

# Icograda: The International Council of Graphic Design Associations: 1963–2013 Dora Souza Dias

## Introduction

The establishment of graphic design as an independent field of professional practice in the early twentieth century involved the creation of associations that aimed to gather professional practitioners, establish networks, and promote the value of graphic design within national borders.<sup>1</sup> The period that followed the end of World War II saw considerable growth in the number of national associations focused on commercial art and graphic design, particularly in Europe, as well as increasing ease in international communications and the establishment of international trade agreements. This milieu created opportunities for forming international governmental and nongovernmental organizations,<sup>2</sup> among which were some dedicated to design, such as the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI)<sup>3</sup> and the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID),<sup>4</sup> which appeared in the 1950s, preceding the first international organization dedicated to design, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, known as Icograda. Unlike the AGI, which gathered individual designers, Icograda and ICSID were established as councils dedicated to facilitating connections between representatives of national design associations.

Icograda has had—and in a way continues to have—a long life of activities. From its establishment in 1963 to today's undertakings as the International Council of Design (Ico-D), it has attracted member societies from all inhabited continents. Its archive, shaped under the instructions of its founding president, Willy de Majo, was systematically kept over the years and provides evidence of many activities and exchanges that took place around the world, not only for the council but also for individual member associations. The Icograda Archive, currently based at the University of Brighton Design Archives, in the United Kingdom, holds documents that range from the council's foundation to the year in which Icograda's base of operation moved to Montreal (2003). The consistency of the documentation kept by Icograda's secretariat during this period can offer insights into the exchanges and negotiations that took place on a transnational scale since 1963 and on the histories of national associations, including some that have ceased their operations, such

1 Jeremy Aynsley, Alison J. Clarke, and Tania Messell (eds.), *International Design Organizations: Histories, Legacies, Values* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022). 2 John Boli and George M. Thomas, "Introduction," in *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875*, edited by John Boli and George M. Thomas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). 3 "How It All Began," AGI, <https://a-g-i.org/about/> (accessed July 12, 2022). 4 Tania Messell, "Constructing a 'United Nations of Industrial Design': ICSID and the Professionalisation of Design on the World Stage, 1957–1980," PhD diss., University of Brighton, 2018, <https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/constructing-a-united-nations-of-industrial-design>.

as the Nigerian Association of Graphic Designers (NAGD) or the Asociación Peruana de Diseñadores (ASPED), for example.<sup>5</sup>

The role of professional associations in shaping professional practice has frequently been part of studies of historical accounts of design in national and regional contexts; studies that focus on international design organizations and their relationships to national and regional associations are recent. The book *International Design Organisations* is a key development in the field and brings some of these studies to the fore, including accounts that shed light on exchanges and power relations fed by the relationships and connections forged within these transnational spaces.<sup>6</sup> As historian Sandrine Kott put it, the study of international organizations “can reveal the existence of networks of relationships and system circulation” while allowing the exploration of the “connections between the local, the national, and the global and, indeed, the process of internationalisation itself.”<sup>7</sup> More important, these studies can reveal the nature of the movement of ideas and information, at the time, mostly supported by Western-based beliefs and frameworks of knowledge.

By critically engaging with the council's past activities, the aim of this article is to offer a critical and historical perspective on the nature of the activities undertaken by this organization, particularly its relation to origins, issues of representation, its recognition as an international council, global ambitions, and its change of scope when embracing all of design.

### Sources and Methods

This study draws mainly on primary sources including extensive documentation held at the Icograda Archive,<sup>8</sup> which holds “145.11 linear metres of documentation”<sup>9</sup> spanning forty years; personal documentation kept by former Icograda executive board members in their personal archives and shared with the author; and information collected online, mainly from Icograda's website. Interviews with key actors were conducted following oral history methods,<sup>10</sup> however, these have shown to be less detailed than archival documentation, even though these have issues of their own.<sup>11</sup> The main questions leading this research were: Has there been significant bias on Icograda's approach toward practice in different geographical regions of the world? If so, has the council played a part in promoting ideas of European diffusionism<sup>12</sup> in the field of graphic design, according to the belief of a superior value to European design and cultural production?

Primary sources were analyzed using historical methods through postcolonial/decolonial lenses,<sup>13</sup> drawing on the field of design history,<sup>14</sup> social identity theory,<sup>15</sup> and theory of professions<sup>16</sup> and organizations.<sup>17</sup> This theoretical scope helped the author navigate the internal and external politics of Icograda,

5 Minutes X Icograda General Assembly, August 26–27, 1983, ICO/6/11/3, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

6 Aynsley, Clarke, and Messell, *International Design Organizations*. 7 Sandrine Kott, “Towards a Social History of International Organisations: The ILO and the Internationalisation of Western Social Expertise (1919–1949),” in *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World*, edited by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 33–34.

8 Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives.

9 “International Council of Graphic Design Associations (Icograda) Archive,” Archive Hub (n.d.).

10 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). 11 Many of the accounts in the Icograda Archive, particularly minutes, have been written from a specific point of view, usually that of the secretary general's, who oversees writing the minutes and editing the final documentation a way that keeps track of the discussion but is inevitably portrayed through an individual's ideology and point of view. At General Assemblies, there was a chance to discuss minutes from previous meetings, but minutes were usually approved without changes. 12 James M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993). 13 Postcolonial and decolonial theories make up a significant body of work. Here are the main references for this study: Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad del poder, cultura e conocimiento en América Latina,” [Coloniality of power, culture and knowledge in Latin America], *Dispositivo* / n 24, no. 51 ([1997] 1999): 137–48; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 66–111; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, translated by Christopher I. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

particularly considering the role of the history of design practice as a background.

## Beginnings

Icograda was founded in 1963 by a group of industrial artists and designers in a meeting held in London and organized by a committee of the Society of Industrial Artists (SIA). The SIA, a British association dedicated to design,<sup>18</sup> had been previously involved in another incursion into transnational waters a few years before, the creation of ICSID. This shared beginning of Icograda and ICSID had a significant effect on Icograda's life and its board members, and the ICSID was seen as Icograda's sister organization.<sup>19</sup> ICSID's work focused on societies of industrial designers and matters related to industrial mass production, as defined in 1959,<sup>20</sup> whereas Icograda's focus was on matters related to graphic design practice. Icograda's constitution, published in 1964, qualified a graphic designer as "one who has the artistic sensibility, skill, experience and/or training, professionally to create designs or images for reproduction by any technique of visual communication" who "may be concerned with the problems of illustration, typography, calligraphy, surface design for packaging, the design of patterns, books, advertising and publicity material displays and exhibitions, films and television."<sup>21</sup> There was, however, some overlap in the professional remit of both councils, which could be speculated to be the underlying reason for the issues that surfaced later.

From the outset, the actors involved in Icograda relied heavily on the work done by ICSID. For years, ICSID was viewed by Icograda's executive board as a source of inspiration and support, and they wished to become as relevant as ICSID. Even more important was the desire among Icograda executive board members to establish a formalized cooperation between the two groups, maybe even a joint council. This led Icograda's members to choose a similar name, along with adopting a similar internal structure, which might facilitate such future collaboration, if not a merger. However, it has been noted that ICSID's board members did not always appreciate how actors in Icograda drew on the efforts made by ICSID members. With time, animosity grew between the councils, resulting in their estrangement in the 2010s.<sup>22</sup>

ICSID and Icograda were born from Western European efforts in a particularly turbulent period for transnational collaborations known as the Cold War.<sup>23</sup> In a politically divided world, sanctions and borders became commonplace, along with market protection measures and limitations in international trading. At the same time, a transnational movement began to shape global networks connecting those with similar interests across national boundaries.<sup>24</sup>

According to its constitution, among Icograda's aims were those "to improve the standards of graphic design and the status

14 Anna Calvera, "Local, Regional, National, Global and Feedback: Several Issues to Be Faced with Constructing Regional Narratives," *Journal of Design History* 18, no. 4 (2005): 371–83; Gerry Beegan and Paul Atkinson, "Professionalism, Amateurism and the Boundaries of Design," *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 4 (2008): 305–13; Tony Fry, "A Geography of Power: Design History and Marginality," *Design Issues* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 15–30.

15 Stephen Reicher, "The Context of Social Identity: Domination, Resistance and Change," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6, Symposium: Social Dominance and Intergroup Relations (December 2004): 921–45; Michael A. Hogg and Deborah J. Terry, "Social Identity and Self-Categorization Processes in Organizational Contexts," *Academy of Management Review* 25, no. 1 (2000): 121–40; Michael A. Hogg and Deborah J. Terry, "Social Identity Theory and Organizational Processes," in *Social Identity Processes in Organizational Contexts*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and Deborah J. Terry (London: Psychology Press, 2012): 1–12.

16 Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

17 John Boli and George M. Thomas (eds.), *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

18 Leah Armstrong, "Steering a Course between Professionalism and Commercialism: The Society of Industrial Artists and the Code of Conduct for the Professional Designer 1945–1975," *Journal of Design History* 29, no. 2 (2015): 161–79.



Figure 1

Top: World map projection indicating where the presidents of the Icograda executive board were based by year. Data source: Icograda General Assemblies Minutes and Reports, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton, UK. Bottom: Locations of the General Assemblies between 1963 and 1974. Data source: Icograda General Assemblies Minutes and Reports.

of designers by all practical means” and “to include in [Icograda], organisations of graphic designers in *all countries of the world* and thus contribute to international understanding.”<sup>25</sup> In its official discourse, Icograda aimed to promote the graphic design profession and facilitate exchanges among practitioners and associations globally. Yet it was not until later, when UNESCO rejected its application for recognition, that board members began to actively seek to diversify its membership.

In the first decade of activities, most of the council’s activities were restricted to Europe. All council presidents were based in Europe and represented European graphic design associations (see Figure 1, top). All General Assemblies (see Figure 1, bottom) and International Congresses—the two main types of events Icograda held—were held on European soil. International Congresses were sponsored by Icograda and held by one of its member associations; matters related to design practice were discussed, and the events were open to all who might be interested, pending an inscription

19 For more on ICSID, see Messell, “Constructing a ‘United Nations of Industrial Design.’”

20 In 1959, during the ICSID’s first General Assembly, the council’s first working definition of who would be considered industrial designers was established: “An industrial designer is one who is qualified by training, technical knowledge, experience and visual sensibility to determine the materials, mechanisms, shape, colour, surface finishes and decoration of objects which are reproduced in quantity by industrial processes. The industrial designer may, at different times, be concerned with all or only some of these aspects of an industrially produced object. The industrial designer may also be concerned with the problems of packaging, advertising, exhibiting and marketing when the resolution of such problems requires visual appreciation in addition to technical knowledge and experience. The designer for craft based industries or trades, where hand processes are used for production, is deemed to be an industrial designer when the works which are produced to his drawings or models are of a commercial nature, are made in batches or otherwise in quantity, and are not personal works of the artist craftsman.” “About,” ICSID, n.d., [www.icsid.org/about/about/articles33.htm](http://www.icsid.org/about/about/articles33.htm) (accessed November 30, 2015)

fee. These congresses allowed for speakers to share their views and for connections to be made among attendees. At General Assemblies, all relevant decisions concerning the council were made. Assemblies were closed, confidential meetings, exclusive to representatives of member associations and invited guests, where voting on matters concerning the running of the council and administrative and executive decisions were made.

In the mid-1960s, Icograda board members attempted to seek recognition by UNESCO, as ICSID had done some years before. However, UNESCO did not recognize Icograda “due to the latter’s lack of geographical spread.”<sup>26</sup> Once this became known within the council, efforts moved toward actively reframing the council’s activities, perspectives, and membership remit, but it was not without challenges.

At the time, international travel and telecommunications were not easily or cheaply achievable, and international and overseas postal exchanges took a long time. These factors played a role in the council’s limited reach but were not the only reason. A debate during the third General Assembly in 1968 illustrates the issues the council faced due to its own imposed limitations. Icograda President Knut Yran (1966–1968) stated that “ICOGRADA officers had travelled throughout Asia, Africa and South America [and] it had unfortunately become apparent that in many countries, a designers’ association which fulfilled the membership conditions of ICOGRADA did not exist.”<sup>27</sup> This resulted in new membership category—corresponding member—that allowed designers in countries with no associations fulfilling Icograda’s requirements to become members; however, they had no voting rights.

### Representing Professional Practice

The council’s discourse and activities were a product of its time and context, particularly as a group shaped mainly by representatives of associations in European countries. Its efforts followed the pattern of Western European modern thinking based on the belief of universality and seeing European thinking as the pinnacle of the civilized world, considering themselves as the rule with which to measure the world. Icograda was not alone in this. According to sociologists John Boli and George Thomas, those involved in the establishment of international nongovernmental organizations—such as Icograda—“have found it ‘natural’ to view the whole world as their arena of action and discourse.”<sup>28</sup>

Icograda’s discourse echoed a perception that design practiced outside of the Western Europe lagged in comparison to European design, considered to be a result of European exceptionality rather than that of colonization.<sup>29</sup> There was an expectation that visual and technological standards set by European and then Anglo-American practitioners should be followed.

21 Icograda Constitution: as agreed at the inaugural meeting held in London from April 26 to 28, 1963 and amended by the Executive Board at a meeting held in Amsterdam on July 19 and 20, 1963 and Stockholm on January 23, 1964 (1964), 1, ICO/1/2/1, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

22 Dora Souza Dias, “Icograda: The International Council of Graphic Design Associations, 1963–2013: Transnational Interactions and Professional Networks in Graphic Design,” PhD diss., University of Brighton, 2019, <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.817966>.

23 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

24 John Boli and George M. Thomas, “INGOs and the Organization of World Culture,” in *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875*, edited by John Boli and George M. Thomas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 14.



There was also a strict structure for membership categories, following Western European structures of professional associations. Only associations that had professional practice as their main focus and had regulations of entry that implied a “selective standard of artistic sensibility and technical accomplishment”<sup>30</sup> could receive full membership in Icograda. The associate membership was for promoting bodies such as design councils, which were also granted voting rights. The distinction between these was that for an associate membership the regulation of entry implied “a selective standard of *technical accomplishment only*”<sup>31</sup> and was granted for associations in countries where there was already at least one other association with full membership. In case there was no association that fulfilled Icograda’s requirements for full membership, this would be granted to a member fulfilling the associate criteria, at least until such an association was fully functioning in that country.

The requirements imposed by the council for associations trying to join were frequently questioned—along with its fees— by designers and associations everywhere. Fees were particularly challenging for associations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which operated in currencies devalued in relation to the sterling pound. The internal understanding seemed to be that the national associations should be the ones making the effort to fulfil Icograda’s requirements and meet its standards, rather than the other way around.<sup>32</sup> For example, Secretary General Pieter Brattinga stated that the members of the Japan Advertising Artists Club, “many of whom resided outside Tokyo, did not share this more sophisticated approach to the design profession as a whole, and had failed to understand the importance of ICOGRADA.”<sup>33</sup> In the same discussion, Dutch designer Wim Crouwel, representing AGI at the meeting, claimed that two Swiss associations had resigned for the same reason, that “members that did not understand the importance of ICOGRADA,”<sup>34</sup> but the Swiss associations were not criticized for their lack of sophistication, showing that a bias existed in favor of European associations.

Many assumptions were made within the council about its own relevance and its role in establishing standards for design practice worldwide, disregarding that there might be other standards and other forms of professional practice in different places.<sup>35</sup> Icograda’s membership criteria were so defined in a way that “undervalue[d] diverse understandings of design, prevent[ing] individuals and groups from joining who were not deemed fit.”<sup>36</sup> Activist and critic Edward Said has previously elaborated on the Eurocentric desire he defined as that of “all of the subjugated peoples to be naturally subservient to a superior, advanced, developed, and morally mature Europe, whose role in the non-European world was to rule, instruct, legislate, develop.”<sup>37</sup> Associations everywhere were expected to be aligned with the

25 Icograda Constitution, 2.

26 Knut Yran, Icograda President 1966–1968, in Minutes III Icograda General Assembly, August 19–20, 1968, 9, ICO/6/3/7, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

27 Yran, Minutes III.

28 Boli and Thomas, “INGOs and the Organization of World Culture,” 14.

29 Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World*.

30 Icograda Constitution.

31 Icograda Constitution, 2, emphasis in original.

32 Icograda, Minutes III General Assembly.

33 Pieter Brattinga, Secretary General 1966–1968, Minutes III General Assembly, 10.

34 Wim Crouwel, representative of AGI, Minutes III General Assembly, 10.

35 Dora Souza Dias, “Professional Graphic Design and Cold War Politics: National and Transnational Design Organisations,” in *International Design Organizations: Histories, Legacies, Values*, edited by Jeremy Aynsley, Alison J. Clarke, and Tania Messell (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022), 19–37.

36 Jeremy Aynsley, Alison J. Clarke, and Tania Messell, “Introduction,” in *International Design Organizations: Histories, Legacies, Values*, edited by Jeremy Aynsley, Alison J. Clarke, and Tania Messell (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022), 1–15.

37 Edward W. Said, “Yeats and Decolonization,” in *Remaking History*, edited by Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), 6.

council's parameters if they wished to become voting members. Hence, aspiring members had to—and sometimes wished to—adapt to better meet such parameters. One clear case was that of the Nigerian Association of Communication Designers, which just before joining Icograda was renamed NAGD to better align itself to the language used by the council.<sup>38</sup>

It might be particularly relevant to quote a statement by F. H. K. Henrion, made during Icograda's inaugural meeting, that highlights some of the perspectives held by those participating in Icograda's activities. "ICOGRADA must be internationally minded," he stated, "allowances should be made for differences in different countries," otherwise "no control could be exercised over associations if they were excluded."<sup>39</sup> It is likely that not all those taking part in Icograda's inaugural meeting shared this opinion; regardless, this is the statement that has been recorded in the minutes. The idea of control, in Henrion's statement, along with Icograda's aim "to improve the standards of graphic design and the status of designers by all practical means,"<sup>40</sup> point to Icograda's alignment to a bigger movement in the late twentieth century. As argued by historian Odd Arne Westad, "control and improvement," along with interventionism, became new forms of imperialism that substituted colonization after anticolonial movements swept the globe in the second half of the century, hiding it in financial and technical aid offerings.<sup>41</sup>

As more and more associations from other areas of the world joined Icograda and the executive board started to include designers from more diverse origins on its board, conversations started to change and a broader understanding of graphic design practice slowly developed.

### **A Global Representative in the Making**

In the mid-1970s, more significant efforts were made to expand Icograda's activities beyond Europe. Vice presidents based in non-European countries, representing non-European associations, were elected and events were held in other areas. The 1974 election of Walter Jungkind is further evidence of this shift, given his election pitch for "the extension of Icograda activities outside Europe as one of the main activities necessary."<sup>42</sup> In 1975, the first Icograda-sponsored event was held outside of Europe in Edmonton, Canada—the Education for Graphic Design, Graphic Design for Education conference. This was one of the council's first steps to expand its activities toward Canada and the United States.<sup>43</sup>

The council's remit kept expanding throughout the 1980s when significant efforts were made by the executive board to further expand its geographical remit, even though its membership was still mostly European. In the early 1980s, regional meetings were organized with sponsorships of the Council in Latin America (1980, Mexico),<sup>44</sup> Africa (1982, Nigeria), and Asia (1989, Japan).<sup>45</sup>

38 NAGD (leaflet), ICO/10/18/2, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

39 Minutes of the Icograda Inaugural Meeting, April 26–28, 1963, item 9, ICO/1/1/1, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

40 Icograda Constitution.

41 Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 136.

42 Minutes VI Icograda General Assembly, October 16–17, 1974, 7, ICO/6/7/4, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

43 Edugraphic Conference: Education for Graphic Design, Graphic Design for Education (leaflet), ICO/8/3/1, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

44 Dora Souza Dias, "International Design Organizations and the Study of Transnational Interactions: The Case of Icogralatinoamérica80," *Journal of Design History* 32, no. 2 (2019): 188–206, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epy038>.

45 Peter Kneebone (ed.), *Icograda (JAGDA on behalf of Icograda, 1983)*, ICO/8/3/1 (Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton).

Regional meetings aimed at “making the work of Icograda known, establishing links . . . and encouraging the creation of National Associations along the lines of Icograda.”<sup>46</sup> Even though the council’s main intention with regional meetings was to promote the advantages for national associations in becoming part of its membership,<sup>47</sup> this resulted in a higher number of designers from these regions joining the executive board and therefore having more power to steer decisions. Regional meetings were not, in any way, organized with the intention of understanding the nature of the professional practice of graphic design in these areas or collect information about local knowledge and practices.<sup>48</sup> Yet the exchanges affected some of the European board members too, opening their eyes to what else was out there. Peter Kneebone’s words following the first regional meeting show that clearly, as he stated:

Contexts, constraints and needs are . . . often much more specific and localised. Not to appreciate this diversity, and not to modify our international action accordingly, would be shortsighted and negative. . . . Within the Latin American specificity there are obviously many different social and technical situations each presenting urgent problems that designers of visual communication should solve. To wish them well is self-evident. It is, however, important to hope that they will profit from the stimulus and experience of the graphic design profession internationally, without being colonized by it.<sup>49</sup>

These initiatives resulted in an increase in membership numbers and the council’s geographical remit (see Figure 2, Panel A).<sup>50</sup> Between 1964 and 1977 the council’s membership grew from twenty-three members representing seventeen countries to twenty-eight member associations representing twenty countries,<sup>51</sup> and between 1977 and 1983 the membership almost doubled, reaching fifty-one associated members representing thirty countries, with at least one association in every inhabited continent (see Figure 2, Panel A).<sup>52</sup>

As put by Icograda President Peter Kneebone in 1983 the growth of ICOGRADA between 1977 and 1983 “created a new situation for the Council and the need to re-evaluate an enlarged role.”<sup>53</sup>

The visibility of the council worldwide increased significantly but also demonstrated the council’s understanding of Europe and North America “as a silent referent”<sup>54</sup> between the 1960s and 1990s. It was only in the 2000s that regional meetings were also organized in North America and Europe.<sup>55</sup> Also, even though there was an increase in geographical spread, Europe has always had a significantly higher number of countries with member associations in the council<sup>56</sup> and, consequently, more votes than any other region.

46 “Icogradalatinoamérica80,” *Icogradalatinoamérica80 News Bulletin* 1 (1979), Mauro Kunst personal archive.

47 Peter Kneebone, “A Signpost from Latin America,” *Icograda News Bulletin* 27, no. 1 (1980), ICO/8/3/1, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

48 For more on the regional meetings organized by Icograda, see Souza Dias, “International Design Organizations and the Study of Transnational Interactions.”

49 Kneebone, “A Signpost from Latin America,” 1.

50 Dora Souza Dias, *Icograda Member Associations 1963–2005* (version 1) [data set] (2023), Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8335350>.

51 Minutes VII Icograda General Assembly, May 2–3, 1977, ICO/6/7/3, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives.

52 Minutes X Icograda General Assembly.

53 Kneebone, *Icograda*.

54 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 28.

55 David Grossman, “Regional Meeting Report: The State of Graphic Design in Western Europe,” *Icograda Board Message* 5 (2001): 4–8, ICO/8/1/5, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

56 For access to data collected on Icograda Member Associations from 1963 to 2005, see Souza Dias, *Icograda Member Associations 1963–2005*.



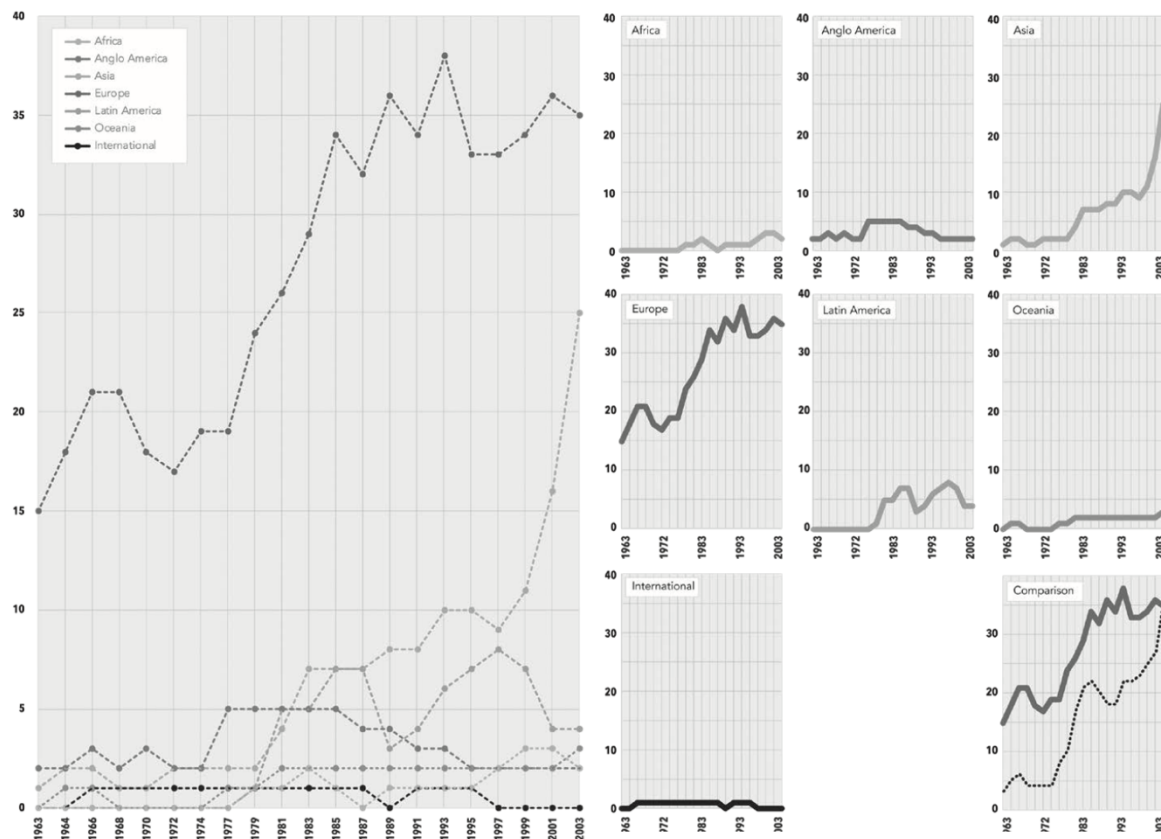


Figure 2

Top left: Panel A. Icograda membership by region, 1963–2003. Data source: Icograda General Assemblies Minutes and Reports, Icograda Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton, UK. Top right: Panel B. Icograda membership by region, separately and a comparison chart, showing membership numbers, one line being European membership and the dotted line with all membership in other areas of the world added together.

It was only in 2003 that the total number of non-European associations surpassed the number of European ones (see Figure 2, Panel B).

The way voting powers were distributed within the council also changed over time. From 1964, voting powers were granted considering each country's number of associations. If a country had fewer than three member associations, a minimum of six votes were to be shared among these associations, each of which should be represented at a General Assembly by a delegate. When a country had more than three member associations, it received two extra votes per association.<sup>57</sup> This significantly changed in 1984, with countries receiving a total of sixty votes each, no matter how many member associations they had, which resulted in equal power for each voting country. Associate memberships were expanded to include educational, promotional, and professional organizations of national status, but they no longer had the right to vote on “any matter of professional practice.”<sup>58</sup> This decision restricted voting powers to members in the full membership/professional category only.

The executive board was elected biennially including a president, vice presidents, a secretary general, and a treasurer. In the early years, only one president was elected, but it quickly became evident that there was a need for resilience and continuity between mandates. A transitional presidency role was created, which made presidency last six years in total, but with a changing status every two years: from president elect, to president, to

<sup>57</sup> Icograda Constitution.

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum and Articles of Association of the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, September 18, 1984, article 41, ICO/1/2/7 (Icograda Archive, University of Brighton, Brighton) (this document replaced the constitution in 1984).

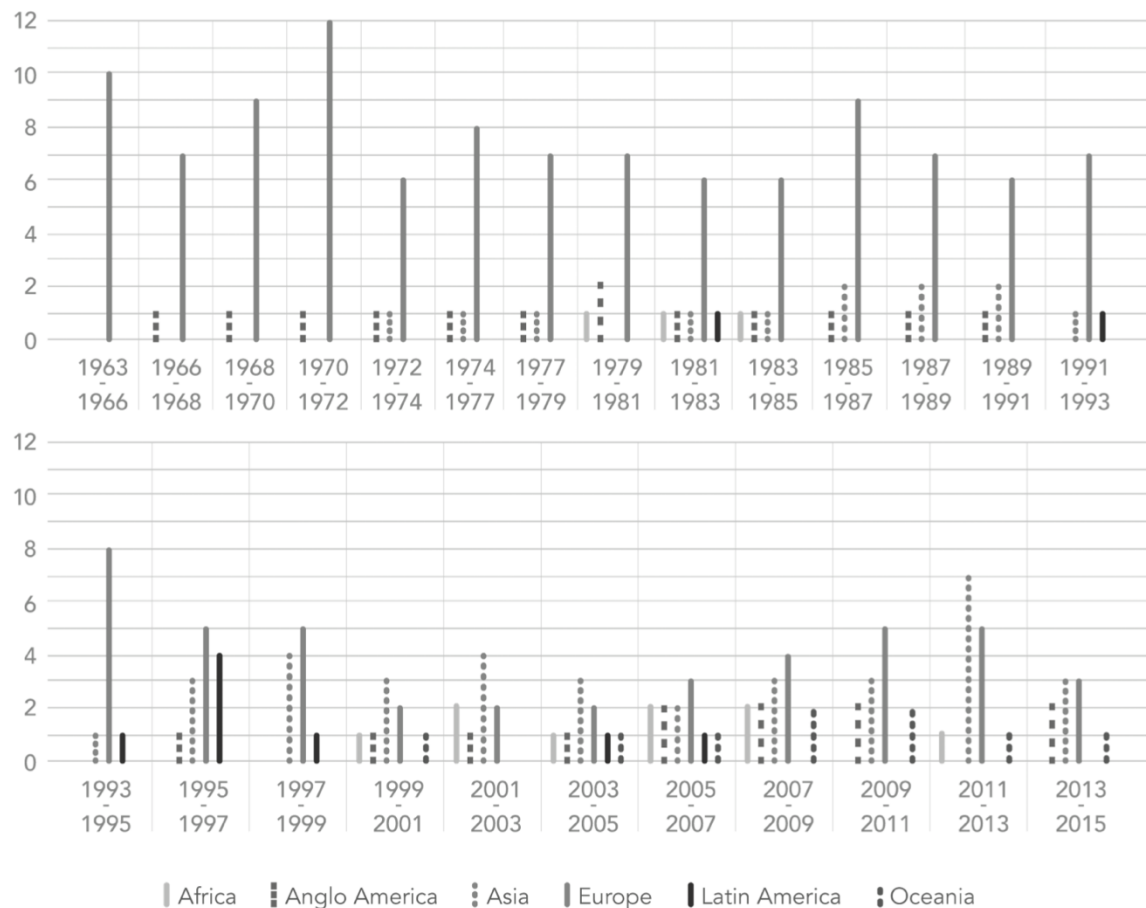


Figure 3  
Icograda executive board over time, showing countries represented by each board member (not their nationality), grouped by mandates, delimited by the time interval between General Assemblies. Data sources: Icograda General Assemblies Minutes and Reports and Icograda website.

past president. Three presidents were concomitantly part of the executive board, possibly creating a more balanced approach to decision-making.

As time passed, the boards and the membership of the council changed significantly.<sup>59</sup> By the late 1980s, the council's membership and executive board (see Figure 3) had become a lot more diverse and its activities more inclusive, with regular discussions about its purposes, activities, and future. Yet, the challenge for members to keep their memberships remained. For example, four of the seven Latin American associations that joined Icograda between 1980 and 1985, had withdrawn by 1989 due to issues with fees. Even though by the council tried to change its approach, the requirement for all societies to pay fees of equal monetary value, regardless of their economic circumstances, made Icograda inaccessible for many.<sup>60</sup>

The 1990s and 2000s also saw a great effort from the council to become more diverse and inclusive, which is reflected, for instance, on the location of the Congresses and General Assemblies (see Figure 4) and the effort to diversify executive boards (Figure 3).

The most significant evidence of change is the new membership fee structure put forward in 1999. Up to that point, membership fees were calculated based on how many members

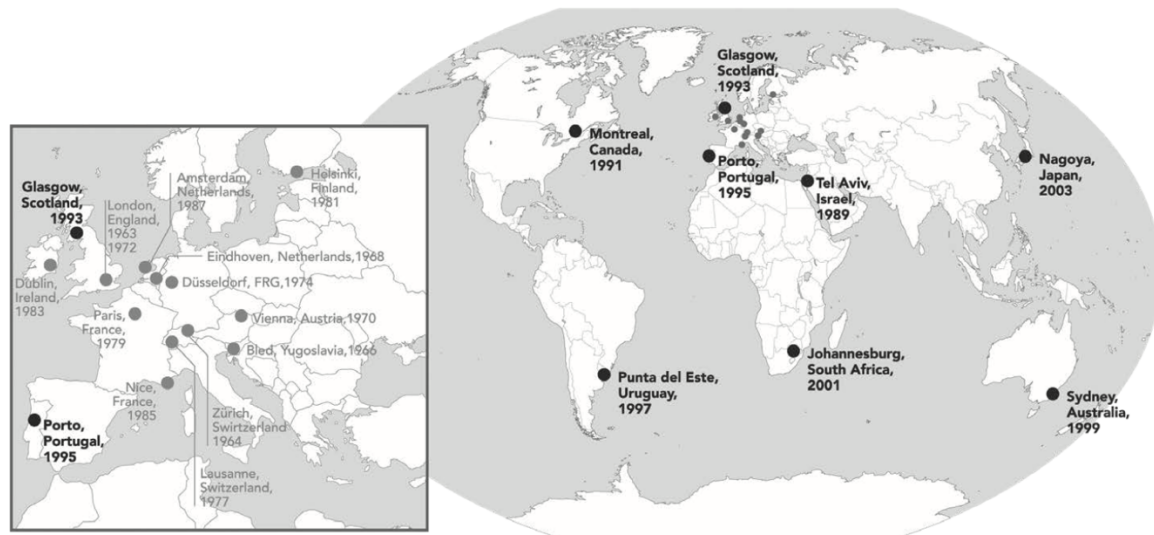


Figure 4  
Locations of Icofrada General Assemblies, 1963–2003. Darker black circles indicate events held 1989–2003. Data source: Icofrada General Assemblies Minutes and Reports.

each association had, which meant no concessions were made in terms of location or currency exchange. The new structure considered three categories of fees that would be connected to per capita gross domestic product, to create a more equitable division of fees. Category A included countries with per capita gross national product (GNP) of more than US\$10,000, which would continue paying 100 percent of the basic membership fee; Category B, with per capita GNP between US\$2,500 and US\$9,999, would pay 75 percent of the basic membership fee; and Category C, with per capita GDP up to US\$2,499, would pay 50 percent of the basic membership fee. The size of the associations was still considered, with three levels: up to 250 members, from 251 to 1,000 members, and associations with 1,001 members or more. A maximum fee was also defined, with no association paying more than £20,000.<sup>61</sup> The General Assembly voted unanimously in favor of this membership fee structure,<sup>62</sup> which was unprecedented.

In the early 2000s, Icofrada promoted itself as “a global community.”<sup>63</sup> There is evidence that, by then, it had member associations in all inhabited continents and many countries (see Figure 5). Yet, although the numbers of associations and countries increased over time, the higher participation of European associations has always been consistent and, at the same time, the significant growth in Asian participation raises the question of the nature of the decisions made, their bias and whom they might benefit (Figure 2, Panel B).

In the 2000s, the focus on diversity shared the stage with globalization—as a threat, an opportunity, and a goal. There were constant debates about how the Council could remain relevant in an everchanging globalized world and projects became increasingly “more complex with all the differing needs of the design community in different parts of the world.”<sup>64</sup> Its agendas to foster diversity and to search for global goals slowly increased

61 XIX Icofrada General Assembly: Report and Minutes 1999–2001 (2001), 28, ICO/6/21/7, Icofrada Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

62 XIX Icofrada General Assembly, 46.

63 Icofrada, *A Global Community* (2001), leaflet, Ruth Klotzel personal archive.

64 Mervyn Kurlansky, “A New Paradigm for Design,” Icofrada Board Message 5 (2003): 13, ICO/8/1/5, Icofrada Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

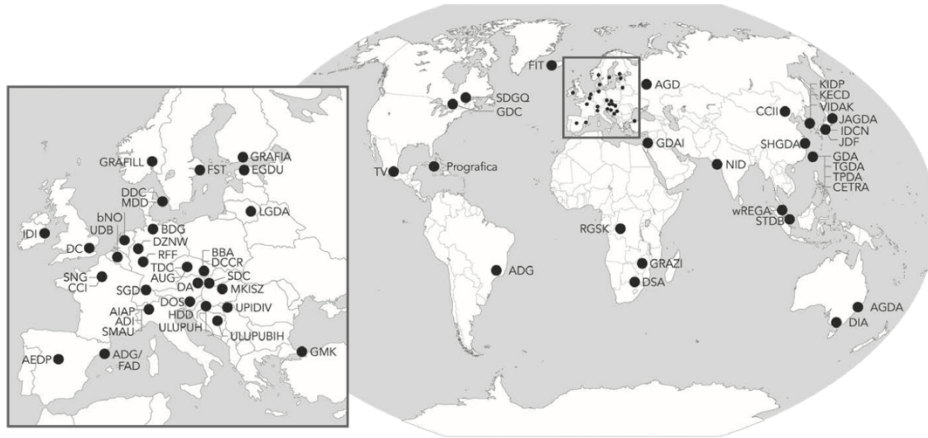


Figure 5

Map showing Icograda's member locations, 2001. Data source: Icograda General Assemblies Minutes and Reports. For a full list of member associations, see: Dora Souza Dias, *Icograda Member Associations 1963–2005*, Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8335350>. Data source: Icograda General Assemblies Minutes and Reports.

the distance between the council and its individual-member associations, aggravated by the time and efforts allocated to establishing the illusive aforementioned alliance with ICSID to unite the whole of the design profession.

## From Icograda to Ico-D

For many years, since its inaugural meeting, Icoagrada's executive board members contemplated the possibility of partnering with the ICSID; the proposal was turned down by ICSID many times. The relationship between Icoagrada and ICSID always had some tension. By the 1990s, ICSID's position had changed.<sup>65</sup> Industrial design, the council's main focus, was no longer as relevant as it once was given changes in the world economy, with the service sector becoming more relevant than the industrial sector. In the same way, Icoagrada's position had changed too. It had become a well-established organization and was no longer willing to be absorbed into a single world council. It no longer made sense for Icoagrada to take part in a joint organization venture that merged the councils into one body, losing its identity, its history, and the work achieved so far, particularly considering the many previous rejections by ICSID.

In the early 2000s, after a long period of negotiations, the International Design Alliance (IDA) was established as a “strategic venture between the international organisations representing design,”<sup>66</sup> an “entity owned and managed collaboratively by ICSID and Icograda as equal partners,”<sup>67</sup> created to serve as “the collective voice for all disciplines, advocating the mutual interest of all design professions.”<sup>68</sup> In 2005, IDA’s headquarters opened in Montreal, hosting both Icograda’s and ICSID’s secretariats. In 2008, IFI (the International Federation of Interior Designers) joined the IDA, becoming the third partner and establishing its headquarters in Montreal.<sup>69</sup>

65 Arthus Pulos, Minutes XV Icoграда General Assembly, September 10–11, 1993, 2, ICO/6/16/8, Icoграда Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

66 Icoagrada, "2011 IDA Congress Explores the Intersection of Design and Issues of Global Relevance," Ico-D, February 17, 2011, <https://www.theicod.org/index.php/en/resources/news-archive/2011-ida-congress-explores-the-intersection-of-design-and-issues-of-global-relevance>. See also ICSID, "International Design Alliance Unveils New Visual Identity for the IDA Congress," WDO, February 21, 2012, <https://wdo.org/press-release/2011-ida-congress-explores-the-intersection-of-design-and-issues-of-global-relevance/>.

67 Mervyn Kurlansky, "Activities of the Past Term," XXI Icofrada General Assembly Report, 2005, 7–8, Ruth Klotzel personal archive.

68 Iocgrada, "2011 IDA Congress Explores the Intersection."

69 IcoGrada, "International Design Alliance Welcomes International Federation of Interior Architects Designers," Ico-D, September 23, 2008, <https://www.theicod.org/index.php/resources/news-archive/international-design-alliance-welcomes-international-federation-of-interior-architects-designers>.

After a short time of harmonious collaboration, turmoil followed, culminating with the termination of the IDA in 2013 by ICSID. The early 2010s seem to have been marked by turbulence not only between councils but within them. In 2012, three Icograda board members resigned, including the president.<sup>70</sup> It is not clear what happened, as not a lot of information has been made public, but Icograda recovered by appointing a new president with the support of its past presidents. However, IDA's termination by ICSID, which came as a surprise for Icograda board members, seems to have severed the relationship between the councils for good. During the twenty-fifth Icograda General Assembly in November 2013, a new board was elected and several proposals were put forward to rethink Icograda's role and scope.<sup>71</sup> It was decided that the new aim of the council was "to become an international voice for Design reflecting *all design disciplines*, advocating the value of design thinking, design-driven education and designing as a potent medium of progressive change."<sup>72</sup> This decision created a watershed in Icograda's history, which had now become, in some ways, a clear "competitor" of ICSID.

Icograda's change in scope was crowned by its renaming in 2014, as the International Council of Design (Ico-D).<sup>73</sup> The new name—officially and openly—changed the council's scope to accommodate the whole of the design profession, no longer focusing on graphic design. In 2015, ICSID changed its name to World Design Organisation.<sup>74</sup> Ico-D remains active and is undergoing its activities with a new scope.<sup>75</sup>

## Final Remarks

This article has focused on Icograda's activities and discourse throughout the fifty years of its existence, until it became Ico-D. Some of the data on member societies was not accessible (from 2005 to 2014), which limited the scope of the data covered here. Issues of gender, class, and racial inequalities have not been addressed here, even though there is potential for these topics to be explored as at least until the 2000s, the executive board was fairly restricted in its composition, being predominantly male, white, middle-class, and European or of white European descent. The focus of the research conducted was mainly in assessing geopolitical power struggles within the organization.

This article discussed how, even though there is evidence that in its first decades, the council played a role in European diffusionism—by advocating for the superior value of European design and cultural production—there is also evidence that these views were slowly replaced with more inclusive ones, with increasingly more diverse executive boards.

For many years, the value given to graphic design in Icograda varied depending on where and how it was practiced, mainly favoring European design. There is evidence of imbalance in the

70 Icograda, "Icograda Board Meets in Istanbul," Icograda, December 22, 2012, <https://www.theicod.org/resources/news-archive/icograda-board-meets-in-istanbul>.

71 Icograda, "Designing an International Organization for the 21st Century Design," Ico-D, September 15, 2013,

<https://www.theicod.org/index.php/en/resources/news-archive/designing-an-international-organization-for-21st-century-design>.

72 Author's emphasis. Ico-D, "Icograda Announces Name Change to Ico-D," Ico-D, December 15, 2014, <https://www.theicod.org/resources/news-archive/icograda-announces-name-change-to-ico-d>.

73 Ico-D, "Icograda Announces Name Change to Ico-D."

74 WDO, "About Us," WDO, n.d., <https://wdo.org/about/>.

75 Ico-D, "Home," Ico-D, n.d., <https://www.theicod.org/en>.



way graphic design practices were seen initially, affecting designers and associations in uneven ways. However, no evidence of cultural appropriation or any form of encouragement of that has been found within Icograda so far. The regional meetings in the 1980s helped reconfigure the council's outlook of design practice and reorient its governance schemes and discourse toward more inclusive views.

In the 1990s, the move toward diversity and inclusivity seen by the council included a more consistent global approach toward design practice. The end of the Cold War and the increasing opportunities for travel and communications led the council to chase more ambitious goals in terms of its global remit. Throughout its rich history, Icograda has had many members, which came and went, in many areas of the world, and its archive proves it. Evidence of these exchanges with national associations, and of some associations that have been long forgotten, has been kept in the Icograda Archive. Even though the council no longer exists in the way it once did, its archive can still play a significant role in writing graphic design histories between 1963 and 2013.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For a list of Icograda member associations between 1963 and 2005, see Souza Dias, *Icograda Member Associations 1963–2005*.