



Knowledge Partnerships for an Innovative Future





The Changing World of Room 100

Bathroom design for an ageing population

One key to good design is getting quality insight from research. But when it comes to something as private as getting people to open up about their bathroom habits, research and insight is trickier. And when it comes to the elderly or disabled, for whom accessibility is a huge problem, it is even more difficult as culturally and commercially, they often aren't given a voice.

'Loo-lab', a creation of Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and Istanbul Technical University (ITU), in partnership with Vitra, part of the Eczacıbaşı Group, one of the largest industrial conglomerates of Turkey, addresses these issues with a series of exhibitions and a website (www.loo-lab.com). Designed to provide a platform where people can comfortably discuss ideas and suggest needed changes, this new approach allows consumers to contribute directly to the design process.

Since we are all sensitive about the whole bathroom issue, there is a wonderful verbal/visual synchronicity between the humorous play on the British word 'loo' and the Turkish equivalent, 'room 100', which helps to break the ice with participants. The main part of the project is an

innovative field lab and exhibition that is also a meeting space to share thoughts and ideas freely. The lab forms the foundation of a user-centred design

lab based at ITU, focussing on the older generation as well as the mobility-impaired population.

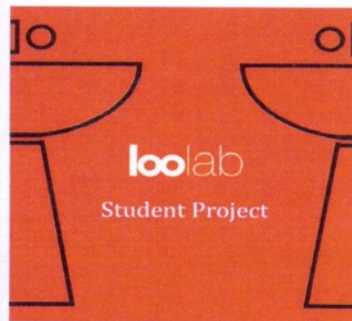
Through the project website, a widespread virtual community has been created that encouraged users to share digital data such as text messages and photos. Additionally, the exhibition lab invites people to look at new products, hold conversations and respond through drawings and writing. These two methods together provide a greater understanding of the cultural aspects of bathroom use.

Researchers have developed an approach where the older participants are seen as active participants rather than passive respondents. The goal is to design 'with' instead of only 'for' consumers.

Project Partners

Sheffield Hallam University (SHU)
Istanbul Technical University (ITU)
Vitra/ Eczacıbaşı Group





During 2012-2013 Fall Semester, 2nd year undergraduate students from Sheffield Hallam University Furniture & Product Design Program and Istanbul Technical University Industrial Product Design Program worked together on the same design brief and communicated with each other via a Facebook group created for the project. The project title was "Better Bathroom Experience for All - Organizing the bathroom". This is a selection of the students' work.

Sheffield
Hallam
University

ITU



The demographics

Globally, the over-50s are a rapidly growing part of the population. Older consumers often suffer from disabilities such as arthritis, sensory loss and mobility problems. The result is that just the simple task of using the bathroom can end up being a source of stress, difficulties and hazards.

There is a very small part of the bathroom market that specializes in addressing these problems in creative, yet

effective ways. Most bathroom products do not take the needs of an aging market into account. There is a great need for products designed for older users that are aesthetically pleasing as well as functional.

However, the bathroom is not only a space for individual use. It has to fulfil the demands of those living with disabled people as well as visiting family and friends. It has to fulfil all these needs at once. The challenge is to create inclusive yet sustainable products.

Understanding older users' experiences

VitrA, the industrial partner, worked closely with the SHU and ITU team and sponsored an external design consultant to design the website. After several meetings, the team held a workshop for 26 older users ranging in age from 70 to 95. The input gained from the workshop helped to further define the goals of the project.

The two-week 'loo-lab' exhibition drew approximately 500 visitors, including academic staff, architects, product designers, press, industry representatives and the general public. The website reached a number of approximately 8000 visitors in total. 26 older users took part in the workshop held in conjunction with the 'loo-lab' exhibition. In addition, there are 40 students from both universities engaged with the project through a parallel design brief communicating and sharing knowledge through Facebook and the results of this design brief were displayed in the loo-lab exhibition). The project has also reached a wider audience via digital and printed media, especially in Turkey.

The collaboration has provided a better understanding of older users' experiences and needs, as well as encouraging an inter-generational and cross-cultural discussion that is needed to provide useful and aesthetically pleasing bathroom products. By using creative methods to gather information, the project has provided the industry with vital information needed to accommodate an ageing population.

The ultimate aim is to use knowledge and insight gained to design bathroom products that will help encourage independence and dignity in later life





Paul Chamberlain Project Lead UK

"The project shows a commitment to user-centred design, giving people an opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences of bathrooms, a topic rarely discussed."

Roger Bateman, teacher of furniture design at Sheffield Hallam,

"This project is a great example of an international collaboration which combines expertise in teaching, research and industry."

Berrak Karaca Salgamcioglu, Istanbul Technical University

"Students from both universities enjoyed an engaging exchange of ideas and the exhibition is an excellent way of encouraging even more user-informed discussion on design."

● Outputs

Conference Participation: The collaboration between the academic and industrial partners will continue, including participation in the 2nd European Conference on Design4Health (July 2013) in Sheffield, International Initiative on Ageing (October 2013) and the IDA Congress (November 2013), both being held in Istanbul.

Curriculum Development: The academic partners are exploring potential shared curriculum development and on-going commercial opportunities will be explored with Vitra. The information gained in this project will reach a broad spectrum of society, including care homes, new home-builders, public facilities planners and government policy makers.

Applied Research: The development of a methodology to increase the potential for applied research within academia in Turkey, will help change the balance of basic research to applied research.

Product-Generation: Through applied research, increase opportunity for commercial income through research-informed, usable and desirable products for an ageing consumer both in the UK and Turkey.

Media Exposure: This project has already generated extensive exposure through the website (www.loo-lab.com) as well as with local media and will continue to expand.