Theme 3: Policy Making
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Introduction: Creative Intersection of Policies and Design Management

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How might we establish and sustain a discourse on design in policy-making and policy implementation?

The relationship that exists between design, policies and governance is quite complex and presents academic researchers continuously with new opportunities to engage and explore aspects relevant to design management. Over the past years, we have witnessed how the earlier focus on developing policies for design has shifted to an interest in understanding the ways in which design contributes to policy-making and policy implementation. Research into policies for design has produced insights into how policy-making decisions can advance professional impact and opportunities for designers and the creative industries. This research looked into how design researchers and design practitioners themselves can benefit from specific policies that support design activities and create the space for emerging design processes.

This track explicitly sought to address issues of design research and design practice in the context of the making of government policy and design related aspects of policy implementation. With this in mind, we were hoping to encourage authors to engage with the topic by identifying and articulating creative intersections in this area or by providing a critical academic reflection on creative intersections when we approach policies as a matter of design. In addition, we thought it relevant to explore and inquire into how policy-makers and public managers currently apply design and were hoping to elicit papers on these topics.

In addition, we wanted to experiment with the conference format in a way that would foster new forms of engagement and interaction to pursue the above questions. We broke with the usual conference format in order to enable a sustained conversation among researchers who want to advance this emerging area of design research and practice. For this reason, participants were asked to present their paper in a Pecca Kucha. That is, each
presenter was allowed no more than 20 slides and no more than 20 seconds per slide to communicate the essence of their paper (see www.pechakucha.org). Our aim was to focus the remaining session time on the implications of these findings that may give direction to further research in this area.

Figure 1: The distinctions between policies for design and design for policy indicates two different approaches to research at the creative intersection of policies and design management. This track intentionally focused on research into what design brings to policy-making and policy implementation.

Included papers and what they contribute to this emerging discourse
Fei Hu, Kun Zhou, Hongshi Zhou, and Jingsi Gong concern themselves with the difficulties involved in adapting national efforts to recognize design as an industrial asset on a regional level. Their paper „Design Policy Driven Development of Chinese Industry: The Experience from Guangdong“ traces “three turns of Chinese design policy.” Design policies, they argue, have already been recognized as important and effective on the macroeconomic level. Yet, the implications on the regional level are less well understood and the paper seeks to offer insights into how to enhance and perfect the current policy path. With that the authors mostly address issues that relate to policies for design, an area that is distinct from the emerging discourse about how policy-makers go about designing policies in the first place. Nonetheless, there are, “creative intersections” that hint at a larger role for design in the policy context beyond policies that benefit professional design and designers.
The two papers by Matthias Hillner further demonstrate the difficulty to establish a discourse around policy-making and design management that specializes in design for policy. His first paper „Managing Design IP — does the end justify the means?” turns to law and “the value of design rights” as they effect designers. Law, of course, is essential in the policy context and law making is already being looked at from a design perspective (REF). But Hillner remains product-centered, using a product designed as a ride-on travel case for children to illustrate the implications of copyright law and intellectual property rights on design and designers – here “a small design firm”. This is a perfect example of research into policies for design.

Hillner’s second paper expands on this notion. Here, he strives for “a critical and detailed review of an investigation into design right infringement in the UK”. Titled „Design IP legislation in the UK — an opportunity to innovate?” he reviews historic cases of design right infringements to draw conclusions on how designers and design IP stakeholders can cope with legal infringements. This work offers generally valuable and practical insights based on rigorous research but it does not engage in the issues on the role of design in policy-making and policy implementation. We can sense the creative intersections of policies and design management but the author does not attend to these.

A similar assessment could be made about the paper by Xiaojian Liu, Yingying Jiang, Yan Sun: “Why Chinese Industrial Designers Oppose Vocational Qualification Certification?” However, reading carefully beyond the linguistics one can glimpse the beginnings of a design critique of policy development that inquires into weaknesses in the design process and design methods in the production of a policy that falls short of its intent. This paper examines why the Industrial Designers’ Vocational Qualification (IDVQ) system created by the Chinese government the 2010 and now formally implemented in two provinces faces opposition by many Chinese industrial designers. The authors suggest that behavioral economics and social psychology including loss aversion, causal schema, availability heuristic, subjective probability and the misjudgment of representativeness, and fairness offer a key to understanding this outcome. Their findings reveal that subjectivity and emotional factors contributed tremendously to many industrial designers’ opposition to the IDVQ. Though the study methods itself remains wobbly and thus endanger the validity of their findings, the core of this research shows how and why design matters to policy-making, policy implementation and policy outcomes.

The paper „User-Involved Design for Direct Citizen Participation in Policymaking: Adaptive Values, Adaptive Conditions and Common Ground“ by Chorong Kim, Yeunyoung Kwon, and Ki-Young Nam demonstrates how one might employ a comparative analysis to explore the intersection of policy and design management. These authors compare and contrast the implications of adaptive values and conditions shared by user-involved design (UID) and direct citizen participation (DCP) within a policymaking context. This research is motivated by a quest to understand how design values can and do contribute to participatory policymaking. It is a worthwhile exercise that points to possible approaches and directions for design research to engage with theories and methods of design in the context of public policy.

Hong Peng and Wei Zhang offer insights into the „Research on the development of cultural and creative products in Hubei Provincial Museum.“The authors turn to a policy
implementation model to discuss the struggles Chinese museums face in meeting standards introduced in 2016 through the National Museum Evaluation Management System. Once again, we can see the wobbly beginnings of something that has the potential to develop into something but will require more theoretical engagement with the policy implementation model they refer to.

**Conclusion: Policy needs of designers and design still dominate design management research**

It is noticeable that the papers submitted and accepted by the reviewers for this track remain vague about the kinds of policy they are concerned about. Policy, like the term design, means different things to different people: For some it represents a law; for others the outcome of a policy making process and for yet others the means by which a policy intent can be achieved. Most authors remain equally vague about where in the policy context they situate the design research and the design projects under study. This indicates that design management research has yet to develop this capability. It would be worrisome to think that authors consciously neglect these aspects because they deem them unnecessary.

Although we envisioned this track specifically to attract research on design issues, design practices and design methods in policy-making, we have received only a couple of papers that actually concerned themselves with these topics. To the detriment of our track and we feel also for the conference, we cannot present those papers because their authors were not able to attend the conference. As a result, most research presented here continues the traditional focus on the design implications of policy implementation and not on the policy implications of design. We can offer a few hypotheses as we try to make sense of this situation:

**Hypothesis 1: Design researchers are biased towards policy implementation.**

1. **Comfort:** Design researchers might be more comfortable engaging with policy issues when they concern aspects of implementation, as these actions of making are more familiar to them.
2. **Access:** Much of today’s design work in the public sector does indeed take place in the context of implementation. As a consequence few designers come in contact with policy-making and even fewer design researchers have opportunities to develop research projects in this area.
3. **Interest:** Design researchers are not interested or do not consider it important to apply principles, practices and methods of design to policy-making.

**Hypothesis 2: Research into design for policies is too new and has yet to become embedded in design education.**

4. **Skills and methods:** Design research in the policy context demands new skills and methods that have yet to be developed. Design researchers do not know how to engage with policies beyond implementation and do not receive adequate/appropriate training.
5. **Understanding:** Design research and education have yet to clearly distinguish between design for policies and policies for design.
6. Exposure: Research into design for policies is too new and has yet to become embedded in design education. Too few researchers are exposed to the principles and theories of design in the public sector with an eye to policy-making.

These are quick hypotheses drawn from reviewing papers (both accepted and rejected) for this track. We propose them in an effort to encourage future research into these topics. Perhaps the answer is indeed as simple as that: We are embracing a new area of research in a young research discipline that is still in search of its core. Regardless of what we agree is the explanation for the current situation, we do know this: to pinpoint the creative intersection with design management in policy implementation, we do need to advance our thinking, understanding as well as our methods and our practices in this area of design research. This work will be a prerequisite for defining design leadership within the policy context, which at present, remains rather unexplored and poorly understood. As design management emerges as a relevant profession and skill in the public sector, this is one creative intersection that deserves further exploration.

Bibliography

About the Track Facilitators


Nina Terrey, PhD is a global partner in ThinkPlace – a design firm specialising in applying human-centred methods to public policy and public value challenges. Nina advises governments in how to adopt and evolve their practices to be more human-centred centred, and she leads academic programs across the Australian and Singapore market in co-design and design thinking. Nina is an adjunct associate professor with the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra, Australia.