



**Culture &  
Creativity**

EU-Eastern Partnership Programme

# CREATION OF A DESIGN AND INNOVATION CENTRE IN AZERBAIJAN

A policy brief for Culture & Creativity  
EU-Eastern Partnership Programme

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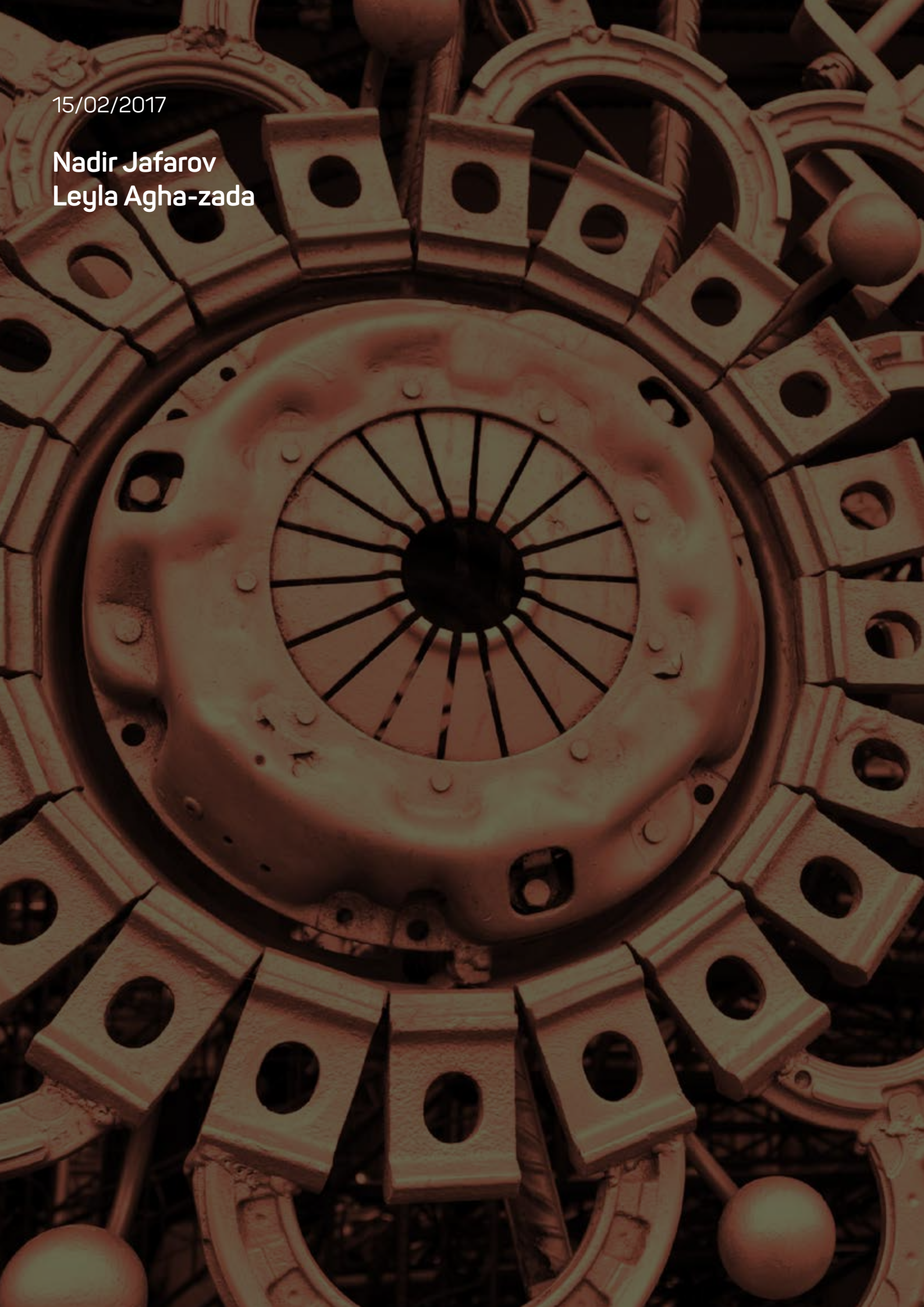
## Nº3



This Programme is funded  
by the European Union

15/02/2017

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# Executive Summary

One consequence of Azerbaijan's industrial development is increased demand for the design of new products. This has led to the creation of job opportunities for designers, especially for young creatives.

Despite this success there is currently an imbalance in the supply and demand of design graduates between the industrial sector and educational establishments in Azerbaijan. The country produces less than 200 design graduates a year.

However, in the workplace design companies in Azerbaijan prefer employees with work experience over ones who have just completed university with a diploma in design.

The absence of a design centre in Azerbaijan could lead to both a lack of a centralised knowledgebase system, as well as cooperation between organisations working in this field (institutions, trade unions, associations, companies, etc.). Creating an institution that will explore innovation in the design sector may resolve these issues.

How could a Design and Innovation Centre (DIC) be formed in Azerbaijan?

Here are five possible options:

- Create a design sector department within the Institution of Architecture and Art.
- Create an DIC within the Division of Humanitarian Sciences of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences.
- The Azerbaijan Designers' Union (ADU) could be re-established as a non-governmental organisation and the DIC could be created within this organisation.
- Create a DIC within the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts.
- Establish DIC as an independent, self-financing organization.



# INTRODUCTION

Since 1992 independent Azerbaijan has concluded trade contracts with OECD member states in a number of industrial sectors including clothing, food, cellulose, leather, shoes, rubber and plastic, computers, electronic and optical products, machinery and equipment, furniture, pharmaceuticals, printing materials and weaving. The country also agreed investment contracts in industrial fixed assets for the period 1995-2015. These investments were successful as those sectors continue their rapid development.

One consequence of this industrial development is increased demand for the design of new products. This has led to the creation of job opportunities for designers, especially for young creatives. At the same time the attractive salaries and business success of the creative design sector has made it a favourite career choice among the young generation. That is one of the main reasons why youth has become more interested in design.

Also after independence the elimination of barriers to accessing education and the widespread growth of the Internet have opened new horizons for young talented designers seeking self-expression. Some examples of this are Samir Sadikhov and Rufat Ismaili are the well-known young Azerbaijani talent who have access to studying abroad in industrial and fashion design respectively.



# Current Situation

Despite this success there is currently an imbalance in the supply and demand of design graduates between the industrial sector and educational establishments in Azerbaijan. The country produces less than 200 design graduates a year. This is due to three main factors.

First, there are a limited number of design course places at universities and course admission. According to the magazine of The State Student Admission Commission (SSAC), which is published for the academic year of 2016-2017, only 320 places were available for students.

Second, funding education programmes abroad imposes a high financial burden on the government.

Third, the capacity building infrastructure needs strengthening through more innovative research centres, handbooks, design teaching methodology, student work placement, internships and accessible online resources on education courses, seminars and professional training.

As a result Azerbaijan has relied on foreign design specialists to support the country's hosting events such as Eurovision (2012), European Games (2015), Chess World Cup (2015), World Chess Olympiad (2016), and Formula-1 (2016). On the one hand these events give local designers exposure to international experience and foreign experts, but on the other hand this expertise and the sector is not developed inside the country.

Design is taught at undergraduate and graduate educational institutions in two cities in Azerbaijan (in Baku - Azerbaijan Architecture and Arts University, Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts, Azerbaijan Technical University, Western University, Khazar University. In Ganja - Azerbaijan University of Technology, Azerbaijan State Agricultural University).

According to the SAAC's statistics for the 2016-2017 academic year:

- 2,666 candidates applied to study decorative and applied art and design
- 1,945 of them were admitted to take skills tests
- 429 were interviewed
- 340 were finally selected

Some 80% of them now study design and 20% decorative and applied art specialties. As both of them have same SSAC code, the data is integrated.

Compared to 2015-2016 academic year, there were three times more candidates in 2016-2017. SSAC increased their number of places in the design faculty from 70 to 180 at the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts in response to this increased demand.

Other candidates prefer to study abroad. Part of them study within government-funded programmes, others do it at their own expense. Although education abroad is of a high quality, it requires large financial resources. Students that study under government-funded programmes must return to their country to work as part of their student grant's contractual obligations. Self-financed students often emigrate and build their careers abroad.

Interior, fashion, graphics and industrial design teachers in Azerbaijan prepare their own curricula. The curricula are peer reviewed by specialists both within and outside the education institution. Based on this feedback the science secretary of the education institution requests approval of the curricula by the Ministry of Education. The curricula are introduced in the education institution only upon approval by the Ministry of Education. This is an inflexible process that takes two or three years to complete. The Ministry of Education approves these curricula based on the feedback of specialists both within and outside the education institution as it does not have staff who are design experts. However, in the workplace design companies in Azerbaijan prefer employees with work experience over ones who have just completed university with a diploma in design. Students of design faculties are not allowed to have internship during their education. This makes finding future employment difficult for students.

The only designers' organisation in Azerbaijan was the Azerbaijan Designers' Union (ADU). However, this organisation suspended its activities in 2007 due to finance problems. Therefore, ADU's design research programmes remain unfinished. The lack of a design research centre affects Azerbaijan's ability to apply international best practices in its design, development strategy, competitive capacity building and introduction of innovations.



# Solution

There are several public and private institutions and associations across the world, such as The Business Design Centre, European Centre for Architecture Art Design and Urban Studies etc, that explore every discipline of design from industrial design and interiors to digital design and branding. Moreover these organizations collaborate and share experience, create joint products and increase awareness of the importance of the design sector. The absence of such an organisation in Azerbaijan could lead to both a lack of a centralised knowledgebase system, as well as cooperation between organisations working in this field (institutions, trade unions, associations, companies, etc.). Creating an institution that will explore innovation in the design sector may resolve these issues.

How could a Design and Innovation Centre (DIC) be formed in Azerbaijan? Here are five possible options.

## OPTION 1

Create a design sector department within The Institution of Architecture and Art, which is already exists under the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences.

**Benefits:** Cooperating with The Institution of Architecture and Art, and Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences might be the important step in terms of promoting ancient cultural heritage of Azerbaijan in the field of design. It might lead to creating national brands and promoting it worldwide.

**Risks:** The Institution of Architecture and Art (IAA) might not be fully compatible with a new organisation in the design sector because the IAA mainly focuses on historical research.

## OPTION 2

Create an DIC within the Division of Humanitarian Sciences of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. The main scientific research centres are created within this governmental organisation.

**Benefits:** Establishment of the DIC within the Division of Humanitarian Sciences of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences will make strategy development simpler for the new centre and give it worldwide recognition.

**Risks:** The new instituton in the Division of Humanitarian Sciences of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences might mainly focus on the scientific study of design. This might limit the wider action plan on of the new institution, that should include both theoretical knowledge and especially practice.

## OPTION 3

The Azerbaijan Designers' Union (ADU) could be re-established as a non-governmental organisation and the DIC could be created within this organisation.

**Benefits:** It would be a positive step to create a design centre within an organisation that already deals with design. The reorganisation of the ADU might bring together people (former union members, design teachers, consumer associations, young designers, institutions and others), who are interested in continuing their former research.



**Risks:** Reorganisation of the ADU under the same name might be create a missunderstanding in terms of their operating structure. Investors might not support the same organisation that has failed in the past. The main risk may be a failure to find adequate funding for the DIC within the ADU.

## OPTION 4

Create an DIC within the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts.

**Benefits:** Most teachers, young artists and designers will be interested in establishing the DIC at the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts. The scientific research conducted by the centre will mainly benefit them. Teachers and students will use their theoretical knowledge practically in a real work environment. It will also motivate them as a new source of income.

**Risks:** The newly-created centre might have to adopt the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts' charters. DIC might be prevented in achieving its own goals.

Practicing designers are ideal for teaching at undergraduate and graduate education institutions and online courses. These teachers could share their practical experience with research staff and this cross fertilisation could increase the quality of practical and theoretical lectures.

## OPTION 5

Establish DIC as an independent, self-financing organisation.

**Benefits:** This option would allow the DIC to be established more rapidly. Operating independently the DIC would also be able to work more effectively with other partners.

DIC specialists could oversee the quality of internships for students at design faculties. The specialists could perform the design orders and students could support them on an ad-hoc basis.

DIC specialists could oversee the quality assurance of online design courses in line with international best practice.

**Risks:** Being a self-financing independent organisation might cause cash flow or other financial problems. It may result in the centre becoming more business oriented rather than a design-based research centre.

Whatever its legal structure, the DIC needs to include the following points in its action plan:

1. Map international best practice in self-funded advanced design associations and add them to the DIC's new activities.
2. Join international and European design associations and design education institutions.

3. Explore global best practice in design.
4. Develop a design development strategy.
5. Develop a capacity building strategy.
6. Explore new innovations in design. The most recent scientific achievements in this area that might be implemented.
7. Review innovative handbooks, curricula, teaching methodology on design from the top universities in the world and prepare unified standards and models for local handbooks and curricula.
8. Establish a structure in order to control design learning materials and programmes based on international experience.
9. Translate handbooks into the Azerbaijani language.
10. Gather information on foreign education programmes, establish cooperation and develop procedures.
11. Develop a website, a unified programme for all in the Azerbaijani language as an alternative education to provide online courses, seminars, professional development training and promotional contests. Irrespective of status online courses should be accessible for everyone. There could be no time constraints for use of online courses. Therefore, users could benefit from online courses in a convenient format and timeframe.
12. Cooperate closely with the Ministry of Education to introduce the DIC study programme.
13. Identify local and international demand in design (industrial, interior, graphic and fashion) and prepare service agreements with state-owned and private companies.
14. Develop a mobile telephone application (app) that promotes the DIC's activities more widely. At the same time DIC pages also could be created on social media.
15. Develop a DIC online gallery with an online exhibition and competition of designers.
16. Cooperate with foreign universities and institutions to help find scholarships or international internships for students in the design sector.

Over time this action plan could lead to improvements in Azerbaijan's design sector.

# Recommendations

- The DIC should cooperate closely with the Ministry of Education for introducing its courses.
- The DIC should create alternative educational online courses, online professional development training course platforms. The Design Centre should create its website, mobile phone applications and social media pages to make its information accessible for everyone.
- The DIC should coordinate contracts between the Ministry of Education and local design companies, foreign design firms, and other production and service companies and arrange for internships for fourth-year design students.
- Such practices are common in top education institutions in Europe (for example, Istituto Europeo di Design). The DIC could study such practice and cooperate with well-established design-related centres.



# Annex 1: Undergraduate Course Application Requirements

In order to apply for study at the design faculty, the applicants have to pass through the SSAC Admission Commission at the Azerbaijan State Academy of Arts. The Commission members include members of SSAC and design professors from undergraduate and graduate education institutions in Baku. The applicant has to submit to the Commission 5 A2 format plaster replicas of Greek and Roman sculptures, 5 A2 format still images, 5 A3 format compositions of geometric figures, digits and fonts.

If these pieces of work pass the requirements of the SSAC, the applicant is registered to take a skills test. After registration the applicant takes attestation exams in the Azerbaijani language, mathematics, and a foreign language based on the 11-year school programme. At these exams the applicant could have 30 questions on each subject and at least 8 questions on the Azerbaijani language, 8 questions on mathematics and 4 questions on the foreign language should be answered.

If over 30 questions of 90 questions are answered correctly, the applicant is admitted but has to pay for their education and if over 40 questions are answered correctly - free education.

The next stage is to take three tests in arts, painting and composition. The pass score for each subject is at least 5 points with an overall pass score of at least 21 points. The ability test and attestation exams results are put together and the applicant is invited to the interview. Applicants with the highest interview results are admitted to the applied institution.

# Note

The policy briefs are the result of capacity building work undertaken by the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme in 2016-2017 with 240 Programme Associates, who had completed a series of eight workshops in business management for mid-career cultural operators. The purpose of these briefs is to help them additionally understand the role of professionals in providing concise and neutral policy advice in the area of their competence. The task was to identify problems within the sector, provide potential models, options and solutions, support critical thinking, evidence-based policy analysis and the formulation of recommendations. The ideas were developed by the Associates themselves.

*The report is developed with the assistance of the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme. The content of this policy brief does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the publication lies entirely with the author.*



This Programme is funded  
by the European Union



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Special Thanks:  
Parvana Khalilova  
Khatira Jafarova



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