Designing environments for life

Programme team
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1) Programme background

Scope
Art and design, anthropology and architecture are among a range of disciplines that aim to understand how people perceive and shape the world around them through creative practices of designing, making, building and inhabiting. However, they have traditionally pursued this aim by different means, including various forms of inscription, arts and craft practice, architectural and product design, ethnography and film. There is scope for combining these means across the entire interdisciplinary terrain, leading to innovative forms of research-led engagement. The overall aim of this programme was to establish the scope, relevance and potential applicability of research in a field formed through the convergence of approaches not only in art and design, anthropology and architecture but also in subjects ranging from archaeology to engineering, while also widening the discussion to include communities of practice beyond academia – including arts, design and architectural practices, government and the public sector, business and industry, and environmental organisations.

Theme
In both scientific and popular discussions of environmental change, two different meanings of ‘environment’ are commonly confused. The first conveys the phenomenal world of our immediate experience. In the second sense, by contrast, the environment is understood as a physical world whose reality is given independently of our experience of it, and that we can know only through the compilation of data drawn from detached observation and measurement. For most people, the environment of everyday life is understood in the first sense. Yet it is the second that predominates in the discourses of techno-science and policy-making. For the disciplines of art and design, anthropology and architecture, caught betwixt these contrary understandings and committed to mediating between them, this poses an acute challenge. Meeting the challenge calls for new ways of combining techno-scientific expertise with the wisdom of inhabitants in the common project of designing environments for life.

Questions
The key questions of the programme follow:
- How might we rethink the concept of environment in a way that enables us to situate the lived experience of engaging with our surroundings within the dynamics of the more encompassing systems of which these engagements are a part?
- What is the meaning of design in a world that is perpetually under construction by way of the activities of inhabitants, who are tasked above all with keeping life going rather than bringing to completion projects specified at the outset?
- Is the creativity of design attributable to innovation or to improvisation? Does it lie in the novelty of prefigured solutions or in the capacity of inhabitants to respond with flexibility and precision to ever-changing environmental conditions?

Objectives
- To further the initiative to create a Scottish Centre for Art, Architecture and Anthropology, by engaging with communities of practice outwith the academic sector.
- To develop a research agenda for the emergent field of Design Anthropology.
- To close the gap between everyday understandings of ‘environment’ and those adduced in the discourses of techno-science and policy-making.
- To challenge conventional thinking regarding the nature of design and creativity, in a way that acknowledges the improvisatory skills and perceptual acuity of inhabitants.
- To disseminate the results of our deliberations to a wider public through a programme of lectures and exhibitions, and a series of working papers.

Format
The programme comprised the following components:
- Four workshops, each of 2-3 days, at monthly intervals: Workshop 1, 10-11 September; Workshop 2, 6-8 October; Workshop 3, 10-12 November; Workshop 4, 16-17 December.

The first workshop was intended for a core group of academic researchers (including doctoral students and early career researchers) and practitioners, with the objective of refining the three key research questions set out above. Between this workshop and the next, participants were tasked with following up these questions through a creative, focused engagement with a pre-prepared ‘designing environments for life’ programme brief. The purpose of the second
and third workshops was to bring together the core group with a range of distinguished academics and practitioners from the UK and overseas. Members of the core group were asked to present the preliminary results of their engagements with the programme brief, using diverse text, image and design media, and our distinguished invitees were invited to respond with advice and ideas on how to take these investigations further. The final workshop was again for the core group, and was an occasion to review and reflect upon these documented outcomes, and to draw conclusions in the form of new theoretical ideas, new artistic/design concepts and practical policy proposals.

- Three public lectures: 11 November, 2009, 12 November 2009, 22 January 2010 (for details, see Section 3).
- An exhibition responding to the themes of the programme, and open to public view. The exhibition was held at Dundee Contemporary Arts, 15-30 January 2010 (for details, see Section 3).

**Interdisciplinary dialogue, cross-sector involvement and knowledge exchange**

The programme drew on an already established network of scholars from a wide range of fields whose capacity for productive interdisciplinary dialogue had already been demonstrated. From the start, colleagues in the Nordic countries have played a role in this dialogue, and the international dimension of the programme was concentrated in these connections. By involving distinguished non-academic practitioners in our discussions, especially in workshops 2 and 3, we were able to address many of the issues that arise in translating back and forth between academic research and the world of policy and practice. The lectures and the exhibition served to engage the wider public with the programme theme and objectives.
2) Breakdown of programme activities

The events at IAS

Workshop 1

Theme and scope
This opening workshop was intended for the programme’s ‘core group’, comprising 35 people from academia, practice, industry and the public sector (including the programme conveners). Of these, 32 were able to attend. The aim of the workshop was to open up the questions and issues raised by the programme proposal and to share responses to the programme brief (see below). The discussion ranged across arts practice, social and environmental anthropology, public policy, and product, architectural and landscape design.

Preparation and structure
In preparation for this workshop, members of the core group were sent the programme proposal and the brief for the programme project. For the structure, we had initially drafted a conventional programme of short talks, discussions and activities, led by specific participants. Subsequent discussion, however, led us to suggest that the SIAS space might afford a less conventional format for sharing ideas and generating work. On the first day of the workshop we therefore decided to put the draft programme aside and create a collaborative ‘drawing the discussions’ activity that would last the whole day. The approach to this activity was based on the experience of one of the conveners, who had used it successfully during previous collaborative workshops between artists and policy makers. Participants were divided into three mixed-discipline groups. They discussed their responses to the programme themes and recorded their responses through written narrative and drawing on large format paper. This activity was highly effective in opening up, articulating and making visible the interests of the core group. For some groups it involved refining ideas more clearly; for example, one group produced a written manifesto for ‘designing environments for life’. The second day of this workshop was devoted to planning future events.

Workshops 2 and 3

Theme and scope
Workshops 2 and 3 were designed to explore the same central themes as workshop 1 but with a considerably expanded scope. These workshops were intended to involve the core group together with a moderate number of distinguished invited participants. The idea was to use these workshops as a forum for the practical evaluation and development of programme-themed work-in-progress, facilitated by constructive critiques from the distinguished participants. We also hoped to schedule the planned public lectures to coincide with these workshops. In practice, the scope of workshop 2 was somewhat scaled down from our original intentions, largely because of the time constraints of its organization and the many competing commitments of participants at an exceptionally busy time of year. Workshop 3, by contrast, was larger and more ambitious, and amply fulfilled our original intentions. Overall, both workshops were very effective and their differing size and scope added their own particular value to furthering the programme’s ideas and work.

Workshop 2 involved 22 participants; 21 from the core group and one distinguished invited participant. As for workshop 1, this workshop's theme was initially open-ended but its emergent emphasis was on 'practices of designing, making and sensing the environment'. Its scope ranged across the core group's disciplines and the distinguished participant's disciplines of sociology and science & technology studies.

Workshop 3 involved 37 participants: 24 from the core group and 13 distinguished invited participants. Again, its theme was initially open-ended but the emphasis that emerged was on 'ways of knowing, being, acting and creating'. Its scope ranged across the core group's and distinguished participants' disciplines of linguistics, philosophy, systems thinking, sociology, ecological activism, public policy, engineering, ecological arts and critical design theory. The broad scope of workshop 3 was enhanced by its scheduling to coincide with two of the programme's three public lectures.

Preparation and structure
Preparation for workshop 2 involved specific participants furthering their responses to the programme brief and preparing their content for presentations and activities. In terms of structure, the first two days of this workshop involved a schedule of morning presentation and discussions, practical afternoon activities and early evening reflective discussions. The third half-day involved extended...
reflective discussions and programme planning discussions. The smaller size of this workshop facilitated more detailed discussion, reflective thinking and focused attention on the practical activities which involved specific methods and tools: visual ethnography using digital video technology and multi-sensory notation using manual drawing techniques.

Preparation for workshop 3 involved the same activities as for workshop 2, with the addition that all participants were requested to prepare a short reading or performance that responded to the programme themes. In terms of structure, the three days involved a mixture of readings, presentations and visual method activities throughout the day, with each day being closed by a reflective discussion. The second and third days included key public engagement events: public lectures at Glasgow Centre for Contemporary Arts and the University of Strathclyde respectively. The latter event was followed by a post-lecture dinner in IAS. Further planning discussions took place over a breakfast meeting on the fourth day. All participants in this workshop were agreed that the sessions devoted to discussion of key readings had been particularly effective in enhancing inter-disciplinary dialogue and understanding across a wide range.

**Workshop 4**

*Theme and scope*

This concluding workshop involved 15 participants from the core group. The main purpose of the workshop was to discuss and plan the outputs of the programme. The scope was notably more restricted and the activity more focused, in comparison to the previous workshops, and it involved participants only from the core group and their various disciplinary perspectives.

*Preparation and structure*

In preparation for the workshop, participants were asked to consider and respond to three specific questions: How have the workshops affected or changed your research and/or practice? What ideas do you have for programme outputs and further collaborations? How might you wish to contribute to the exhibition? In terms of structure, the morning of the first day involved a practical, open-ended making activity, using willow crafting techniques. This practical activity was led by a core group member whose research interest lies in exploring the sociality of craft techniques and how they can be used as methods for facilitating dialogue. The activity made for a productive start to the workshop and was an effective way of concluding the aspect of the programme dedicated to collaborative activity. The afternoon turned to discussing, documenting and creating a shared understanding of participants’ responses to the first two of the questions listed above. A key aim of this activity was to arrive at a shared understanding of the different notions of ‘output’ from various disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives. The second day involved a smaller number from the core group, and focused specifically on the design, planning and curation of the proposed public exhibition.

*Between the events*

The main vehicle for keeping a thread of activity going on before and between the events was the programme brief. This brief challenged participants to translate the theoretical themes of the programme into an opportunity for practical creative engagement from any disciplinary or inter-disciplinary perspective. Some core group participants responded to this brief quite specifically and developed new theoretical and practical work in response to the ideas raised. Other participants used it more loosely to think about how their existing research or practice could be relevant to the programme themes. Importantly, the programme brief encouraged participants to consider how their discipline-specific theories, methods, techniques and practices could be applied in ‘designing environments for life’.

In addition to the programme brief, online communications were used extensively between the workshops to sustain discussions, engage in collaborative work and develop new ideas. This involved the use of standard tools for sharing documents and images such as email and online file sharing repositories. Contact was maintained through a group email list, local contacts and interconnected project opportunities as these developed through and during the programme.
3) Outputs and outcomes

Programme brief
The task of the programme, as set out in the brief circulated to all participants, was to bridge the gap between the familiar environments of quotidian experience and the ‘environment’ of scientific, technological and policy discourse, in such a way that we are better able to reconnect the practices of everyday life with the imperatives of environmental sustainability.

To achieve this, we aimed to develop work which responds to the following themes:

- Find ways of integrating the intimate experience of engaging with our surroundings into the dynamics of the more encompassing systems of which these engagements are a part, so as to afford an environmentally sound foundation for sustainable living.
- Challenge the idea of design as the anticipation of projected future states, by focusing not on the novelty of prefigured solutions but on the improvisatory capacity of living in the everyday to respond to ever-changing environmental conditions.
- Interrogate the notion of familiarity itself, by exploring how familiarities are engendered, how they help or hinder the processes of everyday life, and how these processes, in turn, impact on the principles and dispositions of design.

Workshop 1
One of the principal outcomes of the first workshop was a ‘designing environments for life’ manifesto, which structured much of the discussion in subsequent events. The manifesto comprised three propositions:

- Environments are inherently variable. Design should enhance the flexibility of inhabitants to respond to these variations with foresight and imagination.
- The impulse of life is to keep on going. Design unfolds within constantly transforming life conditions, and should open up pathways for creative improvisation.
- There is always a tension between hopes and dreams for the future and the material constraints of the present. Design should invite people from all walks of life to join in conversation around this tension.

Workshops 2 and 3
These workshops developed our thinking in a number of ways:

- By introducing the idea of ‘provotypes’, as a way of facilitating interdisciplinary dialogue.
- By exploring the concept of art as bioremediation.
- By addressing what ‘designing for life’ entails at a strategic level.
- By considering the relation between environmental sustainability and education.
- By advancing our thinking about the relation between academic research, arts practice, and policy intervention.
- By allowing us to experiment with drawing and video as techniques of observation.

Workshop 4
This workshop provided an opportunity to pull together the strands of thinking emerging from previous events, to consider how they would be developed in outputs to arise from the programme (see below), and to plan the exhibition.

The programme as a whole
Since every participant brought something different to the programme, by way of disciplinary background, prior training and experience, so they each took something different away from it. For all participants, however, the programme was a source of considerable inspiration. Fundamentally, it introduced a new way of thinking about design that:

- is oriented to process rather than product
- is open-ended rather than end-directed
- is dictated by hopes and dreams rather than fixed targets
- associates creativity with growth rather than novelty
- emerges from dialogical relations both among people and between them and materials
- is democratic rather than based on systems of command and control

Outputs
Public lectures
‘Small, local, open, connected: an orienting scenario for social innovation and design, in the age of networks’, by Professor Ezio Manzini, Milan Politechnic. University of Strathclyde. 12 November 2009.

Public exhibition
Three workshops were held to accompany the exhibition:
• ‘With words and wood’, poetry workshop with Alison Phipps (Education, Glasgow University)
• ‘Comob: citizen cartography with GPS’, workshop with Jen Southern (Sociology, Lancaster University)
• ‘Dens, shelters and nests’, willow workshop with Stephanie Bunn (Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews).
The exhibition will move to the University of St Andrews in May 2010, to coincide with the Sustainable Development Festival.

Projected papers
Barney, G. (Fine Art, Gray’s School of Art, Robert Gordon University): projected paper.
Bunn, S. (Social Anthropology, University of St. Andrews): projected paper for willow-craft journal.
Coessens, K. (Music, Free University, Brussels): Journal article on ‘Territoriality and Subjective Mapping’.
Douglas, A. (Fine Art, Gray’s School of Art, Robert Gordon University) and Ravetz, A. (MIRIAD, Manchester Metropolitan University): Paper on modes of address.
Ferraro, E. and White, R. (St Andrews Sustainability Institute): Papers on: (i) sustainability, resilience and improvisation; (ii) design thinking, education and sustainability.
Harkness, R. (Anthropology, University of Aberdeen): Two papers: (i) collaborative building of shelters; (ii) perspectives on interdisciplinary methods.
Ingold, T. (Anthropology, University of Aberdeen) and Anusas, M. (DMEM, Strathclyde University): Journal paper for Design Issues on design, improvisation and open-ended practice.
Ravetz, A. (MIRIAD, Manchester Metropolitan University) and Barney, G. (Fine Art, Gray’s School of Art, Robert Gordon University): Paper on translating from policy into life experience.
Symons, J. (Krata Think Tank, Manchester): Paper on the process of multi-disciplinary collaboration and cross-audience communication and organisation.

Artworks
Bunn, S. (Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews): Development of a set of play structures constructed from willow.
Harkness, R. (Anthropology, University of Aberdeen): Performance concerning perspectives on interdisciplinary methods - e.g. beyond words, poetry.
Ravetz, A. (MIRIAD, Manchester Metropolitan University): Film concerning process, exploration through making, open-endedness.

Resources
Symons, J. (Krata Think Tank, Manchester): compilation of programme bibliography from IAS workshop readings.

Influence on methodologies for future workshops and collaborations

Burr, J., Gunn, W., Donovan, J. and Pederson, J. (SPIRE, MCI, University of Southern Denmark at Sondeborg): Development of a process to influence movement between researchers.

Impact on education and teaching
Anusas, A. (DMEM, University of Strathclyde): Influence on ongoing development of design education at the University of Strathclyde in areas of social practice, creativity and environmental relations.

Bunn, S. (Social Anthropology, University of St. Andrews): Direct impact on teaching through involvement of other disciplines (e.g. Lucas to introduce perspectives in architecture)

Douglas, A. (Fine Art, Gray’s School of Art, Robert Gordon University) Direct impact on teaching through involvement of other disciplines (e.g. Clarke to introduce perspectives from anthropology)

Ferraro, E. and White, R. R. (St Andrews Sustainability Institute): Design of a teaching module on Sustainability and Design for Level 4 students, with invited lectures from among DEFL programme participants, academic year 2010-11.

Grout, I. (Design, Glasgow School of Art) Influence on ongoing development of design education at Glasgow School of Art in areas of social science and sustainability and the cross-European Masters programme

Ingold, T. (Anthropology, University of Aberdeen) and Gunn, W. (SPIRE, MCI, University of Southern Denmark at Sondeborg): International PhD course on ‘Design Anthropology’ to be held in Aberdeen (22-26 March 2010) and Sondeborg (3-7 May 2010).


Influence on education, research, community and practice projects
Bunn, S. (Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews): Influence on general education and research practice through opportunity to do things within the IAS context that are not possible or supported within the context of the home institution.

Ferraro, E. (St Andrews Sustainability Institute): participation of some DEFL programme participants in Sustainable Development Festival, St Andrews, May 2010. The DEFL exhibition will be on display at the Festival.

Grout, I. (Glasgow School of Art): Influence on ongoing development of Low Carbon Living Scotland project.

Grout, I. (Glasgow School of Art): Planned workshop with PLAYCE as part of the Shetland Year of Architecture and Place.

Wrobel, A. (Landscape Architect) and Johnson, G. (Gareth Hoskins Architects): Influence on ongoing development of practice.

Wrobel, A. (Landscape Architect) and Johnson, G. (Gareth Hoskins Architects): Influence on ongoing development of PLAYCE project.

Planned collaborations and funding bids arising from the programme

Proposed government engagement
Ingold, T., Vergunst, J. (Anthropology, University of Aberdeen) and Anusas, M. (DMEM, University of Strathclyde): A planned seminar and guided walk to introduce themes from ‘Designing environments for life’ to policy-makers. Scottish Government Offices, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, and Institute for Advanced Studies, Glasgow, April/May 2010 (seminar dates tbc).

Planned future workshops
Ferraro, E. and White, R. (St Andrews Sustainability Institute): Development of future workshop on ‘Design and sustainability’.

Grout, I. (Glasgow School of Art): Development of future workshops on ‘Design, anthropology and philosophy’.

Development of future research centre
Ingold, T. (Anthropology, University of Aberdeen): Continuation and formalisation of collaborative network for creative practices in anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture.

Overall added value of programme and potential impact
Undoubtedly, the principal added value of the programme lay in the opportunities it created for opening up and developing conversations among the participants, many of whom discovered common interests of which they were previously unaware. These interdisciplinary and cross-institutional conversations were greatly enhanced by the possibility to meet on not one but several occasions, each lasting over two or more days. As the list of potential outputs shows, these meetings have led to collaborations in both research and teaching. In a number of instances, participants have resolved to work together on joint papers arising from the themes of the programme. In teaching, the programme is already having an impact, for example from anthropological contributions to teaching design (Glasgow School of Art) and fine art (Gray’s School of Art), architectural contributions to teaching anthropology (St Andrews), the contribution of ethnographic and sustainability perspectives to the Master’s Programme in Design (Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee) and collaborations between SPIRE (University of Southern Denmark) and Anthropology (University of Aberdeen) in the development of postgraduate training in Design Anthropology.
Appendix: List of participants

Alison Phipps, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow, Scotland.
Amanda Ravetz, Manchester School of Art and Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design, Manchester Metropolitan University, England.
Amanda Thomson, independent artist, Scotland.
Ania Wrobel, independent landscape architect, Scotland.
Anne Douglas, Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University, Scotland.
Caroline Gatt, Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland.
Chris Freemantle, independent arts consultant, Scotland.
David Haley, Manchester School of Art and Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design, Manchester Metropolitan University, England.
Elizabeth Shove, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, England.
Emilia Ferraro, School of Geography and Geosciences, University of St Andrews, Scotland.
Ezio Manzini, School of Design, Milan Polytechnic, Italy.
Gary Johnson, Gareth Hoskins Architects, Scotland.
Georgina Barney, Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University, Scotland.
Gonzalo Salazar-Preece, Visual Research Centre and School of Design, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, Scotland.
Hamid van Koten, School of Design, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, Scotland.
Helen and Newton Harrison, The Harrison Studio, California, USA.
Ian Grout, School of Design, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland.
Jacob Buur, Mads Clausen Institute, University of Southern Denmark at Sondeborg, Denmark.
James Leach, Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland.
Jamie Wallace, Danish School of Education, University of Århus, Denmark.
Jan Bebbington, School of Management, University of St Andrews, Scotland.
Jared Donovan, Mads Clausen Institute, University of Southern Denmark at Sondeborg, Denmark.
Jennifer Parker, School of Design, Milan Polytechnic, Italy.
Jérémie McGowan, Fulbright fellow, University of Edinburgh, Scotland.
Jesper Pederson, Mads Clausen Institute, University of Southern Denmark at Sondeborg, Denmark.
Jessica Symons, Krata think tank, Manchester, England.
Jo Vergunst, Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland.
Justin Kenrick, School of Geography and Geosciences, University of St Andrews, Scotland.
Kathleen Coessens, Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science, Free University of Brussels, Belgium.
Lisa Shaw, independent artist, Scotland.
Mike Anusas, Department of Design, Manufacture and Engineering Management, University of Strathclyde and Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland.
Murdo Macdonald, Visual Research Centre and School of Fine Art, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, Scotland.
Rachel Harkness, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh, Scotland.
Raymond Lucas, School of Architecture and Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design, Manchester Metropolitan University, England.
Rehema White, School of Geography and Geosciences, University of St Andrews, Scotland.
Reiko Goto, Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University, Scotland.
Roy Mohan Shearer, Zero Waste Design, Scotland.
Russell Jones, Glasgow Centre for Population Health, Scotland.
Stephanie Bunn, Department of Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews, Scotland.
Svenja Jaffari, Mads Clausen Institute, University of Southern Denmark at Sondeborg, Denmark.
Tim Ingold, Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland.
Wendy Gunn, Mads Clausen Institute, University of Southern Denmark at Sondeborg, Denmark.
Wendy Guthrie, Civil and Building Engineering, Loughborough University, England.
Wilma Eaton, Department of Sports, Culture and the Arts, University of Strathclyde, Scotland.
Wu Mali, independent artist, Taiwan.