

## **User friendly**

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## User Friendly

This issue of *The Design Journal* contains a fascinating collection of papers addressing a wide range of very pertinent concerns for designers, particularly around developments in design research methodology. The role of the user in design research and the design process itself has rightfully become far more pivotal in recent years, with designers notably having moved from a 'design for' approach to a 'design with' mentality. This change has occurred so widely, and its benefits are so clear, that it is difficult now to imagine any kind of return to the modernist grand narrative of 'one design for all' or the hugely problematic stance of 'good design'. This move, though, heavily impacts on the nature of role of the designer and design researcher, requiring us to constantly reconsider and reassess the ways in which we approach design.

Two papers respond to the increasingly important concerns of service design. Eneberg and Holm discuss the changing focus of industrial design in a business context, away from material artefacts to more service-oriented innovations. The authors note the correspondingly important role of design thinking as a valuable tool within service design. Design thinking, they argue, not only improves the experience of the user of a service, but also helps in communicating the value of the more intangible aspects of the strategic role of design to clients. Similarly concerned with the effective transmission of knowledge and understanding, Lam et al take a user-centred approach to service design, realizing that the users of services have invaluable insights about their local area and needs, if only they would share their tacit knowledge with local authorities and designers. Highlighting the increased benefits of such knowledge if gathered in real time, the authors' research recognizes the main barrier as being one of trust and identifies six key factors to improve the level of user trust in online public feedback systems.

Afacan takes an inclusive design approach in her article looking at the design of sustainable office environments for older workers. Stating the key difficulties as 'theory-practice inconsistency', 'designers' lack of expertise' and the 'communication gap between designers and older users', Afacan points out that despite the inevitable future age profiles of the office workforce, little is known about their particular requirements, or the implications for older workers and the sustainable development of office buildings. Paying closer attention to the particular ergonomic requirements of older users should, the author asserts, result in significant improvement in user satisfaction as well as provide economic benefits to office developers.

Again pointing to the research value of a considering a wider range of user opinion and debate, Blythe, Yauner and Rodgers consider the current state of affairs regarding the public's exposure to critical design. While it is widely acknowledged that the deliberately provocative nature of critical design artefacts is massively valuable in promoting informative reflection and discussion, critical design products themselves are more usually viewed in a fairly elitist context to a limited audience. By exploiting the open nature of social media as a wide open gateway to public exposure, the authors present

entertaining case studies posted online, examine hit rates and analyse the content of viewers' responses with the aim of usefully widening the context of critical design.

The next two papers investigate architectural issues: the first, by Broffman, continues the inclusive design theme by reporting on the experience of an Australian architectural practice working with Aboriginal people, taking into consideration all the cultural and sociopolitical differences involved. The author proposes that in this context, 'storytelling' can be an effective methodology for eliciting valuable knowledge for designers. The second architectural paper, by Gurdalli and Koldas, takes a historical look at the role of architecture in defining territory and power in the divided Cypriot capital of Nicosia, adding to the debates around the relationship between art and power. The resultant observations provide a relevant touchpoint for architects working in such strongly politicized environments.

Taken together, these articles show that design research is taking developments in design practice to heart, and by doing so remains a vital resource for practising designers. Steve Jobs once said 'It's really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them'. Assuming that the only way to involve the user in design research is in a focus group is the problem: the user is necessarily at the heart of the design process, and therefore, understandably, should be at the centre of design research.