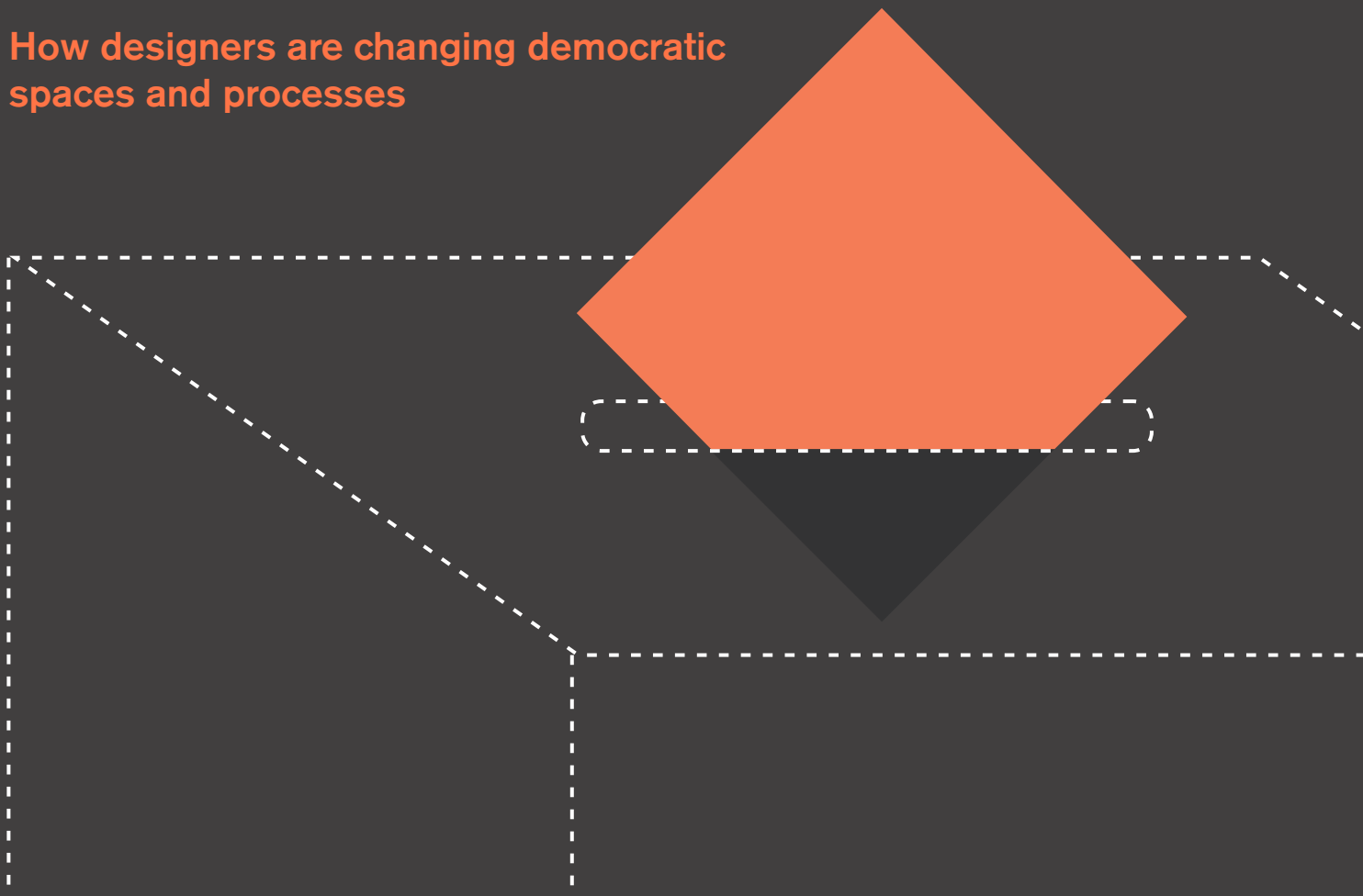


An inquiry by the Design Commission

# DESIGNING DEMOCRACY

How designers are changing democratic  
spaces and processes



**Designing Democracy: How designers are changing democratic spaces and processes**

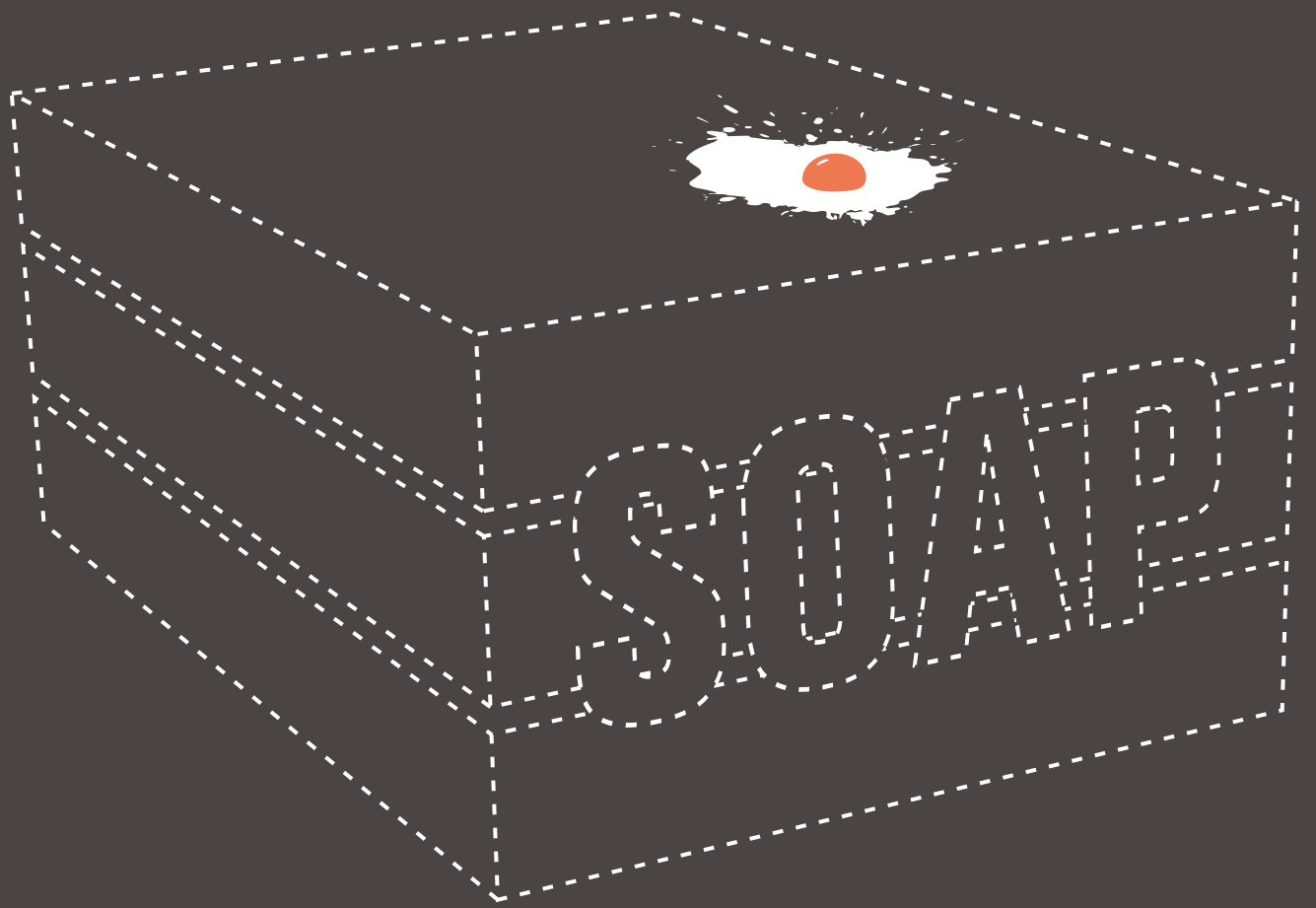
An inquiry by the Design Commission  
March 2015

The essay collection follows a five month inquiry process  
Co-Chaired by John Howell MP and Richard Simmons.

On behalf of the inquiry Co-Chairs, the essays were  
compiled by Naomi Turner, Manager of the Design  
Commission at Policy Connect.

Contact the Design Commission Secretariat at Policy  
Connect, CAN Mezzanine, 32-36 Loman Street, London  
SE1 0EH.

[www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig](http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig)



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# Foreword

**John Howell OBE MP FSA and inquiry co-chair**

I am very happy to introduce this series of contributions on the questions of design and democracy. They set out some clear views. We live at a time when there are constant challenges to the way we as politicians operate and to the exercise of democracy. This is a debate that is not exclusive to politicians. The debates themselves are not new. If we think back to the days of Victorian England, the operettas of Gilbert & Sullivan contain just as strong criticism of politicians as can be found today – often more withering. What is new, however, is the expectation amongst the electorate that things will change and design has a crucial role in this. Below are set out contributions from a number of authors into how the role of design has played an important part in ensuring that buildings provide greater access and help to allow us to perform effectively. This is design in its classic sense. But there are also contributions such as the essay on the Good Law initiative which show that good design can operate in terms of the design of legislation to ensure that it can be widely understood and can say what it means clearly. All of these factors play a part in ensuring that the design of our democracy is genuinely meaningful. They all ensure that we can take examples of how it works today and extrapolate some basic principles of what is required to make it work in the future.

The Good Law paper sets out three principles. The first of these is layout. This applies whether we are talking about the layout of a building or the layout of a piece of legislation. It applies too to the layout of the ballot paper. The second of these is structure. This is about telling a story compellingly for example. The third example is language. This needs to be looked at in its widest terms to include the language inherent within a building for example. All of these things are relevant. But as I aim to show in my own piece on Neighbourhood Planning, the most important principle is to give the people something they really care about and are prepared to vote for – whether this done in a high tech or a low tech way. These contributions all make a valuable input to the debate about democracy and design and I welcome them.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Howell'.

**John Howell OBE MP FSA**  
Co-Chair

# Introduction

## Dr. Richard Simmons, Design Commission member and inquiry co-chair

This collection of essays is about various ways in which design might improve democracy. It is being published by the Design Commission as a novel form of inquiry into the subject. The inquiry was co-chaired by me, and John Howell MP, who has written the foreword.

The Design Commission is made up of Parliamentarians and members of the design world. It supports the All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group (APDIG). The Commission is a coalition of parliamentarians and leading figures of the design industry that aims to drive thinking around design policy in the UK. Its remit is to do this by conducting investigative research into particular areas or policy problems as they relate to, or could benefit from, design.

The Commission wanted to investigate what contribution design could make to improving participation in the democratic process and communication between electors, those who seek election, and those who have been elected. Its usual modus operandi is to hold inquiries using the select committee format, calling witnesses and writing a report.

For this inquiry into design and democracy it chose a different method, inviting essays from designers and others with relevant ideas and knowledge. The subject is very wide-ranging and ideas about it range from the evolutionary to the revolutionary. In the spirit of open, democratic debate, the inquiry team decided to commission essays in which its witnesses could have their say and leave readers to form their own opinions about which ideas should be taken forward.

Why democracy? There has been increasing alarm at low voter turnouts in many elections in the UK over a number of years, cynicism about politicians, and detachment from democratic processes amongst the enfranchised. There have been growing levels of concern about poor voter turnout, especially amongst young people and, increasingly, the economically disadvantaged. There are, though, exceptions, most notably the Scottish referendum, which suggest that there is ample appetite for grassroots campaigning and voting when issues are clearly defined and seen as important, and people feel that their vote will count.

The Commission wondered if the problem is with how our current democracy is designed, making involvement inaccessible, creating a sense of exclusion rather than inclusion, or at least fostering perceptions to that effect. Do we need to redesign communications for relevance or clarity, and redesign our processes to create greater accessibility and readdress the engagement of the individual?

We don't over-claim for design. There are fundamental power relationships which have, historically and in the present, deterred participation in democracy. Race and gender have been particularly troubling bones of contention and, no matter how good the design of a process, exclusion can occur if it is not encouraged. Designers may enable engagement but the gatekeepers of participation are, ultimately, those with the power to decide who participates. Recent movements which deny democracy as a system of governance remind us



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‘Do we need to redesign communications for relevance or clarity and redesign our processes to create greater accessibility and readdress the engagement of the individual?’

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that we must be vigilant not just in defending it as a principle, but in ensuring that we make voting and post-election involvement meaningful for all.

Many people think of design in terms of shaping physical products, but the Design Commission has pioneered thinking about how organisations use design to sharpen their processes; and how politicians and civil servants might use it better to form policies. In this inquiry we wanted contributors to be free to cover all of this ground. The essays are wide-ranging and range over the gamut from systems and institutional design to architecture via games and electronic media and the ballot. We hope that policy-makers will find many sources of inspiration and that the inquiry will encourage them to look to designers to help them to keep our democracy lively, engaging and above all truly representative.

The Design Commission is supported by Policy Connect and the co-chairs would particularly like to thank Naomi Turner, the Commission’s manager there, for her creativity and determination to make this inquiry a success. We would also like to thank AECOM for their generous sponsorship of the publication and Laura Haynes and Kieran Long for suggesting design and democracy as a subject for a Design Commission inquiry.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Simmons', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Dr Richard Simmons**  
Co-Chair

# Designing Direct Democracy

William Baker and Nick Hurley, [thevotingproject.com](http://thevotingproject.com)

It can hardly be claimed that our democracy is the outcome of a thoughtful design process. It lurched and juddered into existence. It reacted slowly and grudgingly to those who wished to experience it, giving in to demands for representation only when they become too overwhelming to ignore. Perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on our ancestors for their lack of 21st century design sensibility. King John could hardly have been expected to invite the Barons to a whiteboard post-it note session in a field, to design the Baronial user experience over coffee. Design, in the way we rationalise it today, did not exist.

But times have changed. The centuries-long conflict about who should be able to vote is largely over. Our focus is shifting to the efficacy and relevance of the system itself. For eight centuries our democracy was just as much about excluding people as it was about participation. It was inevitably going to be slow to accommodate new ideas. We still tackle today's problems with yesterday's democratic equipment, utilising Victorian tools in a digital age. Voting mechanisms and Parliamentary procedures are already criticised. We may soon question whether representation by MPs alone, a concept from an era when communication limitations prevented direct participation in democracy, really is the best we can do.

In most areas of life, if something is poorly designed and we don't have to use it, then the chances are that we won't. This could explain why many fail to use our electoral system. Some feel it doesn't meet their needs – for their views to be listened to, understood and visibly capable of influencing outcomes. Low turnout and a lack of proportional representation can result in governments formed by parties voted for by under a quarter of the electorate. A government's

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**'Our focus is shifting to the efficacy and relevance of the system itself. For eight centuries our democracy was just as much about excluding people as it was about participation'**

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legislative programme may therefore be perceived as having little real connection to the people's will. Voters are not directly asked which policies they support, even though they have views about issues and are willing to express them. Our Victorian electoral system has no effective mechanism to facilitate direct democracy.

If people today were asked to work with another Victorian system - that used for washing - one day of soaking, rinsing, boiling, starching, wringing and ironing would be enough to cause anybody to abandon it for a washing machine. The problem with democracy is that no workable alternative system has been designed. People who dislike the process often disengage. Some look for the next best thing. They tweet their views, participate in polls on Facebook or seek other ways to influence: but most of those play no formal part in the democratic

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'In most areas of life, if something is poorly designed and we don't have to use it, then the chances are that we won't'

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process. Democracy has yet to absorb these new, more accessible, ways of doing things into its core systems. Design could help it to do so.

Good design is inherently democratic. It recognises what people want and need, and finds the best, most practical and beautiful way of achieving this. If calls for people's views to be better harnessed continue, it will be in developing the tools of direct participation that design may play its biggest role.

By supporting systems allowing the electorate to vote directly on issues and policies, design could address the disconnect between government policy and voters' views. Digital referenda on headline policy issues could become an integral feature, allowing government to put major or contentious issues to the people. Digital systems could be more accessible and cheaper than traditional referenda. Design would be key in addressing concerns that direct democracy is complicated to organise and comprehend: design is itself the science of information organisation and can provide clarity and simplicity.

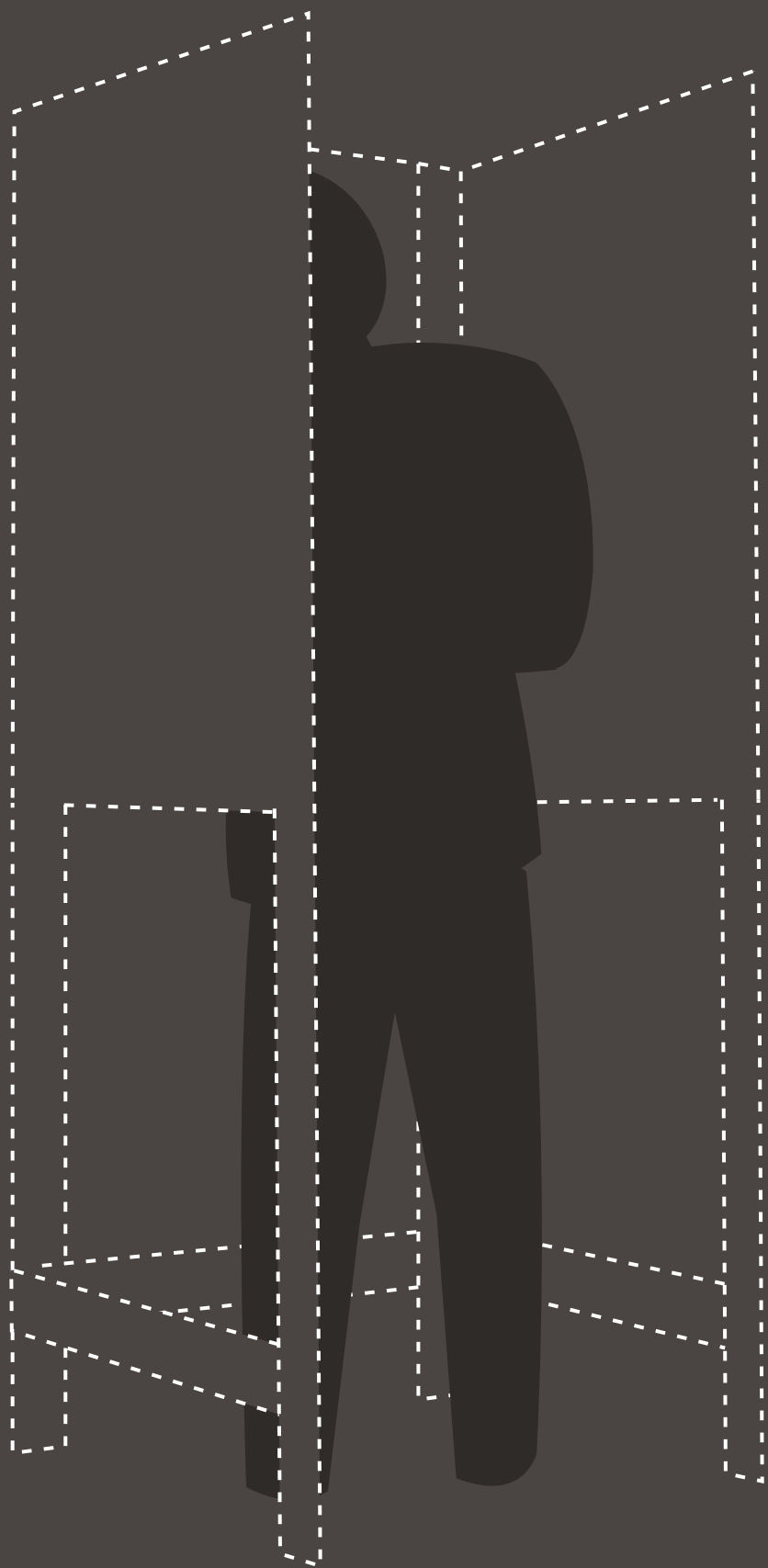
Design could revolutionise engagement with elected representatives. Digital systems can link voters directly to MPs, alerting them to forthcoming votes and inviting decisions on how they would like their MP to decide. Such technology already exists and pushing notifications to voters willing to engage would inform decision-making and lend greater legitimacy to MPs' decisions.

Parliamentary debates and scrutiny could be opened up for wider participation. Digital networks already respond to users' interests, targeting products and information. The same principles could, as an example, be used to design a system to bring consideration of agricultural legislation to the direct attention of farmers, inviting them to express their views on headline issues, or to contribute in more detail if they wished. This could better inform the process by inviting more detailed participation by those who have particular expertise or interest.

Design may not provide immediate solutions or perfect systems, but it can facilitate engagement and experimentation, helping democracy to learn that it can manifest itself in our lives in new and interesting ways, putting the users at the centre of the process. Design happens incrementally through observing users' behaviours, testing assumptions and responding. Democracy can learn from this. Properly utilised, design can itself be democracy in action.

# Section 1

## Parliament Buildings



# The Welsh Assembly

Lord Rogers of Riverside, Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (RSHP)

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'The building is more than simply the place where the process of democracy takes place – the Neuadd and Oriel gives visitors a sense of openness'  
- Dame Rosemary Butler AM

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For many years, the United Kingdom was one of the most centralised states in Western Europe, with all power residing in Parliament and local authorities highly restricted in their powers. In the late 1990s that started to change: following referendums, Scotland elected its Parliament and Wales its National Assembly in 1999. London elected a Mayor and Assembly the following year. Devolution opened a new chapter in the story of British democracy. It is a chapter than has not yet been completed.

Each of these three new institutions would have new headquarters, to symbolise and enable a new approach to government - more transparent, more collaborative and closer to the people. The competition for the Assembly building ("the Senedd") in Cardiff was launched in 1999, with a jury chaired by the former prime minister, Lord Callaghan.

The competition brief specified that, as well as providing a good quality workplace for the Assembly and its officials, the scheme had to be highly environmentally efficient, and to generate a sense of open government and transparency.

We went a step further; we wanted the Assembly building to be at the heart of a new democratic public space for the people of Cardiff. The link between democracy, public space and civic value is a long one. The heart of Classical Athens' democracy 2,500 years ago was the agora, the market place, where the 6,000 adult male citizens who regularly participated in assemblies would gather to debate and discuss before voting.

Here, on the slopes below the Acropolis, you can imagine Pericles preparing his speeches, or Socrates walking with Plato, looking out across Athens while discussing philosophy, politics and public life. Citizenship entailed not only the right to vote, but also a duty expressed in the Epebic Oath that young men swore: "I shall leave this city more beautiful than when I entered it".

The Welsh Assembly looks out over Cardiff Bay. Steps rise from the waterfront like a continuation of the shoreline, up to a plinth covered in Welsh Slate. Visitors can follow the steps and ramps up and along the top of this plinth, in the middle of which is set a funnel-like structure. The Assembly chamber is within this funnel, sunk below the public space, allowing visitors to look down from the plinth to the hall where their elected representatives sit. The funnel links earth and sky, and acts as a focal point, reaching back before the formalities of Athenian democracy, to the societies where people would gather round a tree at the heart of their village to discuss the issues of the day.

The hierarchy – members below and the public above – deliberately reflects how politics should operate. The public space is surrounded by a light glass wall, and topped by a floating roof lined in warm wood, pierced by the Assembly chamber's funnel. Between this roof and the plinth that rises from the shoreline, the building is opened up, drawing citizens to the seat of government. Old people,

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'The hierarchy – members below and public above – deliberately reflects how politics should operate'

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children and parents with prams are able to meet in this enclosed piazza, to hear debates and start their own, whilst looking across the beautiful bay to Wales and beyond. Transparency, for passers-by and visitors, and for the people watching the democratic debates below, is the driving force.

Other support services – offices, information desks, café and public seating – are either on top of the plinth, or sunk into it, with windows and skylights maximizing the use of natural light (and further enhancing transparency), while preserving separation of public and private spaces. The building has built-in measures for environmental efficiency: the mass of the plinth reduces temperature fluctuations; rainwater is harvested from the roof; and natural ventilation is used for almost all internal offices, with the cowling above the Assembly chamber drawing warm air out of the chamber, and cooler air in from below.

In building the Senedd we did not want to create an imposing statement of government or a shiny temple of public administration, but to bring democracy back to where it began, to the heart of a city's public space.

Did this intention work out in practice? The Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, Dame Rosemary Butler AM comments:

*The Senedd, like politics, is designed to be open and transparent. Richard Rogers and RSHP's lead partner Ivan Harbour were determined to make public space integral to the structure. The building is more than simply the place where the process of parliamentary democracy takes place – the Neuadd and Oriel gives visitors a sense of openness and they are drawn to the central chamber and want to look down into the debating chamber. Sustainability and recycling are at the heart of the design, with the building using recycled water, natural ventilation and an earth heat exchanger. Its combined renewable energy systems halve its running cost. It is a building that perfectly reflects the modern forward-thinking democracy and approach to politics that are developing in here in Wales.*

# The People's Palace

**Carole-Anne Davies, Design Commission Wales**

The Senedd design competition and subsequent proposals attracted great controversy, happening just ahead of the birth of the Design Commission for Wales, itself a National Assembly for Wales first term initiative, supported by then Minister and design and planning expert, Sue Essex AM.

Two key projects rising from adjacent sites on Cardiff's waterfront came to represent a turning point and spurred on the fledgling Commission. Jonathan Adams' Millennium Centre theatre and opera house, which remains a success story, was growing fast. Alongside it grew Richard Rogers' Senedd. These two high profile projects, emerging from the ground, represented resurgence in commitment to high quality design in civic spaces, a renewed vigour in our democratic processes and a bold attempt to express them in architecture.

Wales already had a Rogers building at Newport in South East Wales, where his Inmos factory flipped the hitherto imagined possibilities in a poetic response to a challenging brief for the microprocessor plant. Both Inmos and the Senedd have stood the test of time: perhaps the only true test of the strength of good, innovative design over stylistic trend. Whilst Inmos serves as a reminder that our everyday should be excellent, so the Senedd demonstrates the importance of our civic buildings being outstanding.

Much emphasis was placed on claims of a design approach to the Senedd that made democratic processes more visible and more accessible. These have been borne out in the constant stream of visitors to the building. Events regularly take place in its milling spaces, and the public galleries above the chamber, from which elevated position the electorate may observe the elected below, are well used. Technology allows us to beam in: debates are broadcast from the chamber whilst social media accounts promote messages from Assembly Members and commentators. As a place of welcome for international visitors it has earned its keep. As a kind of people's palace it provides space for cafes, exhibitions and receptions, film crews, protests and dissent. Whilst the necessary security measures are in place, members of the public have in many ways become accustomed to spending time in 'their' building; having a coffee and a catch-up with a friend or colleague. In these ways the Senedd could be said to have met the brief for a '21st century agora'.

The Senedd building, perhaps by way of response, also offers a 'brief', as it were, to its users. The nature of the space is such that our elected representatives, our leaders, and their capacity for leadership, are on display and subject to scrutiny. Conduct in the chamber is influenced by the nature of the surroundings and the sheer visibility of proceedings. In this way the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government have spent their formative years on display – their democratic approach and ambitions have developed in the public eye, their codes of practice and culture have been shaped under public gaze. Whilst some long-standing, fully formed traditions and conventions underpin essential processes, others of the new Assembly in Cardiff have been forged in public. As we have learned to allow the largely passive building design to operate without significant

interference, perhaps we have also learned that our democratic processes need a similar settlement period, allowing us to test how we wish to work and to capture the opportunity for a distinctly Welsh approach.

The Senedd building has accommodated the maturation of the first phase of our nation's distinctive governance as comfortably as its own distinctive form has, over time, settled into the waterfront silhouette of our capital city, hunkering down in its quiet yet robust fashion, ready for the business of the day.



# The Scottish Parliament

Karen Anderson, Architecture and Design Scotland

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'It is much easier to promote high quality design in a building which is [itself] a great example'

- Eugene Mullan, Smith Scott Mullan Associates

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## Architecture as Celebration of, and Inspiration for, Democracy

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In our online world, democracy is increasingly driven by tweets and blogs, by popular petitions and polls. Online fora and webinars allow people to come together virtually with ease. Digital technology can be used creatively to extend interest and participation in democracy but this, in my view, throws into relief the precise and specific importance of those buildings and spaces we design to bring people together: in particular the spaces where we collectively aim to work for a better future whether in local, regional or national government.

The physical space people need for the business of democracy should be universally accessible, empowering and inspirational, designed by the best and most sensitive of designers. It should aim to make a setting for us to reflect on, and connect to, the most important of our values and be the best citizens we can be.

The Scottish Parliament is a winner of the Stirling Prize, an architectural masterpiece by Enric Miralles. In bidding for the commission he acknowledged it was a milestone for his practice, and pledged that he would give up his academic work to devote his energy to its realisation. Following his tragic death this energy inspired the continuing design team. The resulting building is testament to his architectural vision, and to the commitment by him and others to give Scotland's people a 'gathering space' built to reflect 'the land which it represents'. Miralles aimed to make a 'strong and clear statement' mindful that such a statement 'should carry political implications...'.

Whilst Miralles' conceptual design was based on connection to the landscape, he created a building of inspiring interiors with an internal 'townscape'. Here, Scotland's citizens and policy makers move through carefully designed spaces, enjoying the contrast of light and dark, high and low crafted volumes. No corner, juxtaposition or element is happenstance: every detail is the result of careful thought. The building brings together joy and gravitas. The time and care spent in its creation imbues its spirit. It is a generous building that gives its all - as we hope our politicians will give, with sincerity and conviction. It is loved by most architects; but how do the general public view it?

It is always contentious when politicians are considered to be spending money on 'themselves', but the Scottish Parliament had a particularly rough ride due to the, sometimes disingenuous, reporting of its construction costs. There were public consultations on the various sites and competition designs, but still there were inevitable 'shock of the new' responses when it was finally opened. Now complete for more than ten years, it is no longer the number one conversation of taxi drivers but many Scots still do not understand the choice of site, or its siting. Others comment that externally it is defensive and unwelcoming. Members of the public who don't take up the offer of guided tours tend to be ambivalent or negative about the design; but those who use or visit it are touched by the building - inspired and delighted in all sorts of ways. The architecture's generous spirit makes them fans but does the design support democracy?

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'It may be modern in design but it feels like it's always been here'

- Linda Fabiani MSP

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In terms of public accessibility, the entrance has 21st Century security measures and the original entrance has been significantly altered to augment them. This is regrettable but, once through the new secure zone, Miralles' design asserts its architectural character despite some other changes.

### Designing Democracy

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The originally clear lobby space, which leads the eye to the interior of the building and up to the main chamber, is now a vigorous, sometimes over-crowded, mix of exhibitions, impromptu meetings, reception and coffee house. The Parliament operates an enthusiastic visitor and outreach programme and the lobby is often filled with diverse groups on business or visits. It has a 'check in' spirit, reminiscent of a busy conference hotel but the architecture is robust enough to cope. Without the intimidating 'hush' of some public lobbies, it is a relaxed and accessible introduction to the business of government.

Beyond these public areas the architecture conveys the importance of good political dialogue and decisions, by design. The Committee rooms are inspiring and uplifting; the spatial quality of their soaring walls and ceilings, and the light within them creates an atmosphere that supports constructive dialogue. The volumes are not static or predictable but spaces that encourage creative thinking. Everywhere the architecture conveys a sense of national import and of special occasion. The care and energy of the design transmits to the user. Those who visit on occasional business have commented "you walk tall when you are there". Those who work in the promotion of better design, including my own organisation Architecture and Design Scotland, benefit greatly from being able to cite the experience of the Parliament. "It is much easier to promote high quality design in a building which is a great example," says Eugene Mullan of the Cross Party Group on Architecture and the Built Environment.

Most MSPs are positive about working in the building. "It's a joyous space to work in - the day and night sky through the garden lobby roof, and the backdrop of Edinburgh's crags makes it open and welcoming, part of the environment. It may be modern in design, but it feels like it's always been here," according to Linda Fabiani, MSP.

The Debating Chamber is an intimate and accessible space. MSPs are not shut away from the public and parliament workers. Instead they are easily viewed from the circulation areas through a designed glass screen. The public gallery spaces feel close to decision takers. There are views not only to the Chamber, but to the landscape of Arthurs Seat, symbolic of the rest of Scotland away from urban centres: a clear cue to consider the bigger political context, not just in Scotland but worldwide.

Politicians, like all building commissioners, use architecture and design as symbolism and expression of values according to the times, their political

ambition and necessity. In the 21st century, when we need space to come together effectively, design can help democracy by reaching beyond the immediate brief, working with the client to give them more than they knew they needed. In giving Scotland for its democratic focus a building at once solid and creative, Enric Miralles and the Holyrood team gave the nation just that.

# The Future of the Palace of Westminster, by Design

**Kate Jones, Design Council**

Design plays a critical role in the relationship between people and politics. It has the power to create successful spaces and systems to increase civic participation in the democratic process. It can enable more effective and transparent governance. Design is therefore recognised as an important tool in the development of systems that meet the needs of real people. Governments around the world are using it to help them innovate.

The way people in the UK engage with democracy has changed. People no longer participate only through formal processes, or in traditional places like the Palace of Westminster. A major shift has come as a result of social media and the democratisation of conversations between people and politicians - where people have become broadcasters in their own right. In parallel, the introduction of devolution to empower local communities has led to an increased focus on local democracy, and a potential rebirth of local civic buildings and spaces.

With such changes to the nature of democracy here in the UK, how can design update and support the spaces and systems in which British democracy takes place?

Arguably, one of the biggest opportunities is the restoration and renewal of one of the world's most iconic homes of democracy, the Palace of Westminster. The current estate evolved over the centuries, sometimes deliberately by design, at other times through accident or attack. The new gothic Palace of Westminster was custom-built by the Victorian architects Charles Barry and Augustus W. N. Pugin, incorporating older parts of the estate. Now, Grade I listed and part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, major work needs to be carried out to conserve and enhance the Palace's heritage, whilst making it fit for purpose to continue to serve as home to a modern democracy.

In 2012, the House of Commons Commission and the House Committee of the House of Lords commissioned a comprehensive, independent assessment, including costs, of a range of options for the restoration and renewal of the Palace. The report concluded: "If the palace were not a listed building of the highest heritage value, its owners would probably be advised to demolish and rebuild." The Commission and House Committee agreed that doing nothing was not an option and ruled out the option of constructing a brand new building.<sup>1</sup>

Design could help the renovation programme to deliver a parliamentary estate that functions better for its purpose today. The successful regeneration of Kings Cross St Pancras is a great example of what can be achieved by taking a design-led approach (user focused, visual and interactive) to go beyond a more traditional conservation-led or repairs approach to deliver better quality outcomes. Tried and tested design tools such as Design Review delivered results

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1 <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/building/restoration-project/background/>

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‘Design can also help adapt and create new systems in and around Westminster following the shift in the way people in the UK engage with democracy’

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far beyond anyone’s expectations, creating a more beautiful and functional place that now serves well over 95 million people a year.<sup>2</sup>

There is also the question of where Parliament will sit, should members not be able to use Westminster during the renovations. Could Parliament visit and sit in different towns and cities across the country, in the spirit of local engagement and participation and to support devolution? And, if so, what role could existing local civic buildings and spaces play?

Design can also help adapt and create new systems in and around Westminster following the shift in the way people in the UK engage with democracy.

In 2004, the Design Council, with the think tank IPPR, looked at the role of design in mediating and defining the relationship between the State and citizens to increase engagement and a sense of citizenship. It found that the points at which people interact with the State present important and immediate opportunities to build on positive engagement. Critically, it recommended that government should look to invest in new, accessible places to host democracy, such as well-designed platforms and systems – somewhat foreseeing the success of the Government Digital Service nearly ten years later.<sup>3</sup>

Internationally, through “Design for Democracy” the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) is collaborating with researchers, designers and policy-makers in service of public sector clients to apply design tools and thinking. They aim to increase civic participation by making interactions between the U.S. government and its citizens more understandable, efficient and trustworthy. This initiative was prompted following the distrust created by the 2000 Presidential election, where around 1.5 million votes cast for U.S. presidential candidates were not recorded due to voting equipment difficulties. In that same election, the design of the “butterfly” punch card ballot of Palm Beach County, Florida, misled many voters to select the wrong candidate.

Meanwhile and in contrast, research by the Parsons Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability Lab’s Amplifying Creative Communities project highlights how design-based social innovation has the potential to undermine politics by empowering people to find alternative ways to live and work, independent of government and avoiding conventional, explicit politics.<sup>4</sup>

Critically, design can reconfigure our democratic places and processes to create a new, integrated approach to democracy fit for future generations. The UK has the second largest design sector in the world and the largest in Europe, and it is growing. We must draw on our design expertise to put people at the heart of Westminster and the other places where democracy now takes place.

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2 Design support for Kings Cross St Pancras was provided by Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and latterly the Design Council. In 2011, the activities of CABE were transferred to the Design Council.

3 Design Council/IPPR (2004), *Touching the State*

4 <http://www.amplifyingcreativecommunities.org/>

5 University of Cambridge (2009), *International Design Scoreboard*

# Competition to host a Northern Parliament

Julian Smith MP and the Rt Hon Frank Field MP

## A unique opportunity for design

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The likely temporary relocation of Parliament owing to essential maintenance works to the Palace of Westminster provides a unique opportunity to make a city or area in the North of England the focus of UK political life for five years.

Ever since the Restoration and Renewal Programme began, examining the option of vacating the Palace of Westminster while essential works to the Parliamentary Estate are undertaken, there has been debate about possible host locations for the temporary UK Parliament. We believe that to consider only London alternatives to the Palace of Westminster would be a missed opportunity, especially at a time when there is cross-party agreement that we need to grow the Northern economy.

The North of England has a strong cultural identity, powerful economy, and is a considerable distance from the traditional centre of political power. Parts of the UK with much smaller populations – Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland – have tasted power directly for years following devolution. This is the North's opportunity to host the UK Parliament and to show every single MP and Civil Servant why the North of England is so vital to Britain's prosperity in the 21st century.

Furthermore, it presents a fortuitous chance for the House of Commons to move closer to, and renew its relationship with, the people it represents; and to showcase new, more efficient and cost effective ways of working. Relocating Parliament temporarily to the North of England would force politicians and the Civil Service to look at new working practices, because dealing with the challenges of distance will require significant innovation.

Last but by no means least, temporarily moving the seat of Government hundreds of miles away provides a fantastic opportunity. This could critically examine and improve the fundamental design of every logistical and operational level of one of our most important institutions. From how Parliamentarians debate and vote on legislation, to how welcoming and transparent our political processes are.

We want to launch this campaign now because we believe that a temporary move away from the current building is highly likely and we want to build momentum for a viable Northern bid well in advance. Otherwise we fear that a London venue will be the default setting.

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‘Moving the seat of Government hundreds of miles away provides a fantastic opportunity. This could critically examine and improve the fundamental design... of one of our most important institutions’

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### How temporary relocation of Parliament in the North can help build the Northern Powerhouse

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There is widespread agreement that the UK economy needs to be rebalanced, in order to enable the North of England to achieve its economic potential. The recently published report of the Independent RSA City Growth Commission argued that this could best be achieved by northern metropolitan areas collaborating with each other to create the agglomeration effects that would enable more rapid growth. There is growing agreement about what action is required to make this happen. We need better connectivity between northern cities; we need to develop the human potential of the North through putting a much higher priority on skills and apprenticeships and through better aligning labour market support with functional economies; and we need to support our universities in promoting innovation and world class research and creativity through collaboration to achieve centres of excellence in the North.

The Chancellor’s Northern Powerhouse and new powers for Manchester and Sheffield embody this approach, as does Lord Adonis’s Growth Review. But this process also needs to capture the public imagination if it is to create the confidence necessary to reverse decades of underachievement. That’s why what is also required are transformative projects that can both symbolise economic renaissance as well as catalyse further growth. Two important examples have already been announced - HS3, which will provide the long awaited fast connectivity between northern cities; and the new Sir Henry Royce Institute for advanced material science. The temporary relocation of Parliament to the North, not to mention the key role that the world-renowned UK design industry would play, would coincide with these projects and put a national and international spotlight on the North, just when it most needs it.

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### The Parliament in the North Campaign

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The Campaign will have a focus on encouraging engagement from young people and from all parts of society on a broad range of issues ranging from staffing of the Parliament, ways for the public to be involved in the political process, and innovative use of technology. Design here will be key: ranging from both adaptation of existing buildings, to new systems that better facilitate engagement of the public.

In order to drive enthusiasm for the idea of a Northern Parliament, we aim to launch a Competition to find the best temporary Parliament venue in the North of England after the election. We aim for the Competition to be run by an independent, nationally respected organisation that would offer a prize to the best entry. The way in which the UK’s Capital of Culture is selected provides a possible model.

## **The Competition**

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This Competition will not be an official procurement process and will be independent of the House of Commons and the formal processes that would have to be followed should a move to an alternative location be decided upon.

Although any Competition will be run by an independent organisation, we envisage that entries will be judged on economic benefits, value for money, public engagement, viability, and the credibility of the submission.

As we have stated earlier, we believe that it is better to start this process now to ensure that, in the event of a decision to temporarily relocate Parliament in 2016, we have a strong North of England alternative to London in the pipeline.

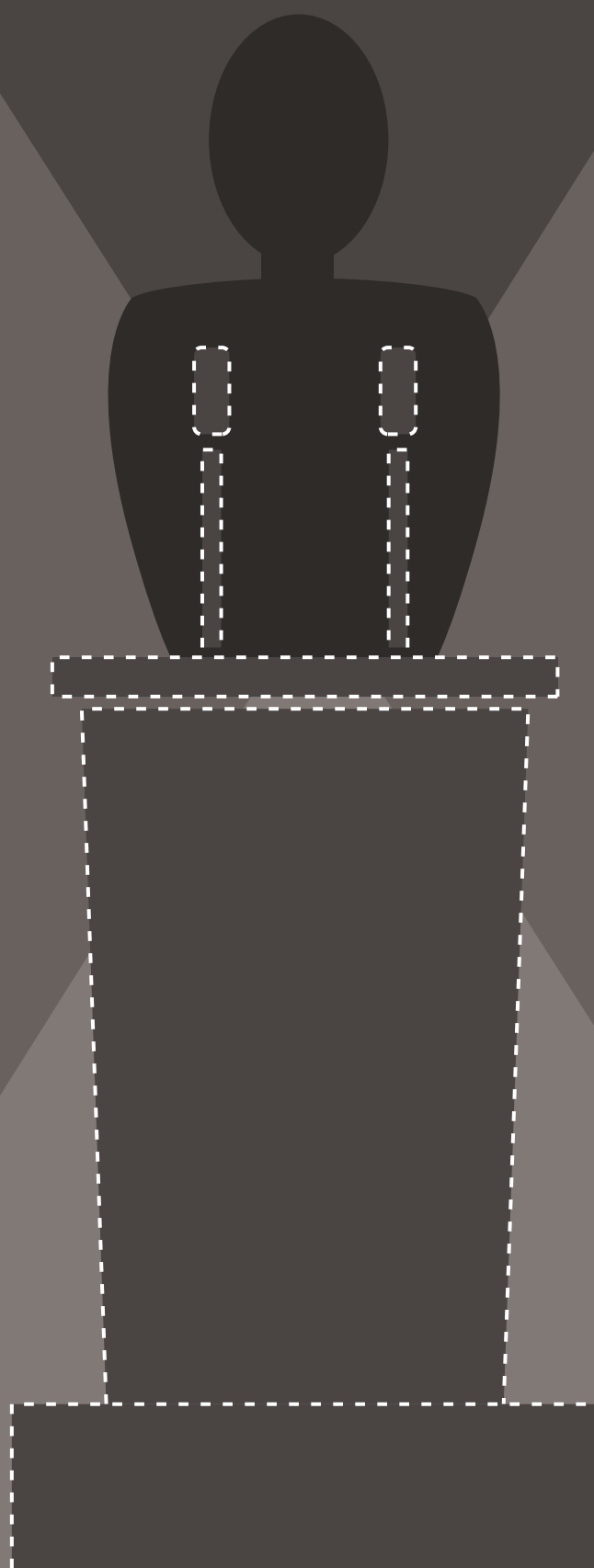
That said, winning this competition will be no guarantee of being chosen by the House of Commons Commission, who will have to run an independent process once a decision has been made to vacate the Palace of Westminster. However, the Parliament in the North Campaign will be making the broader political and economic arguments and so we hope that the competition winner will be in a strong position to be ultimately selected.





# Section 2

## Digital Opportunities



# Reflections on Design and the Digital Democracy Commission

Rt Hon John Bercow MP, Speaker of the House of Commons

When, in November 2013, I decided to establish a special Commission to consider how we might harness the potential of technology to revisit and improve representative democracy, the idea of design was not, I confess, at the forefront of my thinking. What I (and my fellow Commissioners) were certain about was that we wished to hear the voices of those people often described rather patronisingly as ‘hard to reach’, as much as recognising the voices of those people with in-depth and ingrained detailed knowledge. Which is why, unlike a traditional Parliamentary Committee, the Commission on Digital Democracy was willing to take evidence, ideas and information in any format and did not stipulate precise rules about submissions. My aim at the outset of this project was to make our methods part of our message.

As people told us about their experiences of voting, contacting their MP or finding out about Parliament—or why they do not do those things—some of the barriers to getting involved became clear. These included:

- lack of understanding about politics and Parliament
- jargon and unclear language
- difficulty finding information about Parliament and its activities
- lack of opportunities to be involved with Parliament

In a sense, our vitally important democratic institutions have unwittingly designed out the voices of those who do not feel comfortable in the places traditionally inhabited by the political class. We realised that the barriers needed to be tackled if every UK citizen is to have equal access to democracy in the UK.

So although we did not set out to consider design, it crept in to our thinking. How would we redesign Parliamentary democracy to make it more democratic? Part of this was about parliamentary language, which people found obscure and alienating. Some people suggested that digital tools and jargon busters could be used to translate complex terms into simpler language, whereas others thought the best approach would be to review and simplify parliamentary language: in other words, redesigning the lexicon. We came to the conclusion that both will be necessary.

Presenting complex information in a way that is easy to understand and interrogate is a key design challenge for the digital era. There was widespread agreement that Parliament needs to get much better at this. We recommended that Parliament’s website should use more infographics and audio/visual content to provide alternative ways for people to access information, and to improve transparency. While the Commission acknowledged the need for intellectual rigour in parliamentary reports and other publications, lengthy documents can act as a barrier to citizen engagement with democracy, particularly for those with learning difficulties, special needs or just limited time. For example, the Register

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‘Presenting complex information in a way that is easy to understand and interrogate is a key design challenge for the digital era’

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of Members’ Financial Interests, currently a very dry document published online as a PDF, could be transformed into a much more accessible source of information for voters by producing an interactive version featuring the use of icons to represent categories of data.

Of course, we couldn’t opine on such matters without practicing what we preached, so we made extensive use of graphics and audio visual content in our report, and asked colleagues in the Parliamentary Service to design us a website which made the report come alive no matter what device it was viewed on. Often, other people have risen to the challenge of how to present parliamentary data better than Parliament itself, a good example being [theyworkforyou.com](http://theyworkforyou.com), which revisited the way people could browse online parliamentary debates transcribed in Hansard, also enabling them to add comments. As Parliament releases more information as open data on its [data.parliament](http://data.parliament) platform, it can pass the design challenge on to others, to see what fresh and unexpected ways of making sense of key information emerge. That is one of the main reasons we recommended that all parliamentary information in the public domain should be made available to the public as downloadable data in formats which make them easy to re-use.

Finally, the Commission saw a very real need to do more to reach out to groups of people who feel excluded from the political process, especially young people. Many of our recommendations sought to address this, but in one area in particular we looked to Government to do more, and that is in the area of voting and elections. It will in our considered opinion become increasingly more difficult to persuade younger voters to vote using traditional methods.

Hence we argued there is an urgent need to investigate the means by which citizens can be given access to online voting. We recommended that online voting should be an option for all UK citizens by 2020, provided that the inevitable concerns about electoral fraud and secrecy of the ballot can be overcome. This will involve another of the great digital design challenges – how to combine security with usability. The integrity of the electoral process is non-negotiable, but at the same time, if the security makes online voting difficult to use, the main point of using it will have been lost.

So did we succeed in redesigning democracy? That would be a grand claim, but I would like to think that we have made a small but significant contribution to this task.

# Designing Democracy

Julian Huppert MP interviewed by Ben Terrett, Head of Design at the Government Digital Service (GDS) and Naomi Turner, Manager of the Design Commission

## Using the Internet to Improve Voter Registration and Turnout

BT: We at GDS are digitising public services, and the one closest to democracy is the ability to register to vote online. In doing so, we discovered a lot of aspects that haven't been designed, per se, which are no one's fault and which no one intended to happen. For example, the white card posted through the door asking for updated details asks for 'the Head of the Household', which some people find very offensive.

JH: Yes, that's a very Victorian idea, which evolved from the census. Indeed, Queen Victoria filled it out as Job, 'Queen'; Head of Household, 'Albert'.

BT: So, obviously you'd remove that. Now you can register to vote on your phone, you can do it every week and so on. The process strikes me as one of those things which haven't really been designed, but that no one questions it because it's just there.

However, we think that everyone agrees that we want more people to vote, and maybe it is hard to do so. I for example missed the deadline to register when at university, and I was desperate to vote even though I couldn't.

If you're looking at it as a design problem (and I know there is much more to it than that), maybe we should ask about whether getting people to a certain place at a certain time, the polling booth for example, prohibits people from voting.

Is there a better way of doing it, like putting it online?

JH: Registering to vote online is very sensible and has to be a better thing to do, but there are questions about the issue of people failing to do so. Broadly speaking, [registering to vote] is an easy thing to do. The question is more to do with how to get people to register – we've always had difficulty in getting people to do it appropriately. It was difficult under the old system and still is under the new.

Of course user registration needs to be easy, but this needs to be set against the security of voting – quite a complex thing to establish. We are remarkably secure-free in the UK – indeed the only check when you go to vote is that one knows their name and address. It would not be hard to go and vote polling station to polling station, casting votes for people who are dead and so on.

I worry about the vulnerability of online voting – particularly of impersonation. If I voted again at a polling station, I would be recognised, but I might be able to vote online hundreds and hundreds of times. In general, it is possible to scale up easily with digital technology. Technology allows for things to go wrong on a much bigger scale.

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'We're still archaic about the way we do things in Parliament; you'd never design it like this'

- Julian Huppert MP

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There are also risks with the system outside one's control – for example denial of service problems. It would be hugely problematic to get denial of service at 4pm on Polling Day. I lost a council by-election when it started to hail... One is vulnerable [to factors outside one's control].

I am however relaxed about expanding the number of voting days, and for where you vote, too. There are places such as Australia which allow you to vote where you work, for example. The busiest polling station is in Central Sydney, because on the whole places where people work are more concentrated than where people live. There is also no particular reason why it has to be a Thursday – it is no longer connected to the day people got their wages.

BT: In terms of improving accessibility, the Helen Hamlyn Centre (at the Royal College of Art) held an exhibition of accessible voting machines in conjunction with Norway – where wheelchair users can vote with ease.

JH: We should also think about blind and partially-sighted people, whose carer votes for them but the person cannot check it.

NT: Given the emphasis on factors beyond our control like the weather, this leads us to think about whether MPs would be interested in thinking about changing the whole design and/or user experience offer of voting. We can't solve the problem by throwing technology at it. Could there be a system, for example, which privileges one click over another, or an online experience which helps solidify our experience as active citizens, rather than likening it to buying something from Amazon?

JH: We have to make sure what we do is neutral in making people vote. For example, putting more polling stations in urban areas where people work and fewer in residential areas means that retired people or those not working are less likely to vote (which would have massive consequences on the result). Similarly, online voting may have the effect of a turnout of a certain set – making it substantially higher. We should remember however that there are already prejudices in our current system – higher turnout for the elderly, for example.

Ideally, you want one vote to be as easy to cast as any other, whether that person is 20, 60, 80 – and for it to be worth as much as any other. We wouldn't want older people to abandon online voting because they see it as too difficult, where an 18-year-old could do it, as there is an app to do it for you.

NT: But digital by default does not mean cutting people out of services, as it does not mean digital only.

JH: But this is different. If you can provide access to public services for all, and

much better access to some rather than others, that is still a good outcome. We are not bothered about equality of access here, we are concerned with moving people upwards – that is the key difference. If some people find it much, much easier, that devalues other people. That is the thing with digital by default – it shouldn't mean the degradation of services for others.

BT: What are your thoughts on the infamous example of the ballot paper in Florida, whose designer has since come out and said that this was a failure of graphic design?

JH: It is a failure of design; but it is also a failure of the US system where they don't bother to count votes. In the UK, every questionable ballot paper is agreed by agents and notes are taken of every incident. We have plenty of case law on this; a smiley face in one box counts for a vote, for example, regardless of the size of the majority.

In the US, this doesn't matter, but in the UK we have a more sensible way of going about it. We cannot ask people to be entirely rational and dispassionate about small things when they know it makes a massive difference. In general, the count is a fascinating process – you see the agents argue for hours and more people should understand how it works.

There is still a human element to the count. If you look at the last digits of the votes counted, one would expect to find a random distribution but, instead, you find a lot of 0s and 5s – which means people have been rounding off because they can't be bothered to count it.

### Experiments in Data and Democracy

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JH: Deliberative democracy is also very interesting (I helped to run a model in Yale). The Chinese are interested in this as an alternative to democracy. The challenge is to get enough information feeding in, as echo chambers are not helpful.

From my experience, the most valuable insight was that people became more liberal when presented with all the information. For example, previous support for the death penalty and long sentences collapsed.

Closer to home, I pushed Cambridge County Council to run this process with regard to Council Tax, asking residents what they would like a) their tax level to be, b) what services would you like to receive? In short, the answers didn't match up. Whilst the deliberative democracy trial was too small and too short, we found that people were keen on higher council tax – on improving schools and so on. There is huge educational role there for the potential of deliberative democracy in the future.

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'You don't have to work out who the user is and what the user wants to do with [the data]. People can re-shape data in lots of different ways'  
 - Julian Huppert MP

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BT: There is a massive opportunity for any organisation in making this data available and asking people what they would like. One of the founders of Google said that it is more important to know what is happening than trying to control what is going on.

JH: Yes - It is important to get out as much data as you can, and then think about how you might represent it. The more you can provide access to the raw stuff the better.

BT: The performance platform in Government Digital Service (GDS) means people can see usage of the site; anyone can look and it and see that the site was very busy at 3pm for example, and go away and do something with the data. That stuff is very neutral.

JH: You don't have to work out who the user is and what the user wants to do with it. People can re-shape data in lots of different ways.

BT: Churchill said that we shape our buildings, and then they shape us. I believe this as true for buildings as it is for technology as it is for systems and so on.

NT: The Good Law project were monitoring hits on legislation.gov and found that they were mostly to do with regulatory issues – indicating that it users were on the whole small businesses checking the site to see if they were in trouble or not. The system is now being redesigned with this user group in mind.

JH: There was a case where someone was tried for an offence which was appealed, but only then did a junior lawyer notice that the offence had been repealed six months before that person had done it. This could have been catastrophic because there was no way of tracing the amendments to subsequent bills.

### On Language

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BT: In a democracy, everyone agrees that everyone should have access to laws and what they are. We've worked hard on language, as most laws are written in such arcane language that no one can understand them. We've had lot of stick for this at GDS, but we've done research with Reading University which shows that the average reading age is 12 years old, which may seem really low until you find out that by the time you are 6 you know the 1000 words you need to get through in life – after that you put words together to make more complex words, learn about nuancing words and so on. Therefore, we write for an average age of nine, because we know that, under pressure, the way that you take in information changes. The average reading age decreases by three years; receiving a letter from government is a classic example. This stuff should be easy to understand – there is no benefit in making it



more technical; having tax laws that only accountants can understand, for example. It is not dumbing down, but opening up.

JH: Unless you're an accountant.

### On Design and Technology Education

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JH: There is a real problem of understanding of technology among MPs and Peers. We do periodically hear ideas which sound perfectly sensible unless you really understand them – encryption, filtering out defamation and in general filtering out the bad things and not filtering out the good. These are unachievable. It is important to keep listening to people and understand preconceptions about how things work and not how they work.

I believe that with each election, we will gain more tech aware MPs. Also, up until recently, consumer technology wasn't changing that fast, with not much advance between elections. I remember when Alta Vista was the search engine of choice... or even when there was a page called 'What's New on the Internet'.

It is also important to keep a sense of fun, opportunity and excitement about technology, and not feeling like we have to have too much control on things. I have always had a problem with the idea of the precautionary principle - of not doing anything until you know it is safe - which can be an incredibly damaging concept. The idea of provable safety for everything doesn't work. MPs and Peers should be encouraging innovation and flexibility whilst remembering that some things that are tried won't work and that that's okay. This is why I always go back to getting the data out there, because people do things with them; some of them will fail and some will get it wrong, but someone will come along with something else.

There are obviously a few specific instances of such misconceptions in government. We the Lib Dems had so many fights over things like the Postcode Address file, OS data, Met Office data. There is still the prevailing view that data has be kept tight control over. This view ignores the fact that the value of data can only really be found when it is out there [in the wild]. There is a philosophical view to this as well as the political.

We're still archaic about the way we do things in Parliament; you'd never design it like this.

# Democracy and the role of social media

Laura Haynes, Appetite

- *Can we regard a process as democratic if an increasing number of people are not engaged?*
- *Is this disengagement a design problem that can be solved by redesigning our processes for communications and inclusion?*

While the virtues of democracy are fundamentally good, it could be argued that many have become disillusioned by the process, opting instead to regard it as flawed. Dwindling participation means that public opinions are not fully heard; making this process of governance, which aims to reflect the views of the many, dependent on only a few.

A portion of the electorate has lost faith in the democratic process and trust in its leaders. This is problematic for two reasons: politically, it means an ever-dwindling political base and therefore ever-closer election results with no outright winner; and socially, a disengaged electorate is more likely to become a disenfranchised population.

The ramifications of these problems should be self-evident: the increasing frequency of governments that are often marriages of convenience; more likely resulting in incessant in-fighting and thus, little progress on important issues. Cumulative effect: loss of public trust in democracy.

Similarly, with a disenfranchised populace, a fraction may seek extreme alternatives. In the Arab world for example, disenfranchisement likely led to the revolutionary Arab Springs; whilst in Europe, it is this sentiment that is likely promoting the rise of challenger parties such as Podemos (Spain), Syriza (Greece), Pegida (Germany), Front National (France) and UKIP (UK). It could be argued, however, that these recent “upsets” represent real democratic involvement, fuelled by social media and the power of the individual.

So, what is really happening? Does the answer lie with social media? Will it help to restore faith in the system and trust in its leaders? Can it be used to engage the whole electorate and thereby have a truly democratic process?

Social media could without doubt contribute to true democracy because, for the first time in history, anyone can be a content creator, content distributor and commentator to a large public audience – something that has historically been the privilege of journalists, politicians and a small number of influential others. They can state their opinions from their own homes and speak to millions. Equally, and importantly for those who govern, they can also be heard.

In this way, social media gives every citizen a potential voice that can be spread and amplified beyond borders and boundaries. Historically, public opinion

on political matters was largely influenced by mass media, but now, there is a perceptible shift from that traditional, well-curated, one-way communication to more open, user-generated, crowd-sourced dialogue promoted by social media.

As a result, social media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, can dramatically reduce the perceived “barrier” between the electorate and political decision-makers. If used honestly (and not simply as a form of PR) ordinary citizens would have a “direct-line” to these key decision-makers; and the decision-makers can communicate directly with the electorate.

Consider the unprecedented voter turnout numbers that were observed during the Scottish referendum (84% - last seen in the UK in the 1950’s). Whilst the vote was a generation-defining decision, it can be argued that effective social media usage engaged the populace in conversation and debate and encouraged democratic participation, especially in younger age groups. Between August 1st and September 8th, the Scottish referendum generated 10 million interactions and there were more than 4 million tweets covering the topic.

Methods as well as channels for communication have changed; and if we want to engage people in the democratic process we need to go where they are and truly participate, not expect them to come to us. Consider for example that 98% of UK 16-34 year olds claim to have active social media accounts. Indeed, it appears that as trust in mass media dwindles, people are more likely to read and believe content validated by their peers or third party strangers than “party political broadcasts”. Social media is where they are discussing, sharing and becoming engaged in ideas, supported and amplified by digital channels such as YouTube, Reddit and Instagram.

This is where the democratic process is already happening by influencing democratic thought and action. Just imagine what could happen if it were to be fully embraced – not just to voice an opinion, but to have that opinion registered, perhaps even to cast a vote.

Having said that, social media is not without its limitations. It is clear that there are risks of oversimplification, propaganda or simply creating so much noise that we alienate the very people that we are trying to include.

If politicians (and the communications agencies who advise them) simply leap on the social media bandwagon and turn it into no more than a new channel for “spin” or a replacement for TV advertising from the days of Mad Men we will have missed the real opportunity.

There is a need to redesign our communications processes for social media to add to understanding by helping people to assess information, as there is a great difference between shared and informed opinion. More information does not mean more knowledge or better judgement. We should address the opportunity to develop user-designed journeys from awareness to understanding

to participation that could represent true democracy in action. This new process might include a level of curation that will help us to move from sound bites, to allow us to make better informed decisions; a forum for policy debate a sort of combination between Wikipedia and Tripadvisor.

The key to social media as a cornerstone for democracy is participation, exploiting the opportunity for information and debate, to create knowledge, understanding and trust. To engage people through the channels relevant to them. To design an experience that allows for a forum for two-way conversation. To involve people in the process: after all, isn't that what democracy is all about? Information and participation, design as a feedback loop, working together to feed continuous improvement.



# Section 3

## Other Voices, Other Ways



# New Spaces of Democracy

Kieran Long, V&A

Perhaps the most important spatial metaphor in a recent democratic building was conceived by a British architect. When it was completed in 1999, Norman Foster's cupola on the roof of the Reichstag in Berlin was a suitably optimistic, high-tech symbol for a reunified Germany. The glass dome is public: you process up it via a helical ramp, taking in the views of the city, and look down into the debating chamber below. A cone of mirrors, like a space-age chandelier, directs sunlight down into the debating chamber in the depths of the late-19th century edifice, a purifying light directed into the depths of a building scarred and marked by totalitarian regimes that came before.

Richard Rogers (Foster's former partner and contemporary) took a similar line with the Welsh Assembly building in Cardiff Bay, completed in 2006. Here, a light-filled public shed sits above the debating chamber. No symbolic purification, just another good view of politicians' bald patches. These buildings attempt to transmute transparency and light into democratic virtues for one nation dealing with a troubled past and another developing an independent institutional identity for the first time in centuries.

I wonder today whether parliament buildings made of glass and light are, well, as transparent as they may have seemed a decade ago. Transparency is now less a virtue than a requirement, prompted by revelations about UK MPs' expenses and enabled by Freedom of Information legislation. Who are we watching when we watch the politicians of the Bundestag? The very ones, perhaps, who might authorise the mass surveillance of their own citizens to prevent terrorism. We are watching the people who are watching us. More and more transparency cannot appease our mutual suspicion.

Marc Augé, the French social philosopher, has commented that in contemporary politics "we have left the domain of dreams and revolutions for good", and that in this globalised world, politics contents itself with good bureaucratic behaviour: 'governance' is a neologism seized upon, some years ago now, by politicians of the globalised world; it implies in effect that everything is a matter of competence and good management." Little wonder then that the spaces that accommodate contemporary governmental processes are designed by architects whose bread and butter is earned designing glassy office buildings. Their spatial abstractions have been satirised by the architect and writer Peter Sloterdijk, whose Pneumatic Parliament project proposes a mocking infrastructure for pop-up democracies around the world.

The architectural gestures that seem most characteristic of our age, and most participatory, are being generated out of new political processes, some of which have yet to take institutional form. The unMonastery project, a social experiment underway in Matera, southern Italy, is conceived as a kind of civic laboratory. It inhabits a former seminary in one of Italy's most ancient cities and creates there a new forum for public debate, education and technological experiments. These are all conceived against a background of receding public services: how can a

'The spaces unMonastery creates for participation and civic action are post-welfare state, even post-state'

combination of technological literacy and social mission help find solutions to the failure of government to deliver services?

Living On The Edge 4, a conference at unMonastery in October 2014, blended together the sometimes blind optimism of the tech community with familiar social problems. At its optimistic best, UnMonastery is an embryonic public institution that seeks to escape participation in the market but, nonetheless, tries to find ways to join its work to that of municipalities or governments.

The spaces unMonastery creates for participation and civic action are post-welfare state, even post-state. Inhabiting the ruins of a monastery is perhaps appropriate. The pictures and video from the conference show tech entrepreneurs, Italian politicians, UN Development Programme officers and young 'unMonks' discussing together the future of economics and governance against the honey-coloured walls of a thousand-year-old Benedictine monastery.

This sense of the young, social entrepreneurs of the future playing in the ruins of the city is a common theme. El Campo de Cebada (the Barley Field) in Madrid, Spain, is another place where an architectural lacuna prompted a new, self-organised group to come together and institute new kinds of democratic participation. After the 2008 economic crisis, the site of a proposed sports centre in the Plaza de la Cebada was abandoned, leaving a 5,500 sq m void in the La Latina neighbourhood. Groups of local people were able to negotiate with the local authorities temporary use of the site, and set up various systems of direct democracy to establish what should happen there. Gradually a range of uses emerged on the site, as local people collaborated to bring power and water to the place, and added a variety of sports, leisure and arts uses to what had been an inaccessible building site.

The unMonastery and El Campo de Cebada are given their distinctive atmosphere by a combination of a new kind of social contract between local residents and the sharing of information and skills enabled by the internet. unMonastery is a Europe-wide network that aims to offer its lessons online as a template (or 'bios', as its founders call it) for future projects to imitate. El Campo de Cebada would announce its activities on its website, a Facebook page and on blackboards surrounding the site.

Both of these projects see young, idealistic people playing in the ruins created by failed government interventions and receding faith in conventional democratic accountability at the scale of individual communities. In Italy and Spain this is clarified by the spaces created by profound economic failure and austerity government. The architectural gestures of contemporary participation in democratic processes against this background are lengths of waste timber knocked together to create a temporary auditorium, or a few chairs in a circle in the chapterhouse of an abandoned monastery.



# Internet-era citizen movements and political parties

Francesca Bria, Nesta Innovation Lab

Open and participatory policy making models that combine the openness of the Internet with a continuing role for parliaments, committees, citizens and experts in making decisions and being held to account are showing great potential.

Network parties are appearing in Europe: The Pirate Parties in Iceland, Germany and Sweden, and the Five Star Movement in Italy have pioneered Internet-based decision-making structures. Podemos in Spain, now leading in the national polls, is opening decisions up to large numbers of people through the Internet, involving citizens in shaping policy and sharing their expertise.

However, attempts to engage people in democratic decision-making using digital platforms are still in their early stages. A few existing platforms have been specifically designed to engage in Internet-scale democracy that goes beyond the limits of traditional corporate social media. The European funded project D-CENT (Decentralised Citizens ENgagement Technologies) is bringing together leading European examples of collective deliberation and decision-making, and helping them developing the next generation tools for online democracy.

In the past years we have witnessed the experimentation of new forms of public consultation and popular deliberation that are being practiced in contemporary democracies, where the electoral system is bypassed and challenged. Some experiments that are part of D-CENT are deliberately designed to link into existing formal structures of democratic power; others aim to build alternatives for grassroots citizen movements. The main examples being a participatory approach to constitutional reform in Iceland in 2009-2013, citizens' deliberative assemblies as the ones experimented by the new Spanish party Podemos the Finnish Citizen Initiative linked to Parliament.

These examples show that the 19th century institutions of democracy, such as Parliaments, elections, parties, manifestos democratic assemblies are in great need of revival, since they are out of synchronisation with 21st century technologies, norms and collective aspirations. The purpose of democracy in the 21st century should be to harness the collective knowledge of the people to build more inclusive institutions, formulate better policy and laws and solve real social problems empowering citizens. D-CENT wants to provide a positive vision of collective intelligence in democracy, which is a vision of a more inclusive and participatory democracy in the 21st century.

### Blueprint for institutional change: The democracy ecosystem

D-CENT aims at exploring a wider perspective of democratic innovation in which the whole policy cycle is democratized, linking top down and bottom-up aspects.

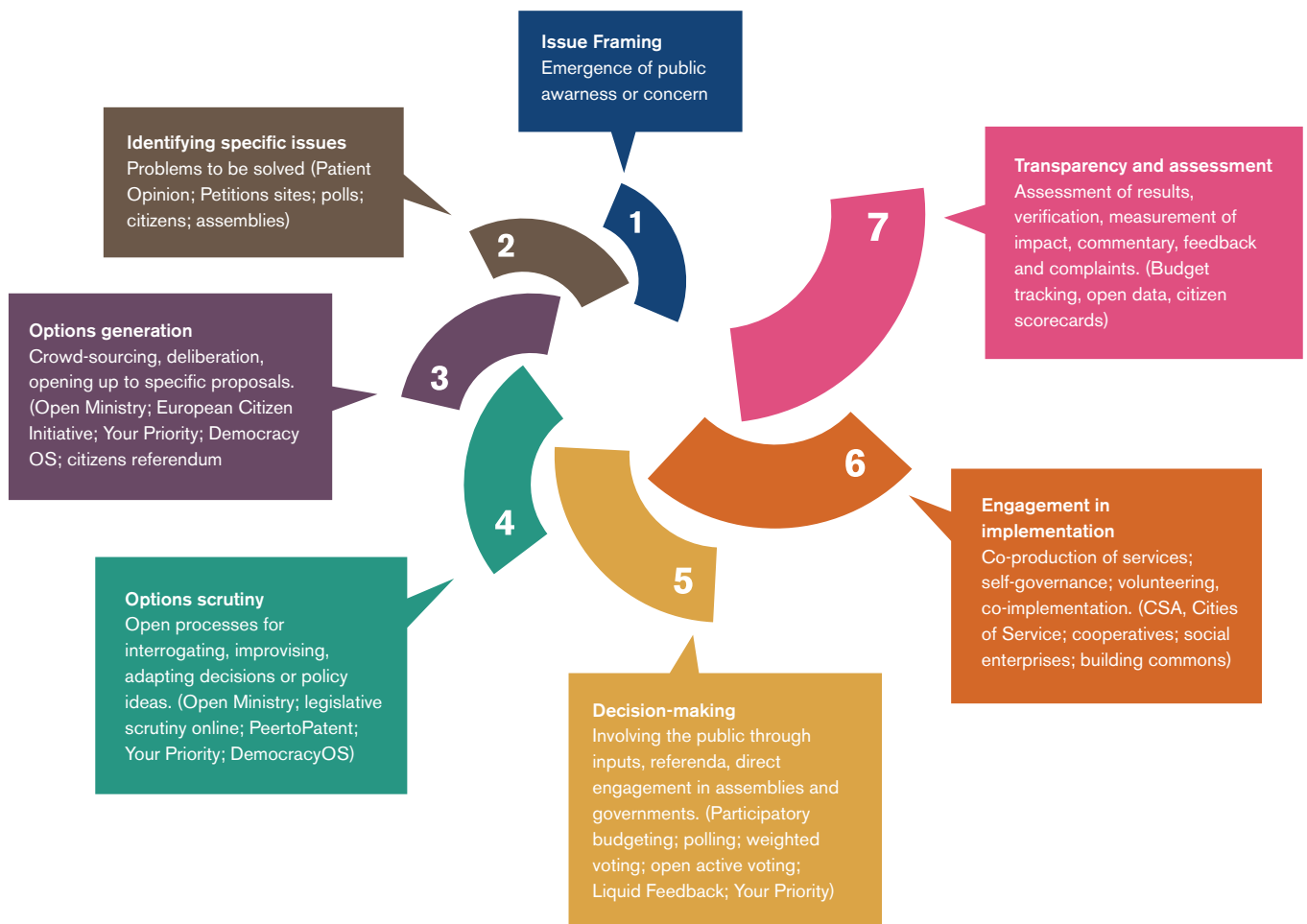


Fig 1: Democracy as open ecosystem

Online infrastructures for democracy are essential tools to allow for mass engagement, options generation, democratic deliberation, debates, and collective decision-making at every stage of the democratic process (see Fig. 1).

## Agile and Lean design & development

D-CENT is a fairly challenging open Source software project. Never before has anyone tried to form such a compilation of free online tools for democratic participation to serve NGOs, parties and movements. D-CENT will be built on already existing open source democracy tools (see: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/tech4labs-issue-3-digital-tools-participatory-democracy>) and create a loosely integrative and cohesive modular open source, distributed, and privacy-aware platform for participatory democracy.

We are doing this by applying the design methods of Agile and Lean UX development, stage by stage: first we have something small implemented Minimal Viable Products (MVPs) then we move quickly towards testing what works, learning and improving the product. User groups and stakeholders are engaged from the very beginning using iterative lean methodologies by opening existing codes and collaborative learning and experimenting with continuous users' feedback

## Running large-scale pilots and experiments with democratic organisations across Europe and beyond

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### Collaborative policy-making and large-scale deliberation in Spain

In Spain, the purpose is to offer D-CENT tools for the use of citizen movements moving into the electoral arena. The piloting was launched with two new and influential political groups: Podemos at national level and Barcelona En Comú at municipal level.

Podemos is a political party born in the wake of the 15M “indignados” anti austerity and pro democracy social movement, with strong citizen participation and that relies heavily on the Internet and online platforms to mobilise their members. In the spring of 2014, it obtained five seats in the European Parliament Elections. As of today, polls reflect a huge growth in vote intention to the point of being clear candidates to win the elections due in November 2015. Barcelona En Comú (Catalan for Let's win back Barcelona) is a citizen-led coalition attempting to win the next city elections and build a new type of city management.

D-CENT is now running large scale pilots in collaboration with Laboratorio Democrático, a digital strategy Lab driving the participatory infrastructure of Podemos at national and municipal level. Labodemo is developing innovative tools for networked democracy and has launched the debate platform Plaza Podemos with 220,000 people registered. The challenges reside now in developing new prototypes and tools that allow experts and citizens to get involved in policy making processes, ranging from citizen initiatives and collective policy-drafting to meaningful large scale debates and voting.

**Crowd sourced legislation and bottom-up municipal democracy in Finland**

The Finnish pilot of the D-CENT project offers online tools for citizen movements. New kinds of online tools are tested to open up the decision-making of the City of Helsinki and help collaborative policy making and crowdsourced drafting of citizens' initiatives. One organisation active in the project is Open Ministry, which has assisted citizens in drafting laws for a couple of years already. The citizens' initiative amendment to the Constitution in 2012 ensures each Finnish citizen the right to have his or her bill presented to the parliament. The prerequisite is that minimum of 50,000 persons of voting age back the bill. Open Ministry has been involved in drafting the bills aimed at changing copyright laws and establishing an equal marriage law. The D-CENT project tests how to design a functional kit for establishing an online democracy community using open source tools.

Another focus is to create bottom-up citizen feedback on the decision making of the City of Helsinki. D-CENT will provide citizens with an alert when the city council handles issues that interest them. When a relevant issue comes up citizens can get organized, mobilise, and act to influence decision-making.

D-CENT is trying to change the decision-making processes and makes it easier for citizens and social movements to participate and change things, thus restore people's trust in politics and democratic participation.

# Designing Democratic Innovations

Geoff Killy

Democratic innovations<sup>1</sup> are novel ways of increasing civic engagement through inclusive decision-making, changing political behaviour to promote participation or rebuilding trust in government. Five innovations are presented that evidence the role of design in shaping how we experience and participate in democratic government. The examples include new participatory structures in the legislative process, mobilising digital technology to foster a more engaged citizenry, as well as alternative party structures that directly incorporate citizen input. This selection highlights notable developments in the field, and demonstrates the varied role of design.

## An Operating System for Democracy in Argentina

In 2014, the Partido de la Red (Net Party in English) piloted a programme with the city legislature of Buenos Aires that allowed citizens to debate and vote on three pieces of proposed legislation. An online platform, DemocracyOS, was used to host the debate and facilitate the vote. Democracy OS was created by the Democracia en Red foundation, from which the Net Party was formed. Although the results of the vote were not binding, it was a successful experiment in direct citizen participation in the legislative process and the non-partisan use of digital technology to promote civic engagement.

Built to provide space for collaborative decision-making and political discussion, DemocracyOS<sup>2</sup> stands out in the rapidly expanding field of digital tools aimed at re-defining the interface between citizen and government. Naturally, the design of these tools has a significant impact on the level and type of participation. One fundamental design question, which has significant implications for the user, is whether the debate and vote are conducted anonymously or if participants are identifiable. Anonymity may elicit more responses from a greater number of participants; but it would also increase the potential for anti-social behaviour, such as trolling so evident on other web-based discussion platforms. For the pilot in Buenos Aires, users were required to register with government-issued ID. This was not just to avoid bad behaviour, but with the hope that it would foster a greater sense of civic culture, further empowering citizens to engage with their government.

## New Party Politics in Spain

Podemos, or 'We Can', was an instant success. Rising out of the 15M and Indignados movement, they won five seats in the 2014 European elections, becoming the third largest party in Spain within twenty days of accepting membership (they are now second) — all on a primarily crowdfunded budget. Although the party's anti-corruption, anti-austerity platform is an important factor, the way they engage their membership has also been integral to their

1 See Participedia for a list of over 400 cases: <http://www.participedia.net>.

2 See <http://democracyos.org>. DemocracyOS can be downloaded by any interested group — government or civil society alike — and since it is open-source, can be made fit-for-purpose. It is currently being used by the federal government in Mexico to collect feedback on its open-data policy; in Brazil to discuss the social and economic impact of the World Cup; in Tunisia to host official constitutional debate and voting; and by the Podemos party in Spain, discussed below.

success. From agenda-setting to the party's manifesto, incorporating input from membership has been paramount. The party maintains an elected Citizen's Council. It forms policy positions from the outcome of debate on proposals made by individual members, which are discussed in issue 'circles'. To facilitate this level of participation and aggregate input into usable information, Podemos use a tailor-made derivative of DemocracyOS. This allows parties like Podemos, cheaply and efficiently to reach large portions of the electorate and incorporate their interests — essentially enabling them to build a national party on a grass-roots foundation.

Design is central to the very architecture of the party. By constructing a framework that is centred on inclusivity and participation, it has been able rapidly to win wide appeal, with relatively little formal infrastructure. This architecture has created a self-organising membership which supports the activity of a relatively small leadership, enabled by online platforms. Podemos demonstrates the effectiveness of pairing digital technology with a citizen-driven party structure.

### **e-Democracy in Estonia**

e-Democracy — using electronic voting and digital technology to increase citizen participation — has been a cornerstone of Estonia's post-Soviet government. To the greatest extent possible, transactions are conducted entirely online, from service delivery to elections — even their Cabinet is paperless. In 2005, Estonia piloted an online voting system. It was scaled-up to parliamentary elections in 2007 and European elections in 2009. Although forms of electronic voting are widely used in many other jurisdictions, internet-based voting has had little take-up. Systems tested are mostly abandoned due to security concerns or functionality issues.

Successful deployment of online systems is contingent on three factors: ease of use, security and access. Access is a policy issue. The others are design problems. Although Estonia shows that creating a functioning system is possible, a significant increase in turnout is not guaranteed. Overall voter turnout in the 2011 parliamentary election was only 1.6% higher than in 2007, and only 5.5% higher than 2003, when the system was not yet in place.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 15% of the electorate cast their vote online in 2011, up from 3% in 2007.<sup>4</sup> Estonia's experience is both an encouraging display of mobilising e-Democracy, and a cautionary example of its limitations.

### **Participatory Public Policy in Brazil**

More direct participation in formulating public policy is an important tool to engage a disaffected citizenry. Brazil has been undertaking exercises in participatory democracy since 1988. Growing from a relatively narrow range of topics to include the economy, education, healthcare, minority rights and even public security, National Public Policy Conferences play an increasingly influential role in shaping policy decisions at the federal level. It is estimated that between 2003 and 2010, 73 national conferences were held with a cumulative 5 million participants.<sup>5</sup>

Institutional design — here, the formal and regular inclusion of citizen input on public policy decisions through national conferences — is fundamental to the level and quality

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3 See: <http://www.vvk.ee/voting-methods-in-estonia/engindex/statistics>

4 Ibid.

5 Cameron, M.A., Hershberg, E. and Sharpe, K.E. (2012), *New Institutions for Participatory Democracy in Latin America*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.

of participation. The conferences are formal, regularly held components of the legislative process, so they contribute to a civic culture of participation that would not be fostered to the same extent by an adhoc approach. Institutional design is also crucial to enable such large exercises to produce tangible results. Consultations are held at the local level, with results aggregated and moved up to the state and, finally, federal level. This ensures that engagement can be broad but manageable, and that input from each level is included. Without this formal structure and clear methodology, such an exercise would unravel under its own complexity.

### **Crowdsourcing Constitutional Reform in Iceland**

Iceland's experiment with constitutional reform in 2013 is a notable example of citizen participation in the highest order of decision-making, the use of crowdsourcing to inform the construction of a country's paramount legal document. In the first stage a 950-person mini-public was tasked with identifying the fundamental ideals to be enshrined in the new document. They included human rights, provision of healthcare, public ownership of natural resources, and universal access to the internet. A 25-member council followed, drawn from a random sample of the public. It was charged with drafting the constitution. All citizens were encouraged to provide commentary for each of twelve drafts, continually fed-back into the drafting process via social media and email. The final document was then brought before Parliament, where it stalled and ultimately failed to pass. This was blamed, in part, on the consultative process itself, which was felt to have lacked a coherent design. Given the increasing use of crowdsourcing to inform legislation, or constitutional reform, it is essential to put in place a robust platform and strategy for the collection and aggregation of information. Failing to communicate the specific goals of each stage will obfuscate the process and create the opportunity for failure. This is why system design is central to the success of these procedures. By incorporating clear design thinking about the collection and use of data from end to end, ambiguity can be avoided and time saved.

Despite failing to pass, Iceland's experience with constitutional reform was an encouraging example of participatory democracy. It reflects the increasing use of crowdsourcing as a mechanism directly to incorporate citizens in drafting legislation. The failure of the process emphasises the importance of designing a robust system to incorporate feedback.

# Learning from Constitución

## Dan Hill, Future Cities Catapult

*“We are taking 21st century challenges, evaluating them with 20th century ideas and responding with 19th century tools.”*

– Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State

*“It’s not about guns; it’s about information. It’s 20th century institutions versus 21st century implications.”*

– Cody Wilson, “inventor” of the 3D-printed gun

Can we see a pattern here? Cody Wilson notes how the regulatory system for firearms is made irrelevant by the ability to print guns at home. Governance is rendered a ‘category-error’ in a world of 21st century dynamics like this. Albright’s reflections come from decades-worth of experience of public administration.

Equally, a casual glance at the news would also suggest that many of our systems of government are not just creaking a little, or even malfunctioning badly, but actually belong to another age; that government itself should be redesigned: in fact, completely reimaged.

Our institutions of governance emerged in a post-enlightenment blur of invention lasting a few hundred years. It worked, for a while. Yet the 21st century is different. Over 40 years ago, Rittel and Webber produced their ‘wicked problems’ paper, presaging a slew of emerging, complex interdependent problems with no clear owners or solutions and deeply contested goals. We now wallow in them.

Government, at least in much of the ‘Western’ world, hardly seems to be in a fit state to rise to those challenges. It has become bereft of symbolic agency in the eyes of much of its electorate, and confidence in government has dropped significantly as a result almost everywhere<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, government has not been seen – or, arguably, been allowed to be seen – as a place of innovation, a place to get things done, for bright young things with ambition.

Breakthrough entities like the UK’s Government Digital Service (GDS) have bucked this last trend to great acclaim. Rebuilding GOV.UK to a very high standard, at pace, cost-effectively and from within government has been a huge achievement. Its ability to embody and convey a strong sense of ‘public mission’ is almost equally powerful.

But although GDS’s work has been exemplary, it has largely concerned service design – incrementally improving existing services. Building something entirely new – the kind of 21st century tools Albright implies – requires strategic design. This means a reinvention of what government is; not just doing it better, but doing it differently. In essence, this might mean a new kind of social contract, forged with 21st century dynamics.

A key opportunity here may be in the locus of politics moving from the national

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation: ‘The World of Work 2011’ (based on Gallop World Poll Data 2011). For more on the critique of government, see Hill, Dan, Dark Matter and Trojan Horses, Strelka (2012)



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'We are in an urban age, yet the centre of gravity in many countries is still national: no more so than the UK, which is now, clearly, centralised to an embarrassing degree'

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to the urban. We are in an urban age, yet the centre of gravity of governance in many countries is still national: no more so than the UK, which is now, clearly, centralised to an embarrassing degree.

Yet Manchester was recently announced as the location for the first major devolution of powers to a UK city-region. As the world's first truly modern city, it is perhaps an appropriate place to start developing a new form of 21st century governance.

But will we? A new social contract requires more than a simple relocation of policy-making, a copy-paste of a mini-Westminster to devo-Manchester. It means devising those new tools, new cultures and practices of decision-making.

With this in mind, it is worth spinning the globe to Latin America and examining new forms of democracy being forged in cities there.

The rebuilding of the Chilean city of Constitución after its devastating 2010 earthquake and tsunami is particularly inspiring. A local team devised an entirely new masterplanning process, drawing from Michel Callon's idea of "Hybrid Forums", which pulls together experts, non-experts, ordinary citizens, policymakers and politicians in a balanced, non-hierarchical form of "technical democracy" around shared issues.

The results in Constitución were extraordinary: a new masterplan for the city, predicated on high levels of citizen participation, yet delivering systemic infrastructural interventions. Co-design was the organising principle. Both the design of the plan, and the almost unanimous approval for it, was achieved in 90 days.<sup>2</sup>

Such an approach is not dependent on technology. Rather, it dissolves the digital in a broader understanding of behaviour and local culture. We see social media in use, plus a pickup truck with a loudhailer on the roof, compelling people to take part in the discussion; a community meeting in one room, with 3D modelling software responding to the debate in real-time in the adjoining room.

Of course the key question is whether the impetus behind such an event, the momentum so crucial to its success, can be achieved outside disaster conditions. There are serious questions as to whether any of these dynamics can achieve the robustness, or modes of representation, of previous systems of government.<sup>3</sup>

And can we really look to the post-earthquake rebuilding of a Chilean city for clues to broader 21st century governance questions? Although the drizzling rain can sometimes feel like a tsunami, Manchester is a very different beast.

Yet devolution to city-regions should necessitate finding new roles for

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2 See <http://brickstarter.org/conversation-rodrigo-araya-tironi-asociados/> for more information and a short documentary.

3 See McGuirk, J. (2014), *Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture*, New York and London: Verso Books, for numerous examples of such approaches to city-making, weaving together so-called 'bottom-up' community-led concerns with broader strategic urban matters; in effect, new designs on democracy.

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'We need to design decision-making cultures which are risk-taking and responsible... holistic and nimble; and take account of individual views as well as the systemic'

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policymakers, politicians, experts, businesses and citizens in similarly pragmatic fashion. We need to design decision-making cultures that are risk-taking and responsible; forward-looking and pragmatic; holistic and nimble; take account of individual views as well as the systemic. There are broad questions about tools, frameworks, systems and cultures, at the heart of "designs" for 21st century governance. The transferable elements of these inspiring projects, from GDS to Constitución, might well be the first tentative sketches of what we're looking for.

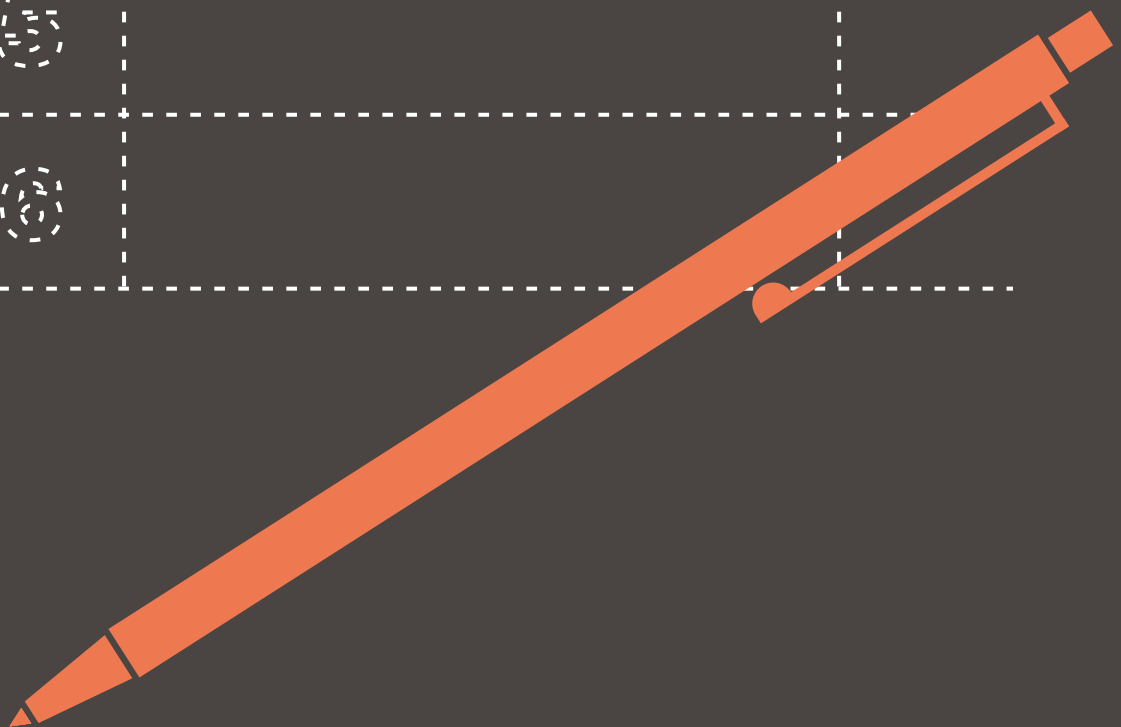
Either way, when we ask the question "how we should design a 21st century governance system?" there's only one way to find out.



# Section 4

## The Stuff of Democracy

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# Political Design: Simplification is Key

Dr Chris Burgess, People's History Museum

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'Good political design can point towards the good in democracy'

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'It is of cardinal importance that the appeal should be immediate, intimate, obvious.'" These words – written by poster artist John Hassall in 1911 – get to the heart of what all good designers of political communication know to be true: make the complex simple. This requires good design. Jeremy Sinclair, who has worked on Conservative campaigns from 1978 until the present, voiced a similar opinion in a recent interview: 'If you can't sum up your message in five to six words, then your message isn't right.'

We tend to think that effective political design began in 1978, with the Conservative Party's appointment of Saatchi & Saatchi and the flurry of hard hitting and memorable posters that followed. 'Labour isn't working,' with its snaking queue heading towards the dole office was the point – so the advertising agency and many other commentators would have use believe – when politics 'changed'. Our elected officials had supposedly turned to advertising; democracy and political design would never be the same again.

Such arguments are seriously misguided. They create a binary separation; all design that came after 1978 was 'professional'; all that came before amateur. Hassall was, in fact, the Saatchi of his day. He produced the iconic *Skegness Is So Bracing* poster and was the man the Conservatives turned to for several designs during the two elections of 1910, when over a million posters bombarded the people of London.

From the beginning of the 20th century politicians have constantly turned towards the professional designer. Because as democracy has expanded over the course of the century, the space between politicians and voters has expanded. The more voters there are, the harder it is to communicate with them individually. Within the mass, each person brings a different attitude to politics and democracy.

Both Hassall and Saatchi understood something that politicians of all creeds often have not. The most effective way to communicate with all these people is to boil down the message. Simplicity wins elections. Something or someone needs to take the incredibly complex world of elections and running governments and make it accessible and interesting to the 'voter in the street'. Good design is the key to that task.

Good posters create accessibility through effective combinations of image and word, something Hassall and Sinclair understood. But both men shared the more problematic belief that elections can only be won by attacking the opposition. Saatchi & Saatchi designed billboards that hammered Labour throughout the late 1970s and early 1990s, while Hassall routinely depicted the then Chancellor, David Lloyd George, as a bumbling idiot.

If we accept that, in the age of mass democracy, design can fill the chasm between politicians and people, what does it mean for democracy if that design is turned almost exclusively towards attack? What a paradox: that the key ingredient to winning elections might also be adding to feelings of disenfranchisement. For, just as we rarely see positive depictions of politicians, politics or government in the news or in fiction, neither do we see it posters.

The relationship between ‘the visual’ and politics has always been complex. Plato riled against the image as a site of untruth. The British electorate has traditionally placed a high value on the great orator or the pithy soundbite. We should not despair. Good political design can point towards the good in democracy. Just as it does in fine art, the sun can represent the hope of politics. A striking Liberal image from 1910 showed an elderly couple basking in the sunlight of the old age pension. A 1929 Labour poster witnessed the dawn breaking over a new Britain. Even in 2010 the Conservative party released a series of little discussed but highly innovative posters, one of which included a voter holding a ‘people power’ sign as the sun rises over his head.

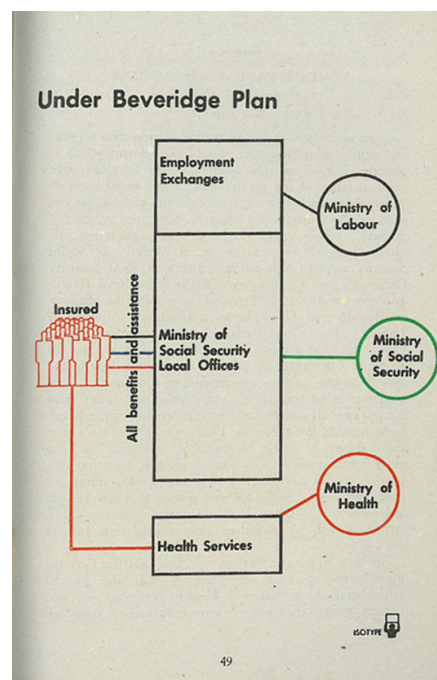
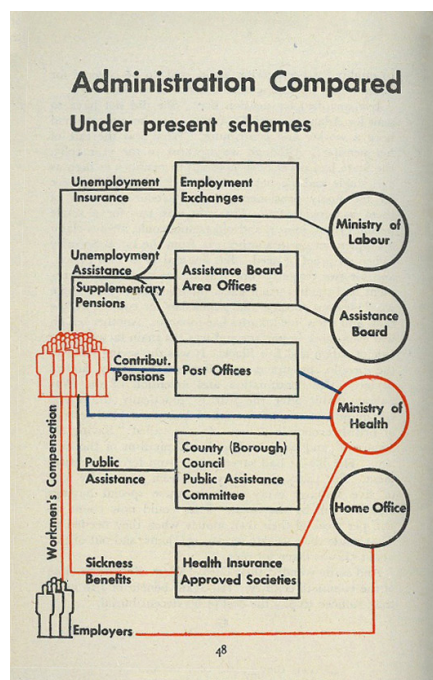
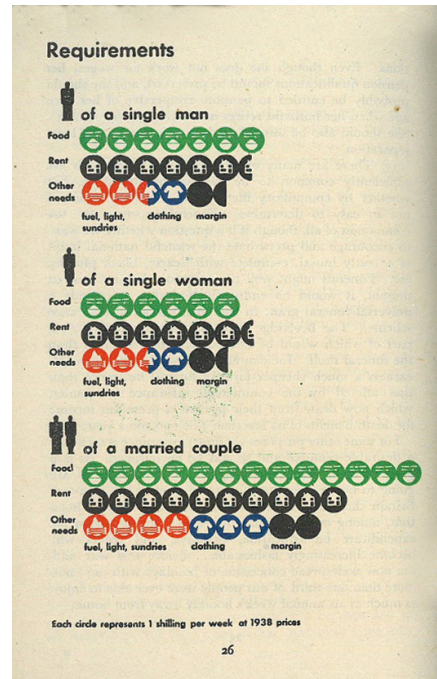
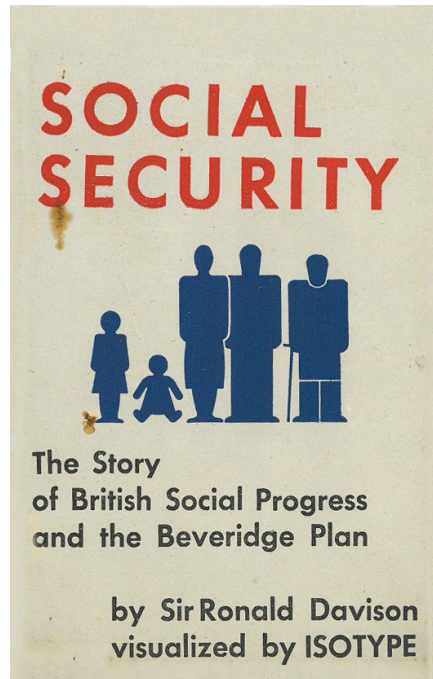
Whatever visual language political posters use, whether it be the rising sun, the snaking queue or the personal attack, all function at an emotional level. They are arguments yes, but ones that aim to crystallise a view we already hold.

What, then, of political design aimed towards educating the electorate? Some posters do present an argument, usually using numbers. Throughout the 20th century numerous posters show falling wages or rising prices, presented in numerical form. Argument yes, but not debate. As philosopher Alain Badiou argued, the numbers in these posters function as all numbers exist in the public world: to close down a debate. Partisan argument is presented as irrefutable fact. They act in the same way as the full stop that ends the claim that ‘Labour isn’t working’.

Can we move beyond this? Digital has been described as the answer, but surely that is just the platform and not the method. With the politics of attack occupying our Facebook and Twitter feeds, how does political design move to something more substantive? One solution could lie in the form of info-graphics and the translation of the complex into the visual. It’s a problem we faced at the People’s History Museum when planning our latest exhibition *Election! Britain Votes*. Finding an object from every general election since 1900 was easy enough; explaining the nature of our democratic system and the life of an election with no objects was more problematic.

Artist Alex Gardner translated everything from what a Returning Officer does, to election night, to coalition building, into something visually stimulating. Such techniques are not new. In 1942 the Ministry of Information produced a guide to the Beveridge Report, explained through the radical visual language Isotype; the benefits of state intervention explained easily for all. If design could make understandable a new social and health care system that would radically alter the relationship between state and people, surely it can help fix the problems of democratic disengagement.

Designers, though, must remember that not everyone has the time to commit to politics. We should all recall the message of Labour Party designer Peter Harle from 1948: when designing a poster, ‘Remember always that the basic idea is to present a message in such a way that “he who runs may read”.’



These are all of the Beveridge Report, Ministry of Information (1942). All images are used courtesy of the Manchester People's History Museum.

# Good Law: how can the design of Bills and Acts help?

Hayley Rogers, Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, Good Law Initiative

It is a founding principle of a democratic system that the people must understand and consent to its laws. The United Kingdom has an awful lot of legislation, some very old (The Statute of Marlborough of 1267), some very new (the Infrastructure Act 2015). It covers a vast range of subjects, from academies to zoo licensing. Some is contained in Acts of Parliament, some in regulations, orders, byelaws or Orders in Council. Of course, our complex society needs legislation – it can confer rights, protect the vulnerable, promote a stable economy and resolve disputes. But the sheer volume and structure of our statutes can make it hard to work out what the law is and how to comply with it.

The Good Law initiative attempts to reconcile the good things law can do with the difficulties faced by users. Our premise is that “good” law must be necessary, effective, clear, coherent and accessible. As I draft legislation, I’m naturally interested in the language of law: how do we make it clear and accessible? But structure and layout – the design of Bills and Acts – have an important role in helping us achieve good law too.

Some of our legislation is really old. This is section 2 of the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750:

**2 Hundredth years, except every fourth hundred, to be common years of 365 days. Years bissextile of 366 days.**

And for the continuing and preserving the calendar or method of reckoning, and computing the days of the year in the same regular course, as near as may be, in all times coming, the several years of our Lord one thousand eight hundred, one thousand nine hundred, two thousand one hundred, two thousand two hundred, two thousand three hundred, or any other hundredth years of our Lord which shall happen in time to come, except only every fourth hundredth year of our Lord, whereof the year of our Lord two thousand shall be the first, shall not be esteemed or taken to be bissextile or leap years, but shall be taken to be common years consisting of three hundred and sixty-five days, and no more; and that the years of our Lord two thousand, two thousand four hundred, two thousand eight hundred, and every other fourth hundredth year of our Lord from the said year of our Lord two thousand inclusive, and also all other years of our Lord which by the present supputation are esteemed to be bissextile or leap years, shall for the future and in all times to come be esteemed and taken to be bissextile or leap years, consisting of three hundred and sixty-six days, in the same sort and manner as is now used with respect to every fourth year of our Lord.

What on earth is this about? This is what makes it hard to tell:

- The language: what are “bissextile” years? What are years which “by the present supputation” are “esteemed” to be bissextile years?
- The structure: this is one sentence, with innumerable subordinate clauses and exceptions buried within over 200 words.



“Good’ law must be necessary, effective, clear, coherent and accessible’

One hundred and fifty years later, the drafting and layout of legislation had moved on. Here’s an example from 1906:

1. A local education authority under Part III. of the Education Act, 1902, may take such steps as they think fit for the provision of meals for children in attendance at any public elementary school in their area, and for that purpose—

(a) may associate with themselves any committee on which the authority are represented, who will undertake to provide food for those children (in this Act called a “school canteen committee”); and

(b) may aid that committee by furnishing such land, buildings, furniture, and apparatus, and such officers and servants as may be necessary for the organization, preparation, and service of such meals;

but, save as herein-after provided, the authority shall not incur any expense in respect of the purchase of food to be supplied at such meals.

Power of local education authority to aid school canteen committees in the provision of meals for children.  
2 Edw. 7. c. 42.

The language is more straightforward: an authority “may take such steps as they think fit” for “the provision of meals for children”. The structure and layout have also improved:

- a sidenote tells us at a glance what the section is about;
- although it is still one sentence, the improved layout enables us to get the gist of what is happening quickly and easily;
- a general power is conferred in the opening words;
- subsidiary powers are in paragraphs (a) and (b);
- there is an exception to the general power in the closing words.

In 2001, Parliament agreed a new layout for Bills and Acts. This example is from its first use:

**PART 1**

INTRODUCTION

**CHAPTER 2**

EXCLUSION OF DOUBLE RELIEF

**7 No double allowances**

(1) If an allowance is made under any Part of this Act to a person in respect of capital expenditure, no allowance is to be made to him under any other Part in respect of—

(a) that expenditure, or

(b) the provision of any asset to which that expenditure related.

(2) This section does not apply in relation to Parts 7 and 8 (know-how and patent allowances).

This shows that a little more white space and a slight change of font, coupled with shorter sections and sentences, can make even complex subjects easier to understand. You'll note too that the Act itself is clearly and logically structured: the headings above section 7 show that it is part of a chapter about excluding double relief, within the introductory part of the Act.

More recent developments in drafting style and layout have included the use of:

- a “step by step” approach to setting out a series of complex rules: e.g. section 91 of the Income Tax Act 2007;
- tables: e.g. section 181 of the Finance Act 2013;
- headings for subsections: e.g. section 2 of the National Insurance Contributions Act 2014.

How might section 2 of the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750 look if it was drafted today? Perhaps something like this:

**1 Leap years**

*What leap year means*

(1) A leap year is a year in which February has 29 days.

*Which years are leap years: basic rule*

(2) The year 2016, and every fourth year after that, is a leap year.

*Exception to basic rule*

(3) But the year 2100, and every hundredth year after that, is not a leap year.

*Exception to exception*

(4) But the year 2400, and every four hundredth year after that is a leap year.

Made available by the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office/Queen's Printer for Scotland and the Cabinet Office.

Or maybe we could simply replace the whole thing with a table showing which years are leap years. Then there would be no need for complex rules at all!

What more could be done? Rob Waller of the Simplification Centre thinks recent advances in typography and information design could help us signal the structure of complete text. Take a look at Rob's “before” and “after” examples from the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rob has published this redesign exercise in 'Layout for Legislation' Technical Paper 15, Simplification Centre, downloadable from [www.simplificationcentre.org.uk](http://www.simplificationcentre.org.uk).

Before:

(5) In section 110 of the Equality Act 2010 (liability of employees and agents), after subsection (5) insert—

“(5A) A does not contravene this section if A —

- (a) does not conduct a relevant marriage,
- (b) is not present at, does not carry out, or does not otherwise participate in, a relevant marriage, or
- (c) does not consent to a relevant marriage being conducted,

for the reason that the marriage is the marriage of a same sex couple.

(5B) Subsection (5A) applies to A only if A is within the meaning of “person” for the purposes of section 2 of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013; and other expressions used in subsection (5A) and section 2 of that Act have the same meanings in that subsection as in that section.”.

(6) In Schedule 3 to the Equality Act 2010 (services and public functions: exceptions), after Part 6 insert—

“PART 6A

MARRIAGE OF SAME SEX COUPLES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

*Marriage according to religious rites: no compulsion to solemnize etc*

25A (1) A person does not contravene section 29 only because the person—

- (a) does not conduct a relevant marriage,
- (b) is not present at, does not carry out, or does not otherwise participate in, a relevant marriage, or
- (c) does not consent to a relevant marriage being conducted,

for the reason that the marriage is the marriage of a same sex couple.

(2) Expressions used in this paragraph and in section 2 of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 have the same meanings in this paragraph as in that section.”.

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013; made available by the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office/Queen's Printer for Scotland and the Cabinet Office.

How easy is it to tell what is going on here? Which text belongs in the 2013 Act and which in the Equality Act 2010? The numbering is confusing. You need to rely on the quotation marks and level of indentation for the answer. Rob points out that, with the exception of the italics, this layout could have been done in the nineteenth century on a typewriter.

After:

**2.5** In section 110 of the Equality Act 2010 (liability of employees and agents), after subsection (5) insert—

**5A** A does not contravene this section if A—

- a does not conduct a relevant marriage,
- or b is not present at, does not carry out, or does not otherwise participate in, a relevant marriage,
- or c does not consent to a relevant marriage being conducted, for the reason that the marriage is the marriage of a same sex couple.

**5B** Subsection (5A) applies to A only if A is within the meaning of “person” for the purposes of section 2 of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013; and other expressions used in subsection (5A) and section 2 of that Act have the same meanings in that subsection as in that section.”

**2.6** In Schedule 3 to the Equality Act 2010 (services and public functions: exceptions), after Part 6 insert—

**Part 6A: Marriage of same sex couples in England and Wales**

**25A Marriage according to religious rites: no compulsion to solemnize etc**

- 1 A person does not contravene section 29 only because the person—
  - a does not conduct a relevant marriage,
  - or b is not present at, does not carry out, or does not otherwise participate in, a relevant marriage,
  - or c does not consent to a relevant marriage being conducted, for the reason that the marriage is the marriage of a same sex couple.
- 2 Expressions used in this paragraph and in section 2 of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 have the same meanings in this paragraph as in that section.”

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What about this? The hierarchy is much clearer because the numbering of the amending provisions is in larger print. The text inserted into the Equality Act is clearly separated (by being “boxed”) from the text of the amending Act. The “or” relationship between a, b and c is now made explicit by repeating the “or” and moving it to the start of the line, where it is easier to see.

So, how do the design of Bills and Acts and good law interact? There are some key principles:

- Language: we need to write laws in plain, modern and intelligible language.
- Structure: We need to tell the story of the legislative changes clearly and help users find their way round the law once enacted.
- Layout: We need to think hard about what is most readable and clear for users.

Rob’s example is just one illustration of how redesigning the layout of Bills and Acts can make them easier to understand. Good modern design principles aren’t the whole answer, but they can make a valuable contribution to achieving good law.

# The Ballot: A Brief History of Information Design

Naomi Turner, Policy Connect

In any discussion of information or service design in voting processes, it is helpful to know more about the past to learn about the present. Yet the design of such systems and role of the physical stuff that constitutes them are often overlooked.<sup>1</sup>

The ballot form and other state information gathering apparatus should be of interest because they:

- form the earliest type of (what became known as) interaction design;
- offer insight into modes of ‘in house design’ before ‘designers’ were recognised as such;
- enrich existing conceptions of historic users of design - in this case citizens who were required to act with compliance but who frequently misunderstood and committed errors.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary voting processes in the UK are largely a result of design choices based roughly on Victorian information infrastructure, as indeed is much of our government bureaucracy.

Whilst not much work has been undertaken into the history of ballot design in Britain, there are close parallels with the census. This is a subject of great historical interest, particularly relating to the issue of ‘the willingness or otherwise of the public to divulge the information requested, and their ability to do this via the medium of the printed form’.<sup>3</sup> There are numerous accounts of people deliberately ‘spoiling’ their returns forms, of misunderstanding where to fill in the details, or of the type of information asked.

There is also ample evidence to demonstrate that many people thought forms - the census, or the tax return – an ‘abominable inquisition’ which represented the extension of an increasingly bureaucratic, intrusive state.<sup>4</sup> One particular essay on this topic quotes ‘a victim’ who informed readers of the *Daily News* in 1887 that he was forced to comply with “the very elaborate instructions in the exasperatingly complicated paper”.<sup>5</sup> There are certainly parallels to now.

## Comparison with the United States

The history of voting in the USA is more thoroughly documented, in part due to interest in comparative studies between the different state legislatures. As with

1 ‘The official form, site of mediated exchange between interrogator and respondent, intricate in its linguistic and graphic representations of state and subjects, authority and readers, remains a disregarded class of document and a void in design history’. Paul Stiff, Paul Dobraszczyk and Mike Esbester, ‘Designing and Gathering Information: Perspectives on Nineteenth Century Forms’, pp.57-58, *Information History in the Modern World: Histories of the Information Age*, (Ed.) Toni Miller, London: Palgrave Macmillan (2011), p.83.

2 These three bullet points are also expressed by the authors of ‘Designing and Gathering Information’, *Ibid*, p 84. In addition it is also important to note the limitations of the intended user group for the ballot. Even the third Reform Act (1884), which enfranchised all male property owners in both urban and rural areas, adding 6 million to the electoral register - fell some way short of introducing universal manhood suffrage. Universal suffrage (allowing women to vote) was only introduced in 1918.

3 *Ibid*

4 *Ibid*, p. 83.

5 *Ibid*, p. 82.

'It would appear that the disastrous design of the Hanging Chad ballot paper used in Florida for the 2000 Presidential Elections had historic precedent'

the UK, we know that the evolution of the paper ballot was by no means uniform across the country: whilst Ohio passed a law in 1802 requiring voting by ballot in all elections, fellow citizens in Kentucky voted *viva voce* up until 1891.

The eventual move towards paper voting was the big opportunity for political parties, which seized on the opportunity to print their own, more favourably designed ballots. Printed ballots even came to be called "party tickets," paid for by the candidate and printed by the party.

The printing on ballots of a party symbol, like the Free Soilers' man-pushing-a-plow, meant that voters didn't need to know how to write, or even to read... Undeniably, party tickets led to massive fraud and intimidation. To make sure [that candidates were getting their money's worth], ballots grew bigger, and more colourful.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, it would appear that the disastrous design of the Hanging Chad ballot paper used in Florida for the 2000 Presidential Elections had historic precedent. It was not until the mid 19th century that the idea of government printing their own ballots was floated. However, along with various efforts by different state legislatures to stop certain sections of society from voting, it has been argued that the new form (as opposed to the party ticket) made it much harder for those less likely to be literate in English - immigrants, former slaves, and the uneducated poor - to cast their ballot.

This was because, unlike the more graphic party ticket, prospective voters now had to be able to read the words on the voting paper before marking their preferred candidate. Whilst some precincts formally imposed and selectively administered literacy tests; others 'resorted to ranker chicanery' to make voting all the more difficult for certain sections of society. In 1894, one Virginian congressional district even printed its ballots in Gothic letters.

Even despite the widespread adoption of the secret ballot in 1884, the move to a government-printed ballot saw the start of a great decline in voting rates across the US, particularly in black or ethnic minorities, which have not recovered since.<sup>7</sup>

### Prospects for Future Democracy

History shows us that throwing technology at the 'problem' of democracy, and indeed democratic engagement, has not solved it. Can the internet really overcome these historic problems of persuading people to vote?

Tiago Peixoto, a commentator on the intersection between democracy and technology, has referenced initial reactions to the Napoleonic Semaphore (known to us as the Telegraph). Not only could it 'be used to speak at great distances as fluently and distinctly as in a room', but;

<sup>6</sup> Lepore, Jill, 'Rock, Paper, Scissors: How We Used to Vote', New York Times, 13th October 2008, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/10/13/rock-paper-scissors>, accessed 27th February 2015.

<sup>7</sup> The year after Arkansas passed its secret-ballot law, the percentage of black men who voted dropped from seventy-one to thirty-eight. *Ibid.*

*“...there is no reason why it would not be possible for all the citizens of France to communicate their will, within rather a short time, in such a way that this communication might be considered instantaneous.”*

– Alexander Vandermonde, 1795

One can imagine the same was thought of the possibilities of the television, given the propensity for leaders’ debates (a particularly sore subject, and clearly not a guaranteed solution to the democracy problem, given the controversy about them in the run up to the 2015 General Election). Similarly, whilst the internet might be beneficial for consumer transactions, we cannot assume that this will necessarily translate into increased voter engagement, because people realise that the chances of making a difference with their individual vote are infinitesimal.<sup>8</sup> Whilst there is great promise of a new digital democracy allowing for sustained voter engagement between elections, it is fair to say a radical re-appraisal of the internet’s role (perhaps back to its technocratic origins, and beyond a mere transactional relationship) is due.

### Conclusions

A brief overview of the design history of forms and other means of formatting information for the state shows that the form remains a site of disagreement between the bureaucracy and the respondent, and indeed there are long standing problems with getting people to comply.

Furthermore, the history of technology shows that there have long been hopes for democracy to flourish due to innovations in communication, but that this is only a small part of a much bigger system of voter engagement.

With the prospect of new communication channels, is it too basic to suggest that there will always be tension between the interrogator and the respondent? Of perhaps more concern, what are the consequences for democracy should design inevitably privilege one group of users over another?

<sup>8</sup> From a talk given at Piexoto at the University of Westminster Centre for the Study of Democracy event, Technology and Participation: Friend or Foe?, 8th July 2014. A write up can be found at <http://democracyspot.net/2014/08/>, accessed 27th February 2015.

# Census

**Cassie Robinson, Civic Bureau and Louise Armstrong, Forum for the Future**

Census is a prototype exploring how the current UK census could be used to increase democratic participation, both through using design to galvanise civic involvement and by designing a way to make sharing data for a public good more explicit and understood.

Census statistics have been the core of social architecture for thousands of years, used as a key tool for directing huge amounts of public funding and every ten years in the UK the census is undertaken to give us a complete picture of the nation. Information collected by the census is used by central and local government to develop policies, plan and run public services, and allocate funding. The data are also widely used by academics, businesses, voluntary organisations and the public. As such it plays a central role in the functioning of democracy in Britain as it is currently constituted.

*“Statistics form the backbone of democratic debate...Every day in the UK, decisions are made and money invested based on official statistics.”*  
 – Jil Matheson, National Statistician, October 2010

However the census currently fails to capture parts of the population - particularly in areas where there are transient populations, or other ‘invisible’ communities. For example, the 2001 UK census failed to account for 900,000 men under 40. Other groups such as new urban migrants are hugely underrepresented. Given the overall scale of the task these individual examples may seem small, but taken together these incidents were serious enough to prompt Manchester and Westminster councils to take legal action over the consequences of the discrepancies between census data and their own data.<sup>1</sup>

It is in some ways paradoxical that these gaps exist because more than ever our cities are filled with data, whether it’s air quality sensors in parks, the steady accumulation of civic records, or the constant hum of public Wi-Fi. In short, census data isn’t keeping up with the dynamic nature of our future cities. In an increasingly urbanising world, we are inevitably seeing the rise of the city-state.

*Would the Census be more accurate and inclusive if done at a city, rather than national, level?*

We believe that a “Citizen Census” could open up new forms of democracy and participation by making people in cities more visible. There is huge potential for the census to be re-imagined and designed to be a tool for communication between citizens and elected representatives. In this way it could activate communities to share their own data locally and improve local services as a result.

*We all take part in the National Census every 10 years, but what would that Census look like if it was woven into the fabric of our lives and our cityscape on a constant basis?*

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1 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/mar/10/census-2011-do-we-need-it>



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'We are designing an alternative experience of democratic engagement that goes beyond box ticking'

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As part of the cross-disciplinary Unbox lab supported by the British Council, we've been asking these questions and more.<sup>2</sup> From this process, we are designing an alternative experience of democratic engagement that goes beyond box ticking.

The Civic Bureau, our first installation at Somerset House, invited the public to consider the possibilities of a new *citizen-led* census, answering new questions that could form the census of the future. These questions related to themes such as belonging, sharing, trust and health.

From the early data, we can already start to understand what people are (and aren't) willing to share, and with whom. For example, 64% of people would share information about hereditary conditions with friends and family. 39% would be willing to share this information for the 'public good' – but only 18% would be willing to share it with the city council.

The data also indicates a different type of connection within local communities. 89% of respondents said would like to know what other people on their street need help with, whilst and 76% of people would like to know more about their neighbours' concerns.

However, of crucial importance for future government at all levels, our data showed that only 1-2% of respondents put most faith in local councils or the government - with most people putting their faith in themselves or their friends and family.

Building on our current sample size of 600 people, we want to take the installation around the UK so that we can build up comparative data. So far this work has explored the behaviours and attitudes towards sharing data for a public good and going deeper by getting more granular information, but our next ambition is to design how we will go wider and reach the invisible communities who are left out of the official census.

Designers bring empathy and creativity to social challenges, which can also be applied to how we measure and thereby keep telling the story of the population.

We see designers as having a crucial role in working with the public to develop a sense of the benefits in sharing data for a public good, as well as developing more accessible, creative and dynamic methods for collecting it.

Designers might also create a demand for data. Whilst people in the open data movement have created supply, they have not always created demand for its possible uses. Effective design at the point of data collection focuses clearly on the audience (the customer, or other ultimate beneficiary).

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<sup>2</sup> 'Census' was originally developed as part of Unbox Labs, a British Council Creative Economy supported project through which cultural practitioners from the UK and India collaborated on solutions to urban and social issues. The installation has been further developed in collaboration with the Intel Collaborative Research Institute on Sustainable and Connected Cities (ICRI-Cities) at University College London (UCL).

Finally, design methods could be used as an educational tool around data collection, particularly given our sample's reluctance to share it. Helping people understand why their data counts and what can happen when it is linked with other data sources could be of crucial importance in the future, both in creating new modes of understanding and ultimately new forms of value.

With the increasing prevalence of technology and growing civic activism, could the Census be redesigned to galvanise the immense digital potential of the population, in a way that invites a more frequent and granular form of citizen involvement? Could this in turn lead to a shift in the relationship between citizen and state and alter the nature of democracy itself?

# The Open Manifesto

James Smith, [Somethingnew.org.uk](http://Somethingnew.org.uk)

Party manifestos are normally written by a tiny group of carefully selected people. Party policy might be set by a slightly wider group, and perhaps any party member might have the right to propose something for debate at a conference, but that's about as accessible as it gets when parties are coming up with their ideas.

Given the network revolution and the rise of open source culture, how else might we design that process?

Well, a core tenet of open culture is that there are more good ideas in the world than there are in the room, so the best results come from listening to people and letting them contribute.

With that in mind, we've been working on an open source political manifesto since August 2013, using freely available tools and a bit of imagination. The project is the OpenPolitics Manifesto (<http://openpolitics.org.uk>), and at the time of writing it has around 9,000 words of agreed policy ideas, and has at least two Parliamentary candidates standing on it in the 2015 General Election.

We're a little different from other open policymaking projects, in that we're not actually trying to express a solution that satisfies the majority. We're trying, with help from everybody, to build a cohesive platform that will hopefully appeal to voters. This is a party-style manifesto for now, not a list of things that the entire country agrees on.

So, how does it work?

The manifesto is basically a simple website, with a button that allows anyone to make a change to the text, just like Wikipedia.

However, unlike Wikipedia, those changes don't get added straight in. They are discussed and voted on first by people who have already made a contribution to the manifesto. That means that the project should be able to maintain the direction and general outlook that it started with, and is really similar to the process in open source software, where existing maintainers decide what gets added in order to keep the project on track.

As soon as your change is accepted though, you get to vote on future changes. Nobody maintains a list of "approved" contributors; if you add something good enough to get in, you get control.

Agility is really important to the project; we want to make small changes quickly and then improve them, not spend months discussing and debating a single policy before it's accepted. Under the current rules, only a couple of votes from existing contributors are needed to adopt a change, though contributors can also vote that more work is needed, or veto the change completely.

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'The manifesto is never "finished", never "published". It's a living document, always being updated and improved'

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Of course, all those discussions and votes are public as well, so anyone can go back and see which alternatives were considered, or who was involved in accepting the change. The underlying version control technology also keeps a full history of changes, so you can go back to older versions, or see who exactly wrote a particular line.

This is policy transparency in action in a way that's unlike anything that's come before in the political arena.

There's another really important point here. The manifesto is never "finished", never "published". It's a living document, always being updated and improved. The world doesn't stay still for 5 years between elections, so why should party manifestos? You may argue that policies could appear that people didn't vote for, but that's really no different to the traditional system, it's just more explicit. Besides, if people can see the debate and changes involved in a policy, they can see why and how it appeared, not just that it was presented to them one day.

Could this sort of agile and iterative design thinking have the potential to change our traditional election cycle, and give us a way to continuously adapt our political worldview?

We're often asked if the project will scale up, if it can really cope with a large number of people getting involved.

Probably the biggest blocker to that sort of scale is that the manifesto is hosted on GitHub, the world's largest software development and code sharing platform. While that's great from the technology point of view, it's not always the most accessible system to non-technical users. We have tried to create interfaces that make it as simple as possible, but we still have to keep improving the design and experience, and removing all the barriers to entry that we can.

But, the simple answer here is "I don't know how it will scale". I really don't. This is an evolving process that works for us right now. It will certainly have to change in future to cope with increasing demand, and I can't anticipate exactly how that will happen.

For now, we're building a political manifesto in a way that anyone can get involved with, and for me that's revolutionary. How that revolution copes when it hits the mainstream is a little scary, but as often stated in software, scaling problems are "good problems to have"; they will show we're doing something right.

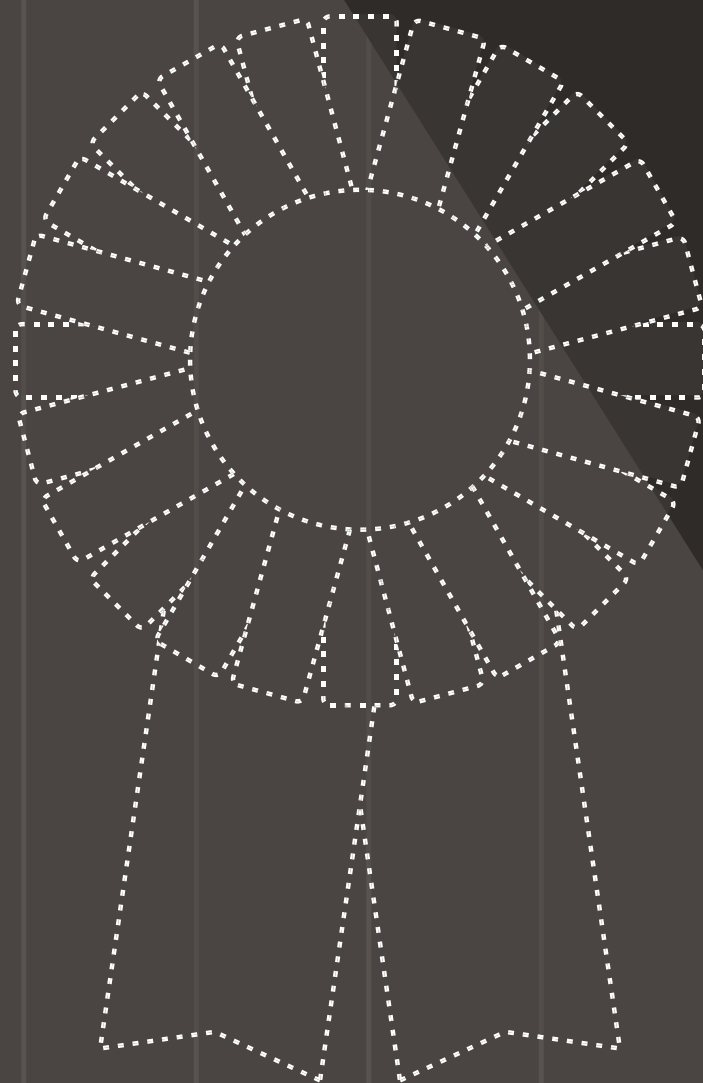
The important thing to realise is that the process of democracy isn't finished, and never will be. We're still working on it as a society, and now we have the tools to make it better and more powerful, with input from everyone.

The Open Revolution is here to change everything.



# Section 5

## Democracy, Local and Hyper-Local



# Design and Neighbourhood Planning

**John Howell OBE MP FSA, Member of Parliament for Henley and inquiry Co-chair**

There has been much written about the use of new media, and social media in particular, to widen the appeal of democratic involvement and increase participation in various projects. Some have pointed out how the design of a building can contribute or how new media can help generate a sense of ownership of a project. Both of these can, of course, help. But the reality is that if you cannot interest people in the substance of what you are trying to do, neither of these is likely to be decisive and any improvement will be short-lived. Let us take a look at one of the principal innovations introduced by the Coalition Government elected in 2010 in the field of planning, and which is generating something of a quiet revolution – a new approach to Neighbourhood Planning.

What the Government wanted to do through Neighbourhood Plans was to give local communities a share in the planning system for their area and a definitive voice in the shaping of those communities: deciding where the housing should go, what it should look like, and what important green spaces should be preserved. It represents the first time that such power has been devolved down to communities. The Neighbourhood Plan is a formal document not to be taken lightly. It carries legal weight in the planning system. It ranks alongside a District Council's own Local Plan. Recent decisions by the planning inspectorate have confirmed that an emerging plan must be taken into account when judging appeals over development.

The experience to date has shown high levels of approval for this process. The process is concluded by a referendum on the Plan and the returns so far have shown outstanding results. Indeed, in Thame in my own Oxfordshire constituency, the referendum was held on the same day as the local county council elections. More people went into the polling booth and voted for the Neighbourhood Plan than did so for a county councillor. The reason for this can I believe be found in the design of the process and the fact that the Neighbourhood Plan is something which has a direct meaning to local people and their ability to shape the future.

The concentration on the need for genuine consultation in putting a plan together is a crucial part of the design and of the evidence that is looked for in the public examination of the Plan. A Neighbourhood Plan does not take away the disagreements that may occur over planning but it does locate it in the right place – in putting a Plan together rather than in opposing every planning application. Not everyone will agree with the outcome of a Plan but the ability of a community to talk to each other – however heated that may be – builds up what has come to be called the social capital of a community. It is the same social capital that we are told characterised Britain during World War 2 and at times of intervening national crisis. In the village of Woodcote in my constituency, the Neighbourhood Plan transformed the village's attitude towards development as they have come to own the problem of what sort of housing the village needs and

where it should go. The referendum that follows the process gives the democratic seal to the Plan. Those that still oppose it have to bow to democratic pressure. It means something because it is directly relevant to the local community, and the design process was always intended to give the local community that level of public ownership of the problem.

How can 'design' in terms of new media be involved in this process? It has to be involved in the consultation process. This is not, God forbid, a classic case of Government consultation. Indeed, Government has nothing to do with it at all. Rather it is a case of local people finding ways of consulting local people about their views. True – many of the solutions so far used have been 'low tech' – exhibitions, seminars etc. in 'low tech' buildings such as village halls. But the potential to use local networks to share the information and to gather views is certainly significant.

To date, we have some 1,400 Neighbourhood Plans across the country being put together. They cover areas representing over 6 million people. The key to making it work relates to the continued expectation that, having owned the problem, having designed a solution, the powers that be will honour it and not seek to reduce expectations. How we can strengthen that process still further is something we will need to keep an eye on.



# Let's play a game

Dr Richard Simmons, Member of the Design Commission and inquiry co-chair

## Using civic board games for local democratisation

The election is over, the winners in office. What next? Two or three years to make an impact, then back on the campaign trail. Meanwhile, tough decisions mount up, manifesto promises prove hard to deliver, unexpected events throw policies off course. Navigating this difficult terrain, politicians naturally worry about how decisions will play with the electorate.

At national level, opinion polls, focus groups and social media monitoring are affordable, enabling a degree of understanding about voters' expectations. Some of these channels are available to local councillors but, in certain ways, they have a harder job than their national counterparts. Yes, they are closer to the people, but resources are slim; special interests harder to keep at arm's length - you can easily bump into that NIMBY in the supermarket; and there isn't much competition for headlines in the local paper. Growing apathy at local elections means that only a few voters decide if you keep your seat. Every major decision can seem like a massive electoral risk.

How can local politicians take the pulse of their communities reliably? As a local authority planner I used various techniques, including with future electors - young people count too. Design workshops, citizens' juries, and joint visits with constituents to view good practice are excellent ways to help councillors discover what choices resonate with local people. We are increasingly encouraged to use digital means - web sites, Twitter, Facebook, e-petitions - to enable grass roots contact. Macintosh et. al. remind us, though, that whilst electronic communication can extend participatory democracy, we must guard against utopianism. Not everybody has access to e-media, or feels comfortable using them. They cite the vital distinction between electronic democracy: providing the means to conduct processes online, and electronic *democratisation*: opening up participation. The former does not lead automatically to the latter.<sup>1</sup> We need both digital and face-to-face contributions.

Democratisation is, really, the point of all attempts to improve the system, digital or not. They only have worth if they offer fairer access to decision-making and allow broader constituencies to inform representatives' decisions.

How can design assist? One powerful method is gaming. Not the application of game theory (popularised in the film *A Beautiful Mind*).<sup>2</sup> Literally playing games.

Design plays a big role in creating civic board games. It may seem surprising that a board game can leverage democratic dialogue but: "Games are well-suited to communicating a shared understanding of a problem because they allow users to experiment with potential solutions in a safe setting and generate their own mental frames for how it works."<sup>3</sup>

1 Macintosh, A., Davenport, E., Malina, A. and Whyte, A. (2001), "Technology to Support Participatory Democracy" in Grünland, A. (Ed.), *Electronic Government: Design, Applications and Management*, Hershey PA: Idea Group Inc., 228-9.

2 Though, of course, game theory can be used to analyse the kinds of games I am talking about here.

3 Swain, C. (2007), "Designing Games to Effect Social Change", *Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference*, Los Angeles: Game Innovation Lab, USC School of Cinematic Arts, 806, Retrieved from <http://www.gamesforchange.org/learn/designing-games-to-effect-social-change/>.

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‘As with other ways of changing participation, those employing games must be aware that their design can influence who feels able to play, and must leave outcomes open, not closed by in-built biases’

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As an example, colleagues and I designed a game to allow councillors to test the interplay of land-uses and values on a big, contentious regeneration site. The board was a graphic of the site, divided into squares. The pieces were colour-coded translucent plastic tiles. Players overlaid them on the squares to illustrate different land-uses, densities and development values. Councillors played to work out how to deliver the (undeliverable) brief they had demanded. The result: the brief changed; the councillors better understood development economics; but, instead of the acrimony of previous debates, they had fun gaming a solution that they could themselves explain to the community.

While chief executive of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)<sup>4</sup> I encountered two other effective civic board games. In Ashford, Kent, the conundrum was how to design a growth strategy for the town. Should it be a dense urban place, or should suburbia prevail? Ashford’s Future, the area’s growth partnership, was keen to see if local people could resolve the dilemma. Working with a consultancy team co-ordinated by Urban Initiatives, it identified a representative “town team” of 150 people from local organisations and interested citizens. During a week-long design workshop the team played a giant board game. Aerial photographs were overlaid with a grid. Scenarios were gamed on this board, using different planning assumptions. Higher density options were preferred and taken forward for wider public consultation, including replaying the game at an open event.<sup>5</sup>

The second experience was the development by the Royal Institute of British Architects, CABE and AOC Architects of The Building Futures Game. The game allows councillors, professionals and communities to explore future scenarios in a creative, collaborative and non-confrontational way, bringing out solutions that can be delivered with local support. As the case studies on the Building Futures web pages explain, it can be used successfully by many different types of community - of place, age, ethnicity, class and so on.<sup>6</sup>

These experiences are from the governance of the built environment. Games For Change<sup>7</sup> in the USA, and its contributors, suggest (citing digital media) that games can be applicable to all kinds of civic engagement, from increasing voter turnout to city government.<sup>8</sup> As with other ways of changing participation, those employing games must be aware that their design can influence who feels able to play,<sup>9</sup> and must leave outcomes open, not closed by inbuilt biases. If they do this there is no doubt that games can be fun, yet produce serious results involving citizens who might otherwise avoid local politics.

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4 From September 2004 until March 2011.

5 Wilshere, M., Ashford at the Crossroads (c.2004-5), Retrieved from <http://www.rudi.net/books/12422>.

6 See <http://www.buildingfutures.org.uk/projects/building-futures/the-building-futures-game>.

7 See <http://www.gamesforchange.org>.

8 E.g. Kane, J., Middaugh, E. and Evans, C. (2009), *The Civic Potential of Video Games*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 54, Retrieved from [https://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/free\\_download/9780262513609\\_Civic\\_Potential\\_of\\_Games.pdf](https://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/free_download/9780262513609_Civic_Potential_of_Games.pdf).

9 *Ibid.*, 62.

# Understanding Community in the Social Age

Rowan Conway, RSA

Few would disagree that our political structure is under pressure. In a 2013 YouGov survey, 72% people agreed with the statement that: “politics is dominated by self-seeking politicians protecting the interests of the already rich and powerful in our society”.<sup>1</sup> This weariness with the political elite is driving demand for a shift away from old style democracy, based on stringent hierarchy and strong party discipline, to a more direct democracy where citizens are part of – not merely subject to – decisions that affect them.

As society becomes more complex and transparent, due in part to the advent of social media, traditional ways of understanding our communities – through locally elected representation and community consultation and engagement – will struggle to keep pace. In a digital world, it is, perhaps, the faster and more experimental ways of working inherent to design thinking that could shape the future of civic engagement and community participation.

Asset-based community development and co-production use design principles as ways of engaging with citizens. They are experimental, collaborative and do not frame communities simply as bundles of needs, but rather as assets with problem solving capacity. The Connected Communities research team at the RSA (along with UCLAN and the LSE) has been using these methods since 2010 in a large scale Big Lottery funded research programme entitled “Building Inclusive Communities”. Our on-the-ground research has been surfacing “below the radar” local activities through community social network surveys and qualitative methods, offering a multi-layered snapshot of a community – showing its social connections and assets, gathering the data that cannot be found in official stakeholder databases or registries of voluntary sector bodies.

This on-the-ground data, although incredibly rich, is also resource intensive to collect, and time-sensitive. These limitations are outweighed by the benefits, but the RSA also wanted to test digital research methods for mapping community assets to see if they could deliver similar results. To do this we explored social media analytics.

## Mining the Twittersphere

As more and more community activity moves onto social media, the opportunity to apply digital research methods for local community data gathering is becoming a reality. Funded by Nesta, the RSA undertook a collaborative research project with Jimmy Tidey at the Royal College of Art (RCA), to understand the ways in which online data-gathering techniques compare to door-to-door research. The LocalNets.org app mines the social web by aggregating tweets and blog posts from Twitter accounts and local blogs.

<sup>1</sup> <https://politicsupside-down.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/university-of-southampton-results-130606-disillusionment.pdf>

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'Don't just see community engagement in terms of walking the streets and knocking on doors, think about your ability, through technology, to listen to what your communities are saying'

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Twitter is a rich source of social data and is a good starting point for social web mining because of its inherent openness for public consumption (Facebook is a more closed network). Using Tidey's LocalNets.org app to gather the online data, we focused on a single London neighbourhood and produced a visualisation of 294 community assets (people, events, organisations and places) and their connections to one another. We then contrasted these findings with the RSA's on-the-ground asset-based community research. There wasn't a direct overlap between the offline and digital assets with regard to people and events, but a third of organisations and places mapped offline were also discovered by LocalNets.org. The fact that these asset maps were different meant that the digital asset map could be used as a tool to inform further co-production activities and on-the-ground community engagement.

#### **Crossing borders: engaging with communities online**

This hybrid of digital and on-the-ground approaches can provide a networked understanding of community, which will be a key tenet that underpins a new democratic infrastructure. A lesson to pass on to local authorities is: don't just see community engagement in terms of walking the streets and knocking on doors – think about your ability, through technology, to listen to what your communities are saying.

Undoubtedly, there are ethics and privacy questions that need to be explored when social media monitoring is applied to communities. Lessons can be learned from the corporate experience with social intelligence tools routinely used by corporations to track social media and online conversations about their brands in order to understand consumer behaviour. Companies have vast datasets about consumers, but many still struggle with how to engage with customers about the data. The process of interacting with users of social media for organisational purposes such as customer service or sales brings up awkward questions such as: do Twitter users know you are listening? Will they find it acceptable? These questions, when applied to a local community context, will require deeper consideration.

Overall, our study found that digital methods offer a promising approach to mapping community assets, but traditional methods are key to engagement with communities. It is human connections that take asset mapping beyond a simple audit to a platform for social action. While the on-the-ground research requires significantly more resource than digital tools, our study did not suggest that the digital tools could effectively replace offline methods – rather they were complementary. Combined through a well-designed and structured methodology they can provide a powerful source of insight.

# Designing democracy and democratising design

Michael Kohn, Stickyworld

If we need to design democracy, should we also democratise design?

I'm an architect by profession but a technology entrepreneur by evolution. During my career spanning two decades and split equally across diametrically opposite industries and cultures I've come to the conclusion that people from different professional backgrounds generally don't understand each other. It's also the case with professions and end user, with experts and lay people, and with politicians and the citizens they serve.

There is a consistent call especially in the design and planning of the built environment for more collaboration between professions, let alone with end users. But perhaps the problem is more about establishing clearer communication, or rather clearer conversations, since many people and groups who are keen to collaborate do so. They start out on the right track, only to come unstuck along the way, when simple communication breaks down about apparently simple things.

Establishing clearer conversations is a design problem. How can we explain ourselves more clearly so that people will engage in the issues we want to discuss? How can we engage them in a more meaningful dialogue? Or democratic processes and their execution need a re-design to engage more people in important decisions that affect them. Likewise, in the design of the built environment, which can affect just as many people, the design process arguably also needs a bit more democracy than current processes and cultures allow.

As our society diversifies and the cities that we inhabit expand, the processes, rules and regulations of inhabitation and democracy seem to become more and more complex. It becomes increasingly more important for every professional expert, civil servant or politician to learn new skills of design thinking, empathy and end user understanding in order to communicate proposals for change more clearly, or the possibility of change more effectively and the real and genuine ways that a citizen or end user could participate to have a positive impact on those changes.

In the information and data revolution, times are changing. There is a now both a need and an opportunity for a shift in the way we communicate, engage and invite participation of the very people that the built environment serves. In playing this shift out in the built environment, this could also have implications for the rethinking of wider democratic processes.

This opportunity also comes at a time when three trajectories align. Firstly, the role and importance of 'user experience' has become mainstreamed, and applies in almost everything we touch as consumers and end users, from travel to technology. This awareness creates expectations that all other products, services and processes should also be beautifully designed if not we simply disengage or

‘With the emergence of open data, and devices in our pockets and on our wrists to use it, the possibility to be informed and engaged about anything relevant to us... is now here’

drop them. Secondly, the internet has made information available everywhere. With the emergence of open data, and devices in our pockets and on our wrists to use it, the possibility to be informed and engaged about anything relevant to us, wherever we go, is now here. Thirdly, with legislation such as localism devolving decision-making power to local neighbourhoods and communities, the opportunity to better understand and engage the ‘end user’ or local citizen at a more granular level, can de-risk otherwise top down decisions that impact negatively on people’s lives.

At Stickyworld we have developed an approach for enabling clearer conversations between organisations and individuals, between experts and lay people, and between designers and their end users.

Our online participation platform enables professionals and experts to present and discuss maps, plans and 360 virtual tours of interior spaces, buildings and neighbourhoods and invite discussion from their clients, stakeholders and end users. Participants simply stick a virtual post it note to leave their comment or question, framing their exact point of view and enabling everyone to understand the topic of conversation more clearly. Our platform is used by local authorities, local communities, housing associations, architects, researchers and museums alike to present, discuss and deliberate on the design of the built environment around us.

At the local level Stickyworld has found use with neighbourhood forums who need to engage, but who are also learning that they, too, need to develop their own communications skills, forming a central communications team to engage and start to build trust with the wider community, including those that may previously have felt excluded, or who can’t come to the meetings to engage.

Design then, is equally as important for these local groups as it is for professional organisations. For localism to work well, where everyone can feel engaged, neighbourhood forums need to apply design thinking to their communications. They need to improve their own engagement metrics through clear and relevant communications, whether these are face to face, in print or online. Only in this way can they help drive the average turnout for local referendums up from 32% which is the figure recently reported by DCLG.

In the design of democracy, and the democratisation of design, we need more practice in communication, more experiments, pilots and tests for how we can better understand each other, how we can have more open conversations with the people that our decisions affect, how we can learn to engage our own neighbours, listen as experts to our end users, and become more relevant to the people we may represent in our democratic posts. This might lead to us developing the ability to host a bigger and more open conversation about the future of the nation that will want to live in. If, as a country, we can get this right, then there’s every reason to believe we use clearer conversations to build a better nation that benefits everyone.

# Designing Processes for Designing Places

David Janner-Klausner, Commonplace Digital Ltd.

My domain and that of my company Commonplace, is decision-making about the built environment. I love this domain and think it is vital; the built environment is a key determinant of wellbeing and reflects how society addresses the diversity of its populations. Decisions in the built environment have impact for generations, making this domain a nexus of values, power and process.

There is an inexorable link between the design of the built environment and the design of the processes that determine its form. Arguably, some of London's most striking developments of the past decades resulted from the redesign of the planning system in the 1980s. Planning powers over the form of development were removed from local authorities and vested in the government-appointed London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), paving the way to a radical and rapid transformation of Docklands.

As the LDDC demonstrates, political and administrative processes evolve to mitigate contests over the built environment. However, the underlying principle is still that the right to develop land is nationalised and allocated according to certain criteria. The power to shape and impose criteria rests in the political hierarchy, which is implicitly trusted to balance economic freedoms and consequential short-term goals against long-term social need and shared values. A professional bureaucracy is presided over by politicians - local and national - and serves these processes of resource allocation. Collectively, this settlement is "The Planning System".

The acceptance and legitimacy of this Planning System has rested on the assumptions that a common good can be agreed upon, and that the democratic political system is a legitimate arbiter of this common good. However, these assumptions are being profoundly shaken. Fewer people engage in local politics on the one hand, and on the other hand the internet generations expect immediacy and transparency in dealing with institutions, including the planning system. The existing systems, mostly, are unable to respond to these requirements, leading to a crisis of legitimacy. The crisis of legitimacy becomes a crisis of inefficiency, with proposed changes to the built environment facing mistrust as a default reaction often amplified by social media.

Local authorities, developers and other actors in the built environment must recast their relationships with communities. We argue that new opportunities for greater transparency and real-time engagement should be embraced. They empower citizens and can make the decision-making process more efficient and more legitimate - three important gains.

That is why we designed Commonplace, a set of digital tools that aim to help re-build trust in planning processes. Commonplace's clients are actors in the built environment local authorities, developers, housing associations, community

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‘The Peckham co-design exercise was the deliberate design of a process that integrates internet and physical modes of engagement’

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organisations and transport providers. A key principle of Commonplace is transparency - Commonplace operates openly - anyone can see all comments made in a particular Commonplace, and Commonplaces are listed on our web site, [commonplace.is](http://commonplace.is).

A good example is the online platform we provided to the CoDesign Peckham project in south London. Commonplace was integrated into the co-design process for Peckham Rye Station, which was commissioned by Southwark Council and executed by architects Ash Sakula. The co-design exercise was itself an attempt to help reach a consensus about developing the station, after previous attempts foundered on local opposition. The co-design process used a variety of tools - Commonplace as an online platform, local meetings and “pop-up” events, as well as distributing a low-cost broadsheet locally. The broadsheet used the themes that emerged from Commonplace’s on-line engagement to stimulate further debate about local priorities. What distinguished the Peckham co-design exercise was the deliberate design of a process that integrates internet and physical modes of engagement.

This integration is important because it creates bridges between populations whose normative forms of social expression diverge widely. The Economist recently quoted a Resonance survey which found that 24% of Americans update social media once a day while travelling; the proportion rises to 51% among 18-34 year olds. An even higher proportion post photos.<sup>1</sup> These figures demonstrate how integral the Internet is to commenting in near real-time on the world around us. We have to be able to reach out to people through their channel of choice, which Commonplace achieves by integrating with common social media networks, blogs and other websites.

Running Commonplace for another client, a Neighbourhood Planning Forum in north London, we found that the age range of Commonplace users complemented that of the many civic-minded people who attended public meetings. Younger people participated much more readily online.

Commonplace is being used by the City of Boulder, Colorado to obtain public views to underpin a new transport strategy, and by the London Borough of Waltham Forest to engage local residents and businesses in a major scheme to make town centres more cycle and pedestrian friendly. In both cases, adopting Commonplace is embracing both a tool and an attitude: the attitude that greater transparency about decisions, and an opportunity to engage, are required alongside the traditional planning system and its elected mandate.

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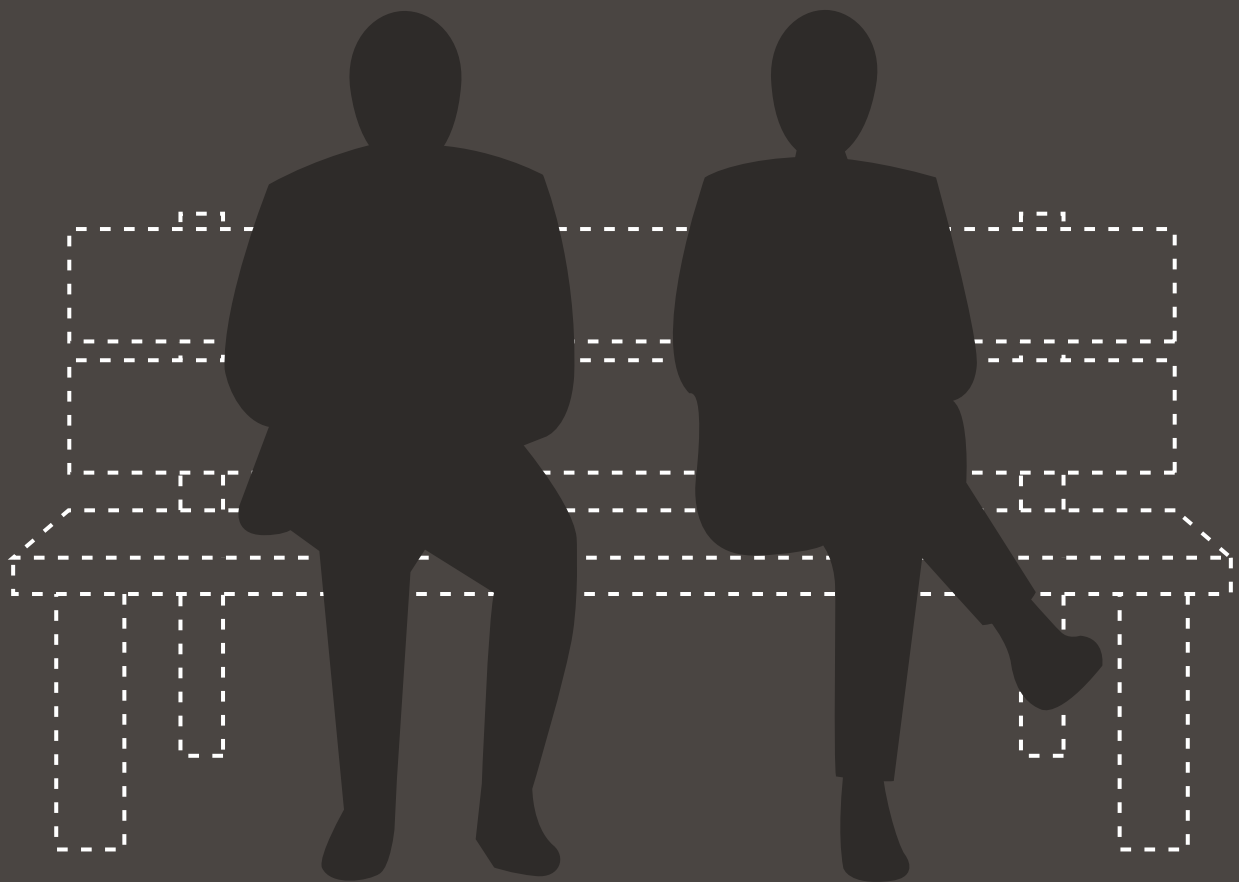
1 Reference: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/gulliver/2015/02/hotel-wi-fi> accessed 5 March 2015





# Section 6

## The Public Realm



# Public Space and Democracy - Voting with our Feet

Jason Prior, AECOM

It is a calculation that's being undertaken in every town and city – the value of public space. Access to urban parks and squares has been hailed by some as a basic human right. These spaces play a vital role in maintaining a good quality of life as cities become ever more densely populated. However, for many, this equation is also about democracy and participation in public life, and the value of that depends on where you stand.

## Setting the stage

While it is difficult to prove any direct correlation between public space and democracy, we know that public space is certainly key in setting the stage for people to join in with civic life, with politics, the democratic process and democracy in its broadest possible sense.

Evolving from the prototype of the ancient Greek agora, our modern shared urban space is the great leveller. It is the place of civility and exchange, where we buy and sell, meet friends and family, where it is made easy to get along together and shed our fears of 'the other'. It's also where we can be free to call for national political change, as we saw in the Arab Spring protests. Interestingly, while the call to arms in those protests usually involved social media, there is clearly a powerful urge to see and be seen. At the sharp end, this type of political protest has been born of frustration, the collapse of faith in institutions of all sorts, and the consequent disenchantment with the political process. In balance, public space is also where we celebrate together think of everything from royal pageants to sporting victories and where we affirm our faith in institutions, as witnessed recently in Paris in reaction to the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings.

## Design and democracy

Good public space is a stage set that adapts to suit a range of activities – public speaking such as Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, festivals, markets, national celebrations or open-air cinemas. The most effective democratic space must be accessible, flexible, welcoming and safe. It has soft boundaries and is easy to navigate. It provides the opportunity for people to shape spaces themselves, as increasingly happens in commercial, public and learning environments.

The design process itself can set the tone for how democratic our built environment can be. Gone are the days of an architect with a single aesthetic vision, applied regardless of the public function of a space. Governments, investors and developers need to be increasingly concerned about inclusivity as a means of future proofing their developments, providing spaces that can attract and adapt over the long term.

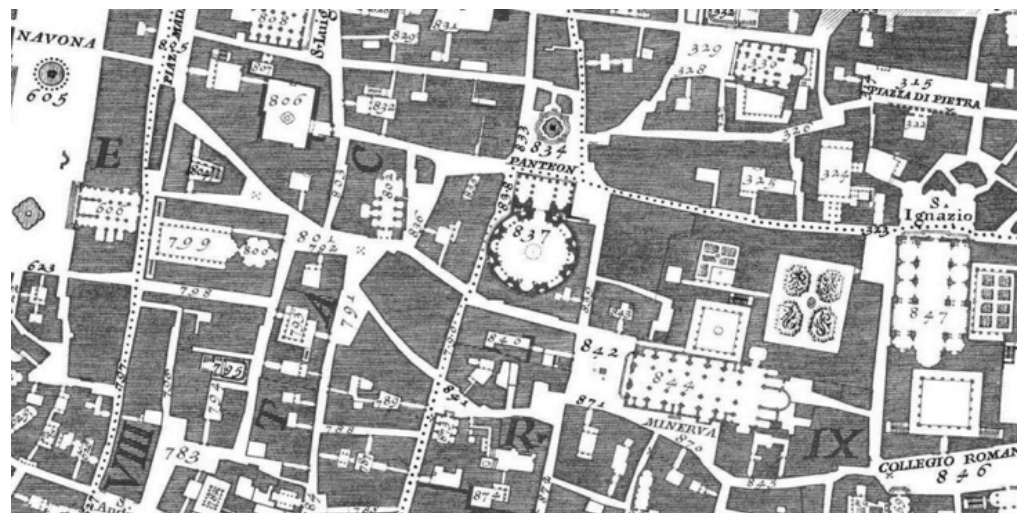
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'A broad and all-encompassing definition of public space is not new'

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### Perceptions and public space

Ask anyone to describe public space and they're likely to imagine parks and squares. Persist and the list could extend to streets, shops, museums, stations, galleries, libraries and government buildings. Such a broad and all-encompassing definition of public space is not new. Giambattista Nolli's map of Rome, completed by 1748, is familiar to most architects. This engraving depicts built fabric in grey/black and the complex network of streets and squares in white. Significantly, it also uses white for the interior of public buildings – the Pantheon, for example, is easy to spot. This beautiful, intricate, lacy depiction of the city, used by planning authorities until the 1970s, lays out the full spectrum of public space in this highly permeable urban fabric.



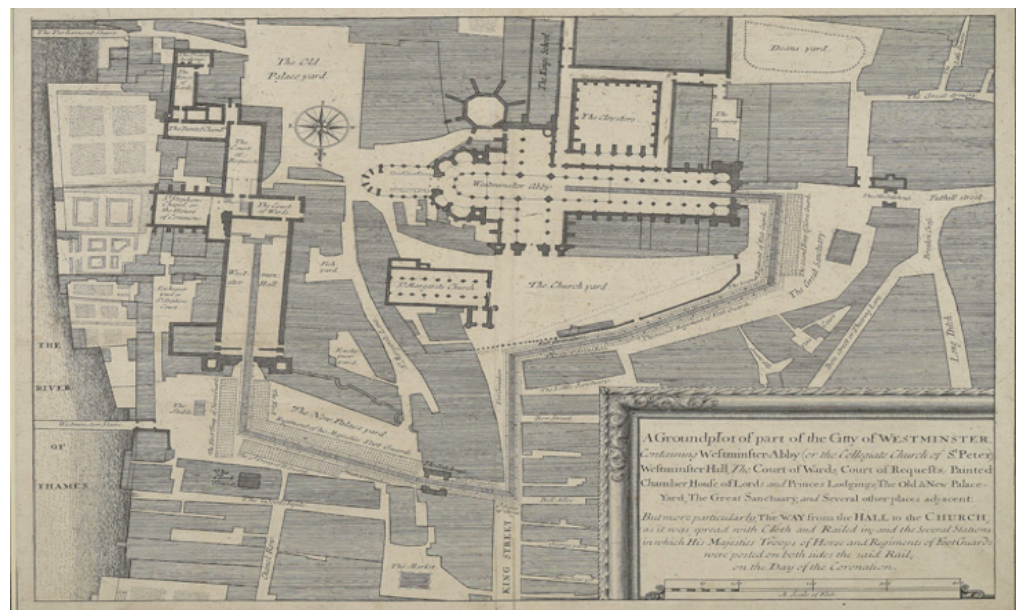
Giambattista Nolli, Map of Rome, 1748

### Reclaiming public space

In large numbers of cities, ingenuity knows no bounds in rescuing and repurposing every scrap of potential public space. New parks are made over sunken hostile roads. Courtyards once used as car parks now become public squares and skating rinks. Ground floors of cultural and commercial buildings are given over to shops, cafes and galleries. With boundaries blurring between working, learning and socialising, people have come to value a similar blurring of the physical boundaries in our cities. Developers have responded with schemes that put new public space at the heart of private developments. Interesting that these new spaces, usually with free wifi, are inhabited by people who continue the blurring and linking with the virtual networks of social media. The effect (as long as private ownership does not come with a hefty rule book) is to activate the streetscape further, increase accessibility and enliven public life. There are opportunities to do the same in the political realm: to forge greater links between the hub of our democratic system and our public space.

### Potential now

More than 60 years before Nolli produced his great map, an unknown surveyor created a similar, little known, depiction of Westminster Abbey and the parliament complex. Again, this gives equal treatment to the streets and public building interiors. The perception is one of openness, accessibility and permeability.



Groundplot of Westminster, 1685. By permission of The British Library, 081811

‘Using a design-driven approach towards the planned work to safeguard the Palace’s fabric may also help finally to place this symbol of democracy within a democratic public space’

Today, however, the lack of coherent and truly accessible democratic space around the Palace of Westminster presents a long-standing challenge. Transparency and access is at an all-time low, with heavy traffic and high fences, a chain of solid black crash barriers, a full-time police presence and a law that prevents public gatherings on the green. The emotional interpretation of this physical response to security is one of ‘exclusion’ rather than embracing transparency and the democratic process. Using a design-driven approach towards the planned work to safeguard the Palace’s fabric may also help finally to place this symbol of democracy within a democratic public space.

Any upgrade to the Palace of Westminster and its surroundings will require significant investment from the taxpayer. This raises important questions about the value of place and its role in democracy. Can our parliament neighbourhood, with public space back at its heart, play a significant role in reconnecting the general public with politics?

*AECOM is part of the consortium with Deloitte Real Estate and HOK appointed to support the Palace of Westminster’s Restoration and Renewal Programme.*

# The real design project of democracy

**Sam Jacob, Sam Jacob Architects**

For some of us, a quinquennial trip to the polling station is our only visceral engagement with the democratic process.

The polling station, with its large, bold capital sign propped outside, volunteers, deck chairs, rosettes, wobbly framed voting booths, clipboards, paper slips and pencils seems to come from a different age. But these are still the objects that make up our physical contact with democracy. Amongst these relics, voting feels as much a ritualistic act as it is exercising one's franchise.

None more ritualistic than the black enamelled ballot box. It's the thing that houses the transaction between citizen and state. Its dark interior is the space of democratic process, the dark space of our privacy, but also a darkness that we put our trust in. This black space is the magical space where the act of voting is transformed into the will of the people.

The design of this moment - of the act of voting - is of course, vitally important. The legibility of the ballot paper, the accuracy of registering voter intention, the accessibility of the polling station itself, are amongst the very real issues that design can improve.

But is the polling station really the space of democracy? And might design's role in making democracy, well, more democratic be more than just functional legibility?

We could think of other examples of democratic space. Take the Westminster Parliament itself, with its opposing banks of raked seating that embed a particularly British political tradition of parliamentary democracy in its spatial arrangement. The House of Commons chamber's relationship to the atmosphere and mechanics of the debates it hosts was eloquently outlined by Churchill.

Surveying the wreckage of the chamber after it had been bombed in the blitz he insisted it be rebuilt as was instead of taking the opportunity to rebuild it to suit contemporary politics.

Churchill insisted on two principles. First, "it must be oblong, and not semicircular". Second, "it must only be big enough to give seats to about two-thirds of its Members"

In other words, it was to be rebuilt as a deliberately dysfunctional chamber - 'bad' design according to most standards.

"We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us," he said. One might wonder if reconstruction with a more continental style chamber, with a semicircular arrangement and enough seats for every elected representative to sit at one

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'Growing disengagement with democratic process suggests we need to rethink how and, maybe more importantly, where democracy takes place. Could new thinking about the space of democracy help to re-engage a disaffected public?'

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time might have altered the combative Punch and Judy tendencies of British parliamentary behaviour.

The chamber might be where politics happens, but is it really the space of democracy? Might it even be part of the reason why so many feel disengaged?

Might democracy be the media through which it is communicated? The TV studios, the column inches, the radio cars and websites that broadcast political debate. This may bring the political world into our front rooms but the medias' own agendas - whether driven by ideology or entertainment - shape the way this debate takes place. The medium, as Marshall McLuhan once said, is the message. The media bring political debate into our homes, giving us far more access to debate than physical space ever could. But their window onto this world is not transparent. Is it even possible for politicians to break through the formats and roles media pre-ascribed to them? Could the redesign of these formats be a way of reinventing the dialogue we have with politics? Or does even the supposedly direct contact that social media bring between citizens and politicians only bring greater levels of fear and loathing between elected and electorate?

Growing disengagement with democratic process suggests we need to rethink how and, maybe more importantly, where democracy really takes place. Could new thinking about the space of democracy help to re-engage a disaffected public?

If we trace the history of democracy back to its Athenian origins we find the city and its citizens were all intertwined in the idea of the polis. And maybe, even now in the in the 21st century, this is where the real political arena lies: not in the institutions and mechanisms of democracy but the world that they try to shape.

The city and the landscape we inhabit is the living force of politics, the real shared space of democracy. This is where everyday life and abstract ideological, economic and social ideas intersect.

Could we imagine the city as the map and the territory of democracy, the product of, but also the site of, participation, of discussion, or engagement, the common ground of the polis.

This, I would argue, is the real design project of democracy. Rather than reforming the institutions, the mechanisms or the presentation of politics, to recognise that it's life outside of these sites that is the actual space of democracy.

What might this mean? Well, for example, it means imagining the city as a place of congregation, as the place where we come together as citizens. It means thinking of our rights of access to the city, to belonging, to affordability, to participation within the city; that we need constantly to construct democracy. It might mean thinking of even the most ordinary moments in the city as democratic devices.

Take the park bench. The bench is something provided for the good of all: a moment to pause and think in the midst of daily life, or somewhere to meet. But think too of its own intrinsic politics - the benches designed so that you can't stretch out and sleep on them for example. Or of the possibilities suggested by the 'Park Bench Statesman' Bernard Baruch, the American political figure who would sit in Washington D.C.'s Lafayette Park or New York City's Central Park discussing issues of the day with whoever might sit beside him.

Could even the simple public bench become a new form of cross-bench politics - the embodiment and site of real democratic engagement? After all, as Churchill suggested, it's the way we shape the city that in turn shapes us.





# About

## The Design Commission

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The Design Commission is a research group that contributes to the work of the All Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group. It is composed of parliamentarians from all parties and leading representatives from business, industry and the public sector. Its purpose is to explore, through a series of investigative inquiries, how design can drive economic and social improvement, and how government and business can better understand the importance of design.

For more information see:

<http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig/design-commission>

## About AECOM

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AECOM is a premier, fully integrated professional and technical services firm positioned to design, build, finance and operate infrastructure assets around the world for public- and private-sector clients. With nearly 100,000 employees — including architects, engineers, designers, planners, scientists and management and construction services professionals — serving clients in over 150 countries around the world, AECOM is ranked as the #1 engineering design firm by revenue in Engineering News-Record magazine's annual industry rankings, and has been recognized by Fortune magazine as a World's Most Admired Company. The firm is a leader in all of the key markets that it serves, including transportation, facilities, environmental, energy, oil and gas, water, high-rise buildings and government. AECOM provides a blend of global reach, local knowledge, innovation and technical excellence in delivering customized and creative solutions that meet the needs of clients' projects. A Fortune 500 firm, AECOM companies, including URS Corporation and Hunt Construction Group, have annual revenue of approximately \$19 billion.

More information on AECOM and its services can be found at [www.aecom.com](http://www.aecom.com).



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## Design Commission members

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Peter Aldous MP	House of Commons
Alice Black	Design Museum
Lord Michael Bichard	House of Lords
Jeremy Davenport	Imagination, Lancaster University
Julian Grice	JG Consulting
Laura Haynes	Appetite/Design Business Association
Wayne Hemingway	Hemingway Design
Graham Hitchen	Directional Thinking
Emma Hunt	Huddersfield University
David Kester	Thames & Hudson
Catherine Large	Creative & Cultural Skills
Jeremy Lindley	Diageo
Kieran Long	V&A
John Mathers	Design Council
Jeremy Myerson	The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, Royal College of Art
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Marek Reichmann	Aston Martin
Barry Sheerman MP	House of Commons
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Andrew Summers	Companies House
John Thackara	Doors of Perception
Baroness Janet Whitaker	House of Lords
Sarah Wigglesworth	Sarah Wigglesworth Architects
David Worthington	Holmes and Marchant Group

## Steering Group

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Kieran Long  
Laura Haynes

## Secretariat (Policy Connect)

---

Naomi Turner  
Michael Folkerson  
Toby Moore

Special thanks to Geoff Killy and Catherine Stockwell

For further information, please contact  
Naomi Turner  
Head of Manufacturing, Design and Innovation

Design Commission  
Policy Connect  
CAN Mezzanine  
32-36 Loman Street  
London SE1 0EH

naomi.turner@policyconnect.org.uk  
020 7202 8588

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