Europe/Australasia Sounding Panels 1&2

25 & 30 March 2021

The first series of Europe/Australasia Sounding Panel sessions took place in late March 2021. Topics discussed largely related to the themes of integration, systemic, transition, time, iteration, communication, scale and measurement. Topics common to both workshops aligned with the first four of these themes only. In relation to Integration, commonly discussed topics included intent versus use, physical versus virtual, the increasing need for specialist stakeholders in the design process and the need to consider the tension between power and trust in the briefing process. From a systemic perspective, increasing recognition of the environmental context and climate change were recognised in both sessions. Both groups discussed the transitional role of changing perceptions and values as part of the briefing process with Session 2 participants further elaborating on issues around organisational change. Time was also a consideration across panel sessions, particularly in relation to increasing pace and the 'speeding up of time'.

Session 1 further elaborated on systemic issues such as adding value to projects and the contribution to society made through briefing. Flow-on effects of societal and individual well-being as a result of sustainable and well-designed environments was also discussed. The importance of communication to help clients understand contexts and possibilities as well as manage their expectations was raised. As well, the need for techniques to support participatory processes and the benefits of communicating in indirect ways or through metaphor was addressed. Topics around iteration (continuity, adaptation and structure versus openness), scale (size of projects and new versus existing projects) and measurement (criteria, tools and real-time data) were discussed in this first session only.

In session 2, issues such as the need for a common language amongst designers and multiple stakeholders was important. Story telling was discussed as a technique to aid in achieving common understandings. Other integrative topics addressed were organisation versus space, or the abstract versus concrete. From a systemic perspective, contextual factors such as regulation and policy was discussed as critical to consider as part of briefing and design. Issues around time related to the need for long term forecasting and perspective change when considering distant horizons. Two other items discussed in the second session were the benefits of briefing as a means of alignment and team building, and the challenges of briefing for speculative development.

The number of paradoxes emergent from panels discussions alluded to many tensions needing to be addressed as part of briefing processes. In addition, it was felt that there were many interpretations of briefing and that as part of our process, we needed to define a clear terminology for it.

The Americas/Europe Sounding Panel

2 June 2021

Our third Sounding Panel session took place in early June 2021 with thirteen attendees from the UK, USA, Germany, Sweden and Argentina. It was noted that the term 'briefing' was not commonly adopted in The Americas, with 'programming' more commonly used in relation to procurement structures for major projects.
Key themes which emerged from this session, common to **both** the Australasia/Europe panel sessions, related to briefing as a systems based wholistic approach, and a process of shifting of mental models and change management. Also common to the three sessions were questions around who was involved in briefing, who led the process and as a result, who held the power. Other themes which had emerged in a previous session included:

- the availability of data to enable constant analysis, and for briefing to be a continuous process. The potential of prototyping was recognised as an opportunity to engage with an iterative briefing process;
- the extended nature of time required to brief for both the short and the long term. It was noted that "time well spent in briefing led to space being well utilised";
- the nature of briefing for both physical and virtual contexts was also raised, recognising that briefing was not for a singular product, but a multiplicity of spaces.

A human-centred and participatory approach to briefing was considered important to adequately capture collective aims and objectives from different communities. It was seen as a necessary approach ("campaign") to attract and involve future users and to incite a sense of belonging. A discussion around the term 'scale' related to not just the spatial, but also the scale of audience or scale of impact of outcome.

Finally, theoretical frameworks which could help explain briefing were discussed, recognising that bringing together research and practice was a valuable approach in exploring the topic of briefing.

Urban sounding panel

6 June 2021

Fifteen representatives from Australia, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland and the UK attended our sounding panel session focussed on the urban context. Central to the conversation was the integrative nature of briefing, particularly in relation to:

- Inclusion of stakeholders to ensure shared values, vision and intent;
- Consideration of multiple voices, including for people that aren't in the room (including past, present and future voices);
- Looking outwards including into other relevant domains;
- The need for connectedness and porous boundaries (crossing the red line, public vs private).

Briefing was considered a living process, involving constant negotiation and debate with storytelling an important part of the communication, translation and generation of shared understandings. Technology was recognised as a useful tool to support the measurement and decision-making process in the iterative nature of briefing.

The systemic nature of briefing was discussed, relating to societal and environmental challenges, and human and digital experiences within varying political contexts. The governance framework was recognised as a critical influence on the nature of the briefing process required.

Time was a distinct factor in urban development, with urban briefs requiring endurance and resilience to direct and influence good choices taken forward by others often not involved in the briefing process itself. Change was a commonly occurring theme, relating to system and practice change, human adaptation and capability shifts.

Many dualities were raised including definition vs freedom and flexibility, IP and disclosure, and power and trust. Other important qualities to a briefing process were genuineness, relevance, and the enabling of space for creativity and innovation.

Key to Themes

Themes	Common topics across Australasia/Europe sessions	Australasia/Europe 25.03.21	Australasia/Europe 30.03.21	Americas/Europe 02.06.21	Urban context 06.06.21
Integration	• Intent v use ◦ Aspiration v need • Specialist stakeholders • Physical v virtual		• Organisation v space • Construction context • Abstract v concrete	• Systems based wholistic approach • Multiplicity of spaces – not a singular product • Collective, participatory and human-centred	• Inclusion • Shared intent • Vision • Values • Relevance • Past/future voices • Future decision makers • Looking outwards • Wholistic • Bringing in other domains • Public v private • Porous boundaries (the red line) / Connectedness
Systemic	• Environmental	• Well-being • Contribution to society / Better futures / Adding value • Supply v demand • Alternative solutions • Efficiency	• Policy • System thinking		• Societal challenges/social integration • Human experience • Digital experience • Politics • Environmental • Governance

Category	Col1	Col2	Col3	Col4	Col5
Transition	• Changing perceptions and values	• Changing perceptions and values	• Organisational change	• Change managements • Shifting mental models	• System change • Practice change • Capability shift • Human adaptation • Resilience • Mega-cities
Time	• Pace/speeding up of time	• Duration	• Long term forecasting • Time v perception	• Effectiveness of time investment • Duration of process	• Time + scale • Changing personnel • Endurance
Iteration		• Early stage v POE • Continuity • Adaptive • Structure v openness		• Prototyping • Continuous process	• Negotiation • Process / Living process • Reuse existing
Communication		• Tools for participatory processes • Indirect questions/metaphor • Managing expectations • Helping clients understand context	• Terminology (for briefing) • Common language • Story telling • Community engagement	• The "campaign" – to attract, involve and incite a sense of belonging • Story telling	• IP v disclosure • Generate debate • Translation • Story telling
Scale		• New v existing • Size of project / building		• Spatial / Audience / Impact	• Time and scale
Measurement		• Criteria • Tools • Realtime data		• Data/constant analysis	• Technology to support decision-making • Measurable

| Other | • Power v trust | | • Team building
• Speculative development/risk | • Power balance
• Bringing together research and practice | • Genuineness
• Creativity
• Freedom + flexibility
• Power v trust
• Contested land
• Bridging theory and practice |

Transformative Design & Transformative Practice Sounding panels

28 & 29 July 2021

In late July we had two Sounding Panel sessions focussed on the human experience. The first one brought together participants from Hong Kong, Sweden, Australia, Scotland, the UK and the Netherlands to discuss transformative design. The second conversation, with attendees from Scotland, Australia and the UK focussed on transformative practice.

Key themes from both discussions related to the importance of values, culture, context and ethics in briefing. Bringing together a wide range of people to discuss, negotiate, understand other perspectives and ultimately seek agreement was considered a critical part of the briefing process. Participation was seen to bring 'culture' into the core of projects and aligned with many First Nations practices. Combined elements of place, space, people and culture were enablers of the 'eco-system of experience' and an important lens through which to explore briefing. Ultimately, in order to be successful, briefing needs to be meaningful and authentic for people, building relationships and trust, and empowering and enabling future users to take projects forward.

Both top down and bottom-up processes were recognised as important - leadership is an enabler for changed operations. In addition, addressing major societal and environmental issues such as inequality and sustainability requires governance and policy. It was felt that we need to brief in ways that recognise multiple types of value for multiple kinds of biodiversity.

Addressing paradoxes has been a reoccurring theme across all our Sounding Panel sessions. Iterative and circular processes, requiring the investment of time, enable the feedback loops required to adequately bring out the richness and dimensions of binary contexts. Rather than being linear, or elegant, these continuous and emergent processes were described as 'messy' with outputs that were 'unknowable and intangible and successful as a result of this'.

In relation to measurement, criteria beyond the elemental (such as environmental conditions and comfort) were raised. These included well-being and productivity as well as emotion and belonging. It was noted that although we are now able to capture data in multiple ways, what was important was how we interpret and make sense of context dependent data.

The use of narrative and storytelling once again emerged as a means of capturing the contexts, aspirations and needs of communities in authentic ways. Other mediums were also discussed in relation to the need to align a common language between different parties.

On one level, it was felt that people were implementing the same assumptions post pandemic despite the major impact it has had on communities around the world. On another, the pandemic was seen to have sped up what we're now experiencing. Recognising the scale and pace of change, transformation of lifestyles and infrastructure, and growth of uncertainty, was the need for capacity building of people and communities as well as of designers and clients. The discussion from both sessions pointed to

the need for designers to 'move upstream' to be in a greater position of power. This required new ways of briefing and practice, and new ways of educating architects to be in practice.

Key to Themes

Themes	Common topics across Transformative design and practice sessions	Transformative design 28.07.21	Transformative practice 29.07.21
Integration	- Values - Context - Ethics - Paradoxes - Inclusion - Experiences - Operations/use	- Values - Culture and context - Ethics - Meaningful - Paradoxes - Expectations and outcomes - Thinking and doing - Breaking silos - Human experience - Inclusion – bringing people together - Participatory - First Nations - Educating clients - Operations brief / leadership role - Intangibles	- Values - Context - Ethics - Authenticity - Relationships - Trust - Paradoxes - Inclusion - Experience - Capturing richness and dimensions - An agreement - Operations
Systemic	Need for governance and policy	- Multiple types of value (biodiversity) - Governance	- Inequality - Politics - Policy - Power - Sustainability
Transition	- Uncertainty - Transformational change - Capacity building/enabling	- Changing perception of design - Transformational change - Enabling - Agency - Uncertainty	- Empowerment - Transformational change - Capacity building - Uncertainty
Time	Change over time	Pandemic (speeding up)	Change over time

		• Transience • Change over time	• Ownership over time • Investing time in the process
Iteration	• Continuity	• Circular processes • Feedback loop	• Continuity • Messiness • Emergence
Communication	• Mediums/language	• Narrative and storytelling • Mediums • Translation	• Informed decision making • Facilitation • Language • Computer modelling
Scale			• Scale and pace of change • Megacities

Measurement		• Integrating criteria (beyond elemental)
		   o Emotion and value
		   o Wellbeing and productivity
		• Interpreting data
		• Context dependent
		• Imperfection
			• Technology

Other	• Need for new ways of practice & briefing	• New ways of practice • Understanding constraints • Flexibility and adaptability • Clarity around book audience • Should it be a network or a platform?	• Need to move upstream • New ways of working/briefing • New ways of educating architects