Realising Art and Design Research in Policy Making Decisions

**Art and Design Research: Applied to the UK’s Grand Challenges**

**9th December 2021**

Introduction

The purpose of this session was to bring together experts and examples from case studies together to discuss Art and Design Research and Arts Research methodologies and how they can be integrated beyond the Art and Design sector itself to help tackle the biggest challenges faced by the UK. This can include, but is not limited to, health, climate, technology and digital transformation, social issues, EDI, and more. We have already been seeing emerging research across all these areas, especially at Design for Planet by the Design Council. What now is critical is for policymakers to acknowledge and utilise this research.

There is a wealth of good practice and case studies present that are not yet fully recognised by and realised in policy, and this session will aim to bring some of these cases to light. The speakers will provide rich and broad examples of where their work is contributing to the Grand challenges. Following on from the first roundtable, where we discussed examples of art and design research having an impact in policy making, this session considers how change can be affected from both a bottom up and top-down approach.

Chair: Shiza Naveed

**Shiza Naveed** is the Policy Manager for Design and Innovation within the Industry, Technology & Innovation team and the organiser of this event series. Through her work with the APDIG, Shiza is also part of the Design Council's Design Economy 2021 steering group and KTN | InnovateUK Design Innovation Network Advisory Group. Shiza is currently a part-time MSc Human Rights & Politics student at the London School of Economics & Political Science. Previously, Shiza has worked as a Design Consultant at a renewable energy service company (ESCO) and has experience as a Consultant at a Fintech start-up. At LSE, Shiza leads events within the LSESU Visual Arts Society. She also holds a BA in Philosophy from the University of Warwick.

* Shiza sent John Howell MP’s apologies that he was no longer able to chair the session. She then provided an over of the session aims and focus as well as a summary of the previous roundtable held on the 29th of November.
* A summary of the first roundtable, written by Shiza can be found [here](https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/news/how-can-we-use-our-arts-and-design-expertise-and-evidence-base).

Speaker: Professor David McGravie

**Professor David McGravie** is the Vice-Chair for CHEAD, Head of the School of Arts, and Deputy Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Education at the University of Derby. With a background in product design and related fields, he was an early adopter of 3D modelling and RP and is a keen advocate of technology within the design process. David has spent a large part of his HE experiences working collaboratively with UK, EU and partners overseas. A key supporter of TNE in its broadest sense, he has worked extensively in China and Malaysia amongst other countries and is well versed in leading and supporting curriculum developments in the U.K., EU and OS markets.

* Change comes from conspiracy, we must start small, build consensus of opinion, actively seek advocacy and draw in the policymakers once critical mass have been reached.
* The second session aims to build on existing case studies whilst the third will be an interactive policy design session – more information on this can be found here.
* Impact is now an implicit expectation of the work in academia, however largely the benefits of Art and Design impact is less well evidenced and felt. There is a now a need to create a viable evidence base, particularly competing and collaborating with STEM.
* The Creative arts, the creative industries are uniquely placed to respond to Grand Challenges, having the skills and attributes to collaborate effectively. Particularly the key interpersonal skills that allow the sector to work and engage with other disciplines, applying problems solving methodologies to tackle the issues that face society. Inherent in the sector is the basic thinking skills and methodologies that underpin impactful research, teaching students to design and think through simple trigger questions.

However, there is a clear need to promote and raise the profile the reputation, as a viable contributor to wider society and economy.

Speaker: Dr Rhiannon Jones

**Dr Rhiannon Jones** is an artist researcher and thought leader in Social and Design innovation through Civic Practice based at University of Derby, UK. She is a published scholar and holds the positions of chair of Cumulus: Contemporary Art Working Group and Trustee of New Art Exchange and Chair of Programming and Projects. She co-founded the International artistic research network, InDialogue, and is a UK researcher for Design for Emergency, (DESIS). She holds a membership with NCCPE and is a Midlands Co-creation Change Maker. As founding director and CEO of Designing Dialogue CIC, she created S.H.E.D, a unique space co-designed with communities; for the shedding of preconceptions about people and place. Working strategically with the Football Association, local authorities, H.E sector and creative Industries to stimulate debate on regenerative placemaking. She leads CivicLAB, an interdisciplinary Research Group at University of Derby. CivicLAB is centred on participatory culture, creative dialogue and experiential design for social impact. Most recently she was guest speaker for Design Council, UK for their summit for COP26 ‘Design for Planet’ hosted by the V&A Dundee, and is guest speaker for CHEAD on Atypical Leadership.

* The University of Derby have created an spin-off company InDialogue that acts as a bridge between higher education and industry. Under this banner, Rhiannon leads [the S.H.E.D project](https://weareshed.co.uk/about/) which is a mobile, reconfigurable, flat pack touring garden shed that behaves as a vehicle for research and its impact on dialogue.
* There are currently 19 Sheds in existence, co designed by stakeholders invested in their local area. The touring programme engages with 1500 school children, targeting identified cold spots. It also gave an opportunity for young people to highlight the youth voice and specifically what young people in Derby feel about their local community. S.H.E.D seeks a mode of inquiry for dynamic, dialogic discourse creating an open and vulnerable space of curiosity. It embodies the change in social and cultural civic regeneration and provides an opportunity to educate in a different way.
* Through its use, stakeholders are beginning to understand the value of the strategic artistic led practice, and is engaging on an international level with policymakers, Industries, Visual arts sectors, football associations and more.

Speaker: Dr Catherine Baker

**Dr Catherine Baker** is an Associate Professor at the Birmingham School of Art. As a practising artist and researcher, she has lectured widely and participated in a number of international drawing initiatives. Her contributions to publications on drawing and drawing research include books, journals, exhibitions, and conference outputs. Being invited to undertake a residency at a cutting-edge Clinical Research Imaging Centre in 2010, her research began to focus on interdisciplinary approaches that crossed into health and the geosciences. As part of Catherine’s cross-disciplinary practice, she is currently leading a team of academic researchers and non-academics on a research project based in Edinburgh, Scotland that investigates the impact of Adolescent Scoliosis on the lives of individuals and their families which is explored through visual arts practice. Dr Catherine Baker studied Fine Art at Central St. Martins College of Art and Design followed by an MA in Drawing at Wimbledon School of Art, completing her PhD by publication in 2012.

* An [interdisciplinary study](http://www.bsrf.co.uk/current-research/backbone-interdisciplinary-creative-practice-and-body-positive-resilience) into adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis led to artistic outcomes for the young women involved in the project. This kind of scoliosis is a condition whereby young people’s spines become curved and rotate causing humps, crushing of ribcages, occurring most commonly in adolescent women.
* Responses to this diagnosis are usually only collected through surveys in order to try and understand how people with this condition feel about it – this condition is considered a ‘deformity’ which is to be ‘corrected’ via surgery. This study involved comparing to trees who also grow ‘idiopathically’, and testing ideas of ‘straightening’ trees, addressing self-image through creative metaphor. This raised ideas of imperfection and perceived perfection as well as mechanisms of healing and repair. In essence, art practice was used in this health context and provided value to the participants of the study and their families.
* This is an example of art practice – not to be equated with art therapy but it inevitably has some overlap with the concept. The primary agenda for this study was to have participants think differently about their embodied experience of being in the world and the way in which creative metaphor can be introduced to change the way participants responded to the diagnosis of scoliosis – an agenda that was successful.

Speaker: Dr Kirk Woolford

**Dr Kirk Woolford** is a pioneer in the field of Immersive Media, having created his first interactive works in the early 1990s, as a method of exploring cultures and technologies. Kirk has a hybrid background with nearly 40 years of industry and academic experience, co-founding video games and interactive media companies in New York, London, and Amsterdam, and working with clients including Adobe, BBC2, Channel Four, Economist Magazine, and the Economist Intelligence Unit, and Sky Television. His creative work has featured at international festivals and venues such as the Venice Biennale, ARCO Madrid, Art Cologne, P.S.1. (MoMA), Shanghai eArts, Ars Electronica, ISEA, SIGGRAPH, and broadcast in the UK (BBC & C4), Germany, Netherlands, Austria, USA, et al. Kirk has published widely in movement and computing, digital humanities, creative technologies, performance technologies, serious games, and practice research.

* At Lancaster University in 2005, a study examined how people are moved by their environment and, attempting to capture this quantitatively not just qualitatively, which required the use of motion capture. For this study, participant dancers travelled to Abu Dhabi to explore how their movements respond to being in the desert, addressing various creative and cultural questions.
* Through this process, using different of motion capture and translational technologies, different application cases were developed using this information, including stroke rehabilitation and exercise analysis. This shows the value for these creative practices across multiple applications.
* Another instance of this application is [emteq labs](https://www.emteqlabs.com/), a start-up, who are pioneering the development of technologies that measure how people are feeling in virtual environments and whether they are having positives and negative experiences in those environments, a technology used in health settings by the start-up’s clients. This technology has a creative base and has been developed by creative technologists in the company.
* Additionally, InnovateUK misses a key part of the creative technology food chain that is driven a great amount by artist experimentation, where the artist plays around with new technologies, and how to use it in their own work. These experiments are then shown in galleries, which may be picked up by ad agencies looking to identify the ‘next trend’, which then develops these experiments into film and TV through popularity. Often, these ideas that are picked up relate to science fiction, and eventually influences projects by STEM members, typically engineers. It is these engineers that are credited for these ideas, however the backbone for this new line of thought is creative practice. More needs to be done to address this chain.

Discussion

This event as attended by APDIG members and CHEAD stakeholders.

* [The Big Idea](https://thebigidea.ie/) is an organisation that works to bridge gaps, make connections, and to unlock the knowledge locked in industry to help young people tackle the problems in society. They use innovative technology from industry and make them into accessible activities for students to address the problems they are passionate about. For instance, the five topics of focus for 2022 include: mental health, equality, housing crisis, climate crisis, healthcare, which are determined by students. This organisation aims to share creative knowledge with students whilst still centring their voices ;
* The importance of language was also raised, such as the use of STEAM. Comparing how well funded STEM is for example, it raises the question: what conditions do we need to produce to ensure success of excellent examples such as S.H.E.D or the Big Idea, in a way that is mindful of and helpful to local communities? What is it in the regulatory environment that needs to change to achieve this and how can we reduce the barriers to entry to make these projects successful? Further, should the A exist within the context of STEM?
* The term ‘arts’ was also problematised. The scope of this word is blurred, and art practice research and design research are distinct in certain ways. There is also a drive for interdisciplinarity – this has to be approached carefully. This is because if the scope ‘sounds broad’ to the funding board to which it is proposed, the lack of clarity and explicit explanation may cause nervousness.
* When doing interdisciplinary work, investing an enormous amount of time to find the right people to work with is key. This is not to say it has to be completely harmonious as it is sometimes sticky but this is where a lot of learning happens across disciplines.
* The [Economic and Social Research Council](https://www.ukri.org/news/49m-funding-boost-for-urgent-social-and-economic-challenges/) has funded £49 million to a number of new centres that make use of interdisciplinary research focusing on some of the UK’s grand challenges, with 36 universities involved, but only 2 representing art and design, both assigned to one project looking at the socio- digital. Perhaps a way to think about this would be how the US, where all publicly funded research requires a designer in residence or artist researcher as the condition of the funding who is present from the start of the process.
* Perhaps there is benefit in articulating the sector’s value in different spaces. [S.H.E.D.](https://weareshed.co.uk/about/) has for instance made a strategic and deliberate approach to go pitch to corporate companies and to bring that money into higher education. 90% of S.H.E.D’s funding goes to freelance workforce and to young creatives who are desperate for opportunities and they have the opportunity to showcase their work. This process of using private sector funding in the higher education environment has allowed the commissioning of 7 young artists, who have developed portfolios and some are studying in Derby University. Thus, other ways of operating must be considered.
* Programmes such as the [AHRC Design Partnerships](https://www.ktp-uk.org/case-study/introducing-a-new-collaborative-pilot-design-exchange-partnership-dep/) are fascinating as they provide an opportunity to add a design expert into a non-design sector to embed changes. This is exactly how the sector is going to see change: by embedding it in non-creative sectors.
* AHRC funded the [audience of the future challenge](https://www.ukri.org/our-work/our-main-funds/industrial-strategy-challenge-fund/artificial-intelligence-and-data-economy/audience-of-the-future-challenge/), and the [National Centre for Immersive storytelling](https://creativeindustriesclusters.com/partnerships/national-centre-for-immersive-storytelling/#:~:text=StoryFutures%20Academy%20is%20the%20new,government's%20Industrial%20Strategy%20Challenge%20Fund.) – this has health and social impact that can be developed but it must collaborate with the other councils.
* If the creative sectors struggle to communicate value through monetary means to the government and policymakers, then another approach might be to focus on the ‘market failures’ that the government refer to, such as issues around sustainable design, deprivation, health, and other challenges. For instance, S.H.E.D could communicate their impact by stating if S.H.E.D. wasn’t created, what would have the cost of no intervention? Perhaps more research is needed here on that invisible value that Art and Design have.
* [The Global Challenges Research Fund](https://www.ukri.org/our-work/collaborating-internationally/global-challenges-research-fund/)  required a demonstration of mutual equal process amongst partners in proposal, for instance ensuring that global south partners had agency when engaging with the global north. It focused the minds of everyone involved in a positive way to ensure there was no imbalance, could AHRC embed this and other funding bodies?
* AHRC representatives noted that they are also looking at the design portfolio and looking to foregrounding design not just as a discipline in its own right but foregrounding other disciplines, making sure design researchers are not just brought into projects as a bolt on at the end, which is too often the case. AHRC are also looking at their principle’s framework, where supplementary funding is provided for meeting certain criteria, such as interdisciplinary work. Perhaps this is something more research councils need to look at and work more closely together.

About APDIG

The All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group (APDIG) is a cross-party coalition of Parliamentarians as well as art and design sector organisations that work to: critique existing government decision-making, help the sector better engage with the policy process, and develop new policy ideas that improve the sector.

About Policy Connect

Policy Connect is a membership based, cross-party think tank with four main policy pillars; Education and Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability and Health & Accessibility. We bring together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to inform, influence and improve UK public policy through debate, research and innovative thinking, so as to improve peoples’ lives.

We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums and commissions for which Policy Connect provides the secretariat and delivers impactful policy research and events programmes. Our collaboration with parliamentarians through these groups allows us to influence public policy in Westminster and Whitehall. We are a social enterprise and are funded by a combination of regular membership subscriptions and time limited sponsorships. We are proud to be a Disability Confident, London Living Wage employer and a member of Social Enterprise UK.

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