

**Designing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
Interdisciplinary Methods and Findings

Edited by Prof. Tom Inns

**GOWER**

## **Preface**

‘Once you enter its world Design becomes a passion.’ I said this in the Preface to the first volume produced as a result of the AHRC and the EPSRC research funding Initiative ‘Designing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’. Here we have the second volume, the results. This clearly illustrates the comprehensive nature of ‘design’, the richness, and the depth and breadth of design research.

Having campaigned for 25 years for academia, industry and research funders to recognise the contribution that design, designers and design researchers make to improved global wellbeing. I am so pleased to have been able to promote and support this programme and to follow the work of the Initiative Director Prof. Tom Inns and the research teams, guided by the wisdom of an eminent advisory group.

The chapters in this book are testament to the dynamic change that is occurring in design research. Design has never recognised discipline silos, and designers and design researchers have always crossed boundaries, stepped into other disciplinary realms to create solutions to problems, to challenge orthodoxies and to innovate. Previously this has been undervalued by government, industry and academia, but this Initiative has provided a formal funded opportunity to enable this to happen and to prove its value.

The research orchestrated by, through, and around design has included researchers from the arts, sciences, social sciences and humanities, addressing most of the issues and problems facing contemporary society – notably sustainability, the environment, inclusivity, accessibility and all aspects of socially responsible design, as well as the pervasive technology that is dominating our now digital world. The research undertaken moves from measuring the value of design internationally, and visions of the

future for the design industry, through service design, design and complexity, metadesign, considerate design and fashion, to democratising technology, branding places, making better workplaces and learning spaces, into the digital and virtual worlds and our interaction with them.

However, there are two predominant themes in the book, the first being ‘people and teams’ – almost all the research has involved large multi-disciplinary teams. It has also involved workshops. . . and more workshops – workshops with other disciplines, with users, industry and policy makers. The second is ‘doing design’, through making prototypes, testing prototypes, visualising tools and systems. This is not surprising; the reason why we are passionate about design and design research is because it is essentially, I believe, about working with people to improve our world.

It has now been recognised that individuals or single disciplines cannot address the challenges that face us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must change our notions of research especially in academia; many research teams now need to be interdisciplinary or indeed what some people call ‘post-disciplinary’. This can be a challenge to some, not to design; the research reported here illustrates the value of design research in providing cohesion, orchestration, systemisation, visualisation and innovation and in leading our approach to solving problems and creating the future.

I congratulate the research teams and especially Tom, and Vicky Hale the Initiative Co-ordinator, who have inspired and encouraged the teams towards their individual goal, while understanding and promoting the overarching Design for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century landscape. This book is a testament to that work. We all now need to ensure that it continues.

Prof. Rachel Cooper  
Chair  
Designing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Advisory Group