

Welcome to DRS 2022

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Editorial: Welcome to DRS2022

DRS2022 has been a labour of love and an article of faith. The long process of preparing for the conference started in February 2020, as the pandemic began to take hold and change our world forever. Throughout the following two and a half years we have held our breath and had many doubts. We hoped that there would be a window of time in summer 2022 where design researchers could once again reconnect in-person. But we also wanted to learn the lessons that both coronavirus and climate change have taught us. Academic conferences bring with them large environmental footprints and we must either justify this or change, with our emphasis firmly on the latter. Early in our planning, we decided to hold the conference in a hybrid format, where in-person and online participants were valued equally, and with the corresponding benefits of accessibility on the one hand, and a decreased environmental footprint on the other. Our reasoning was that if any discipline could develop a workable format for hybrid conferences, it should be design research. Our experiences with both DRS2020—intended for Brisbane but held online—and the innovative DRS Festival of Emergence—held in 2021—have allowed us to prototype new approaches and shown us the way forward. With nearly 800 participants, online and in-person, DRS2022 is the biggest and most ambitious DRS conference to date. The technical challenge of treating all participants equally has been difficult and we are not sure that we have succeeded, but we have certainly made a step in the right direction.

DRS conferences have until now been hosted by a selected University but for DRS2022 our host is the City of Bilbao, represented by the organization Bilbao Ekintza, and in partnership with the local universities, led by the University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU. Bilbao is a UNESCO City of Design and the city saw the benefit, as did the DRS, of holding a design research conference in an environment that values design in all kinds of contexts; values aligned to those of the DRS. Design research, of course, is not identical to design, and a central question in our early meetings was what impact and legacy the conference could have on Bilbao and the Basque region. Shouldn't conferences be more than just a bunch of academics flying across the world to a location where they present papers to each other, and then leaving? We talked about how we could discuss and work on local issues that affect



the Bilbao region but that also resonated globally; we talked about how to involve local professionals and organisations in design research; and we talked about how to raise awareness about the importance of design research. Both the new DRS Labs and the keynote debates engage directly with these issues. The design of this conference has been considered from many angles and in its final form we hope that we have struck a good balance.

A central focus on academic quality in design research remains, with the paper presentation once again forming the core of the conference. We started in July 2021 with a call for theme tracks, receiving 41 proposals, and selecting 31. Many were familiar subject areas, but a significant number of new subjects have emerged. It seems to us that design research is extending further outwards, bringing new perspectives to disciplines such as anthropology, politics, economics, healthcare, and others. The field continues to develop its core subject areas, with new methods, approaches, technologies, and philosophies all evident in these proceedings. Also emerging is a focus on how to deal with our uncertain futures, for example through societal transitions, transdisciplinarity, transformations, and pluriversality. The themes that have emerged for DRS2022 represent a rich snapshot of the current state of the art in world design research.

The richness of content presented another problem, however. How do we prevent so many interesting sub-disciplines from fragmenting the field of design research? There is a real danger that we end up in small, specialised communities of researchers talking to ourselves. That may be necessary and desirable in some cases, but the risk is that we lose the shape and understanding of the discipline as a whole. At this point, with the hoped-for return to (pre-Covid) 'normality' imminent we felt that something different, as a conference format, was needed. Our solution has been to extend the conference over a longer period of time and have fewer parallel tracks. Previous conferences have had up to ten parallel tracks with participants effectively experiencing very different conferences, in terms of content, depending on which stream of tracks they selected. Taking more time with fewer parallel tracks means that sessions at DRS2022 may be better attended, with more people exposed to ideas that they might not have come across with more tracks. Holding the conference over a longer period of time allows for more coherence, discussion, and learning, while also creating opportunities for the informal networking where future research partnerships and initiatives are forged.

Our call for papers resulted in 588 full paper submissions which all received at least two peer reviews (and with a large proportion receiving three peer reviews, which helped to further drive-up the quality of final papers). In total 1308 reviews were written by the international board of reviewers. All authors were able to provide feedback and rate their peer reviews. An average score of 6/10 (for both accepted and rejected papers) suggests that reviewing was acceptable, but that more work needs to

be done in nurturing the reviewer community. Following peer review, 81 papers were accepted, 236 were provisionally accepted pending revision, and 271 papers were rejected. At the conclusion of the review process, we accepted 317 papers for presentation and publication in the DRS Digital Library. This represents an acceptance rate of 54%. We think this strikes a good balance between publishing high-quality research and allowing a broad variety of contemporary issues and concerns in design research to be made available.

Design researchers must continue to strive to produce high-quality research: research that is carefully argued and evidence-based. While some conferences approach design research in more of a 'show and tell' manner, with DRS conferences we aim for research that is contextualised and argued in a way which will have a greater long-term impact. Many of the papers in this conference demonstrate these qualities. We should continue to bear in mind the distinction between design research and design itself. Design research is different from design, though it clearly depends on design and design activities for its meaning. Good design research asks well considered questions and answers them in interesting, innovative, and rigorous ways. Good design research leaves a legacy for others to build on.

One community of design researchers deserves a special mention in this respect, and that is the community of PhD researchers who now make up a substantial part of the DRS membership and design research more generally. This is a community that has grown considerably over past years, forming the next generation of design researchers. For many PhD researchers, who have become used to online conferences through the pandemic, DRS2022 is the first opportunity to participate in a conference in person and experience the benefits that can result—new ideas, new colleagues, new opportunities—that online conferences have sometimes struggled to recreate. Many older academics can trace important developments in their career to conferences. The progress of the design research PhD has been significant in recent years and is on show at DRS2022. PhD researchers are tackling contemporary subjects in new and exciting ways, in many cases surpassing previous generations with their insight.

We should also note how the DRS itself has developed in the past two years, since governance changes have allowed a more international and inclusive organization to take shape. This is also reflected in the geographical make-up in the production of the conference, with authors and reviewers participating from 64 countries; the majority are from Europe and the USA, with the top five countries being the UK (19%), the USA (12%), The Netherlands (10%), Denmark (6%) and Italy (6%). Notable countries for increased contributions are China (4%) and India (2%).

The biennial conference remains the major event for the DRS as an organisation, but we now have a healthy ecosystem of Special Interest Groups, Networks, and communities all offering events and initiatives of their own. We have a more active membership and opportunities for regular communications between members.

Supporting recent developments in the DRS has been our open access Digital Library: in place since 2020, the Library is now a central hub for disseminating design research. The Library is also a place where we can connect with and promote other design research communities. For example, the recent partnership with Nordes (Nordic Design Research), for example, has made more widely available a high-quality catalogue of design research.

We hope that DRS2022 will be a celebration of new ideas, of new connections, of increasing diversity, and of ways of doing things together that many have missed intensely. We also welcome opportunities for new, hybrid approaches to gathering. We should certainly look back and celebrate what we have achieved as a discipline but above all we should look forward to the potential that design research has in helping us to see older disciplines from new perspectives, to translate concepts and methods between fields, and to enable technologies to bring people together through new communicative formats. We hope that the ideas shared and the relationships created at DRS2022—whether in person, online, or a combination of both—will be powerful catalysts for design research’s positive contributions to the future.

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We have many people to thank in making DRS2022 happen. Above all, we have to thank everyone at Bilbao Ekintza, and especially Carolina Gutiérrez Gabriel, for her commitment, energy, trust, and professionalism. We have had many meetings, and grown into a highly effective team. It has been a joy to work together and with the amazing City of Bilbao. We would also like to thank the University of the Basque Country and other local universities who provided resources and allowed their staff to contribute to DRS2022.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to all the Theme Track Chairs who have put so much time and effort into producing their themes, as well as to the Reviewers who provided constructive criticism to help develop individual paper. And then, of course, we thank all the authors themselves who submitted their work for review. Some have been accepted and some rejected but we hope all have grown from the experience and will participate in future DRS conferences.

Finally, we should also thank two TU Delft Master’s students: Caroline Häger wrote her thesis on the design of academic conferences in the future, which provided valuable inspiration for us as we planned DRS2022 as a hybrid event; and, Lenny Martinez Dominguez worked countless hours—right up to the last moment—to format papers for the conference proceedings.

DRS2022 Proceedings Editors:

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