DRS2016

Design + Research + Society

Future-Focused Thinking

50 2016 Design Research Society
50th Anniversary Conference
27-30 June 2016, Brighton, UK

Editorial

The 50th Anniversary conference of the Design Research Society is a special event at an interesting time for Design Research. The Design Research Society was formed in 1966 following the *Conference on Design Methods* held at Imperial College London in 1962. In the lead up to DRS2016 we contacted the secretary to the 1962 conference, Peter Slann, who now lives in Scotland, and who sent us the original reel-to-reel audio tape recordings of that conference. Listening to those tapes it is striking not only how similar some of the discussions are about design and design research, but also how much has changed. In 1962 every voice is a male British voice. One comment at the end of the conference stands out as significant. Thanking people for coming to the conference and looking towards the future at the end of the closing session, John Page, then Professor of Building Science at Sheffield University, asks the audience three questions (the quote is verbatim):

> "if one agrees that there are bodies of knowledge that have been raised here, which need further exploration – particularly a case in point would be the terminology of design – is there any point in trying to get some kind of inter-disciplinary working party going on these problems? In this question of disciplines, is there any machinery or any way of arranging for an interchange of information between specialists and people working at Universities? Lastly, is there any point in making the whole thing more of a formal entity, a society, or something of that kind?"

Fifty years later it is clear that there was a point. The DRS as it exists today can trace its origins to the affirmation of that last question in 1962, and the 'some kind of interdisciplinary working party' that Design Research has become owes its identity to that 1960's future-focused thinking.

Since the Conference on Design Methods in 1962 many Design Research conferences have been held, with the DRS often as a key organiser. Certainly in the earlier days, defined sub-fields of research originated from these conferences. Design Participation in 1971 started the participative design movement that has grown into present day co-design. Design for Need, held in 1976, and taking a global view of the population, started both sustainable and inclusive design, and Design Policy held in 1980 introduced a much needed social, political and international dimension to the design research field as Design itself lurched into the consumerist 80s.

Peter Lloyd

From almost every conference comes a thread that leads to the present day, so the fiftieth anniversary conference represents a point to gather these threads together, see how they complement and blend with one another, and consider what kind of textile they might weave in the coming years. Indeed, the early advice that many gave was not to spend too much time looking back and to concentrate on the future. For DRS2016, as well as the Design Research field more generally, the increasing number of PhD researchers is a sign that this future is set to be a healthy one. A significant number of papers in these proceedings are the result of doctoral research projects and organisations like PhD by Design, who had a strong presence at DRS2016, ensure that today's PhD Researchers will become tomorrow's Design Research leaders.

The DRS Conferences have always looked to develop new formats for people to engage with one another, over and above the standard paper presentation. The 1973 Design Activities conference aimed at:

> "the provision of an extension of media forms beyond the normal 'verbalized' media of the average conference with the idea that such extensions were significant contributions to dialectical form, and not just 'entertainments'."

The 2014 DRS conference, in Sweden, continued that tradition by introducing 'Conversations' and 'Debates' alongside the more traditional academic paper presentation. It feels entirely appropriate that the field of Design Research is at the forefront of conference design, appropriating new technologies in developing more productive formats for discussion, networking, and presentation. And rightly so, because in an age when research papers and keynote presentations are available online we need to ask whether a conference, with all the travel, expense, and carbon involved, is still the most effective way of energizing and invigorating a research field.

DRS2016 is no exception and continues this ongoing conference prototyping activity. We have tried to develop a discursive conference that leans both towards the academic, in research papers, but also towards the practical in Conversations and Workshops. So this is a conference that presents existing research, projects, and discussions not as fixed end points, but as ongoing dialogue. To do that we have tried to balance the online conference with the offline one, and the ephemeral with the enduring. Partly this approach helps to provide a continued legacy for the conference, but it also helps to include as many people as possible in (re)directing the dialogical flow of research activity.

As an organising committee we met in January 2015 to talk about key questions, conference themes and conference design. From that discussion the three individual words of the DRS – Design, Research, and Society – were felt to define an interesting area for a conference; one that was about the practice and *doing* of design but also about design's societal impact and the moderating role that research plays between the two. Design + Research + Society perhaps represents a larger area than that of the Design Research Society, but as these proceedings demonstrate the appetite is clearly apparent for Design Research to embrace ever-wider concerns.

The underlying premise, however, was that 50 years of design research has provided us with a sound understanding of design and a solid foundation upon which to build. The interesting questions, then, appeared to us as not so much how we do more of the same – though that of course has its place – but in how we use what we now know. Hence the three broad questions that the papers in these conference proceedings respond to:

- How can design research help frame and address the societal problems that face us?
- How can design research be a creative and active force for rethinking ideas about Design?
- How can design research shape our lives in more responsible, meaningful, and open ways?

The DRS has a number of established Special Interest Groups (SIGs) which the organising committee thought important to prioritise but we also wanted to find a way to add additional emerging and complementary research themes to these. This resulted in a call for additional themes in June 2015 and a selection process that resulted in 15 further themes (from 25 proposals) alongside the 9 themes represented by the Special Interest Groups. The idea of a 'conference of conferences' began to emerge, with theme papers managed by sub-chairs, but consistency of peer-review overseen by a central review committee across all themes.

The systems currently available for managing paper submission, in the case of DRS2016 the excellent ConfTool system, now provide comprehensive integrative platforms to conduct sophisticated submission, peer-review, rebuttal, discussion, communication, and programming of papers, which means we can be more confident than ever about the academic quality of the final papers accepted for DRS2016. In total we received just under 500 paper submissions all of which were reviewed by two, and sometimes three reviewers, as well as being managed by theme chairs. In total 939 reviews were written by 290 reviewers with 200 papers being accepted, and a further 40 accepted following revision. This represents an acceptance rate of 49%.

The 240 papers in these proceedings have been grouped under 26 themes, 23 of which have been closely managed and developed by theme chairs (the other 3 themes derived from an Open Call). In these proceedings you will find an introduction to each theme by the relevant chair(s), outlining the background to the theme and putting the papers that were finally accepted and published into a wider context. Nine of the themes are the result of calls from the Design Research Society Special Interest Groups, which are active throughout the year and that report to the DRS council regularly. Many Special Interest Groups hold their own conferences, supported by the DRS, so the papers in these proceedings, responding to the overall theme of Future-focused Thinking, should be seen as a sample of those specialisms.

Fittingly for a 50th Anniversary conference there is a strong historical thread of papers – the field of Design Research now becomes a subject of historical study in the themes of *Histories for Future-focused Thinking*, *50 Years of Design Research,* and *Design for Design: The*

Influence and Legacy of John Heskett. This is a useful development, and shows the maturity of the field now, with early work not just a familiar citation in reference lists, but something that can be looked at in a wider cultural and historical context.

Many of the new themes bring a more critical and speculative approach to Design Research, framing research questions and practices in ways other than what some see as more 'traditional' evidence-based approaches to research. These are papers that argue for a particular position or approach to understanding design or practice. Examples of these themes include *Aesthetics, Cosmopolitics & Design*; *Design-ing and Creative Philosophies*, and *Reframing the Paradox: Evidence-based Design and Design for the Public Sector*. The emerging area of Social Design is well represented in the areas of *Design Innovation for Society* and *The Politics of Commoning and Design* and shows the importance of Design Research to discussing and achieving concrete outcomes for social good.

The idea and limits of Design and Design Research are explored in many themes, but in particular *Objects, Experiences, Practices & Networks*; *Design and Translation*; and *Design for Tangible, Embedded and Networked Technologies* take a more systemic view of design, placing it within a network of activities and technologies. In contrast to this other themes focus much more on the individual and collective experience of designers and others involved in the process of design, for example: *Experiential Knowledge*; *Embodied Making and Learning*; *Aesthetic Pleasure in Design*; and *Food and Eating Design*.

Of course there are themes that have been ever-present in DRS, and in other Design Research, conferences – understanding design process and the nature of design knowledge are the subject of the *Design Epistemology* and *Design Process* themes. The practical impacts that design can have on all types of organisations are explored in *Design Thinking*, an area of continued and increasing interest, and *Design Innovation Management*. *Design Education and Learning,* now with its own large biennial conference series, was the most popular theme for DRS2016, with 28 papers accepted from 53 submissions.

Finally, there are a set of well-developed themes, organised as part of DRS Special Interest Groups, that broadly explore the welfare of others both in a small and large sense embracing ideas of person-centredness, responsibility and ethics. These themes include *Design for Health, Wellbeing, and Happiness*; *Inclusive Design*; and finally *Sustainable Design.*

As in any research field the definitions between sub-areas often blur and overlap, and there are themes that contradict and conflict with one another, strongly arguing against a particular approach or theoretical grounding of another area. The DRS2016 keynote debates were designed to explore some of these issues and fault lines but more generally this should be taken as a sign of health and maturity. For many years we have heard that Design Research is a new field, still finding its feet, but as an organising committee we think the definition and extent of the themes in these proceedings demonstrate precisely the opposite. In Fifty years we have built up a strong and diverse research field that is widely applicable, broadly inclusive and, in 2016, more relevant than ever.

There is a sense in which design research sits at the crux of a false dichotomy; between on the one hand research in a 'pure' form (which values objectivity, subjectivity, experiment, discourse, history, analysis) and on the other the active engagement in shaping future forms by suggestion, prototype, speculation, practice, and intervention at all levels, from the molecular to the political, from the anthropological to the computational. In an increasingly fragmented and atomised world Design Research is a field which reveals the falsehood of the dichotomy. It is a field that collectively links disciplines, audiences, and technologies in a critical but productive way. The design of a conference – with its implicit value systems, partiality to statistical analysis, but with an emergent structure and representation – is no bad example of a future-focused design research that shares what knowledge is known and explores what knowledge is possible.

Finally, we would like to thank all people – the local organisation, the international programme and review committee, and all the reviewers – involved in organising DRS2016 and who have contributed to such a huge collective effort. The valuable time that has been given in helping to shape and deliver the conference has been very much appreciated. Thanks should also go to the Design Research Society, for supporting the conference so effectively; to the Royal College of Art and Imperial College London for providing time and resources as partner Universities; and to the University of Brighton, particularly the College of Arts and Humanities, for enabling the early vision of a 50th Anniversary DRS conference to be fulfilled.

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Previous Design Research Society and Associated Conferences

1962 *Conference on Design Methods,* London, UK

1964 *The Teaching of Engineering Design*, Scarborough, UK

1965 *The Design Method*, Birmingham, UK

1967 *Design Methods in Architecture*, Portsmouth, UK

1971 *Design Participation*, Manchester, UK

1972 *Design and Behaviour*, Birmingham, UK

1973 *The Design Activity*, London, UK

1974 *Problem Identification for Design*, Manchester, UK

1976 *Design for Need*, London, UK

1976 *Changing Design*, Portsmouth, UK

1978 *Architectural Design*, Istanbul, Turkey

1980 *Design Science Method*, Portsmouth, UK

1982 *Design Policy*, London, UK

1984 *The Role of the Designer*, Bath, UK

1998 *Quantum Leap*, Birmingham, UK

1999 *CoDesigning*, Coventry, UK

2002 *Common Ground*, London, UK

2004 *Futureground*, Melbourne, Australia

2006 *Wonderground*, Lisbon, Portugal

2008 *Undisciplined!*, Sheffield, UK

2010 *Design And Complexity*, Montreal, Canada

2012 *Uncertainty, Contradiction and Value*, Bangkok, Thailand

2014 *Design's Big Debates*, Umea, Sweden