values reinforce each other.

The creative sector and the design discipline

In this world in transition, the design discipline is indispensable. All prospective products, processes and services must arise from some concept and be converted into some form.

If our society invests sufficiently in a number of basic conditions for education, regulation, research and innovation, then it will benefit from the unparalleled difference that designers can make in terms of functionality, sustainability and external appeal. Designers, in turn, must be sensitive to social-cultural issues, must increase their influence on decision-making processes, and must be successful in networking and collaboration.

The creative sector has enjoyed a great deal of attention in recent years, even attaining the status of top sector in government policy. To procure the sector's advice, the government has appointed a 'Topteam' and a Creative Council. In the interest of findability and representation, a number of professional and trade associations have bundled their forces in the Federation of Dutch Creative Industries. The remit of relevant public bodies such as the Creative Industries Fund and Het Nieuwe Instituut has changed. Research programmes such as CLICKNL and CRISP have been launched. On the international scale, networks such as BEDA are seeking to favourably influence (EU) policy and regulations. All these players have their role on the same board. It is an obvious yet difficult challenge to coordinate these efforts well and where possible to cooperate, so that all ambitions can be fulfilled.

The awareness of the relevance of design is still growing. There is a worldwide interest in star designers, mediagenic designs and unconventional approaches. Thanks in part to the quality of the professional education programmes, the Netherlands continues to produce frontrunners. In the meantime, the conditions under which designers and agencies must work are not becoming any easier. The market is still shrinking due to the economic recession. Commissions are becoming scarcer, and clients are becoming more demanding. They are often not well aware of the conditions designers require to produce good work, resulting in unfortunate encounters with regard to copyright, pitches and tenders. Design commissions increasingly require a cross-sectoral approach and a multi-disciplinary execution. Technological developments are creating unheard-of possibilities, but at the same require a permanent updating of equipment and skills. Parallel with the need for social change, there is an increasing interest in social and service design. Social awareness and flexibility are more important than ever before.

All these developments are forcing designers and agencies to review their own work methods and to continue to develop their skills and scope, for example through targeted trainings.

BNO and its mission

The composition of the BNO board has changed in recent years, and since May 2013 there is a new director. Against this background as well, it is time to draw up a new policy plan. Fundamental questions to be answered are:

- **How can BNO best support its diverse constituency of members, in the current time?**
- **How will BNO respond to shrinking markets, which also affects its own organisation?**
- **How can BNO rejuvenate itself?**
- **How can BNO remain an effective professional association with an influence on the position and development of the design discipline?**

In today's complex world, there is an unmistakeable need for support, for bonding, for structure and direction. At the same time, calls for networking and collaboration are the order of the day. Still, it is a pressing question to what extent (prospective) creative professionals feel that it is worthwhile to be part of a professional association, in the current era of internet, virtual communities, fleeting connections and hybrid professional practices. This depends, not just on the actual cost versus benefit ratio, but also on the extent to which such an association manages to inspire, to bond together, and to represent its members. Its image is extremely important.

Drawing up the balance for BNO as of 2014, it appears to still be a unique professional association for designers and agencies; and not just in the Netherlands, but also compared to international standards. And that's because of its history: BNO's existence in its current form dates back to 1996, which demonstrates both significant stamina and the ability to bind people together. Also, because of its size: BNO unites some 2500 independent designers and some 150 design agencies, which makes a total of around 6700 designers. And, because of its diversity: virtually all design disciplines are represented in its member body. BNO moreover unites independent designers as well as employers and employees: driven by the need to prioritise the design discipline itself, and given the different positions that designers hold over the course of their career.

In the light of the above we propose a new and concise mission: 'BNO binds and represents a unique diversity of professional designers and design agencies in the Netherlands. BNO promotes their interests, works on the conditions favourable to the further development of the design discipline, and highlights the relevance of design for society.'

Strategy and priorities

In determining the course of BNO, it is important to be familiar with the latest insights of the member designers and agencies.

BNO is well informed, thanks to its frequent contact with many of its members. To augment and verify its knowledge, an extensive members' survey was conducted in mid-2013. The results will be incorporated in the elaboration of the policy. The results show that the member designers and agencies are generally positive about BNO and that we chose the right course with the previous policy plan, 'Redesigning BNO'.

Through BNO:

- **related professional education institutes and programmes receive relevant input**
- **designers/agencies are offered legal and business advice**
- **designers/agencies are provided (advice about) continued education/further training**
- **designers/agencies are informed about relevant developments**
- **designers/agencies are facilitated in finding and using each other**
- **designers/agencies are represented in locations that they have no direct access to**
- **designers/agencies are supported in finding clients and new markets**
- **research and practice are linked together in a fruitful manner**
- **lobbying efforts are made for constructive legislation and regulations**
- **the design discipline continues to develop and its relevance continues to increase**
- **society is aware of this and benefits from it.**

The goals that BNO sets itself are not new. But we will be taking a different approach to some of these goals, in the coming years. Our success will mainly depend on how the following three factors are combined and will interact: support for the individual design practice of members, the organisation of the collective, and the positioning of strategic interests. The focus points for the first years ahead, based on the results of the members' survey as well as on the need to anticipate current developments, are set out below.

1 — Supporting the member designers and agencies in terms of business operation and professional discipline remains the top priority.

We shall however seek to cater more effectively to the various profiles as regards professional phase, scale and type of practice. Contracts, services and activities will be designed more specifically to match these profiles. We offer instruments such as a pitch dossier, point out specific networks and possible subsidies, provide information on tendering practices, and so on. We encourage and support designers and agencies with international aspirations.

2 — Training courses and other activities relating to entrepreneurship and professional development will become more demand-driven and will facilitate the transition to tomorrow's designer.

This implies a more limited and well-considered direct BNO offer, with more referrals to other parties. Naturally, this offer will be developed with a view to the professional education programmes as well. Based on pilot projects we shall examine how collaboration with FDCI and/or separate (professional/sector) associations can generate added value, in content and/or practical terms.

3 — We shall focus more specifically on stimulating mutual contact among our members through networks across the country, specific platforms, and peer-to-peer communication.

After all, the members together represent a goldmine of talent and experience which should be utilised more effectively. Activities in a number of regions demonstrate what an association actually can mean for the members. (Live) communication - via the platforms, regional circles, office meetings and other events – lead to a knowledge exchange, inspiration and useful contacts. Through collaboration, certain efforts can pay off better or pay off again. More visibility, both of the events and of the organisers, is an important element here. This also gives members a more explicit opportunity to network with third parties, through BNO. BNO takes an inclusive and an inviting approach to non-members, but will start making clearer distinctions (e.g. in prices) between member designers and agencies and non-members. There is also much to be gained through peer-to-peer communication. People are clearly motivated for this form of mutual contact, and for mentoring and coaching. We shall seek smart and contemporary interaction forms in consultation with the members, and shall be experimenting with them in the coming period. The new communication strategy and website should encourage and facilitate this.

4 — Given the significance and the effectiveness of the collective, we shall invest extra energy in member recruitment.

We shall organise various recruitment campaigns, focusing on education programmes, role models and affiliated members. Coverage in design categories that are already affiliated with us can increase through 'warm recruitment'. Additionally, we shall start to recruit more explicitly among designers and agencies that are specialised in interaction, new media and service design. The developments in the design discipline are also prompting recruitment efforts among graduates from the universities of applied sciences in the disciplines of Communication, Multimedia and Design (CMD), and Industrial Product Design (Dutch acronym: IPO).

5 — To further profile and position the discipline we shall start utilising the ambassador's and broker's role that designers and affiliated professionals can fulfil.

We shall set up a speakers' academy and start making more use of the category of affiliated members. We will also seek a more systematic approach to binding together designers, agencies and (potential) clients; for example, by using the BNO website to tempt and to guide. Based on shared interests and concerns, BNO will continue to work with entrepreneurs' initiatives, mediating professionals and so on, to also create more mutual understanding and matches in that way.

6 — Through carefully chosen projects and publications, we shall devote attention to important developments in the design discipline, societal trends and their implications for designers.

Given the huge amount of events already organised by other parties, the challenge is to limit our scope. Choice of topic, approach and collaboration with the right parties can highlight both BNO's agenda-setting role and bonding role. We will more actively align our efforts with other parties that play an important role in the development and representation of and/or research into the design discipline. The goal is to be more precise in our choice of (knowledge and communication) partners in events, research, and so on. Collaboration will be weighed in view of 'the greater good', that is to say in terms of quality, urgency, positioning and appeal. We shall naturally be clear about our reasons and conditions.

7 — Jointly with relevant partners, we shall continue the national and international (lobbying) work aimed at adequate regulations, commissioning, pitches and tenders, copyright issues, and so on.

We shall make our efforts and results more visible for all stakeholders: designers, citizens, businesses, public authorities. Given contemporary developments, we will engage with the principled discussion on intellectual property at the same time. In doing so we shall confirm our status as an authority and indispensable partner.

Framework conditions and further elaboration

The priorities will be converted into year plans. Success depends largely on framework conditions such as communication, the work method of the BNO office, and the course of collaboration with third parties.

Given the desire for information, dialogue and visibility, communication is the most critical success factor for BNO policy. This pertains to communication between the different BNO departments, and between BNO and other parties. Ideally, communication should never be the closing act of activities; instead, the desired forms of communication should be considered carefully at the outset of each activity. This is something to work on for everyone that is active within BNO. A new communication

strategy is currently in the making. Website, electronic newsletters, social media, the Vormberichten magazine and PR will be reviewed conjointly, and in view of financial scope. The BNO website forms the core of all communication. The websites of platforms and circles that are now operating independently will be linked to this website. Vormberichten will be transformed into a thematic quarterly magazine. The electronic newsletters provide information about topical matters, and will focus specifically on certain groups of members if desired. Social media should be used to provide support and to energise. Several people within BNO will work on communication at both the conceptual and operational levels. The new communication strategy should help profile BNO as a professional, proactive and inspiring professional association. The BNO brand value ideally emanates from its reputation as an authority and professional support base, and from the desire of designers and agencies to be part of the club. BNO's effectiveness and lobbying power are made clear by explaining the process and the goals, and above all the achieved results. Wherever possible, the communication goals will be tied to financial targets. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find sponsors, unless people feel addressed as a partner. BNO is still very attractive to a lot of parties as a reputation enhancer, and as the access point to a large group of professionals.

The BNO office consists of BNO Advice, BNO Projects, BNO Communication and BNO Administration. This arrangement, however obvious it may seem initially, also has a drawback. Namely, that the departments sometimes operate too independently of each other, that not all knowledge is shared, and that certain cross-cutting connections are not made. The department structure will therefore be replaced by portfolios, which will favour the emergence of cross-cutting connections. There will be more of a project-based approach to work, throughout the organisation. Naturally, it will remain clear for every member designer, agency or other stakeholder who they should contact at BNO, depending on their need or question.

Common ground will be sought with a variety of partners, so that activities can have more impact. Whenever possible and worthwhile, our agenda will be coordinated with organisations such as Het Nieuwe Instituut, education institutes, universities and networks such as FDCI and CLICKNL. Since professional development, entrepreneurship and internationalisation are critical success factors, these will play a significant role. These efforts should result in more explicit choices regarding projects, publications and research. The political agenda is concentrated on the significance of and conditions for the design discipline, through education, regulations, research and innovation, if necessary at the international level. The awareness of administrators regarding the impact of design can be increased by presenting the options, appealing cases and best practices. Exemplary applications of design in public space should be encouraged and promoted.