DESIGNERS' DESIGNERS' INQUIRY

an inquiry
on the
socio-economic
condition of
designers
in Italy

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last two years, Italy has seen many cultural workers standing on the frontline of the fight against the current management of the economic crisis. The structural precariousness of everyday life, the budget cuts to culture and welfare, the lack of protection and support around work, amongst other social and economic changes, drove workers to mobilise. These experiences of mobilisation were, and still are, based on the refusal of a culture and an education that shape creative subjects as "industry-ready." At the basis of these mobilisations lies the awareness that creative/cognitive work represents a fundamental economic resource of the current economic system and that, therefore, it is necessary to reclaim and redistribute the wealth that has been created through it. In parallel, these mobilisations took on the idea that today everything produced, thanks also to the possibilities of information technology, can embody the autonomy of co-operation and collective intelligence.

How do designers insert themselves into the recent struggles and experiences of self-education? To what extent do they realise that as producers of knowledge and languages, they are an essential dowel of the mechanisms of production and accumulation? How do they deal with a professional world in deep and constant change?

The investigation *Designers' Inquiry* arises from this questioning. It also arises from a number of difficulties and personal experiences which, as designers, led us to long for a radical change in our lives that allows for a constant discussion and re-imagination of the modalities, conditions and objectives of our work. Here, hence, the attempt to create a tool capable of picturing designers' conditions of life and work in Italy, while at the same time being a tool to initiate a dialogue and self-reflection on our profession.

Designers' Inquiry is, therefore, an investigation into the social and economic profile of who today defines him- or herself as "designer," including in this definition a broad range of overlapping competences (graphic, web and product design, animation, fashion, illustration, architecture, design research, etcetera). The project was launched in April 2012 through an anonymous online questionnaire and, within two months, saw the participation of 767 designers. This publication is the account of the data and the testimonies collected.

However, this account should not be considered only as a public condemnation: difficulties encountered by cultural workers have been widely documented by various sociologists and research institutes. *Designers' Inquiry* is rather based on the model of co-research that emerged in the sixties in the context of Italian workerism which, instead of considering the people questioned exclusively as statistics, tries to transform the methods of social science into tools dedicated to class struggle and to the production of new forms of knowledge. It aims therefore, at eliminating the distance between researchers and subjects of research in order to establish a unique subject, which is at the same time participant and leader of the inquiry in progress.

Inspired by this approach, the 78 questions elaborated in the *Designers' Inquiry* made an attempt to get the participants involved in a reflection on their own conditions, thus opening a path, in the context of situations of conflict and unease, for possible co-operations and common struggles. A first "collective step" has been taken in the consecutive phases of the inquiry: the evaluation and conceptual, visual and textual elaboration of the data have been developed publicly through workshops to which various designers with an interest in the project participated. Indeed, the long-term goal of *Designers' Inquiry* is to keep on producing shared tools for analysis and collective action that aim at intervening in the current state of affairs.

In which direction, therefore, to operate? Considering that in many cases we are our own bosses, how could conditions of work be improved, payments raised, physical and mental health be preserved, without giving up on a critical as well as a qualitative approach to our work? We know we want to defy precariousness, but to focus exclusively on the precarious dimension of the design service itself does not seem to be the ideal strategy. The objective is not (or at least not for everyone), to go back to a single, lifelong and somewhat rigid guaranteed job structure. It rather seems important to reflect on how the ways of producing the world have radically evolved and the extent to which precarious labour can no more be considered a temporary state people pass through before reaching a more traditional and stable professional position.

The questions elaborated in *Designers' Inquiry* helped us to deconstruct the concept of precariousness in its varied manifestations in the designers' everyday lives: we must now recompose it and, at least as long as models of development do not drastically change, make it bearable, while joining forces to construct and reach common goals. In this complex context, are designers able to become active subjects of social transformation?

Construction site for non-affirmative practice

We are a group of young Italian designers who met in autumn 2011 in Milan, during a collectivised artist residency at Careof DOCVA, a non-profit space for contemporary art inside the Fabbrica del Vapore. Since then, we have been working to pose questions, study and experiment with support structures for critically engaged design practices.

As designers, we feel deeply involved not only in the making of objects, but also in the creation of relations, processes, languages and collective imaginaries. As a consequence, we believe that our research should raise questions about what kind of society we want to contribute to with our work, and to question the role we play in the economic system we are living in.

The Construction site is a virtual and physical space where we carry on this research and where we try to translate it into practice according to modalities that are verified step by step.

Credits and acknowledgements

Notes

In the following report, the term "designer" will be used many times. We thus want to specify that the term always refers to the people who have participated in the inquiry and who thus constitute our sample. The data and testimonies are hence to be interpreted considering the original context in which they have been collected.

Designer's Inquiry was publicly launched on April 17th 2012 during the Milan Design Week at the non profit organisation for the promotion of contemporary artistic research Careof DOCVA. For the following two months, everyone interested in the inquiry had the possibility to complete the online questionnaire.

Designers' Inquiry is a self-financed project by the Construction site for non-affirmative practice and does not claim absolute scientific reliability.

Key

single response

multiple response

open response

WHO PARTICIPATED (1-7)

With a degree and without children

The inquiry mainly involved the participation of designers between the ages of 21 and 35 (with a peak of participation between 26 and 30), of Italian nationality, who have completed a university degree.

At the time of participation, the majority of the respondents declared to be working full-time and to not have children.

1. Sex

	count	%
male	404	52,7
female	355	46,3
not responded	8	1,0
total	767	

2. Age

20 or less	3	0,4
21-25	209	27,3
26-30	295	38,5
31-35	122	15,9
36-40	62	8,1
41-45	33	4,3
46-50	17	2,2
51-55	8	1,0
56-60	2	0,3
61-65	3	0,4
66-70	1	0,1
did not respond	12	1,6
	767	

3. Nationality

Italian	737	96,1
other	23	3,0
did not respond	7	1,0
	767	

4. Educational qualification

bachelor degree	257	33,5
MA (2 years)	256	33,3
secondary school	145	18,9
postgraduate certificate	32	4,2
MA (1 year)	25	3,3
academic diploma	11	1,4
professional qualification	11	1,4
MA (2 yrs) + PgCert	9	1,2
PhD	4	0,5
middle school	4	0,5
no title	2	0,3
other	2	0,3
did not respond	9	1,2
	767	

5. Are you currently studying?

no	514	67,0
yes, full-time	128	16,7
yes, part-time	111	14,5
did not respond	14	1,8
	767	

6. Are you currently working?

yes, full-time	389	50,7
yes, part-time	139	18,1
no	135	17,6
other	95	12,4
did not respond	9	1,2
	767	

7. Do you have children?

no	684	89,2
1	46	6,0
2	25	3,3
3	4	0,5
4	1	0,1
more than 4	0	0,0
did not respond	7	0,9
	767	

FAMILY BACKGROUND (8-14)

The family (often) provides the house

The typical designer outlined by the questionnaire comes from a middle class family that is unrelated to the so-called creative industries, and very rarely has a migrant background.

From the listed professional profiles, one can deduce that, in order to progress in their professional career, only a few designers can count on strategic relationships or on tools (such as workshops or studio spaces) deriving from their family background. However, the housing situation of these designers remains rather tied to the conditions of their family of origin or of their partner. If in fact 43% live in rented spaces, 39% live in homes owned by their parents or partners.

8. You are living...

with your partner	248	32,3
with your parent(s)	224	29,2
with friends	156	20,3
on your own	127	16,6
other	5	0,7
did not respond	7	0,9
	767	

9. The house you mainly live in is...

rented	326	42,5
the property of your family/partner	296	38,6
your property	124	16,2
other	13	1,7
did not respond	8	1,0
	767	

10. What is (was) your mother's profession?

housewife	200	26,1
employee	165	21,5
teacher	145	18,9
worker	31	4,0
storekeeper	22	2,9
social worker	19	2,9
seamstress	16	2,5
nurse	16	2,1
self-employed	15	2,1
designer/illustrator	14	2,0
accountant	12	1,8
doctor	11	1,6
craftswoman	10	1,4
sales clerk	10	1,3
manager	10	1,3
physical therapist	9	1,3
professor	8	1,2
entrepreneur	6	1,0
chef	4	0,8
architect	4	0,5
janitor	4	0,5
farmer	3	0,5
pharmacist	3	0,4
lawyer	3	0,4
hotel owner	2	0,4
law enforcement agent	2	0,4
sales representative	2	0,3
tax advisor	2	0,3
other*	14	2,0
not responded	5	0,7
	767	

* other professions specified:
unemployed, municipal police officer, railroad worker, bartender, obstetrician, security guard, toy librarian, nanny, insurance agent, call centre operator, naturalist, engineer, farm hand, agronomist

11. Indicate your mother's educational qualification

secondary school	278	36,2
university degree	167	21,8
middle school	146	19,0
primary school	47	6,1
academic diploma	5	0,7
no title	4	0,5
PhD	1	0,1
other	12	1,6
I don't remember	93	12,1
did not respond	14	1,8
	767	

12. What is (was) your father's profession?

employee	139	18,1
worker	68	8,9
manager	39	5,0
teacher	38	4,9
self-employed	37	4,8
storekeeper	30	3,9
entrepreneur	30	3,9
craftsman	30	3,9
doctor	26	3,4
designer/illustrator	23	3,0
architect	20	2,6
professor	18	2,3
engineer	17	2,2
surveyor	16	2,1
law enforcement agent	16	2,1
sales representative	15	2,0
mechanic	13	1,7
nurse	10	1,3
programmer	10	1,3
railroad worker	10	1,3
truck driver	7	0,9
electrician	7	0,9
farmer	6	0,8
retired	6	0,8
chef	5	0,6
dentist	4	0,5
chemist	4	0,5
janitor/porter	4	0,5
administrator	3	0,4
insurance agent	3	0,4
unemployed	3	0,4
lawyer	3	0,4
consultant	3	0,4
driver	3	0,4
plumber	3	0,4
sound technician	3	0,4
decorator	3	0,4
car electrician	2	0,3
pilot	2	0,3
tax advisor	2	0,3
body shop worker	2	0,3
carpenter	2	0,3
butcher	2	0,3
radiologist	2	0,3
other*	59	7,7
did not respond	19	2,5
	767	

* some of the other professions specified:
condominium administrator, agronomist, goldsmith, port worker, public health inspector, optician, lifeguard, bartender, unionist, accountant, administrator, pastry cook, musician, geologist, baker, biologist, economist, hotel owner, herbalist, farm hand, shepherd

13. Indicate your father's educational qualification

secondary school	288	37,5
university degree	184	24,0
middle school	128	16,7
primary school	41	5,3
PhD	5	0,7
academic diploma	2	0,3
no title	2	0,3
other	5	0,7
I don't remember	93	12,1
did not respond	19	2,5
	767	

14. Are your parents or grandparents immigrants?

no	672	87,6
yes	44	5,7
just one of them	35	4,6
other	7	0,9
did not respond	9	1,2
	767	

WORKING CONDITIONS (15-34)

One out of three works more than one job

Among the participants who considers himself/herself as a "designer," the majority manages to work in his/her field of expertise (both as freelancer and employee), but for more than a third it is necessary to supplement their wages by carrying out other jobs. Among secondary jobs and occasional services, designers, after their primary working hours, are employed in a variety of sectors.

The VAT number blackmail

About 40% of designers have registered a VAT number at least once, and among them the percentage is high (33%), of those who registered on a more or less direct request from the studio in which they are working or worked. This data, compared to the percentage related to the types of contracts, shows that in all likelihood, many designers with a VAT number work in a studio according to modalities that are characteristic of people on a stable contract (set hours, scheduled vacations, work on location), but without enjoying the social protection such contracts guarantee (regular wages, maternity/paternity leave, sick leave, etcetera).

A network of contacts is essential

The network of contacts and direct relationships to people seem fundamental to obtain design commissions: in 26% of cases, one obtains such jobs through friendships and in 28% of cases, thanks to previous collaborations. Entrepreneurialism (such as proposing your services to a potential client) and word of mouth seem to be a valid supplementary tools for accessing work.

15. In what area is your main professional occupation?

design	589	76,8
I don't work	90	11,7
other*	81	10,6
did not respond	7	0,9
	767	

* some other areas specified:
catering industry, journalism, construction industry, photography, security/surveillance, retail trade, business development

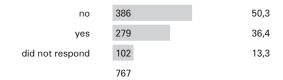## 16. What is your main professional position?

freelancer	317	41,3
employee	169	22,0
studio owner	81	10,6
intern	59	7,7
other	42	5,5
did not respond	99	12,9
	767	

17. Do you have a contract?

no	443	57,8
yes, specify*	216	28,2
did not respond	108	14,0
	767	

*		
Co.co.pro.	53	27,1
open-ended contract	50	25,6
fixed-term contract	25	12,8
apprenticeship	14	7,2
educational placement	11	5,6
occasional collaboration	10	5,1
consultation with VAT	7	3,6
bursary or research fellowships	5	2,6
on-call contract	5	2,6
Co.co.co.	3	1,5
other	12	6,1
total contracts specified	195	

18.1. Do you have a second occupation?

no	386	50,3
yes	279	36,4
did not respond	102	13,3
	767	

18.2. If yes, in what area is your secondary profession?

design	153	54,8
other*	126	45,1
	279	

* some other areas specified:
restoration, teaching, agriculture, photography, copywriting, translation, baby sitting, engineering, catering industry

19. If you have a secondary profession, what is your professional position?

freelancer	171	61,3
employee	27	9,7
studio owner	10	3,6
intern	5	1,8
other	53	19,0
did not respond	13	4,7
	279	

20. If you have a secondary profession, do you have a contract?

no	216	77,4
yes, specify*	56	20,0
did not respond	7	2,5
	279	
*		
Co.co.pro. (project collaboration)	11	22,4
occasional collaboration	10	20,4
fixed-term contract	8	16,3
on-call contract	6	12,2
consultation with VAT	4	8,1
open-ended contract	2	4,1
Co.co.co. (project collaboration)	2	4,1
research fellowship	1	2,0
educational placement	1	2,0
other	4	8,1
total contracts specified	49	

21. Do you have additional jobs?

no	367	47,8
yes, specify*	297	38,7
did not respond	103	13,4
	767	
*		
graphic designer	31	17,0
teacher/university lecturer	14	7,7
promoter/hostess	10	5,5
waiter	9	4,9
private tutor	8	4,4
web designer	7	3,8
various jobs	7	3,8
musician	6	3,3
baby sitter	5	2,7
consultant	4	2,2
illustrator	4	2,2
rendering and photoshop technician	4	2,2

animator	3	1,6
bartender	3	1,6
interior designer	3	1,6
photographer	3	1,6
journalist	3	1,6
seamstress	2	1,6
warehouse keeper	2	1,1
craftsman	2	1,1
farm hand	2	1,1
events organiser	2	1,1
dealer	2	1,1
receptionist	2	1,1
other	43	23,6
total jobs specified	182	

22. Have you registered a VAT number as a freelance worker?

no	369	48,0
yes	301	39,2
did not respond	97	12,7
	767	

23. If yes, why did you register a VAT number?

personal necessity	200	66,4
on request of the studio	98	32,6
other	3	1,0
	301	

24. How are you usually accessing commissioned work?

people I already worked with	437	27,8
friends	409	26,0
public tender or pitches	184	11,7
relatives	125	8,0
networking events	97	6,2
I don't work on commission	77	4,9
ads	74	4,7
proposing collaborations	12	0,8
word of mouth	12	0,8
contacted by client	9	0,6
personal website	8	0,5
social networks	7	0,4
thanks to past work	4	0,3
other	7	0,4
did not respond	110	7,0
	1572	

IT HAPPENS THAT I MAKE UP MY INCOME AS A BARTENDER, DECORATOR, SOCIAL WORKER, NIGHT GUARDIAN, WAREHOUSE KEEPER.

"Junior" salaries for ever?

Most participants work on average between 35 and 55 hours a week, in other words from 7 to 11 hours per day, within a hypothetical "5-day working week."

The designer's average net salary tends to be lower than the national average: if an Italian worker monthly makes about 1,300 €/month (data: Istat 2011), the majority of designers earn less than 1,000 €/month.

However, it is necessary to note that (again according to Istat data) in the first two years of work, juniors or new recruits generally receive wages clearly inferior to their older fellow workers, equivalent to about 900 €/month. Considering the relatively young age of the participants to this inquiry, they could be included in the last income bracket mentioned, but even in that case the question remains: for how long are designers paid as "juniors" or "new recruits" within the context of the creative industries?

Unpaid overtime and irregular income

Most designers are paid monthly or at the end of the project but often with a delay. This fact allows us to deduce that for freelancers or designers on project-related contracts, this results in the difficulty of maintaining steady earnings inasmuch as payments vary according to the client's schedule and obviously, on the duration of the project. In 56% of cases, overtime does not get paid or is paid only occasionally; when paid, a standard rate is most often applied, and not an overtime rate, or work is traded with "favours and flexibility on leave and being late, concert tickets or free time."

The monetary value of one's work is determined in a rather confused way according to the circumstances: the most widespread modality is a calculation relative to the type of project (for 30%), followed by the effective working time (for 23%) and on a pre-set budget basis (for 21%). Very few people follow scales of fees, a tool which could, if up-dated and flexible, be an efficient strategy to fight the market logic, which aims at depressing fees. The German association of communication designers BDG (Berufsverband der Deutschen Kommunikationsdesigner) for instance, created for its members an online instrument to calculate a hypothetical fee for each project, adding up more entries at the same time (hours and kind of work, needed overtime, material cost, etcetera).

25. How many hours are you working on average in a week?

less than 10 hours	38	5,0
between 19 and 15 hours	25	3,3
between 15 and 25 hours	35	4,6
between 25 and 35 hours	68	8,9
between 35 and 45 hours	173	22,6
between 45 and 55 hours	159	20,7
between 55 and 60 hours	82	10,7
between 60 and 65 hours	42	5,5
between 65 and 75 hours	23	3,0
more than 75 hours	21	2,7
did not respond	101	13,2
	767	

26. What is your annual average net income? (€)

0	42	5,5
less than 1,000	61	8,0
between 1,000 and 5,000	129	16,8
between 5,000 and 10,000	93	12,1
between 10,000 and 15,000	131	17,1
between 15,000 and 20,000	81	10,6
between 20,000 and 25,000	46	6,0
between 25,000 and 30,000	44	5,7
between 30,000 and 35,000	13	1,7
between 35,000 and 45,000	14	1,8
between 45,000 and 55,000	7	0,9
between 55,000 and 75,000	4	0,5
between 75,000 and 100,000	1	0,1
more than 150,000	1	0,1
did not respond	100	13,0
	767	

27. Your salary/compensation is paid...

monthly	248	27,7
at the end of a project, with a delay	229	25,6
at the end of the project	175	19,6
monthly and with a delay	71	7,9
other	68	7,6
did not respond	104	11,6
	895	

IF I WASN'T SUPPORTED BY MY PARENTS, I'D HAVE TO QUIT STUDYING, AND WOULD NEED TO STOP WORKING IN THE FIELD OF DESIGN INASMUCH AS THE FIRST EXPERIENCES NEVER GET PAID ENOUGH TO MAKE AN AUTONOMOUS LIVING.

28. Are you paid for your overtime?

no	428	55,8
not always	160	20,9
yes	58	7,6
did not respond	121	15,8
	767	

29. If you are paid your overtime, you are paid...

a regular rate	121	55,5
overtime rate	47	21,6
other*	29	13,3
did not respond	21	9,6
	218	

* some of the other recompensation specified:
favours and flexibility on leave and being late, concert tickets, agreed remuneration, medium-low rate, fixed payment

30. How do you determine the monetary value of your work?

according to the typology of work	394	29,7
according to the hours of work	301	22,7
according to a prearranged budget	275	20,7
according to an approximation	136	10,2
according to a scale of fees	79	5,9
other	33	2,5
did not respond	110	8,2
	1328	

31. If you are defining the monetary value of your work based on a scale of fees, which are you using?

AIAP	41	56,9
professional association	14	19,4
ADI	7	9,7
scale of fees shared online	4	5,5
scale of fees of other countries	2	2,7
TAU Visual	2	2,7
Associazione Illustratori	1	1,4
ADEGRAF	1	1,4
total scales of fees specified	72	

Key:
AIAP – Associazione Italiana Design della Comunicazione Visiva
ADI – Associazione per il Disegno Industriale
TAU Visual – Associazione Nazionale Fotografi Professionisti
ADEGRAF – Associação dos Designers Gráficos do Distrito Federal

Autonomy? Still a mirage

A third of the designers declared that they rely on the help of their family circle and friends in order to make it to the end of the month, specifying that this support has been or still is essential to continue studying and to not abandon this profession. Another third is composed of those who barely square the balance sheet, who have debts or took out a bank loan, and who have to use personal savings to make a living. So on the whole, only 16% of designers are able to count on an autonomous, "well-off" economic situation, managing to accumulate savings.

32. What is your overall financial situation at the moment?

I'm receiving help from relatives/friends	366	34,2
I'm just about squaring the books	201	18.8
I have to use my savings	160	14,9
I'm able to save a little	145	13,5
I have debts	76	7,0
I have a mortgage	70	6,5
I'm able to save a fair bit	25	2,3
I'm able to save a lot	5	0,5
other	4	0,4
did not respond	19	1,8
	1071	

33. Did you incur debt for financing your studies?

no	666	86,8
yes	79	10,3
other	7	0,9
did not respond	15	2,0
	767	

34. If you could not count on the help of anyone, what would your financial condition look like?

I would have debts	248	32,3
I would just square the books	125	16,3
I would need to use my savings	108	14,0
I would need to get a loan	45	5,9
I would be able to save a little	22	2,9
I would be able to save a fair bit	7	0,9
I would be able to save a lot	1	0,1
other	47	6,1
did not respond	164	21,4
	767	

INTERNSHIP (35-43)

Who can afford it?

70% of participants carried out at least one internship in their life, a great majority of which were unpaid.

The collected answers underline that, in the case of internships without payment or with minimum payment, young designers often face two options: relying on family and friends who are able to help them economically (41% of cases), or work before/during the internship, in order to be able to carry out the internship itself (25% of cases). Considering that many choose a big city for their first work experience (Milan being the first choice), the required investment to undertake an internship turns out to be high, both on an economic level (rent, transportation, basic needs) and on a personal level (energy and commitment). At this point, it seems crucial to ask: are the expectations that justify such an onerous investment satisfied in terms of acquired experiences and working perspectives?

35. Did you ever do an internship? Why?*

yes	533	69,5
no	225	29,4
did not respond	9	1,2
	767	

* Some of the motivations specified:

Yes. After just having finished my studies, it was the only way to approach the world of work.

Yes. Compulsory internship during my BA.

Yes. I believed it to be useful to enrich my knowledge, to fill gaps and to get to know the foreign market.

Yes. Because it was the only way to work.

No. Because no opportunity arose.

No. I don't trust this kind of formula much. Furthermore, I chose to live out of town and to work on my own, I could however consider it if it truly were significant for my formation and development.

No. Why work for free?

No. After my studies, I immediately started to work.

36. How many internships did you do?

1	267	50,1
2	173	32,5
3	57	10,7
4	16	3,0
more than 4	16	3,0
did not respond	4	0,8
	533	

37. For every internship you did, please specify the duration, city, area, pay and the educational qualification you held when applying for the internship. (semantic categories drawn from open answers)

City

Milan	256	33,3
Rome	46	5,0
Treviso	30	3,9
Turin	30	3,9
Florence	18	2,3
Venice	17	2,2
Naples	17	2,2
Bologna	16	2,0
London	12	1,6
Udine	11	1,4
Palermo	11	1,4
Bozen/Bolzano	9	1,2
Genoa	9	1,2
Padua	8	1,0
Bari	7	0,9
Paris	6	0,8
Amsterdam	6	0,8
Trieste	5	0,7
Caserta	5	0,7
Bergamo	5	0,7
Vicenza	5	0,7
Munich	5	0,7
Varese	4	0,5
Perugia	4	0,5
Verona	4	0,5
Siena	4	0,5
Forlì	4	0,5
Berlin	3	0,4
Ancona	3	0,4
Salerno	3	0,4
Macerata	3	0,4
other	203	26,4
total cities specified	769	

Duration

up to 3 months	454	63,0
3-6 months	210	29,1
6-12 months	47	6,5
more than 12 months	10	1,4
total durations specified	721	

Area

visual communication	339	44,5
architecture	111	14,6
design (not specified)	97	12,7
product design	46	6,0
interior/exhibit design	44	5,8
fashion and accessories	21	2,8
art	17	2,2
photography	10	1,3
craft	9	1,2
non profit organisation	6	0,8
service design	6	0,8
university/research	4	0,5
interaction design	3	0,4
other	49	6,4
total areas specified	762	

Pay (€)

0	410	55,6
up to 200	82	11,1
from 200 to 500	154	20,9
from 500 to 1,000	61	8,3
more than 1,000	8	1,1
expenses refund	16	2,2
other	7	0,9
total pays specified	738	

Educational qualification

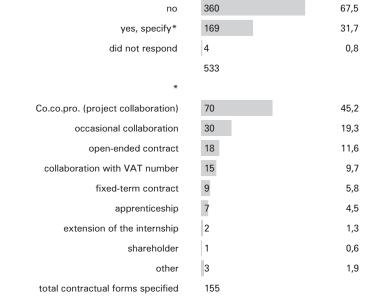|		
BA	333	46,9
secondary school	213	30,0
MA	111	15,6
postgraduate certificate	24	3,4
middle school	12	1,7
academic diploma	6	0,8
other	11	1,5
total qualifications specified	710	

Working relations: a distorted picture

Many young designers regard internships as the only viable option for finding work. Still, this opinion does not seem to be justified by facts: a mere 32% of internships lead to a contract with the same employer, where 'contract' stands for both hiring or collaborating with the former intern on a fixed term basis, the latter being much more frequent.

When confronted with the question "Did you feel exploited?" opinions diverge. Those who answer with a yes (47%), consider themselves as victims of exploitation, due to poor compensation for their work, regardless of the type of task performed. Those who answer "no" (48%) advance different types of reasons: passion (I like what I do), lack of preparation (I am not sufficiently skilled to be paid), a priori agreement (I can't complain since I agreed on these terms in the first place), obligation (it's part of my study curriculum, so it's ok not to get paid for it). These answers outline a distorted picture of a working relation in which interns feel like a burden to the employers and have to be thankful for any type of working condition offered. Consequently, asking for fair compensation is often accompanied by a sense of shame and shyness.

Among those criticising various forms of unpaid work, the approach of the Carrotworkers' Collective, a group of workers, students and interns of the cultural sector based in London, is particularly interesting: along with educational activities in universities, the collective has published a *Counter-Internship-Guide*, an anti-exploitation manual for interns, that is available for free download on their website.

⊠ ✐

38. Has one of your internships ever been followed by some form of employment/contract?

no	360	67,5
yes, specify*	169	31,7
did not respond	4	0,8
	533	

*

Co.co.pro. (project collaboration)	70	45,2
occasional collaboration	30	19,3
open-ended contract	18	11,6
collaboration with VAT number	15	9,7
fixed-term contract	9	5,8
apprenticeship	7	4,5
extension of the internship	2	1,3
shareholder	1	0,6
other	3	1,9
total contractual forms specified	155	

39. In case of an unpaid (or underpaid) internship, how did you sustain your living costs?

help from parents/friends	365	40,6
I used my savings	117	13,0
I earned money from another job	84	9,4
I had a bursary	35	3,9
I asked for a bank loan	4	0,4
other	9	1,0
did not respond	284	31,6
	898	

40. Do you think you have been exploited? Explain*

yes	261	49,0
no	248	46,5
in part	19	3,6
did not respond	5	0,9
	533	

* Some original comments:

With my employer I worked on several project as a peer collaborator and we discussed a lot. One of the graphic design commissions started during the internship has been handed over to me and I'm still continuing to work on it.

I finished a few projects that the studio has been carrying on for months without ever completing them, which resulted in profits of several thousand Euro.

Yes, but it was a necessary sacrifice for my growth.

It's just a phase in my life, that is, just before I graduate from my MA, when I need to gather more experience and get to know the world of work. It's my very first working experience, remuneration plays a secondary role.

No, because I really liked what they had me doing. That is most likely the only reason why I didn't feel exploited.

Very low remuneration for the responsibilities I was in charge of. It wasn't about making coffee and taking photocopies, but actual responsibilities. In the end, they did not teach me a thing, which I think is wrong: an internship ought to be a formative experience, whereas today trainees are treated like cheap manual workers.

41. Following your first internship, did you feel ready to enter the world of work? Explain*

no	192	36,0
yes	145	27,2
in part	62	11,6
other	58	10,9
did not respond	76	14,3
	533	

* Some original comments:

Yes, I have learned a lot about how to handle clients, manage a design studio and prepare presentations. In seven months' time, I really had learned a lot.
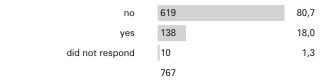
Not at all. During my internship, I have learned very little. They didn't bother teaching me and had me doing things I already knew how to do (graphic labour).

It depends on which type of employment you are talking about. As an employee, maybe, as self-employed probably not.
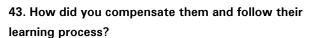
I was ready long before the internships. Internships were more like a way of taking advantage of my skills and didn't have any teaching purpose. Internships played down the importance of my potentialities and deprived me of the desire to put myself on the line in the world of work.

The internship I took helped me figure out what may await me in real life and made me aware of the difficulties and responsibilities of a graphic designer, but also of the choices and opportunities I may encounter.

42. Did you ever have any interns?

no	619	80,7
yes	138	18,0
did not respond	10	1,3
	767	

43. How did you compensate them and follow their learning process?

Some original comments:

Varying remuneration depending on the companies that took on trainees.

Usually I entrust them with tasks I get to follow step by step, without overloading them with responsibilities. I think they ought to learn on the job and I try to make them choose their own area of interest.

Remunerated according to the project, they get a chance to be completely immersed in the design process.

With cash in hand, they are entitled to one third of the profit, plus board and lodging.

I pay them when there's extra money, they are constantly involved in my job.

Since I couldn't afford to pay them (the profit margins of my projects weren't sufficient), I've tried to get them to work on pro bono jobs. Still, I've tried to see about them constantly.

AFTER MY INTERNSHIP I WAS READY TO ENTER A CONTEXT WHERE THE JOB OF THE DESIGNER IS MERELY AN EXECUTIVE ONE. IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A DIFFERENT APPROACH, WHERE THE FOCUS WOULD BE ON THE PROJECT'S METHODOLOGY, I WOULD HAVE HAD TO START ALL OVER. THIS SPECIFIC CONTEXT SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED EARLIER, THOUGH.

SATISFACTION (44-48)

A crowd of enthusiasts

Almost all designers are extremely fond of their work, even though few of them experience fulfilment in regards to their initial ambitions. However, the satisfaction in regards to the goals, procedures and working conditions is medium-high.

Interest and enthusiasm appear to be the main motivations of the profession: 61% of designers would not change their study curriculum, even though their education is thought to be only partially useful in regards to professional goals and despite the precarious working conditions provided by the market.

44. Are you satisfied with your work in relation to...

its aim

very much	126	16,4
much	221	28,8
sufficiently	234	30,5
little	98	12,8
not at all	21	2,7
N/A	38	5,0
did not respond	29	3,8
	767	

the workign conditions

very much	58	7,6
much	121	15,8
sufficiently	232	30,3
little	203	26,5
not at all	81	10,6
N/A	42	5,4
did not respond	30	3,9
	767	

the modalities of executing work

very much	57	7,4
much	159	20,7
sufficiently	292	38,1
little	153	19,9
not at all	39	5,1
N/A	36	4,7
did not respond	31	4,0
	767	

the passion you have for your work

very much	375	48,9
much	200	26,0
sufficiently	84	11,0
little	26	3,9
not at all	13	1,7
N/A	32	4,2
did not respond	37	4,8
	767	

45. How rewarded do you feel in relation to your ambitions?

very much	13	1,7
much	90	11,7
sufficiently	276	36,0
little	265	34,6
not at all	83	10,8
N/A	26	3,4
did not respond	14	1,9
	767	

46. Has your education been useful for the kind of work you are currently carrying out?

very much	100	13,0
much	209	27,3
sufficiently	240	31,3
little	116	15,1
not at all	45	5,9
N/A	32	4,2
did not respond	25	3,3
	767	

WHO AM I?
WHERE AM I DIRECTED?
WHAT DO I DO?
UNIVERSITY DIDN'T GIVE ME A CLUE!

47. If you could, would you change your choice of studies?

no	467	60,9
yes, explain*	265	34,6
did not respond	35	4,6
	767	

* Some original comments:

I lack the theoretical knowledge (I'm more of an autodidact here) and the network of acquaintances that is generated during university.

I'm afraid I only lost time with a not so trustworthy degree.

I would start with something more specific, maybe abroad.

It's a question I ask myself constantly. The work of a designer is a hard and underpaid one (at least at the beginning and in these times). In addition, it's very hard to enter the world of work, especially right after graduation. I really love this work, but it doesn't provide any economic stability and involves lots of stress. I don't know what I would have done alternatively… I am trying to figure out how to make the most of my degree in order to find a well-paid job that I like.

I'd take on something more practical and manual, most likely I wouldn't go to university.

I would try to integrate a few more humanistic subjects in my curriculum.

48. Would you like to change your current occupational condition?

continuing the work I do but improve my conditions	305	39,8
opening a studio or another activity	146	19,0
yes, finding work	108	14,0
I'm still studying	74	9,6
changing my profession	35	4,6
moving from being employed to freelance	33	4,3
moving from being freelance to employed	24	3,1
no, continuing the work I do until I retire	8	1,0
closing my studio	4	0,5
other	15	2,0
did not respond	15	2,0
	767	

WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH (49-66)

Modalities to re-evaluate

The majority of participant designers live in a large city in the North of Italy. For 44% of them, the work place (or the place where one would like to find a job) does not coincide with the place one would like to live.

The inquiry shows that 55% of designers work from a study or an office, a third of them takes work back home with them to do at night or during the weekend. The working environment appears to greatly influence the quality of life of designers and to work from home is considered by many to be claustrophobic and non-stimulating. Nevertheless, co-working (a style of work that allows designers to share working space, expenses, competences, relations and both financial and social counselling) does not have a high degree of diffusion.

49.1. Where do you work?

in Italy	667	87,0
abroad	67	8,7
did not respond	33	4,3
	767	

49.2. In Italy, you work...

in the North	502	66,2
Center	131	17,3
South	70	9,2
Islands	22	2,9
did not respond	33	4,4
	758	

50. The Italian city you mainly work in is...

big	323	42,1
medium	187	24,4
small	181	23,6
did not respond	76	10,0
	767	

51. Abroad you work...

in a metropolis	61	40,9
in a big city	51	34,2
in a medium-sized city	24	16,1
in a small city	13	8,7
	149	

52. Does the city you are working in (or where you think you will find work) correspond to the place where you would like to live?

no	338	44,1
yes	326	42,5
other	66	8,6
did not respond	37	4,8
	767	

53. You are mainly working from

home and office	275	35,9
office/studio	146	19,0
home	141	18,3
co-working space	63	8,2
studio of the client	12	1,6
bar	6	0,8
home of collaborators	5	0,7
library	5	0,7
workshop	5	0,7
train	4	0,5
public spaces	3	0,4
studio of friends	2	0,3
museum	1	0,1
shop	1	0,1
did not respond	98	12,8
	767	

54. What influence does your working environment have on you? (semantic categories drawn from open answers)

a lot of influence	468	61,0
medium influence	45	5,9
little/no influence	47	6,1
it depends	7	0,9
other	17	2,2
did not respond	183	23,9
	767	

Tireless designers

Flexibility is the current catchphrase of Italian designers: working hours and styles are adapted to the contingent necessities. A third of the participants eat while sitting at the computer, while half of them keep working late quite often. 45% of participants go on holiday only once a year.

Backache, prescription glasses and stress

Well over half the participants complain about work-related physical problems, mainly connected with computer use and a sedentary lifestyle (backache, visual disturbances). Among the psychological problems stress, anxiety, depression and sleeping disorders are prevailing.

A fair percentage of designers declare a patterned use of substances to improve their performance at work.

55. Does it happen that you eat while you work?

always	30	3,9
very often	95	12,4
often	101	13,2
sometimes	220	28,7
rarely	164	21,4
never	127	16,6
did not respond	30	
	767	

56. Does it happen that you work until late at night?

always	41	5,4
very often	143	18,6
often	147	19,2
sometimes	240	31,3
rarely	123	16,0
never	42	5,5
did not respond	31	4,0
	767	

57. How often are you going on holidays during a year?

never	79	10,3
once	343	44,7
twice	199	26,0
three times	59	7,7
more than three times	58	7,6
did not respond	29	3,8
	767	

58. For how long are you going on holidays?

two weeks	149	19,4
one week	114	14,9
ten days	89	11,6
some days	67	8,7
three weeks	60	7,8
one month	59	7,7
more than one month	33	4,3
it depends	25	3,3
other	25	3,3
never	4	0,5
did not respond	142	18,5
	767	

59. Do you have physical problems related to your work?

yes, specify*	404	52,7
no	335	43,7
did not respond	28	3,7
	767	

* Semantic categories drawn from open answers:

back pain	264	38,6
problems with eyesight	181	26,5
joints	135	19,7
headache	45	6,6
digestive problems	14	2,0
posture issues	5	0,7
circulation problems	5	0,7
problems related to sedentary work	5	0,7
limbs: inflammation and pain	4	0,6
tiredness	4	0,6
cutaneous conditions and dermatitis	3	0,4
other	19	2,8
total problems specified	684	

Some of the problems specified:
colitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, lack of muscle tone, arthritis of the hands, dizziness, psoriasis, tennis elbow, sciatica, low back pain, tinnitus, gastric reflux, gastritis, cervical osteoarthritis, stress-related dermatitis, low immune system, stomach ache, spinal disc herniation, haemorrhoids, muscle fatigue

HAVING YOUR STUDIO AT HOME OFTEN MAKES ONE FEEL CLAUSTROPHOBIC. ONE RISKS BEING TRAPPED INSIDE FOR DAYS. IN ADDITION, I OFTEN WORK LATE OR SKIP LUNCH. HAVING A SEPARATE AND DEDICATED WORKING SPACE ALLOWS A HEALTHIER DAILY LIFE AND A WORKING ROUTINE, STILL, IT IS UNECONOMIC FOR FREELANCERS: WHY PAY DOUBLE RENT AND DOUBLE INTERNET CONNECTIONS?

60. Do you have psychological problems related to your work?

no	409	53,3
yes, specify*	324	42,2
did not respond	34	4,4
	767	

* Semantic categories drawn from open answers:

stress	266	44,3
anxiety and panic attacks	183	30,4
depression	73	12,1
sleeping disorders	17	2,8
nervousness and impatience	14	2,3
dissatisfaction	10	1,7
frustration and anger	7	1,2
tiredness	5	0,8
unstable mood	4	0,7
sadness and solitude	3	0,5
a sense of inadequacy and confusion	3	0,5
fear and worry	3	0,5
low self-esteem and insecurity	2	0,3
apathy and alienation	2	0,3
other	9	1,5
total problems specified	601	

Some of the problems specified:
tics, fit of tears, irritability, agressivness, neurosis, memory issues, bipolar disorder, low sexual desire, sense of emptiness, restlessness, angst, lack of appetite, discouragement, I only think of work, chronic irritability

61. Did you go through a period of psychological unease after having graduated?

no	532	69,4
yes, why?*	190	24,8
did not respond	45	5,9
	767	

* Semantic categories drawn from open answers:

difficulty of finding work	28	17,8
disorientation/insecurity of how to go about things	22	14,0
dissatisfaction regarding the job I found	16	10,2
insecuirty of being able to find a job	16	10,2
anxiety about the future	11	7,0
lack of preparation at university level regarding the world of work	8	5,1

difficulty of finding work appropriate for my degree of education	8	5,1
doubts on the appropriateness of my studies	8	5,1
contrast between life at university and at work	7	4,5
identity crisis	7	4,5
reduction of the pressure to work	3	1,9
other	23	14,6
total motivations specified	157	

Some original comments:

Stress due to precarious work and lack of a fixed income with related debt accumulation.

I felt lost and confused. I didn't know what I wanted, but I think it is very common to feel a bit lost at the end of your time at university. Back then, I often found myself questioning myself, if I really wanted to work in the field of communication.

Anxiety of not being able to live up to the requirements of the world of work.

I didn't have a clue what to do, where to look, that's why I opted for a masters' degree instead.

Slightly unsatisfied with my years at university.

Little hope for the future.

62. Are you making use of substances to improve your performance at work?

no	438	57,1
yes, specify*	303	39,5
did not respond	26	3,4
	767	
*		
coffee	267	66,3
energy drinks	30	7,4
nutritional supplements	22	5,5
cannabis	19	4,7
alcohol	18	4,5
tobacco	16	4,0
tea	12	3,0
non specified drugs	4	1,0
painkillers	3	0,7
non specified medicines	3	0,7
antidepressants	1	0,2
cocaine	1	0,2
performance-enhancing drugs	1	0,2
Ritalin	1	0,2
other	5	1,2
total substances specified	403	

Coffee like it's raining, a sea of Red Bull.

A cup of coffee in the morning and one after lunch, I wouldn't call this "patterned use of substances."

Marijuana and booze, mainly in the phase of brainstorming.

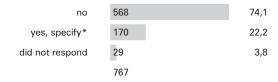Coffee, four times a day during the more relaxed phases. Valerian at night to help me get some sleep.

Mum or designer?

22% of Italian designers say they feel discriminated against at work, mainly related to gender, geographic provenance, personality and lack of strategic social relations. Gender-related discrimination doesn't affect male participants, while it affects a third of females.

Having children emerges as the main obstacle between young female designers and professional fulfilment. Comments show how childbirth has very different consequences for males and females working in the same occupation. While designer-mothers feel less competitive on the market, not being able to feed as much energy and time into projects as before, the fathers among our participants feel that they were able to regain a healthy work-life balance thanks to their children, even though many complain about the fact that they don't get to spend enough time with them.

Among the childless, half declare they just couldn't afford having children in their current working situation. In this case too, women seem to express the most difficulties.

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63. Within the world of design, did you ever feel discriminated against?

no	568	74,1
yes, specify*	170	22,2
did not respond	29	3,8
	767	

***** Semantic categories drawn from open answers:**

female:

gender	42	29,8
social contacts	22	15,6
character	14	9,9
geographical origin	10	7,1
education and competences	8	5,7
opinion	5	3,5
age	5	3,5
sexual orientation	4	2,8
having children	4	2,8
social background	3	2,1
economic condition	3	2,1
disability and illness	2	1,4
professional position	2	1,4
religious orientation	2	1,4
look and outfit	1	0,7
linguistic competences	1	0,7
political orientation	1	0,7
kind of design produced	1	0,7
other	11	7,8
total motivations specified	141	

male:

social contacts	17	23,9
character	11	15,5
geographical origin	7	9,9
social background	5	7,0
professional position	4	5,6
look and outfit	4	5,6
education and competences	3	4,2
opinion	2	2,8
having children	1	1,4
disability and illness	1	1,4
age	1	1,4
gender	1	1,4
political orientation	1	1,4
sexual orientation	1	1,4
religious orientation	1	1,4
kind of design produced	1	1,4
linguistic competences	0	0
economic condition	0	0
other	7	9,9
total motivations specified	71	

Some original comments:

Often, just because you're a woman, people tend to consider you less worthy.

During my PhD in architecture my degree in design didn't help, because it was considered a shampooist. Being a woman can be an obstacle in many areas, not so much in the cultural area, where I work now.

When you're from the South of Italy and your family doesn't have much money you get indirectly discriminated against, not so much because of the environment but more because you lack the money to invest into your own projects and people don't respect you as long as you don't have your own product to sell.

Because of my introverted personality and because I am not always as outgoing as one ought to be.

Relations and PR always seemed more important than actual designing skills.

GENDER-RELATED DISCRIMINATION: I CAN'T RECALL ANY INTERVIEW DURING WHICH I HAVEN'T BEEN PUT UNDER PRESSURE IN RELATION TO A POSSIBLE FUTURE PREGNANCY, EVEN AT THE DESIGN STUDIO WHERE I WORK NOW, LED BY TWO WOMEN.

64. Do you know people who dropped out of the design profession?

yes, do you know why?*	391	51,0
no	352	46,0
did not respond	24	3,1
	767	

* Semantic categories drawn from open answers:

economic difficulties and precariousness	93	32,0
difficulty in entering the labour market	67	23,0
to much stress, competition and anxiety	38	13,0
to start another activity/other plans	19	6,5
disappointment and dissatisfaction	16	5,5
ceased loving this profession	12	4,1
for a more balanced life or for having a family	11	3,8
impossibility of professional/ economic development	9	3,0
negative working environment and stressful working patterns	6	2,0
inability to face a situation of difficulty	4	1,4
ethics: to avoid commercial compromises	3	1,0
other	13	4,5
total motivations specified	291	

Some original comments:

Because of the job insecurity, shameless exploitation and creative stress.

Mainly women: they just couldn't keep up with work because they had a family to take care of.

90% of my fellow students. There's not enough room for everyone, even more so when the new generations excel in their technical skills (but not in the creative ones).

Because they didn't love their work as much as before: having to talk to the marketing department instead of the client, contracts being awarded on the basis of personal relations, directors being less competent than employees.

65. If you have children, how does this influence your working life? (semantic categories drawn from open answers)

difficulty of reconciling work and family	22	28,9
positive influence	17	22,4
little influence	11	14,5
sacrifices: money and time-wise	4	5,3
my role has been reduced	2	2,6
I lost my job	1	1,3
other	19	25,0
total influences specified	76	

Some original comments – female voices

Extremely hard to handle during the first 15 years, then there is an improvement.

No maternity leave for me, I had to work full hours even after giving birth, I only took a break between three and six months after birth, after that I hired a nanny before finally signing up my child for a costly nursery.

Some original comments – male voices

I'd love to be able to spend more time with my daughter, it's just not possible if I want to make ends meet.

I have a seven-months-old, for now, aside from some tiredness, which is largely outbalanced by joy and happiness, having kids didn't influence my working routine.

66. Do you think your working conditions would allow you to have children?

not now, but maybe in the future	306	39,9
absolutely not	154	20,1
yes, with some compromises	101	13,7
yes, with huge compromises	96	12,5
yes, no problem	38	5,0
other	36	4,7
did not respond	36	4,7
	767	

Some original comments:

Not more than one, I think. I've one already and it's really hard.

My income is still too low to afford a family. When I'll be "rich", that is, when my personal income will guarantee some financial security, we might reconsider.

No, but I can't wait for a whole life.

FIGURE OF THE DESIGNER (67-69)

A sense of incomprehension

Designers feel like their role isn't sufficiently acknowledged within the context they live and operate in. This is further outlined by some adjectives they use when describing someone else's opinion of their profession, like "fun" and "indefinable." In their answers to the open-ended questions, a fair number of designers interrogate themselves about the chances offered by design as critical instrument. Self-reflection on their own profession and role appears to be rather frequent.

67. Do you think in society the figure and role of the designer is understood?

very much	4	0,5
much	15	1,9
sufficiently	59	7,7
little	372	48,5
not at all	235	30,6
I don't know	77	10,0
did not respond	5	0,7
	767	

Some original comments:

Often, the whole creative process isn't even taken into consideration, just because this part of the work isn't as tangible as the labour of a factory worker.

I believe people don't have the slightest idea of what a designer does and for which necessities he or she caters.

Way too often we get treated as the bottom of the heap. The designer's role isn't considered to be an essential element in the task.

68. Do you have any thoughts on the ways designers relate to society?

Some original comments:

My aim is to bring critical thinking into my work. Sometimes, though, I fail, which makes me look like that type of designer I personally despise, but that I occasionally turn into. Every time I succeed in stepping away from this specific way of doing my work by challenging the hurdles of the market and choosing the less trodden path, I get the feeling of truly moving forward along the path of my profession.

I think there should be days of confrontation and open debate to deliver the message about what we really do and establish a dialogue with other realities and professions. That would be awesome.

We build imaginaries.

Designers who are conscious of the incomprehension of their role tend to perform at their best when they keep to themselves, without trying to approach people in the street. These works, which are noticeable, result in an act of self-celebration, and act against the principle of design for all, which should be our purpose.

I believe that the role of the designer is not a univocal one. The differences in the resulting approaches and practices depend on the grade of self-consciousness of each one of us in our daily life and in our connection with society.

People have their own approach, I'm not questioning that. Generally speaking, I think that the more designers get involved with society, the better the chances that, in the future, society will start taking an interest in the role of designers.

Lamentably, there has been a lot of confusion about the role of designers within popular imagination. Most people think that being able to use Photoshop on a computer makes you a designer.

69. With what adjectives would your family/friends describe your work? (semantic categories drawn from open answers)

creative	259	41,1
graphic designer/architect/artist	88	13,0
enjoyable/a game/easy	62	9,8
they don't know how to define it	60	9,5
interesting	51	8,0
paid little/precarious	45	7,1
useless/superfluous	36	5,7
demanding	15	2,4
strange	14	2,2
total adjectives specified	630	

Some of the adjectives specified:
different, eccentric, imaginative, cool, frivolous, brilliant, futuristic, tiring, uncertain, messy, incomprehensible, inconsistent, innovative, light, marginal, modern, multimedial, nerdy, boring, incredible, little profitable, polyhedric, exploitative, stylish, stressful, utopian, visionary

IN 90% OF CASES, THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER IS COMPLETELY STEREOTYPED AND CONNECTED WITH THE FAMOUS DESIGNERS OF THE FIFTIES OR THE DESIGN OF LUXURY OBJECTS AND FASHION.

ORGANISATION (70-77)

Uninformed, divided and vulnerable

Among designers competition is seen as a rather noticeable factor and the struggles around work suffer from it: almost no designer knows about cases of strike or sabotage within the profession. On the other hand, how to refuse a service or resort to sabotage, when, as in the case of freelancers, we are entrepreneurs of the self?

At the same time, university often neglects the importance of informing students about legal and practical aspects involved in their future profession. The result of this is that a majority of designers aren't informed about their rights and don't participate in organisations for cultural workers, which are, by the way, extremely rare to be found in Italy. ACTA (Associazione Consulenti Terziario Avanzato, Association of consultants of the advanced tertiary sector), just to name one, is a voluntary, non profit organisation with the aim of defending and endorsing especially those freelance professional services which are non-regulated, through counselling, education and peer support. Drawing inspiration from this, could we start conceiving of new types of self-administered and inclusive groups, which are able to protect precarious workers and freelancers in the creative and knowledge sectors?

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70. Do you think that there is competition between designers?

much	305	39,8
quite some	286	37,3
depends on the situation	105	13,7
little	43	5,6
not at all	5	0,7
other	4	0,5
did not respond	19	2,5
	767	

Some original comments:

Competition is determined by both study and work environments: when people avoid cooperation, instead of aiming at it; when you are immersed in a climate of terror; when you fear you will get the sack because someone else is replacing you.

Competition arises when there is little work and working conditions are unstable. This is why we often end up fighting one against the other, despite the fact that we are all in the same sinking boat and that there are far better ways of obtaining more.

71. Can you tell us the name of an organisation/group/union that protects the rights of designers?

no	523	68,2
yes, specify*	227	29,6
did not respond	17	2,2
	767	

*

AIAP	129	45,1
ADI	103	36,0
ACTA	10	3,5
ADCI	7	2,4
AIGA (USA)	4	1,4
AIPI	3	1,0
AGI	3	1,0
ICOGRADA	3	1,0
Associazione Illustratori	3	1,0
SLC-CGIL	2	0,7
BEDA (EU)	2	0,7
ADG (USA)	1	0,3
ADEGRAF (BRA)	1	0,3
Serpica Naro	1	0,3
Quinto Stato	1	0,3
Maison des Artistes (FR)	1	0,3
ADIQ (CA)	1	0,3
Anonima Fumetti	1	0,3
Assografici	1	0,3
BDG (DE)	1	0,3
designaustria (AT)	1	0,3
TARGET (South Tyrol)	1	0,3
BNO (NL)	1	0,3
Design Council (UK)	1	0,3
Creative Commons	1	0,3
Ordine degli Architetti	1	0,3
Associazione TP	1	0,3
others	1	0,3
total organisations specified	286	

Key
AIAP – Associazione Italiana Design della Comunicazione Visiva
ADI – Associazione per il Disegno Industriale
ACTA – Associazione Consulenti Terziario Avanzato
ADCI – Art Directors Club Italiano
AIGA – American Institute of Graphic Arts
AIPI – Associazione Italiana Progettisti d'Interni
AGI – Agenzia Giornalistica Italia
ICOGRADA – International Council of Graphic Design Associations
SLC-CGIL – Sindacato Lavoratori Comunicazione
BEDA – Bureau of European Design Associations
ADG – Art Directors Guild
ADEGRAF – Associação dos Designers Gráficos do Distrito Federal
ADIQ – Association des Designers Industriels du Québec
BDG – Berufsverband der Deutschen Kommunikationsdesigner
BNO – Beroepsorganisatie Nederlandse Ontwerpers
Associazione TP – Associazione Italiana Pubblicitari Professionisti

THE ONLY STRIKE I HAVE EVER HEARD OF IS MY OWN: A FEW COLLEAGUES AND I DECIDED TO STRIKE AND ASK FOR A BETTER DEFINITION OF OUR RIGHTS DURING PREGNANCY, ACCIDENT OR SICK LEAVE.

72. Are you part of an organisation/group/union that protects the rights of designers?

no	690	90,0
yes, specify*	57	7,4
did not respond	20	2,6
	767	

*		
AIAP	30	57,7
ADI	6	11,5
Ordine degli Architetti	6	11,5
ACTA	3	5,8
Sindacato Verdi	1	1,9
BNO	1	1,9
CISL	1	1,9
Serpica Naro	1	1,9
San Precario	1	1,9
ADCI	1	1,9
other	1	1,9
total organisations specified	52	

73. How informed are you of your rights as a worker?

much	26	3,4
quite much	168	21,9
little	423	55,2
not at all	139	18,1
did not respond	11	1,4
	767	

74. Are you part of a pension scheme?

no	418	54,5
yes	332	43,3
did not respond	17	2,2
	767	

75. In case of an illness, accident or pregnancy etc., would you be entitled to some sort of remuneration?

no	538	70,1
yes	181	23,6
did not respond	48	6,3
	767	

76. Do you know of any cases of workers' strikes within the field of design?

no	734	95,7
yes, specify*	18	2,4
did not respond	15	2,0
	767	

* Strikes cited:

Design No Stop was an alternative form of protest by design students and professors at the Politecnico of Milan against the proposed decree law by Minister Gelmini. The protest was aimed at making proposals for the Faculty's future.

Four years ago, while I was working at a design studio, I stopped showing up at work because our wages weren't being paid.

77. Do you know of any cases of sabotage by designers at their workplace?

no	720	93,9
yes, specify*	28	3,7
did not respond	19	2,5
	767	

* Cases of sabotage cited:

Employees contacted the employer's clients privately in order to "steal" jobs from the design studio they worked at.

Stealing of corporate material, including clients' contacts.

Slowing down of workflow or quality reduction of own work in response to anti-unionist behaviour of the employer.

78. What question did you miss? Do you have any other comments?

Some original comments:

Do your clients sign a contract when they hire you? If so, who helped you draw it up?

Did you ever agree to work for free even full-time?

Do you work for cash in hand?

What could be done to improve designers' working conditions?

How much does your degree really count when it comes to enter the world of work?

What does it mean to succeed in your work?

What is the first thing that crosses your mind when you wake up?

Do you deem it discriminating not to own a studio?

What role does the computer play in your work? How much do you use it? In which ways does it influence you?

Do you think you will be able to stay and work in Italy? Are you considering emigration?

What can designers offer to our society?

Why do you think our work is not thought of as real or legitimate?

What is your opinion about design education in Italy?

Do clients acknowledge the creative thinking and research involved in a designer's work?

Why do you keep working as a designer?

Do you feel the need to be part of an organisation which protects your rights?

Are you aware of the fact that if everyone refused to work for free, things would change?

I HOPE ALL THIS WILL CHANGE, THAT PEOPLE WILL TALK LESS MARKETING AND SALES AND THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO BRING BACK THE MAGIC OF THIS PROFESSION.

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