

Introduction: Experiential Knowledge

Nithikul Nimkulrat

Estonian academy of arts

DOI: [10.21606/drs.2016.607](https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.607)

Since the last decade, the Design Research Society (DRS) has begun to set up Special Interest Groups (SIGs) in response to the requests of its international membership, as a way of providing the DRS members with forums for their interests that they can engage and work actively together internationally. The Special Interest Groups organise events and discussion in a number of ways to facilitate the exchange and development of best practice in the field. The first Special Interest Group under the umbrella of the DRS is the Special Interest Group on Experiential Knowledge (EKSIG). EKSIG is concerned with the understanding and role of knowledge in research and professional design practice in order to clarify fundamental principles and practices of using design practice within research both with regard to research regulations and requirements, and research methodology.

EKSIG's interest in knowledge in the creative industries has arisen from the modification of PhD degree regulations to include design practice as a significant part of the research process, first in the UK and later in other European countries and Australasia. The inclusion of design practice in research has led to debates about knowledge in research, i.e. about what we mean by a 'contribution to knowledge' and how new knowledge advances the creative fields. In the UK, Research Excellence Framework 2014 (REF2014)'s overview report, art and design is considered 'the largest sector for the production of research through practice, and as such is a leader in the elaboration of emergent approaches to knowledge' (REF2014, p. 90). This confirms that design research is playing and will play an important role in the production of knowledge through research that has practice as the key component in the process of inquiry.

Focus and Aims

Definitions of knowledge and the contribution to the published corpus have significant implications for doctoral examination and peer review of research generally. A central focus of EKSIG is the clarification of research requirements, such as the contribution to knowledge,



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

in relation to the purposes of research and professional practice to advance respective fields. Fundamental to this is a concern with the integration of explicit and tacit knowledge in order to accommodate the complex knowledge of practice within research, including propositional, procedural and experiential knowledge.

The main aims of EKSIG are: (1) to investigate and advance the understanding of ‘knowledge’ and ‘contribution to knowledge’ in design research, particularly in areas where the act of designing forms part of the research process; (2) to develop principles and criteria of design research for employing different kinds of knowledge and means for communicating such knowledge; and (3) to encourage the implementation of the principles and criteria developed within the current research policy to promote quality, standards and best practices in research.

Contribution to Design Research

The notion of practice-based or practice-led research, which signifies the inclusion of creative practice, has become a topic for debate in a number of conference series, such as *Research into Practice* (2000–8), *Doctoral Education in Design* (1998–2011), *The Art of Research* (2007–) and *Research through Design* (2013–) conferences.

To contribute to this debate, with a focus on the development of principles and criteria of design research for employing experiential knowledge and means for the communication of such knowledge, the first EKSIG conference was inaugurated in 2007 and has since been organised biennially. Each EKSIG conference has a specific theme relevant to EKSIG’s focus on propositional, procedural and experiential knowledge of professional practice within research, as the following: (1) *EKSIG 2007: New Knowledge in the Creative Disciplines* hosted by University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, UK; (2) *EKSIG 2009: Experiential Knowledge, Method and Methodology* hosted by London Metropolitan University, London, UK; (3) *EKSIG 2011: SkinDeep – Experiential Knowledge and Multi Sensory Communication* hosted by University for the Creative Arts, Farnham Castle, UK; (4) *EKSIG 2013: Knowing Inside Out – Experiential Knowledge, Expertise and Connoisseurship* hosted by Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK; and (5) *EKSIG 2015: Tangible Means – Experiential Knowledge Through Materials* hosted by Design School Kolding, Kolding, Denmark. The next EKSIG conference will be hosted by Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) in the Netherlands in 2017. The theme of the conference is *Alive, Active, Adaptive: Experiential Knowledge in Designing with (Im)Materials*.

All papers selected for presentation at the EKSIG conferences are published in the conference proceedings. After each conference, the papers are selected for further development for a special issue of an appropriate journal. Since 2007 EKSIG has collaborated with the following journals to publish special issues: (1) *Journal of Visual Arts Practice’s* Special Issue on New Knowledge in the Creative Disciplines (Volume 6, Issue 2, 2007); (2) *Journal of Research Practice’s* Special Issue on Research Practice in Art and Design: Experiential Knowledge and Organised Inquiry (Volume 6, Issue 2, 2010); (3) *Journal of Art*

and Design Education in Higher Education (Volume 10 Issue 2, 2012); and (4) *Journal of Research Practice* (Volume 6, Issue 2, 2015).

In addition to the EKSIG conference series, the Special Interest Group provides other recognised outlets for research, for example through strands at the DRS conferences or other related events. EKSIG also provides an identifiable focus for researchers with interests in experiential knowledge related to design and a forum for debate through a dedicated jiscmail discussion list as well as promoting collaborative research and its dissemination.

EKSIG Strand at DRS 2016

As knowledge gained by experience, experiential knowledge signifies a way of knowing about and understanding things and events through direct engagement with people and environment. The EKSIG strand at the DRS 2016 aims to examine experiential knowledge, thinking and knowing at the core of design practice, with an attempt to illuminate how a design process conducted in a research context begins and ends in the domain of experience, which is in turn changed by design.

Questions of interest are concerned with, for example:

- Methods for the communication and transfer of experiential knowledge within design research;
- The contribution of design practices to the understanding and communication of experiential knowledge in design research;
- Frameworks for guiding the reception and interpretation of professional design practices and/or artefacts within research;
- Issues evolving from criteria of research such as repeatability and transferability for the foregrounding of tacit knowledge in design research.

In response to the call, the EKSIG strand received 15 submissions from eight countries including Australia, Brazil, Belgium, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, UK and USA. Submissions were interdisciplinary and stem from a variety of disciplines within the design domain, such as architecture, experience design, industrial design, interaction design, participatory design, textile design and service design.

After a double blind review process by the conference's international review panel of 18 reviewers, four contributions have been accepted for presentation at the DRS 2016 conference. Selected papers present research and case studies that contribute to a systematic approach to studying and integrating experiential knowledge and knowing into design practice and research.

The first paper in the EKSIG strand entitled 'Double-Loop Reflective Practice as an Approach to Understanding Knowledge and Experience' by John Gribbin, Mersha Aftab, Robert Young and Sumin Park explores approaches to developing practitioner awareness of their own reflective practice. It expands an area of inquiry concerning tacit and explicit (skills) areas of

design knowledge through double-loop reflective practice that potentially provides greater awareness of tacit knowledge and experience. Second, Valerie Van der Lindena, Hua Dong and Ann Heylighen's paper titled 'Designing "little worlds" in Walnut Park: How architects adopted an ethnographic case study on living with dementia' addresses how architects understand the users of their designs, with a focus on how to most fruitfully promote effective knowledge transfer. The paper argues for ethnographic research in architectural practices as a helpful research approach to identifying specific designerly ways of knowing about users. Third, 'Bonding through Designing; How a Participatory Approach to Videography can Catalyse an Emotive and Reflective Dialogue with Young People' by Marianne McAra presents a study in which participatory design practice, focusing on the use of direct animation techniques, were used to enable dialogue with vulnerable young people who can be described as being with the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) group. Several key contextual and methodological findings are reported through the author's reflective account. The last contribution to the strand is Valerie Van der Lindena, Iris Van Steenwinkela, Hua Dong and Ann Heylighen's paper 'Designing "Little Worlds" in Walnut Park: How Architects Adopted an Ethnographic Case Study on Living with Dementia'. In this paper, an ethnographic case study about a person living with dementia is examined as an example of knowledge transfer from the research context to the architectural design process of a residential care facility.

Although the four papers differ from one another in scope, the issues relating to tacit knowledge and the value of experience within design processes form a clear link between them.

Reference

Research Excellence Framework (2014). *REF 2014 Panel overview report by Main Panel D and Sub-panels 27 to 36*.
<<http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref/content/expanel/member/Main%20Panel%20D%20overview%20report.pdf>> (assessed 4 May 2016).