

The Catalonia Eco-design Award: A Tool for Sustainability

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A low-maintenance bicycle, a knife with an extremely thin blade, a bike lane separator made out of recycled material, a reusable and geo-locatable gift wrapping system... These are all eco-designed products already available in the market, but are people familiar with them? Are they successful? Are they really consumed? Eco-design is one of the instruments that will help us achieve a more resource efficient Europe, while at the same time boosting the economy and generating employment in our communities. The strategy is already being used by some companies but is not yet employed on a widespread basis in the conception of new products and services. Moreover, it is necessary to shift the mindset of consumers so that they value and demand these more sustainable products.

In order to help change these production and consumption models, in 2001 the Catalan public authorities established an award to recognise innovative, high quality and environmentally friendly products. Held every two years, until now it has focused on recycled products or products that help prevent waste generation. However, the award has evolved and in 2015 it will be called the Catalonia Eco-design Award, recognising products that incorporate eco-design strategies in general. It will also be international in scope, welcoming entries from Euro-Mediterranean countries. Divided into several categories, both products already on the market and those at the development stage can be presented.

In the presentation several examples will be shown of award-winning eco-designed products that have been successful in the market. Further initiatives will also be shown that accompany the Award, designed to help raise awareness about sustainable products and to broaden knowledge on the subject. For example, an explanation will be given of the workshops and seminars aimed at product design professionals or students, which serve both to disseminate the Award and to highlight the importance of incorporating environmental criteria in product design. The other elements that will be shown are the catalogues featuring the winning candidatures and the other selected award entries, published in paper and electronic format; the carbon footprint results of the winning products, summarised in highly visual and communicative data sheets; and the travelling exhibition of the winning products, held in various public and private venues in Catalonia in order to publicise these products and to explain the added value they incorporate. Last of all, it should be pointed out that many of the products taking part in this Award are included in the catalogue of the Buy Recycled Network (known by its Catalan initials, XCR), a virtual meeting point for buyers and sellers of resource efficient products.

Eco-design is a long-term strategy that will be incorporated little by little in all the products we consume. It must lead us towards a circular economy in terms of resources and towards the sustainable use of natural materials, as set forth in the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe of the European Commission. The Catalonia Eco-design Award is a tool that represents Catalonia's commitment to this path.