Special Issue editorial: Safe Harbours for Design Research

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While each of the European Academy of Design (EAD) conferences are distinctive with its own personality, the 14th EAD conference, Safe Harbours for Design Research, hosted by Lancaster University in the UK had radical changes of format thrust upon it. The fluctuations and uncertainty of the unfolding COVID pandemic meant we could not hold a physical conference. We were keenly aware though that the design research community was isolated and uncertain, we felt we had to offer an opportunity to come together, to draw comfort and inspiration from the excellent work being undertaken in these extraordinary circumstances. The restrictions on travel presented a real challenge as the warmth and generosity of this rich community of design research across disciplines, nations and levels of expertise is one of the defining characteristics of the EAD. We pride ourselves on supporting this community and much of this nurturing, of passing on the craft of undertaking excellent research traditionally happens in the activities between formal activities and presentations, for example, the hugely popular PhD days and walking activities in the previous 13th EAD Conference Running with Scissors conference in Dundee, 2019.

We wanted the theme of the conference to reflect these uncertain times but also to communicate that better times were ahead and together we stronger. This mutual support is a defining characteristic of the EAD community. To represent this, the conference chairs and EAD directors developed the metaphor of Safe Harbours, a place of shelter and safety, a space for reflection and taking stock, exchanging ideas, making plans, dreaming of what's over the horizon and collaborating on new adventures. These were the driving motivations for the theme of Safe Harbours for Design Research. Within this, we focused on education, sustainability, collaborative design, design management and technology. This metaphor of safe harbours runs through this special issue as well, the authors here not only wrote and delivered excellent, insightful conference papers they also expanded and developed these short pieces of writing into the full journal papers presented in thins special issue.

One of the characteristics of design and design research is its optimism (and sometimes opportunism), to look at adversity as a driver not just to make the best of things but to use disruption as a spur to make things better than before. The conference chair, EAD directors and president developed a format that, in some ways, offers advantages over traditional physical conferences. The travelling, hosting, feeding and entertaining of conference delegates can be very resource intensive financial and environmentally. The carbon footprint of conference travel, especially for the global community that makes up the EAD now, is considerable. Equally, the economic costs of delegates can be prohibitive. There is a danger that the costs related to physical conferences create an 'echo chamber of privilege' from institutions able to support the conference fees, transport and subsistence. This continues to be a critical issue for the EAD and how we are thinking about the future of conferences, especially as the participants of our conferences come increasingly from a global not European catchment.

Safe Harbours sought to minimise environmental impact, but we were especially keen to make the conference as accessible as possible when many academics and institutions were

not at all secure about their current and future finical stability. Setting the conference fee at only £50 for the entire 5-day event made the barriers to participation as low as possible.

Safe Harbours also reconsidered the form and function of the peer-reviewed conference paper presentation. Intellectual rigor and peer review are the cornerstones of EAD and these remain so, but it was clear that we needed a new model. Simply transposing a physical experience online was never an option, we had loftier ambitions for an effective, technically resilient online conference. Drawing on the interaction focused research and experience of the conference development team we redesigned the EAD experience to fit our completely virtual format. Track sessions were shorter and spread throughout the week. They were focused on short guest presentations and panels with contributing authors as full papers and 'visual abstracts' were available before the sessions. We found participants came informed of the insights in papers making for excellent, highly interactive panel sessions. This was a richer, more stimulating exchange that was a much more effective exchange of ideas than the traditional procession of twilight presentations and a scant minute or two for questions. The panel discussions were also made available to conference attendees as new ideas, insights, and perspectives emerged from the interplay of the panel and the thought leaders. All the papers submitted are available to all in an open access repository supported in the long term in this link https://www.proceedings.blucher.com.br/article-list/ead2021-364/list#articles. In addition, some of the papers were selected to be further developed into journal papers and blind peer reviewed for this special issue.

Galdon and Hall critique and update the seminal work of Sir Christopher Frayling, proposing a novel refraining from the ontological nature of design knowledge. In particular, they draw on Chris Jones's work to chart how the temporal element to design is absent from historical conceptions of design—posing key questions for future fundamental design research. This is poignant with Chriss Jones`s passing in August 2022. As the nature of design is in flux, for example as the means of production are increasingly available to anyone with a internet connection, an examining the fundamental nature of design and how this can be made fit for the future rather then relying on models established 50 years ago or more is more important than ever.

The significance of systems thinking present throughout Galdon and Hall's paper is further developed by Neuhoff et al. in 'The Potential of Design-Driven Futuring to Support Strategising for Sustainable Futures'. Here the authors analyse a range of research through design projects to explore how strategizing is conceptualised and how design-driven foresight can support strategic thinking concerning sustainability and circular policy making. Design has always been effective at future visioning and then moving towards that vision, this paper offers a view on how sustainability can play a stronger role in these strategic visions.

Sustainability and a search for more environmentally conscious and circular production systems are one of the defining challenges for design and broader society. Walker and colleagues utilise the located making framework to understand traditional making practices and their relationship to places, values, sustainability, and future potentials. They introduce a case study based on local craft makers in the Yellow River valley in China. A more human,

long-lived relationship with the products that form our environment is an important dimension to moving humans into a more balanced relationship with the environment.

Through a study with 23 people involved in healthcare design initiatives, Oertzen et al. Explore the complex dynamics involved in integrating lived experience in participatory healthcare design. The paper Navigating the Tensions of Integrating Lived Experience in Participatory Healthcare Design describes six underlying tensions of integrating lived experience: in/ability, im/partiality, dis/connection, in/direct, dis/similarity, and mis/understanding. As participation becomes increasingly the norm for both design research and healthcare this paper provides important insights to practitioners and researchers in these areas.

Participation is also critical to Niki Wallace in her paper Fostering Communication and Collaboration Through Regenerative Design Games. Framed by critical pragmatism and performed through co-design, the paper discusses the role of games in explorations of uncertain futures. It highlights the important role played by care practices in co-design processes, something that is critically important if we are to move from co-design as a good process to co-design where the outcomes consistently perform more effectively in real world contexts.

Safe Harbours exemplified how we can come together in difficult times to continue to move forward the boundaries of design research but also though to support and nourish the design research community. This evolving, supportive approach will continue in the future. There are real questions over the future of the academic conference as a form of insight exchange and collaboration. Many of us are increasingly uncomfortable with the environmental and financial costs of picking a single point on the globe and making for it. Over the coming years new models for academic conference will emerge and have already started to emerge.

The truly global reach of the EAD now and the diversity of participants is also stimulating a examination. In its inception the European Academy of Design was inclusive and open but now, as we develop and grow our community it feels like the culture and values of our organisation have grown beyond Europe. Perhaps its time to think about the Academy of Design Research to recognise the global reach of our design research community.