



Delft University of Technology

## DRS2020 Editorial

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## DRS2020 Editorial

Stella BOESS, Ming CHEUNG and Rebecca CAIN

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Never before has a Design Research Society Conference happened in such uncertain and changing times. When we embarked on planning the DRS2020 Conference in Brisbane, Australia, we were in a different time, when unrestricted travel and meeting-up face-to-face at academic conferences was the norm. Then the COVID-19 global pandemic happened, which prompted us to rethink and reimagine DRS2020 in a new format.

In recent times, the debate around the sustainability of physical conferences has been starting to surface. This was an issue the DRS was starting to grapple with, but the practicalities of a blended or entirely virtual conference were still uncharted territory. Even before the pandemic was born, the devastating Australian bushfires were causing people to consider whether it would be safe to travel to Australia. Ultimately, the pandemic made a physical conference impossible, and the conference host Griffith University made a joint decision with DRS to convene DRS2020 as a virtual conference. DRS2020 marks an important turning point in the history of DRS conferences, being the first conference to go entirely virtual. We are very grateful to Griffith University for embracing this challenge, and for their leadership and management of the virtual conference in such complex and difficult times.

DRS conferences are international biennial events, held to further and promote design research. They are inclusive conferences, bringing together a wide range of disciplines and communities related to design research, with the aim of fostering new debates on the important issues of the time. Historically, DRS conferences have always taken place through gatherings of delegates in physical venues at a host organisation, with face-to-face presentations and discussions, accompanied by written conference proceedings. New collaborative formats have been added over time – for example, Conversations which were introduced in 2014. DRS2020 took on the challenge of transforming these formats into a virtual experience. Also worth mentioning, the DRS2020 Postgraduate Research Day is pioneering in that it is inclusive of both PhD and MPhil students and of their theory-driven and/or practice-led research projects. In this sense, DRS2020 becomes a prototype for a new type of virtual and inclusive conference experience and continues to build on the legacy of innovation from the previous conferences.



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The 144 papers in these proceedings were conceived of and written in our pre-COVID world. Just three authors were able to make late additions to their papers addressing the current situation (165, 398 and 402). These proceedings therefore provide an interesting juxtaposition, whereby what is written represents design research in the world as we knew it, whereas the discussion that these papers will promote during and beyond the conference will almost certainly be viewed through the lens of the complexities and challenges we now face. The discussions and reflections in the proceedings are a timely barometer for what the international design research community is thinking about and working on, and they will surely prove inspiring and thought-provoking for design researchers worldwide. We hope that you enjoy reading them as much as we have enjoyed curating them.

## **Themes**

The overall theme for DRS2020 is Synergy – the coming together of people and disciplines in design research to create a positive impact. On the one hand, design research champions the uniqueness of disciplinary knowledge and creativity, yet on the other hand, the complex world we now live in demands a more synergistic approach to creativity and problem-solving whereby different mindsets, backgrounds and perspectives come together to realise transformative visions of the future. DRS2020 celebrates these emerging synergistic approaches to design research and seeks to explore their exciting possibilities for addressing multi-faceted problems, supporting participation, and transforming problematic situations into desirable ones.

For DRS2020, we used an emergent approach to the development of the conference programme, with a general call for papers around five themes – Situations, Impacts, Co-Creation, Education and Processes. These themes emerged in discussions between the Organising and Programme Committees at an early stage of the conference planning and were felt to capture a broad spectrum of current design research topics from which we would be able to build more focused themed sections. Continuing the collaborative approach to theme building, we asked the international reviewers to indicate to which of these themes (or others) each paper contributed. Following the acceptance of papers, the reviewers' indications helped us to cluster the papers into the rich programme we have here, with the main conference theme of Synergy being an interwoven thread throughout.

Impacts and Co-creation are the biggest theme categories, reflecting the design research community's commitment to applied research. Situations are an emerging theme reflecting the community's increasing awareness of diverse circumstances and contexts. With Australia as the host country for DRS2020, it is worth noting that 12 out of the 144 papers mention Indigenous communities (108, 135, 165, 166, 177, 187, 198, 228, 277, 278, 387, 402). 32% of the accepted papers are from Oceania, 18% from Asia and 33% from Europe, compared with 5% each from Oceania and Asia and 64% from Europe at DRS2018. Themes such as pluriversal design and diversity, design for global health and wellbeing, collaboration, sustainability and education continue to attract new directions in research and illustrate the

potential of design research to change the world for the better. The theoretical foundation of research into (design) Processes continues to be an enduring theme, the development of which can be traced back through all previous DRS conferences. Some sections were additionally clustered by domain, such as graphics, mobility, experience design or data. A point to note is that the paper clustering differs somewhat between conference programme and these proceedings, as the former also needed optimising by time zones to allow presenters from around the world to interact in their session discussion.

A further way we grouped the papers was around existing themes of interest within the DRS: those of the DRS special interest groups (SIGs). These open and dynamic groups of DRS members form around current and emergent issues in design research, and they welcome participation. The DRS SIGs are one of the main ways that the DRS drives forward debates and keeps a pulse on ongoing topics as well as emergent topics of the day. The DRS currently supports eleven SIGs, all of whom have contributed to these proceedings by selecting and grouping just over a third (55) of the submitted papers into SIG themed sections. Some of these sections are chaired as sessions by SIG members at the conference. This way, the SIGs hope to give authors the opportunity to get to know the SIGs and their members and to get involved. The eleven SIGs are Health, Wellbeing and Happiness, Global Health, Design Pedagogy, Pluriversal Design, Design for Behaviour Change, Experiential Knowledge, Human-Object Interactions, Inclusive Design, Sustainability, Networked and Embedded Technologies and Design Innovation Management. While the SIGs selected their set of papers because the papers speak to current and future themes of the existing DRS SIGs, many more of the accepted papers also relate to the SIG themes and all authors are welcome to engage with a SIG. DRS members are also free to propose new SIGs. One of the aspirations of the DRS conferences is to catalyse the creation of new SIGs, through the collective community building and knowledge sharing which takes place.

## Review

Despite moving to a virtual conference format, what stays a predictable constant is the academic quality of the work presented at DRS conferences. Our standards remain high, through the excellent work of the authors, our Programme Committee and the community of reviewers. The Programme Committee is appointed by the DRS and chaired by a member of the DRS International Advisory Council. We are privileged to have many eminent scholars in the design research community within our reviewer pool, but also early career academics who are supported in writing peer reviews, a core part of their academic development, and who form our reviewer pipeline for future conferences. We endeavoured to match reviewers' expertise with papers through topic selection and automation, with some manual adjustments. The reviewers provided feedback to authors on how to improve their papers.

In total we received 280 full paper submissions in a one-stage submission procedure, of which 269 were viable to go to review. In total the 192 reviewers wrote 553 reviews, using reviewer guidelines. The reviews averaged 350 words. Each paper received two, sometimes

three reviews. 87 papers (32%) were accepted with minor revision and a further 57 (20%) accepted following (major) revision. This represents a 52% acceptance rate. As in previous conferences, we used the ConfTool system to manage the submission process. The ability of authors to rate and comment on their reviewers as in previous years, helps to drive up the quality of the review process. The authors rated 237 (43%) of the reviews with an average of 4.4 on a scale of 1-5 on the criteria *justified, constructive, encouraging, fair and convincing*.

## Words of thanks

DRS2020 would not have been possible without the contributions of many excellent people who have devoted their insight and experience to the conference. We would sincerely like to thank the Local Organising Team at Griffith University for their remarkable work in transforming the conference into a virtual experience, and the extra time, effort and resources that this has involved. In particular, undertaking this transformation 4.5 months before the conference launch has entailed a significant level of creativity, courage and perseverance. We also thank the DRS for their expertise and guidance in the programme and review aspects of the conference. The authors, the Programme Committee and all the reviewers all deserve thanks for their valuable time and expertise in ensuring the high academic quality of this conference, as well as the SIG convenors for their role in curating themed tracks. Finally, we thank Griffith University and the Design Research Society for supporting the conference.

We hope that you enjoy these proceedings, and that they provide a thought-provoking and inspiring read.

Stella Boess, DRS2020 Programme Chair  
Ming Cheung, DRS2020 Conference Chair  
Rebecca Cain, DRS2020 Conference Co-Chair

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