



Roma, May 15, 2022

Cumulus International Association of
Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media
Secretary General Eija Salmi
PO Box 31000, 00076
Aalto Finland

Object: Letter of Motivation for the candidacy to Cumulus President, Years 2022-2025

Dear General Assembly, dear Cumulus Members, dear Secretary General Eija Salmi,

I wish to express my interest to apply for the candidacy of President of Cumulus Association for the mandate 2022-2025.

. Let's build the future together

I have been serving on the Board of Cumulus since 2016 for two terms in a row and I have witnessed directly the fantastic **global growth of our Association in scale and in scope**. Cumulus now reaches more than 350 members in 63 countries, taking its position as one of the most relevant international associations and a point of reference for design education worldwide. **The richness of our Association stands in the plurality and the diversity of its members**, spanning from large to small educational institutions, public to private, Universities to Colleges, Academia and Schools of Art, Design and Media.

. Who I am

For those Cumulus members who do not know me, I am a Full Professor of Design and Chair of the International Relations Board for the Faculty of Architecture and Design at Sapienza University of Rome. Sapienza University has been a full member of Cumulus Association from 2003-2004 and I have been actively involved since 2006, representing my home institution in the General Assembly and in conferences, working groups, publications and exhibitions. Prior to my position at Sapienza, I was a Design Faculty and a Graduate Chair at Carleton University in Ottawa (Canada) where I initiated the Program's membership at Cumulus and expanded its network to Canada and Northern America. My professional and private life brought me to travel extensively and to live in different continents, so developing a special curiosity in meeting and sharing different cultures. Enthusiasm and passion for research and discovery always allowed me to keep my mind open to share ideas and explore the future.

. Design is plural. Cumulus is plural

In my current position as the Director of Sapienza Design Research, I am working with eleven different Departments in my University to develop interdisciplinary design research and educational projects, including arts, computer interaction, user experience, industrial engineering, smart production, management, sociology, and more. I am always experiencing how the **design discipline is growing and becoming a complex part of a larger eco-system that respects the emerging differences**. We are living in a world of complexity and uncertainty: everything we were sure of yesterday, can change suddenly. I personally learnt from Cumulus Association the values of **respecting the diversity and plurality, open dialogue and global engagement, to generate a welcoming friendly environment for innovation and joyful experiences**. These have always been my values.



. It is time to celebrate Cumulus heritage

I have been initiating and co-chairing the ReVeDA working group on design research since 2013, and I co-curated the design competition, the exhibition, and the catalogue 'Design to feed the world', which featured during the Cumulus conference in Milano in 2015. During these projects I learnt about **the value of bottom-up initiatives developed from Cumulus members during and in between Cumulus conferences**. Cumulus offered me the opportunity to remain updated with the current condition of design education and research worldwide. This inspired me to start a **Design research map** at Cumulus with the involvement of our members worldwide, which will be published soon in a Cumulus Think Tank book. The book will display the incredible and diverse approaches, best practices, and fields in design, to become a resource to foresee and to lead the future directions. My vision for Cumulus is to develop a very large repository of data, which will be useful for design educators, researchers, and scholars. **Since Cumulus already celebrated its 30th anniversary, we need to start writing its history while collecting all the projects, people and the stories, also taking advantage of online and visual media channels.**

. Re-Designing Cumulus for post-pandemic

Recently, organizing the **Roma Cumulus conference 2021 'Design Cultures'** with the strong support of our Secretariat, offered me further understanding to the complexity and the number of possibilities we have to serve our Association and to make it grow and expand through **members' initiatives**. Organizing the conference during the COVID19 pandemic, meant completely **re-designing the event as a service design project to deliver a real hybrid experience**. This was not an easy task, to transform a physical conference into the digital realm. We posed this question: **how can we deliver the same cultural experience for online participation while maintaining the collegial spirit and "culture of hospitality" that participants look forward when attending Cumulus?** Although we are all looking forward to getting back to physical presence, we all know that the conferences of the future won't be the same and **we must offer an alternative option to those who do not have the privilege to travel**. From this experience, I wish to take the opportunity to **re-design together the post-pandemic development of our Association, through small initiatives that encourage participation and innovation**. I also wish this will consolidate the motivation of our members on the benefits in joining Cumulus. That is why my priority for the post-pandemic future of Cumulus will as it always has been to: **reinforce the values and the heritage of our Association, while promoting international mobility for students and professors, developing networks for research and education, sharing projects and, above all, getting back to speak about the future challenges of design and implement meaningful research/pedagogy projects.**

An important task for the newly elected Board and President will be to address the values of our Association, to encourage and promote the interest of our members and to keep the unity of our larger community. We will also support and reinforce the current programs and initiatives, such as the Working Groups, the Design Competitions, and the Student Ambassador Program. We will also focus on promoting and developing new initiatives, such as the series of Global Conversations and the Cumulus PhD Network, which I personally contributed to initiate for knowledge sharing between current and future doctoral programs. We will also **encourage our members to initiate new projects, to enrich our conferences, to develop new channels of networking, while involving all for our members and for institutional benefits. We will use our co-design innovation and creativity to leverage on the aspirations and the dreams and vision of our members.**

. Co-designing the future of Cumulus

Cumulus has always been a peaceful and a united association, built through the values of democracy, openness, inclusivity, co-design and integrity.

Now Cumulus is at a milestone: because of its heritage and size. The next three years will be important for its overall future. The new President and Board of Cumulus should have the capacity to **understand the right speed and protocols for decision making, balancing**



progressive and strategic management, with human respect and empathy, and always striving for the unity, the democracy and the progress of our Association.

The heritage of Cumulus is much larger than the Executive Board and the President elected to represent temporarily its members and includes the founder Yrjo Sotaama, who gave birth to our association; all the past Presidents, who made it grow up until now; our Secretary General Eija Salmi, who is taking care of the Association and its members until now together with the Secretariat team, and of course all the board members which gave an active contribution up until now. We can count 7 Executive Boards, which means many individuals, visions, time, projects and friendship. This is the spirit of Cumulus.

The future of governance should recognize such heritage, so developing a **Board of Senators**, gathering the past Presidents and eminent people to ensure the universal principles of democracy and the values of friendship.

Soon we are becoming a registered Association and we need to **co-design together the future of Cumulus, its organization and its governance**. The challenge for next Board and President is to **manage a transition phase, organizing inclusive working sessions** to start a positive dialogue with everyone. We would encourage any initiatives that support:

- the underserved design communities around the world;
- the sustainable and strategic growth of Cumulus;
- smaller bottom-up initiatives from the members;
- collaborative projects between our partners;
- approachable projects that serve and network students;
- the future of Cumulus conferences in the post-pandemic era.

In a nutshell: we will support your dreams for Cumulus.

So, **what is your dream for Cumulus?**

Next Executive Board will inherit an important heritage, and our job is to maintain it and develop it more. Our mission is to take care of each member to be key player for their success.

As a design community, with our creativity and innovation we should be able to fill Cumulus agenda in-between the main conferences. I believe this will help to reinforce our sense of community for the future along with the joy of meeting together soon.

Based on the reasons above, I would be pleased to serve proactively our community with enthusiasm and positivity, but moreover with the help and the support of the members of Cumulus, while listening and acting on their suggestions and ideas.

I take this chance to thank Cumulus for giving me an incredible opportunity for knowledge sharing and to live together exciting experiences, discovering new places and friends around the world. Thank you to Aalto University, thank you to the Secretary General Eija Salmi, thank you to our President Mariana Amatullo and the Board members, which I collaborated with in the last three years. I believe all the work done so far is significant and the outcomes will stay as important bricks to build on.

I wish good luck to all the candidates and a brilliant future to Cumulus.

Finally, I would like to thank the many Cumulus members from any part of the world, and also some eminent leaders from our sister associations, who sent me an enthusiastic endorsement both with a letter and a video. You may find all of them on the following webpage:

www.lorenzoimbesi.it

Sincerely,
Prof. Lorenzo Imbesi

