



DECADE: Emerging practice The recession: a catalyst for change?

Few architectural practices were untouched by the economic changes of the last ten years. The implosion of private investment saw the architectural opportunities of the late 90s and early 'noughties' disappear for established practices – thus, emerging practices and graduates faced a challenging prospect for work. Public procurement processes compounded the problem by awarding commissions based specifically on previous experience, and by preferring to use large consortia appointments.

Faced with this adverse climate, and with limited support, a creative community of architects and designers has emerged in Scotland. They are self-starting, motivated and innovative. This generation is tackling some of the important issues we face: involving people in shaping their surroundings; making architecture and design more useful to society as a whole; designing new types of spaces for our changing needs; and, critically, building to minimise waste.

Freed from the constraints of the prevailing, conventional 'this is how we do it' structures, and with emphasis on cross-discipline collaboration, imaginative teams are exploring new ways of working and challenging established assumptions. Their effort and innovation is influencing conventional practice and approaches.

Emerging practice demonstrates hugely positive future directions and the conversations from this Decade event were inspiring. These architects and designers are developing briefing, service design and community capacity building and skills development.

They are working to promote sustainable design and off-site manufacture. They are enjoying their work and spreading that 'feel good' factor to wider communities and business.

As Michael Marra outlines in his summary, Scotland still faces future economic and social challenges. I believe our design and graduate community can meet those challenges. I hope that in the decade to come, the Scottish Government and Scotland as a whole are able, by policy and practice, to increase their contributions to our public and private investment in the built environment and communities.

Karen Anderson, Chair, A&DS

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Design in action: chiasma

by Michael Marra, Design in Action

You may remember from secondary school Biology that 'chiasma' is a biological term meaning the overlap of two chromatids in the process of meiosis. Chiasma is also the Design in Action innovation process where we bring together different people from different disciplines in a design-led process to create new ideas, new businesses and new products. The overlap in meanings should be clear.

We believe the name speaks to the organic nature of creating new concepts and the nurturing role that is frequently needed for innovation to succeed. We are Design in Action; Scotland's Knowledge Exchange Hub for the Creative Economy supported by the Art and Humanities Research Council and we are helping to address a very old problem for Scotland – our innovation deficit.

The economic rollercoaster of the past decade has taken us through the Great Recession, the longest and deepest since the Great Depression, and out the other side. In light of this, it is remarkable how little in Scottish economic policy has actually changed over the period.

The recently published Scottish Government Economic Strategy is little more than the fourth edition of 'Smart Successful Scotland' published in 2001. The focus on supply-side alignment of growth, skills and connectivity policies has remained consistent throughout subsequent iterations produced by various coalition, minority and majority governments, including three supposedly ideologically distinct political parties.

While the annual performance of the Scottish economy has closed in on that of the UK as a whole, it continues to under perform other EU regions and small nations and is arguably narrowly dependent on a small number of high performing sectors to maintain any semblance of a balance of payments. So the success or otherwise of these strategies is a mixed bag at best. Suffice to say that repetition of diagnosis is no sign that old challenges have been met successfully.

Innovation remains particularly weak. Private sector investment in research and development is among the lowest of the developed nations. The 2001 prescription of translating university research into productive growth through commercial exploitation remains a key priority in 2015. Between 2000 and 2009, rather than succeeding in addressing the R&D deficit, there was a £24bn collapse across the UK as firms sought to invest in concrete and cash rather than people and ideas.

So, what of the decade ahead? There will be little progress made if we repeat the electorally driven reheating of an out-dated economy. Real change will only be driven by new relationships between government and risk in the market place. The Scottish Government is going to have to start focusing on the business of making markets relevant to a modern Scotland.

We have a rapidly ageing population, an explosion in self-employment and the next generation of automation challenging our aspirations for, and assumptions about, our labour market. Scotland needs more innovative economic development policies if we are to foster innovation.

My prediction for the next decade is this: if we find ourselves asking the same questions, let alone providing the same tired answers in ten years' time, then we won't just be treading water, we will be drowning.

About the author:

MICHAEL MARRA is Deputy Director of Design in Action with a professional background in public policy and political affairs, including research in the Scottish and UK Parliaments, Head of Policy and Public Affairs Oxfam Scotland and as Senior Political Adviser to the Leader of the Opposition in the Scottish Parliament.

Will jamming save the world?

by Keira Anderson, Snook

Jams, hackathons, hacks, or any other name by which you might call them, see a group of people coming together, often around a common theme, to tackle barriers, find solutions and develop new ideas over a short space of time. They are quick, fun and dirty – regularly taking place over the course of a weekend. Some offer 24-hour venues, allowing participants to bring sleeping bags and work all night long if they want to.

Growing in popularity within the software development industry in the 00s, other creative industries soon began to adopt them – with events such as Game Jam and the Global Service Jam leading the way. Today, they're increasingly ubiquitous, the format being adapted (or hacked) by governments, councils, policymakers, planners, or anyone who brings a group of people together to foster creative energies and ideas.

As a service designer, I love any event that allows people to share their skills and experiences, and that allows them to experiment with often novel and inventive solutions.

Key messages: reflecting on the past 10 years

The exciting thing about a recession is that it can be a good time to take risks. If you try something new and it fails, perhaps you won't have far to fall.

Recession presents us with an opportunity to collaborate freely. If you're willing to accept that competition is of little benefit in this environment, it's a great time to open up your working practice, share what you know and learn from others.

Recession asks us to take matters into our own hands. If the established way of doing things is no longer working, perhaps we can find a new way forward for ourselves by hacking current systems and ways of thinking.

Jams and hacks are not an answer to any one problem. Within strict time constraints, they have their limitations. It is important to manage the expectations of your hackers; having fun and learning something new are the most important takeaways – workable solutions are only an added bonus.

It has been great to see jams and hacks become increasingly mainstream over the past decade. They've opened up the design process to a greater number of people, helped find new ways to solve old problems and shown the value inherent in that process.

Key messages: forecasting the next 10 years

I hope that hacking methods will continue to evolve and be adopted by different industries in a variety of ways over the coming decade – to hack public policy, for internal company development, or as a fun, creative way for the public to interact with the design process and innovate solutions for themselves.

I hope that we continue to develop clever ways to support each other to make positive and tangible change in the world. We limit ourselves when we don't share processes and ideas with one another. I hope this culture of cross-industry collaboration and support continues to flourish.

I hope that we are cautious in using rhetoric about finding new ways of working or innovating, without putting this into meaningful practice. I hope we can all stop talking and start doing.

Mostly, I hope that all of this happens before anyone realises we're no longer in recession.

About the author:

KEIRA ANDERSON is Co-Design Lead and Project Manager with Snook, an award winning Service Design agency that specialises in customer experience and service design. Snook's process is underpinned by co-creating solutions and concepts with the people who will use them.

Build small, build smart, build beautiful

by Sam Booth, Echo Living

Recession is a construct, defined as an economic decline over two-quarters of GDP, a reduction in the monetary value of the 'stuff' we make, sell and consume.

Apparently, we are now out of recession. The value of what we are producing as a nation has increased by a few fractions of percentage points. We are back on track and things will be all right ... except it doesn't feel like that.

If our climb out of recession is based on a low-wage economy and a London-centric boom, while a practice with the vision of Malcolm Fraser's can fold, then the simple monetary value of our GDP is a poor indication of the nation's health. Wellbeing, happiness or, more importantly, contentment have to be better goals to chase, especially if the current measurement of a nation's economic health relies on the continued consumption of finite global resources.

When I graduated from the GSA in the early 90s, Britain's economy was again in recession. Clients, reluctant to pay for the design of an object, were still willing to pay for its manufacture, so I set up a design-and-make studio. At the time, I was stung by a comment made by Stephen Bailey, then of the Design Museum, that this smacked of 'self-help desperation'.

Fourteen years on, after all the highs of Glasgow 1999 had faded, I set up Echo, another design-and-build studio, and Stephen Bailey might have had a point. The situation that we find ourselves in globally is one where desperation is easy to conjure, but also where self-help, whether on a national, communal or personal level –

and by its nature smaller and more sustainable in scale – should be a cause for optimism.

Echo (eco and house) was set up to promote elegance and efficiency in small-scale living, with the strapline 'build small, build smart, build beautiful'. If the measure of eco home or Passivhaus credentials is the reduction of Wh per M2, we could also look at saving energy and resources by reducing the overall meterage of our homes, not by compromising on quality, but by being clever in how we organise space and daylight.

As a small-scale business, Echo's impact will probably remain marginal, rural and funded by the holiday-let market, but I believe the approach of manufacturing modules in the workshop with very little waste, and delivering to site complete, small buildings that can be added to and grow with their users' needs, could be part of an answer to genuinely affordable homes and sustainable communities.

Small, energy-efficient buildings require little energy to power them. All our buildings are off-grid, working happily year round – even in Scotland – on Solar PV alone, and we have little recourses to build them. We use less 'stuff', make less 'stuff', consume less 'stuff' and, under current measures, we sow the seeds for 'recession'.

Perhaps I am naïve, but it seems to me we should not be looking at how we avoid another recession but at how we should re-evaluate the measure of a nation's health.

About the author:

SAM BOOTH, Echo Living, is a designer and skilled cabinetmaker who uses his skills in the creation of a collection of beautiful, hand-built, small buildings. He divides his time between the design studio and the workshop and enjoys being hands-on in the building process.

Agency in architecture

by Helen Teeling and Rob Morrison, TAKTAL

Agency in architecture

Social sciences define agency as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices, influenced by the belief structures which they have formed through their experiences.

Our experience has been affected by the unique economic circumstances of the recession, and the opportunities it has presented to explore alternative forms of practice and develop relationships with regeneration companies to develop buildings. Our decision to operate as an agency has been informed through a consolidation of our varied experience. In times of economic, climatic and social change, we felt this ability to work fluidly suited the unique context of Glasgow; allowing our work to not be pre-defined by associations with traditional architectural practice.

We realised we had to have a 'foot in both camps', connecting the users of spaces and the parties responsible for developing them. This trend is gaining momentum in many creative industries as the gap closes between producers and consumers. Our ambition is to establish a structure that allows us to actively facilitate the creative use of space, finding a response to the problem, instead of having a pre-disposition to designing a physical 'solution'.

Holistic design approaches

In response to the changing dynamics of developing creative public spaces, we believe that an increasingly holistic approach is required – one that doesn't isolate each skill or professional role, but recognises that all

(events, graphic design, architecture, communications, and business modelling) are essential to the design process. The idea of 'total concept' is so successful in delivering products, and the world's leading brands should be considered when developing creative spaces.

Research and understanding alternative business models and approaches

To further our understanding and promote new approaches to grass-roots development, we have started a research project entitled Agile City, which aims to explore how cultural projects can be more responsive to their communities. The ambition of this project is to explore and document the processes, business models and delivery structures that create sustainable projects.

We research urban projects while looking to other industries such as manufacturing, design and the tech sector, which are often more adaptive and responsive to their customers and communities. By sharing innovative practices, we aim to support grass-roots projects in being more sustainable and in making our cities more vibrant places to live.

Build / test / learn – alternative approaches to education and development

There is a positive increase in community engagement within urban planning and development, as seen with the growth of charrettes and planning workshops. While these are valuable, it is equally important to test responses physically on site with the future communities. Principles of agile development, piloting ideas and validating assumptions are now well

established in the tech and product design industries, and these are slowly emerging in urban design.

Alternative means of financing development

We believe in initiating projects through alternative means of financing and partnership, moving away from the hierarchic relationship that often exists between funders and service providers. And we are excited to see how these alternative means can be applied to urban projects.

Having worked within the creative industries, we feel the ideas of democratising investment opportunities and developing community wealth are especially important. In cities all over the world, it is common for the creative and cultural sectors to become the victims of gentrification instead of benefiting from their engagement with the regeneration process.

About the authors:

TAKTAL is an agency that produces creative projects and connects people with spaces. With roots in architecture, events and space management, TAKTAL collaborates with artists, cultural organisations, property owners and national agencies to initiate the creative use of space.