

On June 29, the Viennese boutique consultancy Brainswork convened the first Incredible Summit “IncrediblEurope – the Power of Innovation and Creativity for the Future of Europe” in Vienna.

The aim of the interdisciplinary summit was to use the diversity of approaches, ideas and fields of work of the speakers and participants to encourage shared connected thinking – brainstorming, and create visions for Europe’s sustainable development. Participants from 23 countries attended the first IncrediblEurope summit, which provided a variety of inspirational insights and thought-provoking statements. One special success for the Summit was the unanimous call for the Summit to become a permanent highlight on the calendar, and for the initiative to continue its work on fostering visions and synergies for Europe’s creative and innovative future through the **IncrediblEurope Association**.

Summit participants were first greeted by IncrediblEurope Initiator and Brainswork Founder and CEO, **Selma Prodanovic**. The Summit, she said, was a rather spontaneous idea: “In January, at the peak of the crisis, we developed the concept, and just five months later, we’re here.” However, it is also a very strategic idea, particularly in times as challenging as these: “The summit is the proof that even in the worst crisis a creative and innovative approach can make a difference. And what the state of the world economy today demands from us, is counter-cyclic action and a clear positioning for Europe.”

Greeting the participants, **Gian Paolo Spadola** from the Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry reminded that “one of the chamber’s main aims was to create and inspire public awareness on what the creative industries mean to the economic system and what they are able to contribute.” A number of successful projects already demonstrate the scope and extent of this contribution – and the way it is shaping Vienna and its identity in economic and cultural terms.

80-year old professor **Luigi Colani**, who embodies the idea of IncrediblEurope by combining diverse approaches and skills in hi-tech design, science, philosophy and industry, provided the day’s first keynote. Celebrated worldwide as the pioneer of organic design, Colani produced some 20,000 revolutionary designs, 70% of which have been produced in series. His presentation provided exclusive insights into some of his extraordinary work in planes, automobiles, buildings and other fields. Colani came especially from China, where he now works, to give critical remarks about Europe but, at the same time, “to encourage young people”, as he repeated on stage. For Colani, Vienna is special as Europe’s true hub: “Everything passed through Vienna, so much genius that came from the East”, underlining Central and South East Europe as a “very cerebral place”. Speaking of rocket pioneer Hermann Oberth or aerodynamics mastermind Henri Coandă, whose enormous contribution is little known in general circles, he reminded the audience: “this is your heritage – you must be proud of it!”

European “doubtmakers” only think of short-term successes – and this is deadly. “We are too dangerous, because we kick the industry’s ass”, said Colani in his provoking manner. When it comes to Europe, the continent isn’t “hungry any more”, which is why we urgently need ideas with “courage and audacity” – and one of them is IncrediblEurope: “Which is why you all have to support this courageous young lady”, referring to Selma Prodanovic, “and this initiative. And which is what I will do. You have a powerful friend in me.”

Erwin Werdenigg from Edelwiser, the Austrian company which not only allows customers to design their own skis, but presents an innovative business model, stated: “We know that people want to innovate. There are now global infrastructures in place which allow this, and we are using them.” Werdenigg invited the summit participants to employ collaborative design and design three unique “Made at IncrediblEurope” pairs of skis, to be presented at the next IncrediblEurope summit.

Introducing the day’s first panel discussion on Europe as an umbrella brand, **Thomas Kratky** (Agency in Progress) said that “we are now in thrilling times. And thrilling times need thrilling people and thrilling ideas.” **Jillian de Beer** (de Beer Communications) from New Zealand highlighted the importance of understanding the full scope of a brand – the people, the landscapes, the thinking, experiential environments and intuitive spaces. And young people: “In many ways, Europe is a ‘now’ destination. But you have to work hard to attract generation Y, to make Europe recognizable as attractive in the eyes of the world’s youth.” “Openness is the key”, answered **Thomas Carlhed** from the Swedish Institute, “and if Europe is going to be relevant for the world’s future, we need to keep our borders open. However don’t forget that right now, 16 of the 20 most powerful nation brands are in Europe. It is one of the oldest place brands in the world.”

Ab Kuijer (of the European youth marketing agency JuniorSenior) underlined the need for more trust in Europe and belief for the idea of Europe – and more European unity. “Why is there no option on social networks such as Facebook that allows you to choose ‘Europe’ as your place of origin? We should be the United States of Europe: you live in your region, with its own distinct identity, but you share your strength and experiences within Europe.” **Georg Wagner** of Spirit Design concurred: “Right now Europe is just an idea. But we’re at the beginning of a great concrete vision. And we need our own European version of the ‘American Dream’.”

Danica Purg, Founder and President of the IEDC Bled School of Management in Slovenia, said she believed that “Europe really lacks leadership.” Europe’s key asset may be its diversity and its traditions, but in order to achieve success, efficient leadership is required to manage all that diversity – and there is no better way than art. Slovene-German violin virtuoso, diplomat and consultant **Miha Pogačnik** used a Siciliana by Johann Sebastian Bach to deliver his inspirational and artistic message to Europe’s innovators: “Everything is organic. Everything grows and works in very logical, natural ways. And this is just one of the things which we can see and understand from music.” Contrasts between serenity and rush, between growth and stagnation, ending at the beginning and beginning at the end are all inherently part of any human activity and the importance of that understanding often underestimated.

Mariana Ferrari from PROCESOi (Spain) invited the participants of the IncrediblEurope Summit to join an exercise for generating ideas for Europe’s future over the next 40 years. Every innovation process, said Ferrari, “has three stages: a spark, an idea and an implementation. Basically, the spark is what we don’t have in Europe. We’re rich; we live well, in a beautiful place which doesn’t lack anything. Maybe that’s why we’re not so innovative.” In an interactive experience which saw the participants generating ideas individually and collectively, the participants were asked to give input on what Europe needs to do

in order to lead the world by 2049. “We have only six minutes to construct forty years”, said Ferrari, managing an exercise that has managed to provide 905 ideas centered around a variety of issues. All these ideas will be used to direct the work of IncrediblEurope in the coming time.

The next discussion panel round was chaired by the **Tulga Beyerle** of the Vienna Design Week and centered around Europe’s creative places and innovative spaces. Reflecting on the variety of participants included, Beyerle said she felt that “multi-disciplinary approaches such as the one today are great for getting ‘off the beaten path’”. **Outi Liedes**, who works with the strategic development of support for the creative industries in Finland, stated that Finland is currently working “to establish a university which will address business, design and technology at the same time, named after Aalvar Aalto, the famous Finnish architect whose work went into business, design and technology at the same time.” **Bettina von Stamm** of the London-based Innovation Leadership Forum addressed the crucial concept of change: “Most of us don’t exactly like change - we tend to stick to things we like.” Change generally means embracing uncertainty, without being sure what one ultimately gets. But it is only this uncertainty that can move things forward. And this requires strong individuals with strong arguments: “Driving by consensus doesn’t really make big change innovation happen.” **Christian Hense** of the Grameen Creative Lab related that it’s not always a big idea that can cause revolutionary change: “Remember - Muhammad Yunus started with 42\$ to 27 women in 1978. But a small idea with a strong partnership and a sense of responsibility can achieve everything.”

Roman Tolic, pioneer of the concept of Film 2.0 with his Hercules Film Network, underlined the need for change in his context: “The European film industry needs, must and will change. And the direction of this development is a completely new approach to involvement and interaction with and beyond the sector.” He also underlined Europe’s need for completely new markets such as content industries, located between the creative and IT sectors. **Irene Fialka** from INiTS, the start-up advisory service for graduates in Vienna, talked about knowing great ideas from good ideas: “Evaluating ideas is a very critical question. Before we actually support an idea, we go through a whole and very broad process of asking questions and finding out the team, the stage, the scope and reach of an idea. And we always strive to raise our own concerns before it’s too late.”

To wrap up the day’s work, two exciting presentations were delivered by architects **Áron Losonczi** from LiTraCon in Hungary and **Barbara Imhof** from LIQUIFER in Austria. Losonczi, who serves as an Ambassador for the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, presented his revolutionary light transmitting concrete: “The inspiration for light-transmitting concrete actually came from a work of art: it’s a captivating, almost impossible contrast”. He also highlighted the challenge for his small team in fighting copiers: “The only answer is to constantly work to innovate and improve.” Barbara Imhof, whose company has offices in Austria and India, and has worked with NASA and ESA, spoke of the immense potential of learning from Space: “A space station is basically like a farmhouse, an autonomous incubator for new ideas and experiences from a completely different environment.” Taking ideas into Outer Space and collecting them from beyond our planet is probably humanity’s key challenge for the coming years.

The event culminated with the presentation of the “**Brainswork Make a Difference Awards**”. These awards celebrate the work of those individuals who use their unique talents, creativity or ideas to make a positive difference for others in this world.

The laureates for 2009 were **Ilse Dippmann**, who 22 years ago initiated the first Austrian Women’s Run which has since become the largest women’s running event in Central Europe; **Suhas Gopinath** from India, who became the world’s youngest CEO at age 14 and now supports other young people as an internationally successful IT entrepreneur; the 24-year old Bosnian **Muhamed Mesic**, who uses his skills in 56 foreign languages to promote human rights and reconciliation throughout the world; as well as **professor Luigi Colani**, the planetary improver and visionary genius. They all have overcome a variety of obstacles without losing faith in their vision. Their special, individual way has – alongside their tenacity and endurance – motivated other human beings.

The awards were **initiated** by the passionate networker and Brainswork-CEO **Selma Prodanovic** and supported by the US star designer **Mirko Ilic**. “I am convinced that everyone can make a positive difference”, says Prodanovic, “but also, that there are certain individuals that can use their extraordinary ability not just for deeper change in their communities and in society, but also motivate and encourage people to make a difference and improve something”. Mirko Ilic added an appeal for supporting others, just as designer Milton Glaser (“I Love New York”) had supported him.

Apart from the day’s exciting presentations and panel discussions, the participants also had the opportunity to meet **werk**, original interior designs from **Werner** and **Katja Nussbaumer**; innovative wood art from **Toshen Ebersteiner**; **Tagtool**, an open source instrument for live visual performance; as well as the projects and programs of **Creative Space** and **Vienna Design Week**.

The summit was moderated by international trainer and lecturer **Martina Gleissenebner** and included a wide range of participants, such as **Erhard Busek**, former Vice Chancellor of Austria and Chairman of the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe; **Christoph Thun-Hohenstein**, Managing Director of the “departure” program for creative industries in Vienna; EDUCULT Chairman **Michael Wimmer**; **Romy Faisst** of Business Circle; representatives of the corps diplomatique and other decision makers and visionaries from a variety of sectors. The Summit participants all concur in their opinion that the summit was a full success: “I loved it! It suddenly became clear to me how much everything and everyone can, should and must make a contribution inside and outside their own box, to make things moving”, says **Aleksandar Klobucaric**; “it was a wonderful, energetic and positive event – and I hope that many will follow in its footsteps”, writes **Alexandra Ritter**. From Spain to Sweden, participants wrote how outstandingly inspiring were both the day’s speakers and the atmosphere of synergy and vision sharing: “A perfectly organized and outstandingly inspiring day. Leaving the province without leaving Vienna! Great!”, writes **Heidi Hueber**.

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