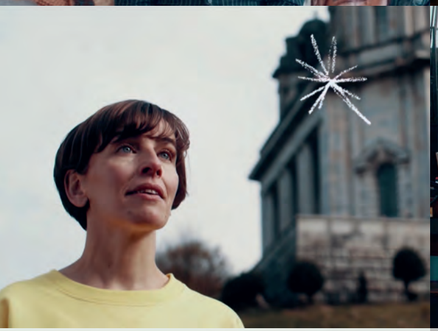
Going Beyond Imagination



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Going Beyond Imagination
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imagination LANCASTER
Lancaster University
UKRI Research England

What we believe in

The unstoppable power of imagination

Exceptional design skills for our future

Deep immersion and engagement leads to revelations

Exploring uncharted territory and revelling in uncertain ground

We

Set agendas to address real world issues

Challenge and re-define boundaries

Collaborate and communicate across sectors, locally and globally

Why

We have built a critical mass of diverse, passionate, internationally acclaimed design-led researchers

We produce a flow of excellent design-led research that transforms people, products, places and policy for the better

Our character

Creative

Challenging

Deep, reflective and impactful

Unstoppable

Swashbuckling

Our spirit

The place for brilliant design-led research

Our focus

Accelerating Imagination's brilliance

ImaginationLancaster is an open and exploratory research lab at Lancaster University using design and architecture to make a difference in the real world.

06 Introduction

08 Imagination Philosophy

Part 01

01

Introduction

Design-led research has the power to change the world.

As one of the world's largest design research groups, we have the chance to harness that power.

We are a 50-strong team, working across numerous design disciplines. We are product designers and architects and technologists and social innovators. We mix academic experts with PhD researchers with undergraduate students with members of the public with local authorities with private business, and beyond.

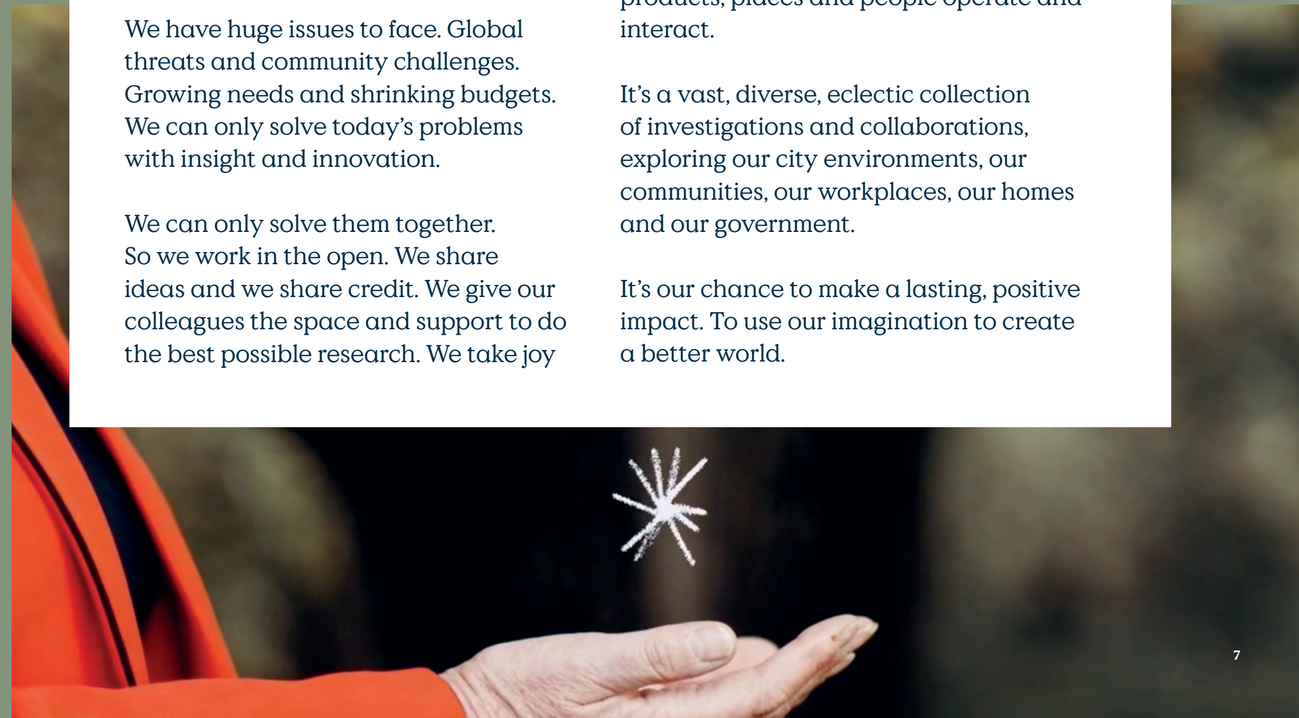
This is academia applied. Going far beyond the abstract to create impact. Research with results.

We have huge issues to face. Global threats and community challenges. Growing needs and shrinking budgets. We can only solve today's problems with insight and innovation.

We can only solve them together. So we work in the open. We share ideas and we share credit. We give our colleagues the space and support to do the best possible research. We take joy in our work, and in each other's work. Right now, we have more than 50 projects running from our studio – looking at how products, places and people operate and interact.

It's a vast, diverse, eclectic collection of investigations and collaborations, exploring our city environments, our communities, our workplaces, our homes and our government.

It's our chance to make a lasting, positive impact. To use our imagination to create a better world.



02

Imagination Philosophy

We explore the boundaries of excellent, rigorous design research.

We are restless in the pursuit of new or modified, effective methods to undertake design research in a manner that has impact on the wider world. We achieve this through the contributions of a diverse range of team members selected from the gamut of design research, bringing inspiration and knowledge from areas including health, product, business materials, visualisation, sustainable, inclusive and urban design.

This creates an energetic, dynamic, curated mélange of different approaches and cultures.

Imagination promotes a design research philosophy that includes experimental, collaborative, speculative, inductive, explication-based, practice-based, hybrid, and hacked approaches and methods.

We believe that innovation and creativity occur along disciplinary boundaries, and that we will only find answers to problems at the place where science, technology, social science, humanities and the arts converge. As such, our design research creates a uniquely powerful socio-technical bridge between academic disciplines, industry, society and policy, transforming future products, places and services.

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Part 02

‘The £13m investment Research England and Lancaster University made in ImaginationLancaster transformed the nature and critical mass of the group. The almost doubling in size of the research group has resulted in an extraordinary influx of talent. Whether this is in lectures in the future of work, policy design or radical co-design the new members of ImaginationLancaster have helped create a new critical mass of pluralistic design research.’

Beyond Imagination

Drawing on design research steeped in cultures from South America to Asia to Africa and Europe we collaborate across disciplines, with and beyond academia in a globally distinctive group. Grounding this global vision we undertake research that helps companies, communities, government and wider society to be better equipped for the challenges the future will bring.

We achieve this guided by the principles of mutual learning, joy and respect.

Professor Leon Cruickshank, Principal Investigator for the BI project

Professor Rachel Cooper, Co-Investigator

Professor Nick Dunn, Co-Investigator

Our research explores our city environments, our communities, our workplaces, our homes and our governments. With partnerships across multiple sectors and industries our research provides fresh perspectives on complex global challenges.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

Project in a Box – the Connecting Kids Project

Case Study 2

Biodiversity Logbooks – designing visualisation tools and practises for nature with children and teachers

Case Study 3

Design for a Pandemic – working towards recovery and resilience

Case Study 4

Social Distance Lab – a methodology for the design and implementation of social distancing in public buildings

Case Study 5

MyMainway – co-designing a social housing community project

Case Study 6

Digital Infrastructure for Reusable Packaging – the world's first open data standard for reusable packaging

01

Project in a Box – Connecting Kids Project

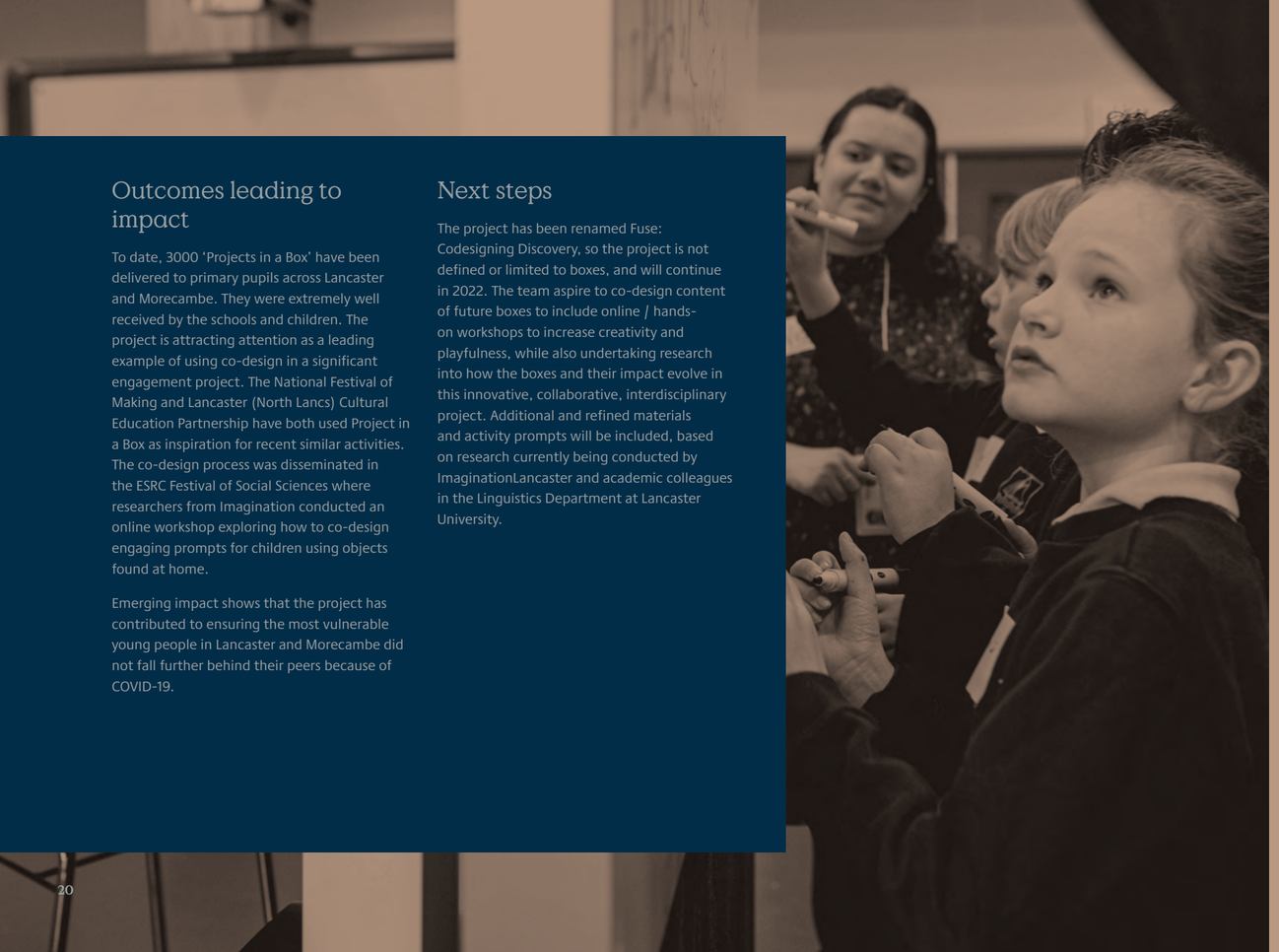
Context

The closure of schools throughout the county due to COVID-19 raised concerns within local government around the potential negative impact on young people's education, health, and wellbeing. Lancaster and Morecambe district has many existing complex obstacles to the social mobility of young people, and COVID-19 could potentially increase the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' to such an extent the gap could become irreparable.

Overview

'Connecting Kids' is a unique project in the HE sector in terms of scale and level of engagement with its community. It was driven by a network of local stakeholders responding to schools requests for help during the pandemic. Each step of the project was taken hand in hand with teachers and community partners to ensure equal ownership of the solutions. This rapid response to an urgent need also needed to be a long term, sustainable investment for the future. The project had three main areas of focus: internet and technology provision for secondary school children, learning resources for primary school children, and mentoring support across both.

ImaginationLancaster's Community and Public Sector research cluster worked with colleagues in Linguistics and Lancaster University Student's Union to support primary school children in their creation of 'Project in a Box'. Along with basic stationery and household items the boxes contained 'prompt postcards' created by our design researchers based on suggestions from academics across Lancaster University. The 'prompt postcards' aimed to excite, engage and connect with young children isolated at home – children could record and then share their activities with their teachers, peers and caregivers in a creative exchange.



Outcomes leading to impact

To date, 3000 ‘Projects in a Box’ have been delivered to primary pupils across Lancaster and Morecambe. They were extremely well received by the schools and children. The project is attracting attention as a leading example of using co-design in a significant engagement project. The National Festival of Making and Lancaster (North Lancs) Cultural Education Partnership have both used Project in a Box as inspiration for recent similar activities. The co-design process was disseminated in the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences where researchers from Imagination conducted an online workshop exploring how to co-design engaging prompts for children using objects found at home.

Emerging impact shows that the project has contributed to ensuring the most vulnerable young people in Lancaster and Morecambe did not fall further behind their peers because of COVID-19.

Next steps

The project has been renamed Fuse: Codesigning Discovery, so the project is not defined or limited to boxes, and will continue in 2022. The team aspire to co-design content of future boxes to include online / hands-on workshops to increase creativity and playfulness, while also undertaking research into how the boxes and their impact evolve in this innovative, collaborative, interdisciplinary project. Additional and refined materials and activity prompts will be included, based on research currently being conducted by ImaginationLancaster and academic colleagues in the Linguistics Department at Lancaster University.

02

Biodiversity Logbooks – designing visualisation tools and practises for nature with children and teachers

Context

Over the past century, botanists and educators have observed a sharp decrease in human ability to notice and identify plants in their environment, especially among urban populations in the West. Often referred to as “Plant Blindness” or “Plant Awareness Disparity”, it is caused by a combination of factors – some of which are related to reduced opportunities for engagement with nature and the increase in the use of digital technology. This inability to recognise, appreciate and value plants has far reaching social, environmental, and economic implications. Children are interested in plants, but this interest drastically decreases as they reach adolescence.

Overview

Working with two schools in Morecambe Bay as part of their Key-Stage 2 curriculum, the project addresses the loss of skills for meaningful engagements with nature and seeks to encourage school-age children to spend time in place, to look for traces of nature, and study and document their findings. Lancaster University academics in ImaginationLancaster and the School of Computing and Communication designed tools and processes to foster skills for noticing plants in their environments, while also connecting the smaller scale of their individual features to large-scale systems.

Helping children develop a basic understanding of plant structure and types, plus appropriate vocabulary, was the focus of initial workshops developed with the teachers. Children participated in a field trip exploring two contrasting local areas. Each child was given a toolkit for capturing photographic impressions (‘cyanotypes’) of nature specimens found and collected in Morecambe Bay. The toolkit includes photo-sensitive paper, an information sheet to help describe plants and their habitats, stickers with prompt questions to add notes, and templates to add additional information to the guide, as well as a map to mark locations.

Outcomes leading to impact

The drawings made at the end of the activity demonstrated how the children's noticing skills had developed throughout the process. In comparison to those drawn prior to the activities, there was a significant increase in attention to detail in the drawings, suggesting the slow visualisation process used plays a significant role in developing key noticing skills. A few weeks after the field trip, teachers reported the idea of 'noticing' had been embraced by the children who were adopting the practise when approaching other subjects.

Children used technical language that went beyond the requirements of the National Curriculum and teachers reported children teaching their parents.

Next steps

The project is being incorporated into the Morecambe Bay Curriculum developed by Eden Project North and local schools. An adaptable set of resources based on the original toolkit will be made available to educators. These resources will be aimed at reinforcing current learning activities and introducing activities that contextualise plant ecology in relation to seasons, climate, and human activity.

The project has been exhibited as part of Tongji Design Week in Shanghai (China), and a series of interactive exhibitions are being planned in Lancaster for 2022.

03

Design for a pandemic – working towards recovery and resilience

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in late 2019, presented a vast array of challenges to societies globally, many of which involve design at their core. This project aims to explore how design has been deployed worldwide, to harness creativity and innovation across disciplines and often across borders, to develop solutions to the complex problems the pandemic has highlighted.

Overview

In March 2020 researchers in ImaginationLancaster began to collect examples of how design contributed to the global efforts to contain the outbreak of COVID 19. Examples were collected at both the micro level, e.g., the design and use of facemasks, production of PPE equipment and social distancing measures, to the macro, e.g., the rapid re-design of health-systems, development of track and trace systems and mobile applications around the world. Through compiling examples in a database, we began to see the development of the designs through the different stages of the pandemic. The current areas of design explored are:

Technology design and use: including contact tracing mobile applications, use of drones and robots in healthcare and public settings.

Personal protective equipment: including design and production of masks in domestic and commercial settings, co-production of ventilators.

Graphic design and communication: including government communications, public health, and data visualisation.

Urban design: including rapid re-design of public spaces to enable social-distancing, and consideration of the future of the urban realm, including infrastructure such as transportation.

Service design: including rapid design and prototyping of local and national policies for lockdown implementation, rapid building.

From these examples we developed a timeline of design interventions and a framework of response comprising four key stages: reaction, adaptation, recovery, and resilience. We then developed some outline design principles to enable recovery and build resilience for the future.

Outcomes leading to impact

Through creation and analysis of a database that captures design interventions which emerged during the pandemic, we can consider the role design can play in collectively recovering from the pandemic and building resilience for the future. Whilst findings represent the beginning of this process, we discover design has been deployed in a wide range of ways and on all scales.

As we live through and emerge from the pandemic we should reflect, within the realm of design research and beyond, on how we might harness design to enable recovery and build resilience for the future.

By developing the database and publishing it online we intend to encourage researchers and practitioners to add to it and use it as a resource when designing for similar scenarios in the future. This collaborative approach has potential to contribute to the development of design for recovery and resilience globally.

Next steps

To enable greater contributions across the global design research community we are exploring how to make the database, currently on an Excel spreadsheet, interactive and accessible to a wider audience. One journal paper has been written and accepted (Strategic Design Research Journal), and we are also publishing an edited volume titled Design through a Pandemic: from Reaction to Resilience, charting design interventions from around the world by renowned design researchers and practitioners.

04

Social Distance Lab – a methodology for the design and implementation of social distancing in public buildings

Context

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the day-to-day use of buildings and is likely to have an enduring medium and long- term impact on the arrangement of building layouts to comply with social distancing requirements. The cost in person-hours to the global economy represented by the millions of concurrent and disparate exercises in building layout re-planning during the pandemic has been truly significant.

To reduce further substantial cost to the economy we proposed a unique automated methodology using parametric software Rhino and Grasshopper to reduce timescales for reopening, and adaptation in the event of revised government advice, local lockdown, or further variant outbreaks.

Overview

The Social Distance Lab tested a 'live' site, automating the design of the interior layout and wayfinding signage of the ground floor of the Storey Building, owned by Lancaster City Council (LCC). We opened to key stakeholders in May 2020, providing opportunity for local business owners to explore a building altered in layout and decked with signage to comply with social distance restrictions, while collecting evaluation data from users active in the space.

To generate the redesigned and optimised building layout incorporating user routes, user destinations (e.g toilets / tables), and signage locations we used a simplified AutoCAD 2D building plan of the building. Three fitness functions were defined: social distance (in meters), net useable space (in m2), and total number of users. Signage was developed in collaboration with the LCC and installed before opening.

Outcomes and impact

Key stakeholder evaluation by invited businesses showed that most visitors to the Social Distance Lab thought the social distance layout and signage was effective, and thought they were visually clear.

Store designers were asked to draw a plan with identical parameters of input prior to viewing the automated outcome. Human-designed plans included, on average, 32 seated locations compared with 40 of the automated. The percentage of useable space defined as the seating region improved by 12% in the software generated layout. On verifying accuracy, the human-designed plans include an average of three locations that infringed upon the 2m social distance.

The research successfully automated social distancing guidance in the case study building using optimisation software, provided socially compliant plan designs, and delivered improved capacity and useable area in comparison with human designed layouts. Subsequent user evaluation proves the method presents visually clear and effective social distancing measures. By retaining variable fitness functions, crucially social distance, the layout may be redesigned instantly to any value of distance, providing an agile and responsive means to comply with changing social distance advice.

The research was featured in several national and international news articles, including BBC radio, Autodesk University, and the UKRI website. It has been the subject of several national international talks, including the Seoul Design International Forum.

Next Steps

The signage has been released on the internet as an Open Source Social Distance Signage pack. We are collecting data from other buildings that have used the signage, including on our new Health Innovation Campus.
The research was presented as a conference paper at LOD2021 and will be developed into a journal paper.

05

My Mainway – co-designing a social housing community project

Context

A social housing estate in Lancaster, UK is in need of significant investment; a collection of high rise blocks of flats which were constructed in 1960 and refurbished in 1990 need major improvement work, with one option being complete redevelopment of the area, including demolition of the current flats. ImaginationLancaster and Lancaster City Council have partnered on this community project to work with the 500 residents of the Mainway estate to support them in reimagining the future of their estate as an ideal place where you would choose to live.

Overview

This consultancy project aims to foreground as protagonists the present and future residents of the Mainway estate in Lancaster. Citizen participation is an essential aspect in the transformation of the built environment since it brings together urban agents (e.g. residents, direct users, technicians, architects, planners, public workers, politicians, etc) around projects, acting as a catalyst to collectively define an agenda built upon citizen needs and social situations. Participation is not a series of events, rather, a process by which the estate, the city, and its inhabitants experience a collective process of learning, approaching perspectives from the common and the diverse, looking for agreements, commitments, and reaching consensus.

A participatory process of this nature allows incorporating and responding to the needs, expectations, and demands of the inhabitants or direct users of the Mainway redevelopment. It provides essential information for the design of the strategies and architectural solutions that will shape the vision of the future estate, always under the criteria of sustainability and social justice. With this, the consultation aimed to activate a sense of community and committing its residents to the redevelopment process – a great challenge, but also a great opportunity that can be driven by citizens. The essence of

a neighbourhood and a city are not found in the quality of the physical spaces but the human activities and interactions (also with the environment) that they support, conforming a social environment. Hence, it is not just about physically refurbishing or rebuilding a residential development, but also, and far more important, building a networked community to support the diverse identities of it, to care for it, to be part of it before, during, and after its materialisation.

Outcomes leading to impact

The MyMainway project began with a series of engagement events which ran from August 2020 to January 2021, where we sought to build a close-knit collaboration with the residents to collectively reimagine the future of the Mainway estate. We ran door-to-door events, drop-in sessions and walks around the estate to discuss with residents their experiences of living there. Through engagement on these events, we encouraged and facilitated residents to become active voices and essential contributors to the redesign of their estate. The ideas and conversations from these engagement activities informed a report which went to City Council Cabinet in March 2021, where a decision to further progress these 'once in a generation' ambitious proposals to improve social housing on Mainway was given the green light to move to the next stage.

Next steps

The next stage of this project will see the drawing up of a strategic vision for the site, concept designs, detailed project and business plans, and a tenant management plan for consideration by the city council's cabinet.

06

Digital infrastructure for reusable packaging – the world's first open data standard for reusable packaging

Context

The Circular Economy is widely recognised to be desirable due to the potential to promote economic growth from creating job opportunities and new businesses, improving the security of supply and cutting materials' cost, as well as reducing environmental impacts of products. At its core, the Circular Economy is about information flows as circularity is not the result of one company closing the loop, but requires the ecosystem to do so through collaboration and communication between stakeholders, such as manufacturing brands, retailers, customers, and regulatory bodies.

Overview

Digital technologies create novel ways to improve traceability and transparency throughout a product's lifecycle, yet there has been little development in data integration and utilising this to operationalise closed-loop supply chains. No single organisation collects or controls all the relevant data, and thus an Open Data Standard is a crucial first step towards creating reusable packaging systems and supporting access to high-quality, relevant data to support decision making.

The Sustainability research theme worked with Reath, a start-up with a mission to build the digital infrastructure required for businesses to shift to the circular economy, who were supported by HappyPorch and the Open Data Institute and funded by Innovate UK in their creation of the world's first Open Data Standard for reusable packaging.

Outcomes leading to impact

This project on digital infrastructure for reusable packaging identified four main challenges to adoption of reusable packaging for businesses, which centred around affordability, health and safety compliance, and reputational concerns.

Four big business concerns were identified:

+ Questions of affordability due to additional expenses from changing their systems
+ Concerns about increased risks and complications for health and safety
+ The potential to hurt brand reputation if their scheme didn't turn out to be better for the environment
+ Current regulations that make single-use containers more competitive. Because packaging taxes are based on weight, business investing in reusable packaging are actually penalised because improving durability often results in heavier containers

Digital trackers, unique barcodes, can address these hurdles. Being able to track an individual container enables businesses to calculate packaging lifespans and return rates from customers. Both are crucial to determining affordability. The unique barcode on a container is needed for recalling batches and evidencing cleaning between refills and return to the shop floor. These 'digital passports' also enable businesses to tell packaging stories in an appealing way, as they are able to verify and quantify their reuse activities for marketing purposes. A reusable container may require many uses for its environmental footprint to compare favourably with single-use alternatives, and so accurate accounting for refills is core to useful life cycle assessments. Currently organisations pay environmental taxes when packaging is released onto the market, but with digital trackers, it would be possible, to exempt organisations from paying every time their packaging is re-filled. In this way, track and trace allows governments to create taxation that incentivises reuse.

Next steps

The Sustainability research theme and Reath will continue work with the Open Data Institute, focusing now on building trust among stakeholders who will use and engage with the Open Data Standard for reusable packaging. We are seeking additional businesses to trial use of the Open Data Standard and establishing track and trace for reusable packaging.

We believe in the unstoppable power of imagination.

01

Flourishing in adversity

The coronavirus pandemic has destabilised some of the long-held ideas we have had about the way we live, how we connect and why we do so. It has also highlighted the many inequalities across societies and demonstrated the need to re-design at different scales, from the hyper-local through the societal and to the geopolitical level.

We in design research must change our processes, our focus and address the challenges we face now and in the future with new zeal. There is a need for innovative, collaborative and cross-disciplinary approaches, and a focus on the resilience of everyone, not just the fortunate few. It is time to do what needs to be done with disciplines across a multitude of domains of knowledge.

Design research must take a leading role where it sees it is able to contribute to the ways in which we can collectively move forward and build resilience at all scales of society.

In addition to new and ongoing challenges for health and wellbeing we must not lose sight of the emerging, devastating effects of climate change. This unique period offers an opportunity to collectively re-consider many aspects of our lives and to re-build in ways that are socially equitable, ethically responsible and more sustainable. It is clear we need new visions for collective life that enable people, planet and the many other species we share it with to flourish. This will also require new pathways that empower us to design, deliver and sustain these ambitions, for us and future generations. The Great Reset moment to build these together is now. We must take a leap into the unknown and push the boundaries Beyond Imagination. That is what we are aiming to do.

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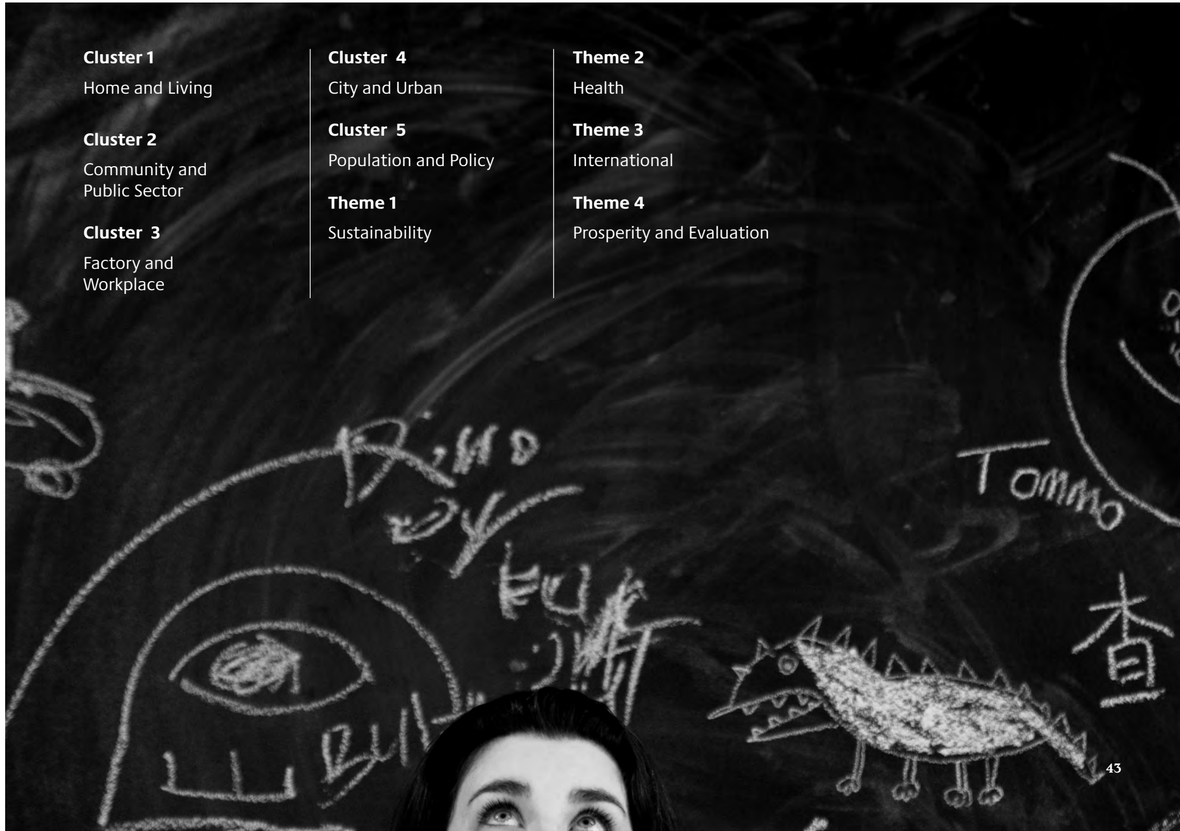
Part 03

We have developed our team around key clusters and cross-cutting themes that encompass many of the local, national and global challenges that are likely to mark the next 50 years.

This provides interdisciplinary platforms across which we will collaborate both within our team and outside of it with policy makers, businesses and organisations, communities and other academics.

Clusters & Themes

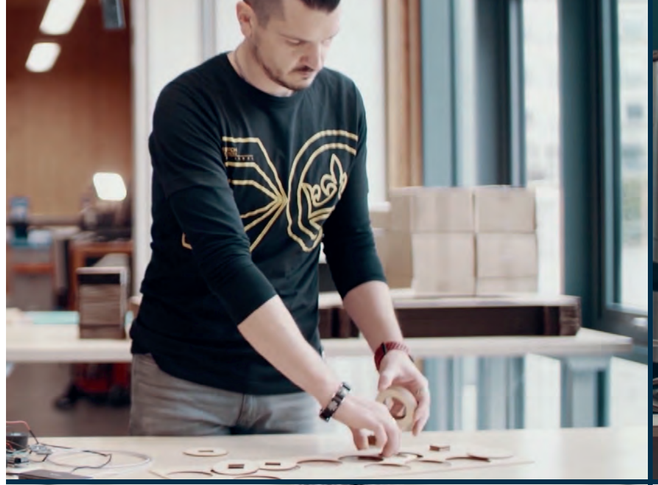


Cluster 01

Home and Living

What are the main challenges of modern living? How important are technologies to our everyday lives? What impact will our ways of living have on future societies?

In bringing design research and architecture research together, we are pioneering new theory and practice in regard to the roles that emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things play in shaping peoples' everyday living experiences – now and into the future. We are addressing key socio-technical challenges by exploring what future modes of living might look like, how they might function and what it could be like to experience them. Through these Design Futures, we envision tomorrow's worlds as a means to inform the design and adoption of socially and environmentally responsible products, practices and policies today.
Our work has a strong sustainability focus and we aim to help people better understand how to embrace less resource intensive lifestyles for the benefit of their fellow and future generations. With our industry and academic partners, we are exploring space syntax, AI legibility, generative evolutionary design, energy in the built environment and research through sustainable design.



Cluster 02

Community and Public Sector

What part can design play in forging stronger links and improving local services? Where does design fit into a world of committees and policies and stakeholders?

By harnessing radical co-design and collaborative urban development, communities have the chance to help themselves – to shape their own world. Not just engaged, not just involved. Empowered. And what makes it radical? It's not so much the 'design', but the 'co'. Whether it's helping to redesign whole council estates or helping people get more active, we do more of the 'co' than anyone else, going far, far beyond standard tick-box-consultations. We offer communities responsibility over the nuts and bolts and budgets and relationships and decisions. We give communities real control and real agency. In a world of distrust, this is transparent and democratic. And, in a world of tighter budgets, it's also a more effective approach. It's a powerful catalyst for change... Enabling more effective design of products services and the built environment. Transforming the culture of public service delivery. Shortening the distance between the funding and its impact. Opening minds and creating connections and offering solutions to complex problems. Because co-design doesn't fit into a neat, linear process.

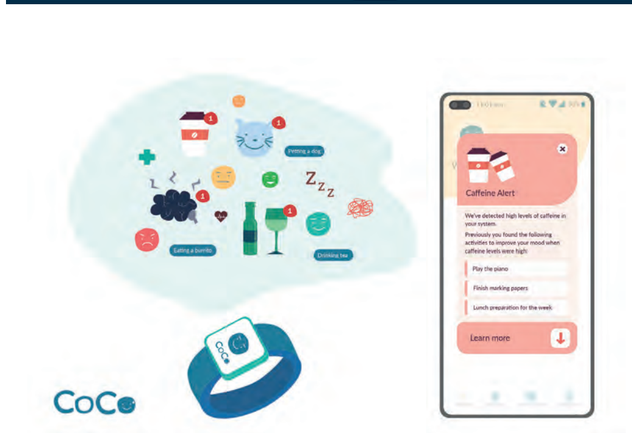
It's open-ended and exploratory. Playful, even. It generates unexpected twists and unplanned turns. Answering all the different inputs, meeting all the different needs. Our expertise lies in fostering all these possibilities – both by breaking down hierarchies that stand in the way and building up a framework for others to harness. We put up the scaffolding. Then it's up to the communities to create. Now, we're working to create better scaffolding – researching the process and the practice. Exploring better ways to harness co-design, drawing expertise from a broad range of sources. We're codesigning co-design. We know it works, but now we want to make it work better – to use co-design to create a new world.

Cluster 03

Factory and Workplace

From the global economy to our personal lives, so much is shaped by our workplaces, our factories, and our supply chains.

We see it all through the lens of design. Not just the products we create, but our approach to critical-creativity. Not just the way we use new tools, but the way we work with each other. Design empowers us to explore the intersections between work, technology, and society, to cast light on innovative ideas in ways no other discipline can. To transform the what and how and when of work. We're imaging, prototyping and testing new computational design processes. We're investigating new uses for virtual reality, augmented reality, machine learning and AI. We're charting data-driven, solutions-oriented approaches for harnessing the physical and digital tools of the future. We're reimagining collaborative workflows, visualising social, professional and innovation networks, using the designers-eye view to shape the future of factories and workplaces. New technologies are emerging faster than ever, becoming ever more integral to our lives. And while they offer incredible leaps in communication, commerce and healthcare, not every impact has been positive. Design-led research offers the perspectives that other kinds of research cannot – letting us look critically at how technology really touches people's lives, by enabling people to reshape the systems they use to work, be innovative and harness creativity. Applying the design research lens to factories and workplaces we're not just helping create better products and shaping future businesses. We're working on a better world.



Cluster 04

City and Urban

The urban environment is fundamental to the ebb and flow of life, for billions of people. Our lifestyles and our families, our health and our wellbeing.

And, just as the rush to our towns and cities is a defining feature of human history, the way cities are shaped, built and developed is set to define our future and that of the countless non-human species we share them with. We work to examine how cities have developed over time, the way that the urban fabric was created and what's next for our urban environment – socially, culturally, ecologically and technologically. We bring together design, architecture, landscape architecture, social science, the arts and more – a team built to explore important issues from a range of perspectives. To look beyond narrow, traditional confines and explore the less tangible – but no less important – aspects of the city and urban environments. This matters – more than ever. From population growth to climate change to global health, the urban environment is a key element to the biggest issues facing our planet. And our work is making a vital contribution to those issues. We're looking past the notion of cities as merely human habitats. We're working to understand the importance of darkness and different ecologies of cities.

The capacity of architecture to be a living system. The materials, processes and methods that will build our future. The process of urban design and the people that drive it. We're challenging existing theories and practices to redefine the very concept of 'city'. This is work at the cutting edge. Yet it's also work with impact in the real world, on real life. We've supported local councils and major government departments, the EU Policy Lab and the World Health Organisation. We've collaborated with bodies and businesses, with policymakers, practitioners and fellow academics. And our door is open for more. We're offering new perspectives. New insights and new ideas. New opportunities to change the world.

Cluster 05

Population and Policy

Where does design fit into the world of policy making?

Design is a discipline that imagines multiple futures. Challenges the steadfast and the certain. Considers different perspectives – indeed every perspective. For policymakers, using design is a route to a more holistic view – letting you live the impact of every decision, feel every ripple in your pond. Design gives us the tools and techniques to create prototypes for testing and stories for sharing – rendering policy real for the makers and the users. Used well it can make us all visionaries, lending insight and foresight. It exposes the issues we face, revealing all the complexities of our multi-dimensional world. But it also gives us the tools to explore and develop joined-up answers. Design in policy is an approach at work today. Internationally. Nationally. Locally. It's shaping the policies, processes and procedures and places that govern life today. Data and disease. Artificial intelligence and emotional wellbeing. Urban structures and virtual worlds. Our food. Our money.

Everything. This matters, more than ever. It's time for better understanding. And we're here to provide it. We have come together to make design for policy more effective. More accessible and applicable.

More visible. More valuable. Exploring how it could be better understood, better harnessed and, simply, better. We're doing research that nobody else is. Assessing, testing, evaluating, exploring, discovering, sharing. We're using design to inform and create new futures.

Theme 01

Sustainability

Today, consumption is king. It fuels our economy and our culture.

It's part of our ambitions, our behaviours, even our character. But the price is high. Sustainability, social inequality and the climate crisis are urgent. These are defining issues of our generation. We're investigating every angle. Our environment, our economy and our society. The role of the consumer and the power of the citizen. Gathering perspectives from China, Colombia, Cuba, Cumbria in the UK, the US, India and beyond to understand what sustainable living actually means.

Because creating a sustainable future demands a radical rethink – in the way we design products and technology, develop policy, farm food, and more. We need meaningful and targeted change. We also need new models to understand our world differently. It's a vast subject to tackle – touching every element of our research, shaping every idea, innovation and issue. But it's also a huge opportunity. Together, we can find a new way of living sustainably. We can change the world for the better.

Theme 02

Health

Healthcare is an industry built for the sick. It's all about curing the disease and managing the condition: less health-care and more illness-care.

Any discussion of prevention comes a distant second to patching up short-term problems – especially in times of crisis. For us, health isn't something that can be prescribed in a pill. It's a vast, interconnected system of behaviour, lifestyle and environment. How we live and where we work. What we eat and how we sleep. The air we breathe and even the way we clean. Design-led research is a bridge between it all. A way for looking at the whole problem, from a wholly different perspective. For looking past the symptoms, and working with the person. For creating better ways of living and working, not new medicines. It's an approach with a powerful vision – where caring for the health of the individual leads to deep-rooted collective change. We're looking to a future where doctors are a last resort, the emergency option. Imagining a world without chronic disease, when we can all be healthier in body, in mind and in society. Together, we can create truly healthy lives.

Theme 03

International

We believe that ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity is everyone's business, no matter where we were born or live, or our race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs and socio-economic status.

That's why, for us taking a global perspective starts from looking into contexts locally, and doing what is socially responsible and fair, is the perfect vehicle for addressing some of the biggest issues facing billions of people across the Global South, and beyond. International challenges demand huge answers. For us, it starts with bringing together expertise from across disciplines and organisations, reaching across the world to collaborate, co-design and connect. It gives us the power to help develop policy in Malaysia, prevent infection in Ghana, engage communities in Angola and to understand how to build community resilience in Brazil – to rise to the challenge of achieving the UN's sustainable development goals. Together, we can unlock more fulfilling lives. The world we want to be part of, we can build together.

Theme 04

Prosperity and Evaluation

Too many of us think about prosperity as pounds and pence, when we should think of health and happiness, of community and society.

So... how do we cultivate real prosperity? Can we create it without sacrificing something else – wealth without well-being, environment over emotion? How does prosperity spread and translate – from high-street to community, from farm to village? We're not just working to better understand these ideas, but to better evaluate our own work. By pioneering methods, reshaping processes and rethinking projects, we're building evaluation into the very foundations of every area of our research. It's an ever-evolving concept – a constant dialogue about the nature of prosperity and our power to achieve it. But with it comes the chance to improve economies, communities and livelihoods. Together, we're giving our research real impact. We're changing the world.

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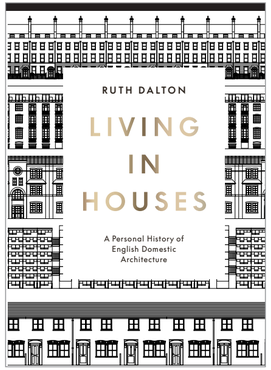
Please visit our website to learn more about our team

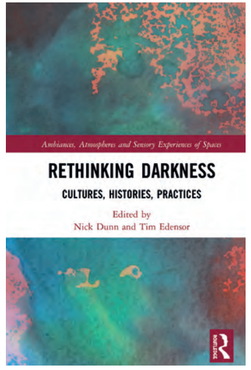
Books, papers and journals

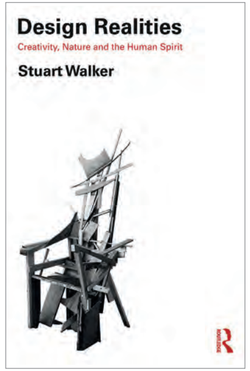
Writing books is a key research dissemination activity in ImaginationLancaster. It's in the book form that profound new perspectives have the space to be developed and grow, where nuanced arguments can be developed and substantiated.

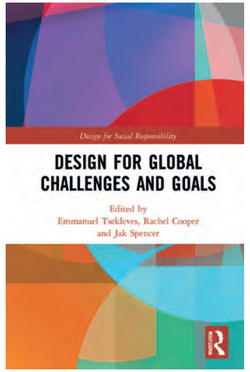
We have used this form to explore a multitude of different areas, from significant monographs on Ettore Sottsass, the relationship between sustainability and spirituality, the transformation of the city as night envelops it or how designing transcends the profession of design. Throughout the life of ImaginationLancaster we have produced 86 books published externally in addition to a series of over 20 'little books', mini-books published internally to explore issues such as ethics in design, speculative design and density in the urban landscape.

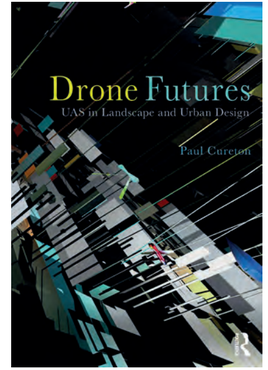
In addition to monographs we have also produced edited books drawing together many voices on a specific topic and have contributed 184 book chapters. This long form knowledge production is complimented by a sustained publication in peer reviewed journals. The journal paper offers an opportunity to make a contribution that is often more contemporary and fast moving, they address the issues of now, we have produced over 360 peer reviewed journals in leading design journals but also in cross disciplinary journals such as Nature.

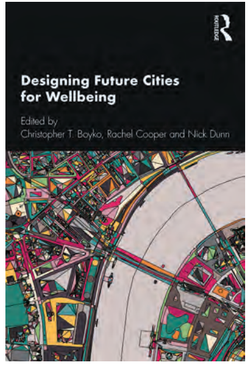


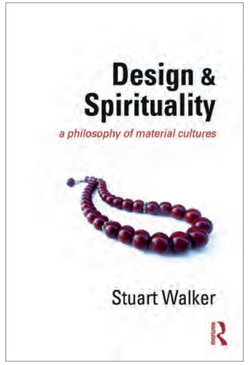


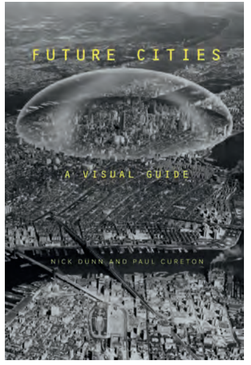












Contact us

We can only solve today's problems with insight and innovation. We can only solve them together. Contact us to find out more.

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