

A Spanish design firm

The case of the Antoni Arola studio (case 2.6)

Ariadna Peralta Lladó, Glòria Guirao Soro, Arturo Rodríguez Morató, University of Barcelona (UB)

CASE BACKGROUND

Estudi Antoni Arola was founded in Barcelona in 1994 by Antoni Arola. It is a well-known design firm specialized in the design of lighting. The studio has won several important awards and contests. We selected two of them:

- The public Christmas lights of Barcelona (2021).
- The lamp Làmina, which won a Silver Medal for lighting design at the Delta Awards in 2020, organized by ADI-FAD.

METHODOLOGY

- We conducted 7 interviews with different actors in different organizations involved in the two selected projects by Estudi Antoni Arola.
- We also did some documentary research at the Museum of Design in Barcelona.
- We proceeded to the content and discourse analysis of the interviews and the documents.



FINDINGS: PHASES, ACTORS, PRACTICES

1 Pre-production phase

Creative process by the designer:

- Informal and non-linear, using manual tools (a notebook and a pencil), intuition and previous experience.
- Collaboration with other actors. They help him decide if the project is technically feasible, economically viable and if it matches his values, particularly beauty.

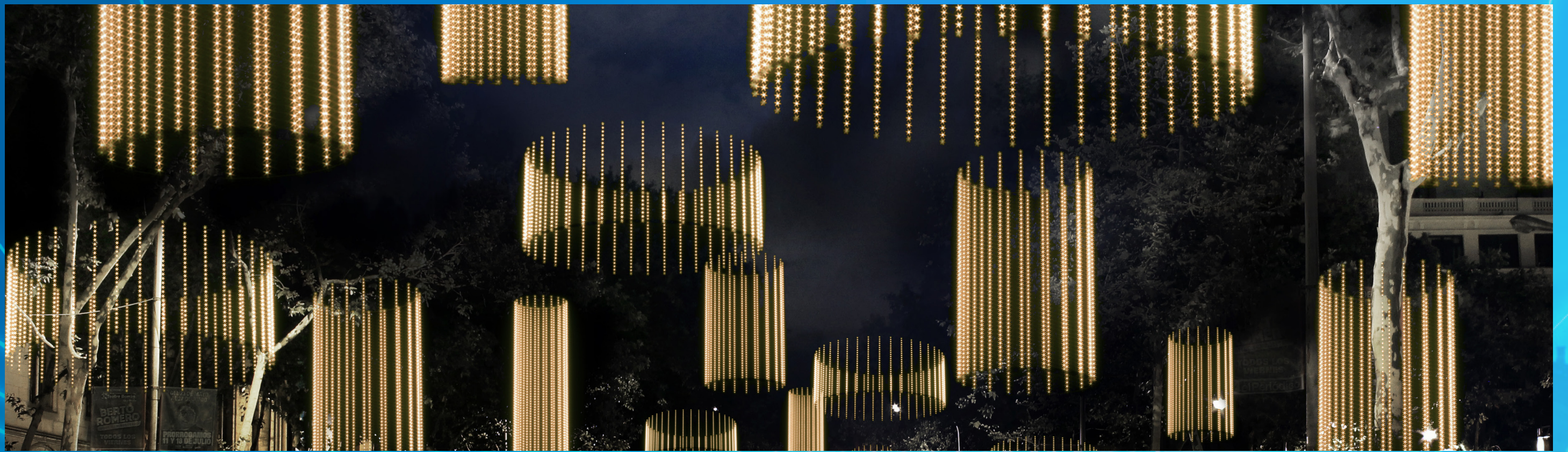
City council call for projects.

2 Production phase

- Unproblematic discussions in the use of materials between the designer and the editing company (Làmina) or in the complex design of the installation with the industrial lighting company and the city hall engineers (Christmas lights).
- However, some conflicts arise during the installation of Christmas lights project (see section 8.5).

3 Postproduction phase

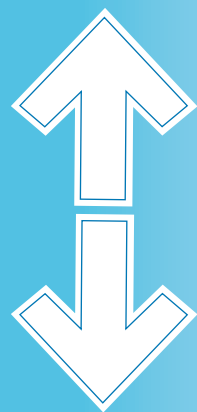
- In both projects, **informal reception** by users is fundamental, regarding citizens (Christmas lights) or clients (Làmina).
- **Formal reception by critics** plays a role in the Làmina project.



TECHNOLOGIES OF EVALUATION

Configuration of actors and organizations

Different organizations as collective actors.



Complex organizations with high functional differentiation in departments and hierarchies:

- The industrial lighting company the city hall.
- Simple organizations with low functional differentiation and hierarchies:
- The design Studio works as an atelier.
- Adi-Fad is an association of designers with few workers.

Complex organizations with high functional differentiation in departments and hierarchies: the industrial lighting company the city hall

Simple organizations with low functional differentiation and hierarchies: the design Studio works as an atelier. Adi-Fad is an association of designers with few workers.

LEVELS OF FORMALITY, RATIONAL ELABORATION, PUBLICITY AND SALIENCE

- Informal evaluation/valuation prevail in all phases.
- Processes involving a formal selection procedure (e.g. the Delta awards and the Christmas lights contest) use more objectivized criteria and regulated procedures.
- Some actors show a considerable degree of rational elaboration and public expression of their values (e.g. the production company thoroughly controls the process with administrative and technical programs and memorandums in order to achieve economic profitability, technical feasibility and safety).

VALUE STABILIZATION

Christmas lights project:

- strict timings help the production company to stabilize the value of efficiency, hindering the beauty sought by the designer.
- The absence of mediation by the City council in this value conflict suggests a prevalence of economic promotion over the artistic value of design.

Làmina project:

- The studio collaborates with the editing company to stabilize the values of beauty and durability during the preproduction and production phases.
- The Delta award is an external recognition of these values in the postproduction phase.



TENSIONS AND THEIR DYNAMICS ARISING IN DIFFERENT PHASES

1 Pre-production phase

- Design studio: interactions with clients are not generally conflictual.
- City council: tension between **objective (e.g. budget, feasibility) and subjective (e.g. beauty) criteria** with a prevalence of objective criteria in calls for design projects and tenders for production and installation.

2 Production phase

- Làmina project: interactions between the studio and the editing company are generally not conflictual.
- Christmas lights project: the design studio and the production company are in conflict over the **prevalence of beauty or technical efficiency**, without mediation from the City council. **Imbalance of power between a small organization (the studio) and two bigger ones** (production company and city council), enhances technical efficiency.

3 Postproduction phase

Different levels of conflict in the two phases of selection for the Delta awards:

- In the call for projects the aesthetic qualities of the projects and their use of technology frame critics' selection, but there is always a subjective approach based on the previous specialization of critics fostering discussions. Tension is reduced in the pre-selection phase through clear instructions and procedures. In the award-decision phase, the specialization of jury members in different areas also helps reduce conflict.