Six Reflections on Inclusive Design Research in 2022; DRS conference and beyond

Dr Farnaz Nickpour - July 11, 2022

It was a pleasure to chair the Inclusive Design Practice and Healthy Ageing track sessions in-person at the 2022 Design Research Society conference at Bilbao. DRS2022 was the biggest and most ambitious DRS conference to date and we had a total of 11 paper presentations, covering a wide and invigorating range of topics. The two track sessions were organised around themes of 'Perspectives & Reflections' and 'Practices & Guidance' respectively. Presentation formats were equally diverse, including in-person presentations (5), online presentations (4) and pre-recorded videos (2).

Some observations having chaired these sessions and having had multiple conversations and reflections in the wider context of DRS conference:

1. A vibrant PhD generation

It is amazing to see a new generation of inclusive design researchers emerging. We had a strong presence from PhD researchers (6 out of 11 papers) bringing to the front interesting key topics. Cara Shaw proposed a framework for inclusive design as an agent of narratives; Haiou Zhu explored the roles of inclusive design in fulfilling Corporate Social Responsibility; Maxim Lamirande probed present-day understandings of designing inclusively from the perspective of practitioners; Luka Kille developed a first critical timeline review of narratives and milestones of inclusive design; Anya Petyaeva proposed a methodology to improve the understanding of the user trial sample's skew and to identify the characteristics of those who are missing; and Rik Wesselink collated, developed and analysed a framework of design principles for dementia. Well done to all these researchers.

Investing in a vibrant, well-trained and well-connected community of PhD researchers offers high ROI and helps build a robust foundation for our future. There was also excellent planning and provision for PhD community throughout the conference - we had an impressive two-day PhD event with well-organised activities and relevant and topical content, as well as mentoring sessions for PhD researchers throughout the conference. This is excellent work by DRS.

2. Inclusive design as both a philosophy and a practice

We need progressing both fronts if we are to remain current and impactful as a field. At DRS this year, we saw a better balance of both - some much-needed critical reflections and progressive perspectives on inclusive design, as well as granular practical views and much needed guidance on the application of inclusive design. I have provided a list of papers presented under each theme, to offer a closer view on the range of topics explored. We know one of our dilemmas in inclusive design is the existing disconnect between theory and practice. These two distinct types of inquiry (theoretical/philosophical and practical) could and should symbiotically inform and inspire each other and it was good to see some online and in-person conversations inspired by their interplay - at least in the context of the conference.

¡Buenas!

Inclusive Design Practice & Healthy Ageing [I]
In-person Chair: Dr Farnaz Nickpour, University of Liverpool
Online Chair: Professor Hua Dong, Brunel University London

[I] Perspectives & Reflections

1. **Design as a Practice of Care:**
   Feminist Perspectives on Preventing Harm and Promoting Healing through Design [online]
2. **Design as an Agent of Narratives:**
   A Conceptual Framework and a First Exploration in the Context of Inclusive Paediatric Mobility Design [online]
3. **Exploring the Roles of Inclusive Design in Fulfilling Corporate Social Responsibility:**
   A Multi-case Study of Three Large-size mHealth Corporations [in-person]
4. **Notions of designing inclusively from practitioner perspectives** [in-person]
5. **The Evolution of Inclusive Design;**
   A First Timeline Review of Narratives and Milestones of Design for Disability [in-person]

Figure 1. Inclusive Design Practice and Healthy Ageing track session one papers in DRS2022 conference

When it comes to inclusive design practice, perhaps we need to more clearly define success and failure and more rigorously measure and report back on the outcome, impact and value of our work? Looking through a **maturity matrix** lens, inclusive design should be at a stage where it could do this better. Where are we now and what is the next stage, what are we doing well, and what capabilities do we need to improve our performance?

¡Buenas!

Inclusive Design Practice & Healthy Ageing [II]

In-person Chair: Dr Farnaz Nickpour, University of Liverpool
Online Chair: Dr Chris McGinley, Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, Royal College of Art
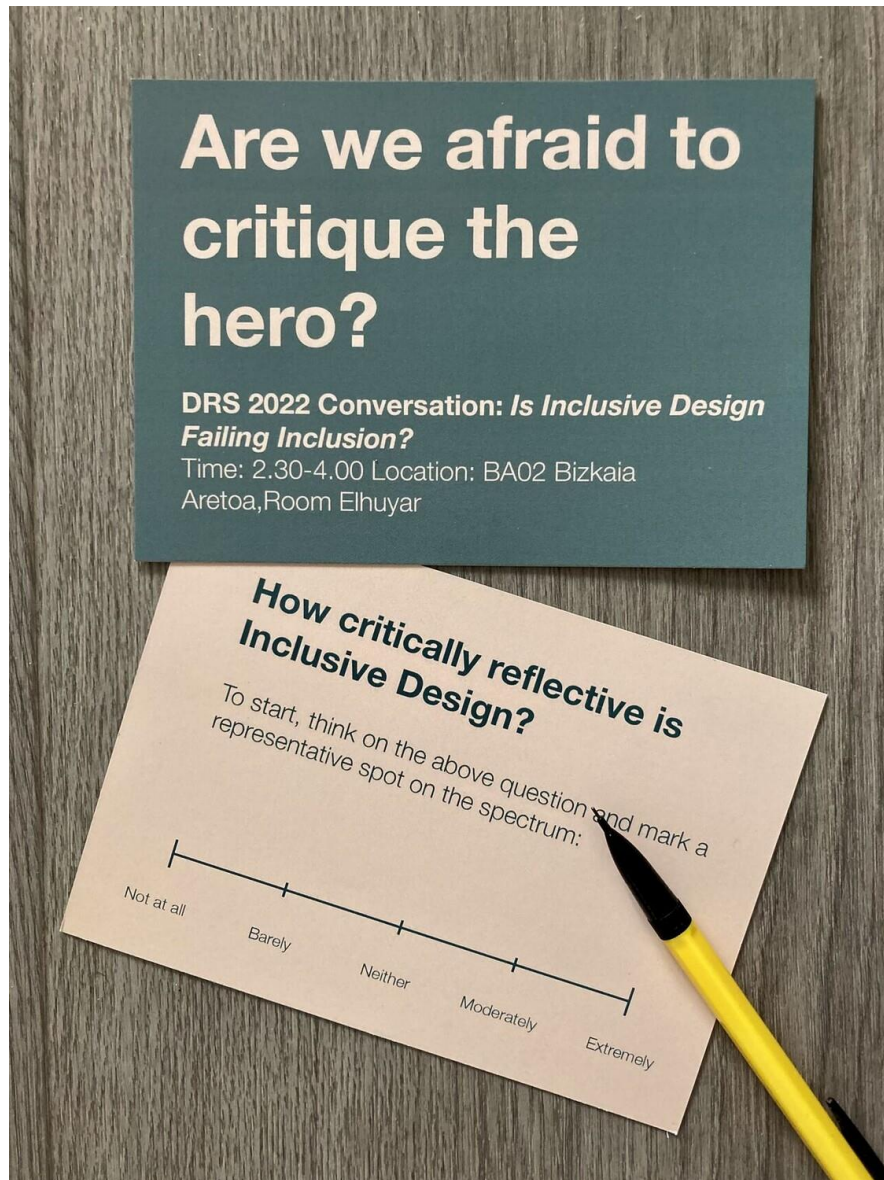
[II] Guidance & Practices

1. **Values arising from participatory inclusive design in a complex process**
   [online]
2. **Improving our understanding of user trial samples using survey data**
   [in person]
3. **Designing for dementia: An analysis of design principles**
   [in person]
4. **How to Apply Service Design Thinking on Designing Accessibility Apps:**
   A Case Study of public transportation for the Visually Impaired [online]
5. **Identifying inclusive design goals for the blind and visually impaired in Venice**
   [online]
6. **Significance of age-friendly co-design from a multi-stakeholder collaboration in Greenland** [online]

Figure 2. Inclusive Design Practice and Healthy Ageing track session two papers in DRS2022 conference

3. [Inclusive] Design in crisis?

It was great to see the timely release of **the little book of Designers' Existential Crises in 2022** edited by Emmanuel Tsekleves and Lesley Ann Noel. In this little book, the editors reflect on the notion that 'if you're not in existential crisis as a designer in 2022, maybe you're not doing it right', and pose a single question to authors from social design, education design, sustainability design, wellbeing design and global health design fields; "**What are the existential crises of designers today [2022]?**"

The same question, and perhaps more importantly, the same critical approach, is highly relevant to the inclusive design field and the community of inclusive design researchers. It was interesting to see this echoed from within the field with an over-subscribed DRS Conversation session run by Luka Kille and myself, provocatively titled "**Is Inclusive Design Failing Inclusion? Mapping dilemmas at the core philosophy and practice of inclusive design**". As a community of research and practice, we are well aware of many of our dilemmas, while for some others, we need to adopt a transdisciplinary lens and excavate and co-define them together with other fields. Going forward, what do we do about these dilemmas and crises, and how do we best capture and communicate them to inform and advance the field? Does this require a more collective approach?

Figure 3. Reflection cards from DRS 2022 Conversation "Is Inclusive Design Failing Inclusion; Mapping dilemmas at the core philosophy and practice of inclusive design" (Kille and Nickpour, 2022)

4. Beyond euro-centrism and global north?

Inclusion is a common theme across many of United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and inclusive design is acutely relevant to a multitude of contexts and communities, beyond Europe and North America. 0 out of the 11 inclusive design papers presented at DRS 2022 was from Global South and 6 out of 11 were from the UK. Is this a fully representative picture? What does this mean and say about us as the inclusive design community at DRS? And more importantly, how does this reflect on, impact and inform the field going forward? There are no simple easy answers. More questions need to be asked, if we are to fully understand our current states of representation as a field that is built around the very concepts of inclusion and diversity.
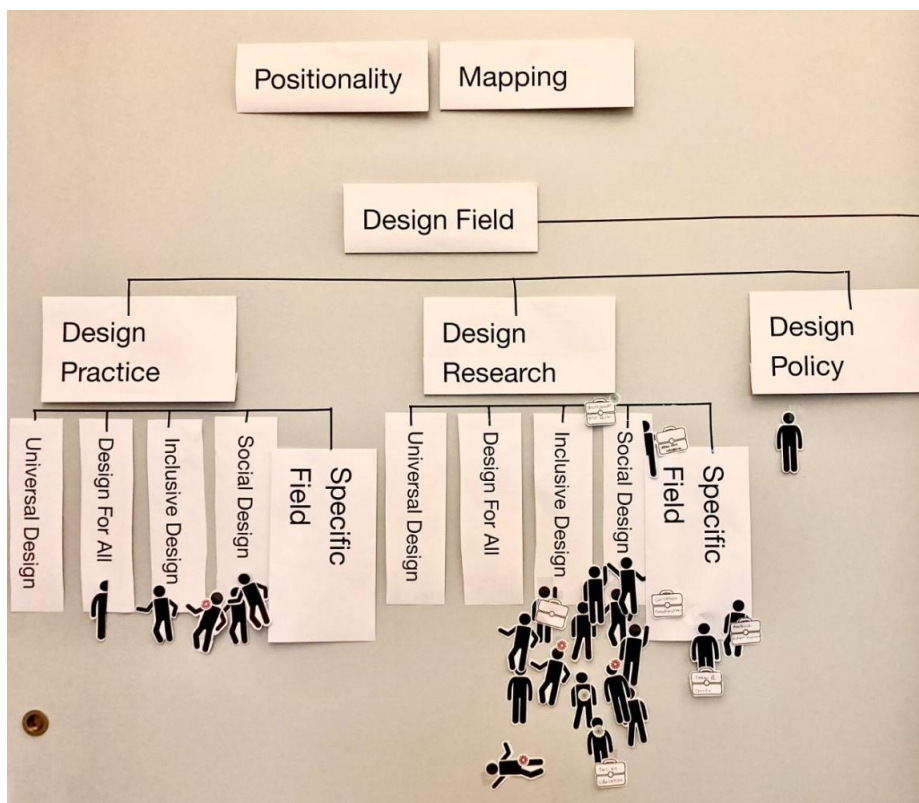
5. Inclusive design positionality?

Inclusion is popular and aspirational and yet a highly contentious topic in 2022 - exposing complexities, contradictions and compromises. As a progressive field, how do we define our position in relation to some of the more contemporary and critical issues of our time?

- **On a societal level** for example - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) has risen to the top of the societal, organisational and educational agenda. This is a major step forward, and prone to tick-boxing and tokenism. This is also a timely opportunity for inclusive design to step in and offer valuable conceptual/methodological/empirical expertise. How should inclusive design dialogue with and inform EDI and are opportunities for such conversations and contributions being realised?
- **On an inter-disciplinary level** for example - is inclusive design actively engaged with important voices from outside the field, such as critical disability studies? And as such, how does inclusive design relate and respond to increasingly relevant perspectives of intersectionality and techno-ableism?
- **On an intra-disciplinary level** for example - how do we position ourselves in relation to relevant emerging approaches within the design field, such as system-shifting design and design justice? How could inclusive design be applied on a transformative system-shifting level and how could inclusive design actively contribute to design justice - moving beyond the equality and equity mandate?

Do we think our inclusive design research agenda and priorities are in keeping with key challenges and priorities of our times, or are we possibly falling behind?

Figure 4. Positionality Mapping for participants at DRS 2022 Conversation "Is Inclusive Design Failing Inclusion; Mapping dilemmas at the core philosophy and practice of inclusive design" (Kille and Nickpour, 2022)

And finally, a note on platform:

6. The pains and pleasures of hybrid

The hybrid format exposed teething problems and challenges and offered new enhanced opportunities for inclusive engagement and open conversation. Accessibility was a major issue within and across in-person and online platforms. This is something the inclusive design community could do better at - leading by example. This is also something the inclusive design community should more actively demand for and provide input on - working with organisers of such events. We are learning, and this is new to all of us, and we could surely do this better.

Beyond challenges and shortcomings, hybrid platform also offered excellent and sometimes serendipitous opportunities - multiple parallel modes of streaming and interaction during the sessions, offered less hierarchical and more open, engaged and inclusive grounds for healthy debates. We had some very interesting conversations in the 'online room' which could not have happened in the 'physical room' without disrupting the session. Each platform has its own merits and hybrid seems to be the sensible, even though not the easiest, way forward.

- You can read our DRS 2022 **Inclusive Design Practice and Healthy Ageing editorial**.
- All paper proceedings for DRS2022, including these 11 papers, are freely available on the **DRS Digital Library**.

Thank you to our excellent online chairs Professor Hua Dong and Dr Chris McGinley. And thank you to all presenters and authors who contributed to this track - those who joined us in Bilbao, online or through their recordings.

In an attempt to create a more connected community of inclusive design researchers, I have tried to include all authors and their contributions here:

1. Alison Place (USA) - **Design as a Practice of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Preventing Harm and Promoting Healing through Design**
2. Cara Shaw, Farnaz Nickpour (UK) - **Design as an Agent of Narratives: A Conceptual Framework and a First Exploration in the Context of Inclusive Paediatric Mobility Design**
3. Haiou Zhu, Cees de Bont, Thorsten Gruber, Hua Dong (UK) - **Exploring the Roles of Inclusive Design in Fulfilling Corporate Social Responsibility: A Multi-case Study of Three Large-size mHealth Corporations**
4. Maxim Lamirande, Katerina Alexiou, Rachael Luck (UK) - **Notions of designing inclusively from practitioner perspectives**
5. Luka Kille-Speckter, Farnaz Nickpour (UK) - **The Evolution of Inclusive Design; A First Timeline Review of Narratives and Milestones of Design for Disability**
6. Stella Boess, Floris Jansen (The Netherlands) - **Values arising from participatory inclusive design in a complex process**
7. Anya Petyaeva, Joy Goodman-Deane, Mike Bradley, Sam Waller, P. John Clarkson (UK) - **Improving our understanding of user trial samples using survey data**

8. Rik Wesselink, Geke Ludden, Marike Hettinga, Berry Eggen (The Netherlands) - **Designing for dementia: An analysis of design principles**
9. Yi Lee, Tang Hsien-Hui (Taiwan) - **How to Apply Service Design Thinking on Designing Accessibility Apps: A Case Study of public transportation for the Visually Impaired**
10. Luca Casarotto, Pietro Costa, Erika Cunico, Maria Manfroni, Calogero Mattia Priola (Italy) - **Identifying inclusive design goals for the blind and visually impaired in Venice**
11. Sidse Carroll, Kamilla Nørtoft (UK and Denmark) - **Significance of age-friendly co-design from a multi-stakeholder collaboration in Greenland**

Let us keep up the good work, and let us be more connected and collective. We are better together.

Dr Farnaz Nickpour
11 July 2022