

DESIGN IN PLACE BASED
POLICY

ImaginationLancaster

3rd and 4th May 2022

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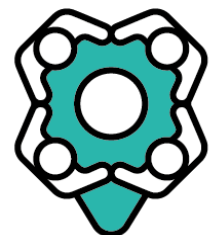
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Executive Summary

This report summarises the activities from the ‘Design in Place-Based Policy’ workshop that was held at ImaginationLancaster in May 2022. The workshop was attended by researchers from different disciplines and practitioners from universities, local government, central government, and external organisations.

The aims of the workshop were to:

- Explore the emergent area of place-based policy making
- Understand what we mean by place
- Explore how design can add value to and become embedded in place-based policy making
- Establish a manifesto for Design in Place-Based Policy Making.

The workshop was held over 1 ½ days, during which there were talks by researchers and practitioners and activities to help us achieve our aims. From the discussions and activities, we have drawn out some key findings which are summarised in this report.

The outcome of the workshop was a manifesto for Design in Place-Based Policy Making:

A Manifesto for Design in Place-Based Policy Making

Develop a White paper to inform policy and in turn provide legitimacy to this area of work

Build a cohesive and persuasive argument for design in place-based policy

Explore R&D opportunities within and between government at all levels and academia

Inspire challenge and advance knowledge in design in place-based policy. Synthesise underlying theories (e.g., more-than-human design) and bring together academics across disciplines, including political science, local government, and policy studies

Cultivate funding and strategic development opportunities between government and academia

Create a data-base of impact projects in the area of design and policy have had

Build a network of active practitioners and researchers in government, academia, and design practice to share learning, tools, and ways of working

Introduction

This workshop was funded by the Beyond Imagination project in ImaginationLancaster, funded by Research England and took place on the 3rd and 4th May 2022. The aims of the workshop were to:

- Explore the emergent area of place-based policy making
- Understand what we mean by place
- Explore *how* design can be embedded in place-based policy making: do we need **new** tools and methods?
- Establish a way forward & create an agenda for further work

Policy makers face challenges in tackling complex problems such as climate change, post COVID-19 recovery and ensuring equitable access to services. These issues are experienced in different ways in different places, and ‘one size fits all’ policy approaches are not always the most suitable.

The idea of place-based policy is becoming more important to governments at all levels in this country and is seen as a way in which to make policies based on the needs of a particular place and those who live there. This approach is also at the centre of the government’s Levelling Up agenda, which aims to give more power to local policy makers and communities. However, in our research we have found that what is meant by ‘place’ is not always made clear. We have also found that design methods and tools offer policy makers opportunities to think more creatively about policy making and engage a wider range of communities in decision making.

What Is Place-Based Policy?

Policies are always located within a place, and are influenced by the geographical, political, and administrative borders they lie within. National policies must work alongside the local, leading to tensions between both political parties, those who must implement the policies and those who are

impacted by them. In recent years the concept of place-based policy has emerged as a way in which policies can be developed by taking a ‘place-up’ approach, which recognises that not all policies will work in all areas.

We know that physical places affect societal wellbeing, but we should think more broadly than places being the built environment. A report by the British Academy (2017) stated that *“we are largely ‘place-blind’ when it comes to making policy. We often design policies for health, education, social care, employment, the economy and new infrastructure separately, and as if places were all the same”*. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, which had profoundly different effects in different places, and feel the effects of shrinking economies which is leading to a cost-of-living crisis, it is vital that policies that tackle these complex issues, as well as the longer-term policies relating to education, housing, climate change and health and wellbeing are fit for purpose and understand the specific challenges faced in different places.

Place-based policies recognize that *“Place emphasises human experience and subjective views on development and change ... This is critical for place-based policy because it speaks to the motivations of individuals and groups. It draws our attention to a specific location, its institutional settings, and meanings for people”*. Furthermore, policies located in place are essential to contemporary economies, as they can provide solutions to *“otherwise intractable challenges such as the long-term decline of cities and regions”* (Beer et al., 2020).

The design and implementation of place-based policies offer challenges in light of the complex nature of place. As Massey (1994) stated *“The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identities through counter-position to what lies beyond ... Places viewed this way are open and porous”*. This type of understanding offered by human geographers poses significant challenges for both policy makers and designers/researchers working in this area. If places are not fixed and are porous, then long-term policies that are situated and embedded within a

place, and designed specifically *from* and *for* that place, understanding how the place and policies may need to change in the future poses significant and complex challenges.

In England the development of place-based policy is being shaped by national agendas, such as the UK Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda (HM Government, 2022). The purpose of the programme is to 'transform places and boost local growth' (HM Government, 2022) and this will be done through a range of policy areas. This programme is important to consider within the context of place-based policy, as one of the core drivers is the move towards more decision making at a local level. A further key focus is the empowering of local decision makers and communities, which fits into the place-based policy agenda.

The key policy areas of the Levelling Up white paper are as follows:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost; and
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency

In order to make the policy areas explored in the workshop relevant to all, we structured them around the key policy areas of the Levelling Up white paper (above).

The Workshop



Figure 1: Workshop Participants

During the two days we completed a series of activities that were designed to help us explore and interrogate what is meant by place, how we can understand it and what kind of tools and methods could help in gathering these understandings and developing policies. The artefacts created during the workshop have been analysed and the findings are summarised in the following sections of the document.

The ultimate aim of the workshop was to develop a research agenda, in the form of a manifesto, which is presented in the final section of this document.

Methods To Understand Place:

During the workshop researchers presented recent project that highlight different ways in which we might understand place, and how design is being used in policy making at the local and national level. Morecambe Bay Timescapes, presented by Dr Serena Pollastri (Pollastri *et al.*, 2022), highlighted the benefits of using qualitative methodologies to draw out rich, qualitative data from a place, and from a wide range of stakeholders offers opportunities to both engage communities in the policy making process and

to envision possible futures for policies. The envisioning of possible futures for policies is of particular use when exploring areas such as climate change, where there is a high degree of uncertainty and the issues are highly complex.



UNDERSTANDING MODELS AND PREDICTIONS

Figure 2: Illustration from Morecambe Bay Timescapes

The ImaginationLancaster Life Survey, presented by Professor Leon Cruickshank is a wide-ranging survey that was carried out in partnership with Lancaster City Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council. Almost 3000 people were surveyed across the two areas by BMG in order to establish a representative picture of views, attitudes and experiences of residents in each area. This evidence base will be used to inform strategy, activity, and future research. The areas covered helped to understand four themes: health and wellbeing; wealth and opportunity; sustainability, transport, and travel; connected communities and services. This approach highlights a quantitative approach that has been developed in close collaboration with data scientists at the Connected Places Catapult and the Data Science Institute at Lancaster University.

What these approaches highlight is the potential for engaging with communities in a place, through a range of ways, in order to gather meaningful data that can be transformed into evidence for policy making.

Using Design Methods in Policy Making:

Three different projects using design methods for policy making, that are rooted in place were presented. The P-PITEE (Participatory Policies for IoT (at the edge) Ethics), presented by Dr Louise Mullagh, explored how design fiction could be used to enable the development of a policy for IoT in public spaces (Mullagh *et al.*, 2021). Through working with Lancaster City Council, the researchers carried out an in-person and virtual IoT walk, in combination with design fiction signage placed on objects around the city (e.g., on a ‘smart’ bin, parking meter and in the bus station). A prototype policy was co-created with council officers and will be developed further, to be implemented as part of a wider IT strategy.



Figure 3: IoT Walk presented as part of the P-PITEE project

The team from Policy Lab presented a project they have recently worked on that specifically relates to understanding place and the use of design methods.

Workshop Activities

During the workshop participants engaged in five activities, the purpose of which were to develop understandings of what we mean by place, how we understand it, what tools and methods we might use and a way forward for this area of research and practice. The tools used to capture the insights presented here are prototypes, which will be developed further, based upon the experiences of this workshop, to use in the development of place-based policy. Brief insights from each activity are presented below, and then developed further into more general insights in the following section of the document.

How Can We Understand Place?

We began the activities by plotting what please meant to the participants, to try and explore the types of understandings in the room. We asked them to think about:

- What are the attributes of place?
- What is a place in terms of policy making?
- What do we need to know about a place to Design policy?
- How can we find these things out?

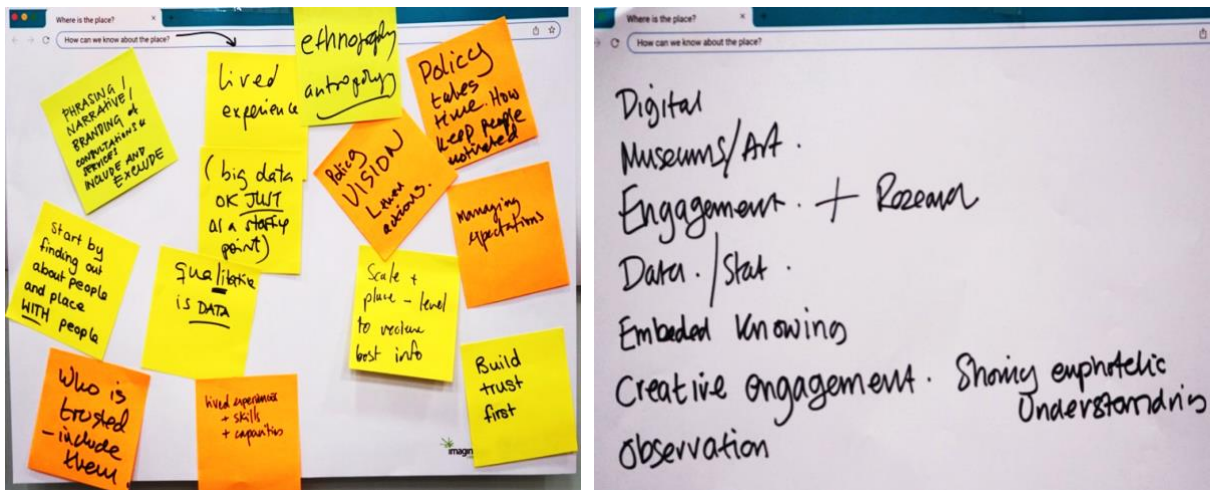


Figure 5: Understanding place part II

Who Do We Need to Engage with in Place to Design Policy?

To understand who needs to be engaged with and when, we asked participants to plot different groups of potential stakeholders and their proximity to the design and implementation of the policy (direct policy influence and indirect policy influence). The groups identified were: private organisations and institutions; citizens and communities; public organisations and institutions and government (national/local/employees/elected officials). This activity helped to shape the later explorations of barriers and opportunities to design in place-based policy.

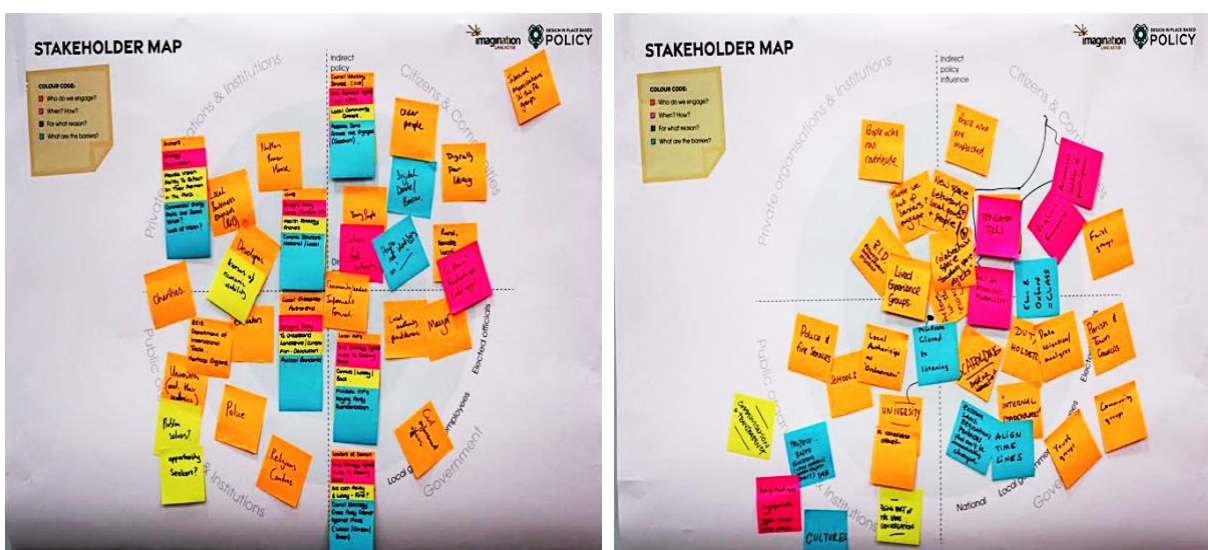


Figure 6: Stakeholder Mapping Activity

Methods, Tools and Process

The purpose of this activity was to map the types of tools and methods being used by participants (and wider communities of practice) in design for policy, and to map these onto the different processes of policy making.

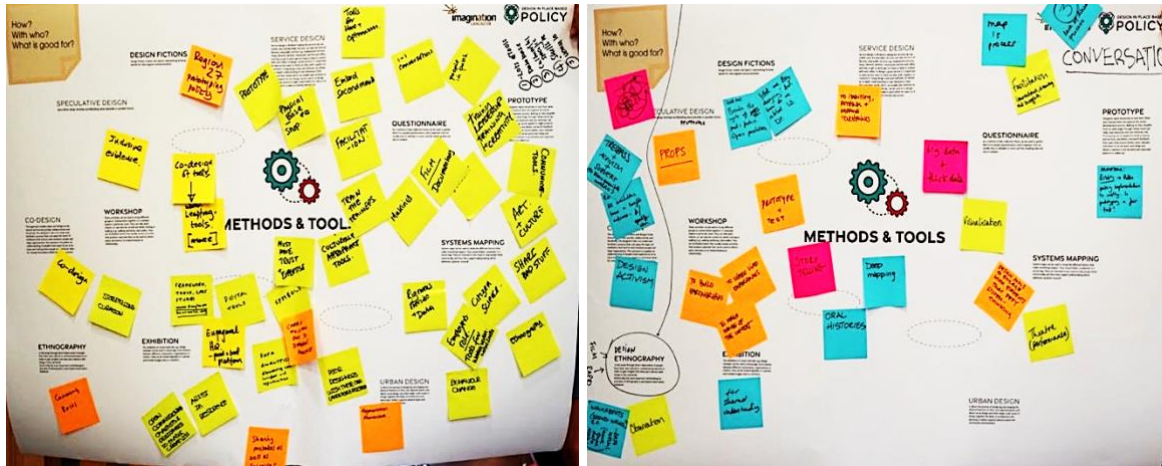


Figure 7: Mapping methods and tools in design for policy



Figure 8: Mapping methods and tools onto processes

Design in Place-Based Policy – Barriers and Opportunities

Participants were asked to write the barriers and opportunities to applying design in place-based policy on white boards. The following is a summary of the responses:

Opportunities:

Starting to get an evidence base of effectiveness	Ethical, digital place-making (with SOCITM)
Systems approaches	Aligning with emerging leaders, e.g., hope and kindness
Embedding in digital transformation programmes (e.g., Connected Places catapult etc)	Connecting people with different expertise to develop solutions
Need to address (rapidly) levelling up agenda/climate	Funding calls – funding opps: academic/LA
Embedding art-based methods	Spaces for collaboration – non-hierarchical
Professional development/leadership training	Thinking about the future through design methods
Understanding systems as the foundation – human learning systems?	Translation
Connecting people from across the whole system that affects what happens in a place	Understanding how we can combine our different levers for bigger impact
Work where there are existing strengths and commissioners are partners (not just desperate for extra capacity)	Policy context – designers understanding its complexity
Co-designing policies that meet actual/real needs	Developing a better understanding of how central and local gov can collaborate to design and deliver place-based policy
Dedicated partners by roles/teams	Honest storytelling – success and what didn't work and Tackling issues where the current solutions don't work
Starting to get an evidence base of effectiveness	Ethical, digital place-making (with SOCITM)
Systems approaches	Aligning with emerging leaders, e.g., hope and kindness
Embedding in digital transformation programmes (e.g., Connected Places catapult etc)	Connecting people with different expertise to develop solutions

Barriers:

Transferring knowledge and good practice between places in such a way that it can be understood/used	Disconnection between vision/strategy and reality & challenges connecting high level policy goals to local places in such a way that they can be owned/interpreted in context-specific ways
Lack of transparency in current govt – local policy process (can someone please make a model?)	Working above the lever of individual issues/policies
Skills/leadership	Timelines
Time to fail well	Resources in LG teams – skills/training when uni/researchers leave
Staying at project level	Academia – short term nature of projects & funding issues
Trust	Hierarchies of value and knowledge
Genuine connections between services/policies and place – e.g., major issue in policing is lack of local and community knowledge amongst officers	When existing policies hinder interventions
Lack of understanding by leaders of design	We need to share failure
Capacity – capability	Knowledge: losing, sharing
Structural e.g., uni funding	Info sharing agreements – sometimes take too long
Bias of areas design innovation work with	Red tape – between orgs
Officer time/resource to engage with these ways of working	Frustration of community with adhering to planning legislation/land remediation
Politics	Loss of knowledge due to short term projects
Regional approach	Permission/buy in

A Manifesto for Design in Place Based Policy

For the final task we asked the following questions:

- What is the goal of embedding design in place-based Policy?
- What are the actions we need to take to make it happen?

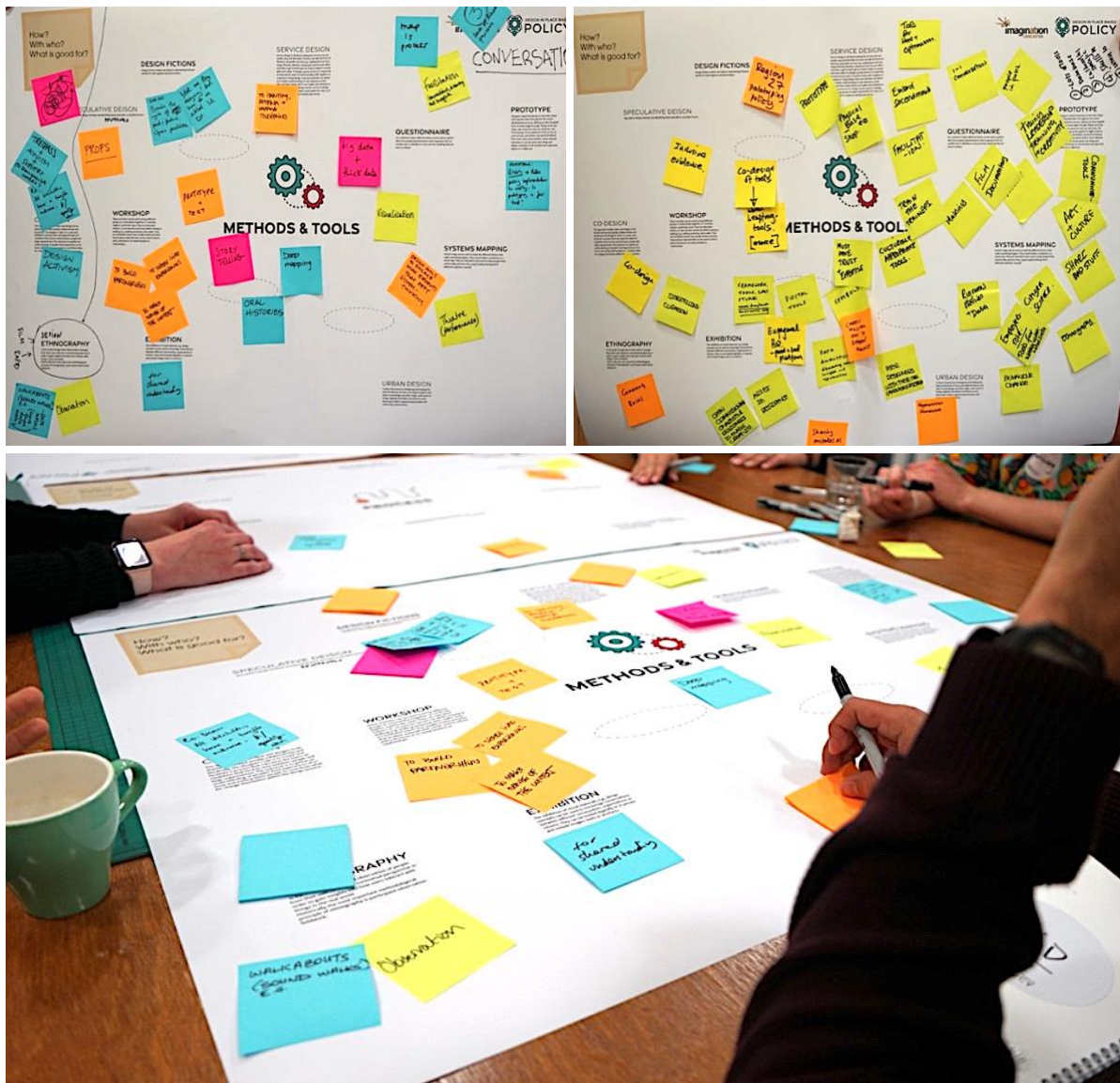


Figure9: Methods and Tools activity

Workshop findings

The following findings have been drawn from the activities carried out (above). These are not exhaustive but offer initial insights around design in place-based policy that can form the basis for further work.

Place: scale, boundaries, and politics: We know that place is about more than borders and physical locations, particularly in the context of today's world where the digital and the physical co-exist. We also know that boundaries, which whilst not physical, are often implemented seemingly randomly. These borders and the political eco-systems they encompass can dramatically affect the life outcomes of communities. This sense of hybridity of place, and the profound effects of borders was highlighted in the first activity, where participants were asked to share their definitions of place. In addition to the hybrid nature of place, the concept of temporality was explored. Those engaged in designing policies need to draw upon the past, considering not only data, but also issues that might have had profound impacts on communities where scars are embedded in a place. The future is also vital to policy makers, who must balance the needs of now with those that will happen in decades to come. This is particularly true of complex challenges, such as climate change and readiness for further pandemics, financial and health crises.

In addition to thinking about the 'local', leaders and policy makers must act within a global 'place'. Dealing with conditions that are felt not just locally or nationally is a huge challenge, particularly when acting within resource constraints. This has been demonstrated by the global financial crisis of 2008, which had profound effects on local government spending through the period of austerity imposed by national government, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Place is often categorised as either rural or urban, but with increases in new housing developments and commuter areas on former brown-field sites this binary split is becoming less clear-cut. Through place-based policy, a specific approach to a location can be designed, rather than creating either/or policies

for urban and rural locations that do not fit the new semi-urban or semi-rural places.

The emergence of new technologies enables us to simultaneously be in a physical, tangible location and a digital location, making place pluralistic. Consideration of how such places is inhabited and impact on many facets of our lives is a key aspect of place-based policy, and highlights that such policies do not only tackle issues in physical locations. This approach is challenging and will call upon cross-disciplinary working and innovative responses.

Within design research and practice the concept of ‘more than human’ is becoming increasingly important. Understanding and designing beyond the human, to recognise and consider non-human actors ... including

Challenges of national and local governance: One of the key themes that emerged repeatedly throughout the workshop was the structure of governance in the UK and the inherent problems this presents. The structure of local governance in England is complex and varies between areas, comprising 58 unitary authorities; 32 London boroughs; 36 metropolitan districts; 24 county councils; 181 district councils, 9,000 town or parish councils and 10 combined authorities (HM Government, 2021)

Skills and leadership: A recurring theme throughout the workshop was that of leadership and the need for skills development, both in the use of design for policy and for designers/researchers working in this area. The development of place-based policy and the use of design in its creation often depends upon the leadership style of those in leadership positions within local governments and elected members.

Resourcing: As all levels of government operate within financial constraints, it is important to consider how this effects not only their operation, but also their involvement in designing policy. This also applies to academic partners, who are constrained by research project funding, which tends to be reasonably short-term. The nature of the funding landscape means that projects are often

short-term (often a maximum of three years), which leads to a loss of experience and knowledge. The success of partnerships between government and academia are also contingent upon personnel and projects can be disrupted if staff leave mid-project.

Types of data and evidence: The collection and synthesis of many different types of data and evidence that feeds into a policy is a complex process. During the workshop we came to understand that in order to know a place prior to the development of policies, it is vital that different types of data and evidence are gathered. This might be through ethnographies that gather rich data about lived experience and embedded knowing, or through finding out about and discovering place *with* communities. This approach can help us to understand the values and ethical concerns of people living in a place. Quantitative data is also important in the design of policies, particularly where large-scale surveys and data sets can inform complex issues such as healthcare and wellbeing.

Who needs to be involved: Participants highlighted the importance of identifying 'gatekeepers' in communities and developing trust and relationships, both as designers and researchers, and within local government organisations. Community leaders, whether part of formal or informal groups are important, and building trust takes time and often resources. This can present challenges when dealing with funded projects and limitations of personnel and resources (see Barriers to Design in Place-Based policy, below).

It is important to recognise that involvement of stakeholders can change, depending upon the stage of policy development and the types of policy being developed. Understanding this can ensure the right communities, organisations or individuals are engaged in a meaningful way. Challenges exist in identifying those who are not involved in community groups, organisations, such as seldom-heard communities or individuals and this poses issues in designing equitable and engaging policies.

In addition to thinking about the human actors who should be involved with and engaged in policy making processes, participants went beyond the human to explore the ‘more-than human’. Within design and policy making there has been a move towards ‘human centred design’ in recent years. However, there is now a body of research and practice that goes beyond the human, to explore how emerging technologies (e.g., IoT and other devices) and the non-human (e.g., animals and the environment) are impacted by the design of policies. Not considering just the people that are affected by the policy, but by actants that can affect policies. One such area is the impact of emerging technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT) where sensors can be found in household objects or in public spaces.

Translation: Throughout the workshop the notion of translation was discussed. These discussions can be broadly split into three key areas:

1. Language and discourse: The need to understand how academic discourse, which is often different between disciplines, can be translated for those working in government, and vice versa. Discipline and specialist practice specific language often means we talk about the same thing but using different words. In order to further the work in this area, translating these different discourses and finding common ground is vital.
2. Design tools and methods: The use of design and research tools and methods within policy has tended to be limited to those used in the wider design research and practice world. For example, design fiction, co-design and participatory design are all explored in design for policy, but we need to think about how these tools are translated within this area. Furthermore, we need to explore whether we need to develop new tools and methods.

3. Research into practice and policy design: This wider area relates to how design research and wider research can be translated into policy, through the use of design

How can design contribute to place-based policy? Workshop participants are all engaged in policy to some extent, with some being practitioners of design in policy. It was widely agreed that design can be used to create value within the policy making process at all levels, but we need to strengthen and develop the body of work in this area to evidence where value is created. Through thinking specifically about place-based policy, we have the opportunity to explore in more depth how design methods can gather rich data about place and those who inhabit it. Participants agreed that we should think about developing tools specific for design in policy, and further understanding the stages at which these tools can be used.

Design can be used for more than problem solving. Whilst it does offer benefits in exploring challenges and problems through creative methods, designers and researchers should not just be engaged in the design of policy to solve issues. The potential for design exists throughout the design of policy at different stages, from initial engagement through to implementation.

Design can help policy makers at different scales envision both potential impacts of policy decisions and explore alternative futures. This can be done through prototyping, methods such as design fiction and through engaging with materiality in design.

A manifesto for design in place-based policy

GOALS:

- Develop a White paper on Design in Place-Based Policy to inform policy and in turn provide legitimacy to this area of work
- Build a cohesive and persuasive argument for design in place-based policy
- Explore R&D opportunities within and between government at all levels and academia
- Inspire, challenge and advance knowledge in design in place-based policy. Synthesise underlying theories (e.g., more-than-human design) and bring together academics across disciplines, including political science, local government, and policy studies
- Develop funding and strategic development opportunities between government and academia
- Create a database of impact projects in the area of design and policy have had
- Develop a network of active practitioners and researchers in government, academia, and design practice to share learning, tools, and ways of working

ACTIONS:

- Identify wider and existing networks of people working in design, policy, and wider place-based policy
- Understand policy context at all scales of governance in the UK
- Translate and communicate the research agenda between government and academia
- Identify areas for funding and strategic development between government and academia
- Develop a network to connect around specific policy areas (e.g., net zero, housing) to be ready strategically for funding etc.

- Develop a hypothesis that we want to test through research and choose small test-beds
- Produce insights and evidence base for range of audiences
- Create a network of excellence in design for place-based policy

Next steps

The exploration of design in place-based policy is emerging as a rich area of research and practice. This workshop highlighted not only the interest in this area from a range of organisations and individuals, but also the potential for significant impact. From the findings of the workshop, we intend to develop a position paper in Design for Place-based Policy. We also intend to develop a research bid, which will enable us to develop the network, based upon the participants who attended this workshop.

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