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**The power of making. The physical model as a design tool for product design students**

In the practice of product designers the computer has become an indispensable tool. Before the introduction of the computer, the design process was closely connected to the process of making. Since the mid-1990s, digital technology has slowly but steadily changed the field, resulting in a changing role for physical models. Many students tend to see the computer as the most important tool in all stages of the design process.

On a screen, an idea looks like a real product, and making a physical model may not seem necessary. But an image on a screen cannot answer the same questions as a physical model, which is tangible and can be placed in a real environment. A physical model provides information about spatial, material and other “embodied” properties that a computer cannot provide. A physical model generates an important bond between making and thinking, plays an important role in the test phase with the intended user and is a vital part of the iterative design process. In my theoretical research I have investigated what exactly the added value is of physical models in the design process.

I applied and created a test case for these findings in Innovationlab, a module assigned to the Product Design students at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. In cooperation with an organization called Refugee Company, the students were given a challenging assignment. They had to find solutions for improving the lives of refugees in emergency camps. My main objective was to explore how physical models can help students in their design process as a tool of communication between students and their clients and target audience, and also as a tool for developing a more inventive and critical attitude towards their own work.

**External critic: Gijs Bakker (designer, educator, owner of GBD Studio)**

*For the Graduation Presentation, a workshop soundscape is brought together with a series of projected images and quotes to form a view on Annelies’s research process. Here, the tinkering or thuds of hands and machinery at work provide a context for reflections on the importance of model-making in design education.*

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