

Creating an atlas of design and policy

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Design can, and does, have influence throughout the policymaking process, and we see design/design activities being applied in a wide range of public organisations around the world. The nascent discipline of design for policy is putting a spotlight upon specific design methods and process being used in local, regional or national governments, both within and beyond policy or innovation labs. Whilst design has been considered within the realm of policymaking (policy design) since the 1960s, there is a tendency towards relying upon 'design thinking' which refers more to creative sense-making and problem solving than the application of specific design methods (e.g., design fiction, rapid prototyping, co-design). A key challenge for researchers in policy design and design for policy both is that there are many different projects being carried out, using different terminologies in different academic disciplines, with literature being located across governance, policy design, political science and design research publications. The lack of a coherent definition of design for policy also hinders its wider understanding and the ability for designers/researchers to communicate its potential value to those designing and making policies. This is particularly the case when a lot of the most intriguing applications and case studies cannot be shared widely due to sensitivity issues. Policy exists within a complex ecosystem, and often designers are not able to grasp the complexities and political nature of this realm (Howlett, 2020), yet are enthusiastic about the potential for design to contribute in various stages of the policy making process.

In this paper, we propose that a large-scale mapping exercise is necessary in order to understand where design is being used or might potentially be used in policymaking in policymaking, at which stages (e.g., in the evidence gathering or implementation stages), by whom and in what realms. Before we can enhance the methodological rigour in the realm of design and policy we need to understand the complex landscape of research and practice that already exists, but which might not be visible between branches of research and practice in different academic disciplines and silos.

We call upon researchers working in the realms of policy making, political science, design research, amongst others, to join us in mapping the global picture, and uncovering processes at different scales from macro to micro, in order to develop an atlas of design and policy that will be of use for both policy makers and researchers in understanding each other's worlds. This research, which is ongoing, will contribute to a global debate on how design can assist governments in both making sense of the complex situations they face and how design methods might help them engage with stakeholders and communities.

Howlett, M (2020) Challenges in applying design thinking to public policy: dealing with the varieties of policy formulation and its vicissitudes, *Policy and Politics*, 48:1, pp. 49-65