Using data- and network science to reveal iterations and phase-transitions in the design process

Understanding the role of iterations is a prevalent topic in both design research and design practice. Furthermore, the increasing amount of data produced and stored by companies leaves traces and enables the application of data science to learn from past design processes. In this article, we analyse a document log to show the temporal evolution of a real design process of a power plant by using exploratory data analysis and network analysis. We show how the iterative nature of the design process is reflected in archival data and how one might re-construct the design process, involving iterations between many parties, including the client, external consultants, suppliers, and designers. We also show how people use different representations during the design process and how this is associated with a design phase-transition in the process. Finally, we relate our findings with the literature on iterations and discuss implications for research and practice with application to project management and process modelling.