



National College of Art and Design

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Product Design, School of Design, Critical Cultures Joint Course

Collective Speculation

Carving a place for participatory speculative design
practices in public sector policy-making

By

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira describe speculative design (SD) as "going through a troubled adolescence" (2015, pg. 1). The relatively new field of design is often branded by its critics as a superficial and privileged practice with mere claims to wider significance. On the other hand, many supporters of the practice recognise its power in exploring the future, challenging the status quo of industry and catalysing change in society in an accessible and tangible way. It is a divisive practice, splitting those in the field of design. We are simultaneously living within a society that is just as divided. Polarisation and disillusionment in governance are at an all-time high, exacerbated by an inability to navigate the uncertainties of today's world. We live in a time of increasing uncertainty, the Covid-19 pandemic and climate crisis being universal signifiers of this, that our methods of governance are not built to manoeuvre. Reflecting the times in which they were established, they are outdated industrial systems with linear trajectories and hierarchical makeups, built on an unrealistic model of certainty.

Differing in that government practices are too established and unyielding, while SD practices are not established enough or, arguably, in the right way, both need to adapt and radically change to find a place in today's world. This essay explores the reasons for the shortcomings inherent in both SD and public sector policy-making. It offers an alternative approach to governance, incorporating SD practices into public policy-making. While this approach has been somewhat explored in the UK Policy Lab and the Finnish and Swedish equivalents - Sitra

and Vinnova - there is a lack of an accompanying framework to assess or replicate such endeavors systematically. Furthermore, there is a complete absence of such an approach in the context of Ireland, for which this paper aims to argue.

The first chapter examines the practice of SD, comparing its intended and actual impact. The second chapter analyses current modes of public sector policy formation, challenging the outdated governmental culture of infallibility. Instead, promoting an alternative approach driven by humility, experimentation and public participation. The final chapter outlines why we might use approaches from SD practices to achieve this and suggests how this might be achieved; through systematic inquiry combined with capacity building in order for such work and thinking to be widely adopted.

Chapter 1 - Speculative Design - Examining its intended and actual impact

1.1 Speculative Design

Coined by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, critical or speculative design is a practice where objects and systems are not designed for the 'now' but for hypothetical futures (Dunne and Raby, 2013, p.34). In their own words, speculative or critical design "rejects things as they are now as being the only possibility, it provides a critique of the prevailing situation through designs that embody alternative social, cultural, technical or economic value" (Dunne and Raby, 2001, p.58). A speculative designer collaborates with experts in various

fields - science, psychology, anthropology, social and political sciences - to investigate social, behavioural and political issues. They use foresight techniques to explore a range of plural futures ranging from the probable to the possible. They then extrapolate on these futures to generate future scenarios and design products or artefacts based in, around and for these speculated futures. The designed products of these collaborations are not intended to be used in our everyday lives but serve a deeper function. Here the role of design is to ask complex questions and make us think rather than develop products and services that are merely commercial. SD challenges us to consider the world around us and how our actions impact the world at local and global levels, both in the present and the future.

It is helpful to consider the difference between design outputs and outcomes here to see where SD bears significance. In design, the design output is "the immediate result of a design activity" (Love, 2015, n.p) which makes up the actualised design or "thing." The design outcome is the "*consequences* of the use" of the design output (Love, 2015, n.p). Design outcomes are the social, environmental, economic and personal changes that occur due to interaction with the design output. Design outputs are singular and static; they are objective and unchanging, independent of their context. Opposingly, design outcomes are multiple and dynamic; they are subjective and change depending on the context of interaction with a design output (Love, 2015). They are how a design output changes the way we think, the way we feel and the way we behave. The focus of SD very much lies within the design outcome.

An example that illustrates this process and emphasis on outcome well is the output of a collaboration between design studio Superflux and Thingtank, a research consortium that explores the social and societal effects of designed objects and the Internet of Things; *Uninvited Guests*. The project's main output is a short film in which we see the protagonist, Thomas, living alone after the death of his wife. His children send him a series of smart objects, as illustrated in Fig - 1, to remotely monitor their dad's behaviour around eating, exercise and sleep. The film shows Thomas hacking the system, paying a young teenager with beer to take his walking stick for a walk, putting books on his bed to deceive the system into thinking he had gone to bed and moving the smart fork around a plate of vegetables as he simultaneously eats fish and chips using a regular fork, as seen below in Fig - 2.

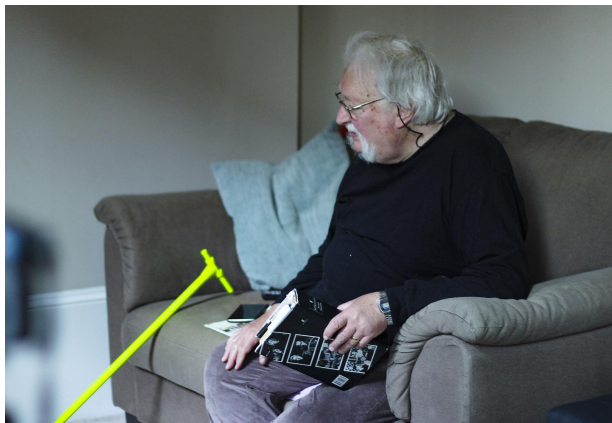


Fig - 1 (Superflux, 2015)



Fig - 2 (Superflux, 2015)

The designed objects, also considered design outputs, are not so important, referred to by Superflux themselves as 'placeholders' (Superflux, 2015, n.p). It is the relationship between the objects and Thomas that is more important. It

raises questions about care and technology, smart objects, our relationships with them, and human agency in a world where objects are assigned increasing agency (Superflux, 2015). The primary role of design here is to question and probe us, as the wider audience, on our attitude to ageing, care, human agency, and technology and the relationship between all of these things. In Superflux's own words,

Ultimately it is our intention that this, at times comedic story, plays on and gives form to some of the growing tensions between human and machine agency. And in doing so, provoke questions about how we want to live and grow old in an increasingly technologically mediated world. (Superflux, 2015, n.p).

Occupying space on the outskirts of traditional product design, SD allows for alternative visions to be explored and pondered than those endorsed by industry (Dunne and Raby, 2001, p.58). Although challenging society's views is often seen as the main role of art, this is a role that design can carry out much more effectively. Art is "too far removed from the world of mass consumption" to be as effective (Dunne and Raby, 2001, p.58). Design is much more accessible, we engage with it daily, and it is simultaneously evolving with society (Dunne and Raby, 2001, p.58). In *Uninvited Guests*, "the brightly coloured "smart objects" in the film are designed to appear as placeholders, where you might <insert smart object here>" (Superflux, 2015, n.p). How they work is neither referred to nor researched as part of the project. This ambiguous, almost incomplete, nature of the design is intentional. It shifts the focus of the design from output to outcome. It fuels conversation and allows the discussion on what we might want these objects to be, look like and do to take on a shifting trajectory without being predetermined or restricted by current industrial and

social standards (Malpass, 2010, p.8). Here, the design priorities lie in challenging our behaviour and morale. This type of design is "just as important as design that solves problems or finds answers" (Dunne and Raby, 2001, p.58). In fact, their ambiguity provides more opportunity for discussion, arguably making them more valuable than an object designed with a utilitarian outlook with a focus on output.

1.2 Limitations to Impact

However, speculative design projects like Uninvited Guests are often rejected as useless or functionless in everyday life (Cakiroglu and Pazarbasi, 2019). Art might be too far removed from mass consumption to infiltrate everyday life effectively. However, it is arguable that the practice and outputs of SD are too far removed from the masses themselves to have the sociopolitical impact intended, despite growing numbers in the field and interest in the approach (Prado and Oliveira, 2015, pg. 2). Luiza Prado, both a practitioner and critic of SD, considers why "the discourse in the field has remained suspiciously static" (2015, pg. 2). It is most widely recognised as being due to its dissemination. SD outputs are most widely exhibited in galleries and museums who are also its biggest funders, advocates and supporters (Prado, 2017). Prado and Hill both argue that the art gallery is not the most effective place or way for these provocations and discussions to take place (Prado, 2017) (Hill, 2012). By confining itself to this specific environment, it fails in its ambition of being a vehicle for political change (Dunne and Raby, 2001). Although Prado recognises that galleries, universities and museums are valuable and serve a place in the

world, exhibiting SD in these spaces does not foster discussion. This is partly because, in a gallery setting, there are distinct and defined roles by which a piece of work is presented with little space for reflection or discussion beyond the individual. The gallery setup "posits the author as a lone, disembodied authority whose ideas cannot be challenged" (Prado, 2017, pg. 41). Discussion is also limited due to the fact that galleries, museums and exhibition spaces are, for the most part, not inclusive spaces. Not only are they not diverse in terms of whom they show and their audience, but they are also symbols and places of socioeconomic and racial exclusion, which further limits the scope of its audience (Prado, 2017).

Hill (2012) also agrees that the museum-gallery sphere is not the prime place for design to impact society in the way it claims and has the potential to. He believes that it is not enough to design and exhibit designs in a vacuum. They must also have what he refers to as dark matter or meta impacts, whether played out or proposed, to become the political vehicle they strive to be. Dark matter and meta impacts refer to impacts in the wider systems of these speculative objects, eg. organisational culture, governance structures, legislation, market mechanisms, tradition and habits or national identity (Hill, 2012, pg. 70-71). Installations do not create the momentum intended because they do not disturb the dark matter; they do not facilitate or enhance design outcomes. Although installations can indeed "suggest a new way of doing, of living," they do not make it happen or feasibly suggest how it might (Hill, 2012, pg. 84). SD is defended as an approach because, as an area of design, it is connected to the real world and everyday life, but in reality, this is not usually

the case. All too often, it just takes the form of temporary interventions with mere claims as to wider significance (Hill, 2012). In *Uninvited Guests*, there are no dark matter or meta impacts; nothing has been put in place to capture the thoughts and responses it might elicit with the public. No methodology or system has been put in place to apply the learnings from its undertaking in creating our futures. To have impact and rich design outcomes, the output of these designs cannot just be prototypes in toto (Hill, 2012, pg. 70-71).

1.3 Overcoming these limitations

Although both critical of the current impacts of speculative practices, both Prado and Hill see its potential as a vehicle for change should it shift to rectify its shortcomings. Prado and Oliveria argue that SD needs to move beyond the exclusionary spaces it currently sits in and needs to be more inclusive in both its form and dissemination. They argue that "this needs to be done without fearing a dialogue with the so-called "mass culture" or "mainstream" so often neglected through the use of purposefully cryptic language" (Prado and Oliveira, 2015). Rather than avoiding this interaction, it needs to fully embrace and incorporate it into its practice. It also needs to become less superficial in what or how it is challenging. Hill continually reiterates the importance of not only designing the artefact but engaging the dark matter and the system it sits within in order to become "systemic, permanent, influential" (2012, pg.84).

Cakiroglu and Pazarbasi propose that one way of overcoming these shortcomings is for speculatively designed objects to be integrated into daily life,

giving examples such as Ascetic Aesthetic's C6 clock, seen below in Fig - 3, which bars users from spending too much time on their phone by accelerating its rhythm and associated ticking noise to provoke annoyance after a set amount of time, or their M1 mirror, pictured below in Fig - 3, which turns its "face" away to block user when they "cross a behavioural line such as squeezing a pimple" (2019, pg. 1231). However, these objects only have such interactions if they are bought and used in the home - inherently becoming commercial. By commercialising these products, it is difficult to say whether they question or achieve many of SD's aims. Commercialisation certainly limits the types of futures that can be considered, restricting them to near futures in order for them to slot into life as it is now. Although they challenge many normative design affirmations and social, cultural, technical and economic values (Cakiroglu and Pazarbasi, 2019, pg.1232), they still exist in a rather superficial domain and feed into consumerism, the very trope of design that SD is trying to escape. Perhaps, SD practices need to move beyond merely producing a physical artefact to become effective. Perhaps there needs to be a shift in its application that prioritises outcome over output and escapes both museum-gallery and commercial spheres. By limiting itself to current practices and relying solely on physical representation as its driving force, SD projects are limited to being consumer goods displayed in a "marketplace of ideas" (Kiem, 2014). Mazé and Redström (2009, p.32) also contend that "if such a practice only evolves in relation to concepts central to its own domain, theoretical frameworks would never extend beyond those traditionally associated with it, e.g. notions of taste, good design, or functionality." We need to rethink the applications for such approaches in order for them to be truly critical of the

practice and have a place in society today.

Chapter 2 - Examining the need for change in public sector policy-making

2.1 Outdated Governance Approaches

It is not just SD that needs a transformation in its operation; our ways of governance are becoming increasingly insufficient and outdated (Cottam, 2018)(Hill, 2012)(Demos, 2021). Our methods of governance today, particularly in the public sector, were derived during or just after the industrial revolution, a time when problems were more linear in nature. Hilary Cottam, designer, innovator and social entrepreneur, believes that the social challenges we are seeing today, such as obesity, global warming and ageing were not foreseen when our welfare state was designed and that they are ill-equipped to deal with them (2012). She also points out that not only are these problems new, but they operate differently to traditionally predictable and knowable problems of the past. A reflection of the time they were implemented, these are "industrial systems" operated by vertical organisations - with well-defined hierarchies and strict operational protocols. Using the example of ageing, our existing welfare systems and supports for older adults were built at a time of lower life expectancy and are struggling with the shift in demographics (Cottam, 2018). They operate as a management system, with a built-in culture of lack and paucity and a one-size-fits-all approach that does not accommodate the nuances of ageing and everyday life that come with longer lives being lived by many older adults today. In the words of Cottam herself, "These systems have

helped us live longer. But now they cannot help us age well" (2018, pg. 169)

It is the well-defined hierarchies and strict protocols that were key to its success that are now the reasons for its failure. As Dan Hill puts it:

Our public services have been designed, operated and measured to within an inch of their lives. Every possible eventuality within a system, such as healthcare or education, say, will have been considered and catered for, at least in theory." (2012, pg. 21)

Yet, we see system failure all around us. Welfare services for older adults assess eligibility based on people's age or physical condition, which might make sense on paper. Yet, in reality, many eighty-year-olds are more emotionally, physically and socially healthy than those 20 years younger than them. Physical condition is also only one indicator among others, including mental health, determination, and family support that affect older adults' quality of day-to-day life. This means that services are not distributed to the people who need them most and that they do not enable everyone to thrive in their old age (Cottam, 2018). Cottam, recognising that the realities of lived experience is not as categorisable as our public sector systems would like to believe, works towards dismantling the inflexibility of this welfare system that is bound by the limits and laws of bureaucracy. She goes on to state that this inflexibility has resulted in a "management state: an elaborate and expensive system of managing needs and their accompanying risks" (2018, pg. 12) that needs to be reassessed. Inita Paulovica, Deputy Director for Public Administration Policy in Latvia, is also working to dismantle this culture of over-regulation in governance (Demos, 2021).

2.2 Navigating Uncertainty

Why are these systems of operation no longer sufficient? Firstly, these systems rely on certainty and predictability (Cottam, 2018)(Hill, 2012)(Demos, 2021), whereas we are living in times of increasing uncertainty; Covid-19 and the climate crisis being two universal signifiers of this. In the context of Ireland, it is predicted that several unpredictable but significant social, economic, political and technological shifts will take place in the coming years (OPSI, 2021). How can our government best support us through these shifts when they themselves cannot foresee how they will unfold? Prominent philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour suggests we need to "abandon the worn-out cliché of incontrovertible matters of fact" (2005, pg. 9) as it is an unrealistic representation of reality. It is not just a nice thing to consider that we might not have all the answers; it is something we must admit, we actually do not know all the answers (Demos, 2021). However, our governments are bound by a culture of infallibility. In order to maintain trust, they are reluctant to succumb to humility, to admit they do not know the answers, in order to retain an image of competency (Demos, 2021). Ironically, this is a false economy in the uncertainties of today's world. Only once we admit we do not have all the answers for the complexity of the problems we are facing can we begin to tackle them and rewrite the narratives that determine our approach(es) and find a way of "moving forward without certainty, without prescribed courses of actions or existing best practice" (Hill, 2018, pg. 25). Only when we move to a state of humility can we move forward to reinvent and reimagine new methods of

governance and public policy implementation in the ways needed to face a world of uncertainty. However, it is not enough to merely be humble. We must go deeper and ask how can we practically "ensure that public institutions designed for stability, predictability and compliance can also improve the capacity to anticipate, innovate and introduce proactive interventions" (Bourgon, 2015, cited in Hill, 2012, pg. 71)? How can we practically tackle complexity, uncertainty and change?

2.3 Need for Increased Experimentation and Prototyping

When looking to other well-regarded disciplines that deal with uncertainty, it is impossible not to consider Science. Science, defined as "the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment" (Breslin et al., 2012, pg. 504), is a discipline comfortable with uncertainty. It navigates this uncertainty practically through experimentation and testing, often without a known or expected outcome (Firestein, 2016). Another crucial part of this definition is 'systematic'; parameters are put in place in order to meaningfully and quantitatively assess and measure success, but failure is accepted and often embraced (Firestein, 2016). A state of experimentation shifts the focus from analysis to synthesis, an essential shift (Latour, 2005)(Demos, 2021)(Hill, 2012). Nikita Agarwal, COO of Apolitical - a network for public servants to communicate, collaborate, and cross-pollinate ideas connected to policy development - states that it is indeed possible to experiment without looking incompetent and argues that one, in fact, appears more competent with

a systematic and transparent method of experimentation (Demos, 2021).

Reporting on what is being done, why and how diminishes notions of incompetency and makes policymakers more trustworthy because they are not trying to cover anything up (Demos, 2021). Increased experimentation at the development level means potholes and discrepancies can be exposed before policies or systems are rolled out on a wider scale (Cottam, 2018). Although it often seems like a superfluous activity, experimenting, prototyping and testing early on in a project save money, time and energy in the long run (Cottam, 2018). Similarly, Hill contests a need for experimentation in the public sector. It is essential to experiment with materials and projects that can be tinkered with and changed the fastest, with the expectation of failure (2012). It is not just about accepting failure but about having a system in place that reflects and learns from it and then applies those learnings. If such an approach was adopted, policies and systems could adapt and change to navigate uncertainty but it needs an accompanying methodical framework.

2.4 Lack of Public Participation

Such work is only effective if it engages the public and people directly affected by the changes that may occur. It cannot take place in the silos of government buildings. Policy-making that does not engage with the public is not inclusive and is therefore not reflective of society. For this reason, it tends to fail (Nussbaum, 2013). In the early stage development of Circle, a revolutionary public service for older adults, Cottam reflects on a visit to the home of Roy, "as I worked my way through his home in my hunt for his hearing aid, I learned quite

a lot about Roy [...] some of them we won't talk about and others could not be expressed on an 'assessment' form" (2018, pg. 168). Direct engagement with the public is far more insightful than the clerical assessment methods currently used. It highlights genuine needs, wants and values rather than those externally perceived and, therefore, leads to more effective policy-making (Cottam, 2018). Public participation makes for more insightful experimentation, but it also solves the issue of disillusionment. Disillusionment in governance is prominent globally, Latour calling it a "crisis of representation" (Latour, 2005, pg. 4). There is an empathy and communication gap driving politicians and everyday civilians apart. Current public engagement forums tend to be unilateral and tokenistic (TCA, 2017)(Cottam,2018). The outputs and outcomes don't tend to affect real change. With limited genuine input channels, the everyday public feels a loss of agency over their realities and futures. They are disengaging from politics as a result, which causes a vicious cycle. Politics needs to be opened back up and made accessible to the public. It is they, after all, who will be affected by the changes. Policymakers, in turn, need to be more engaged in the workings of reality to form a cohesive and accurate understanding of what is going on in order to represent effectively. A radical shift in approach is needed for this to occur, and public participation should be at its core (Latour, 2005)(Cottam, 2018). Participation is a challenge not because people are not interested but because the strict hierarchical makeups of public services are not designed to allow participation and engagement. In fact, the current approaches make it extremely difficult to engage (Cottam, 2018, pg. 187). We need to build the capacity for engagement in order to close the empathy gap between policymakers and the everyday public and solve the crisis of disillusionment.

Chapter 3 - A case for speculative practices in public sector policy development

"The master's tool will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." (Lorde, 2018, pg. 27)

It is clear that, when it comes to policy-making, radical change needs to be made in order to build the capacity for dealing with uncertainty and incorporating more experimentation and public engagement. For such radical change, alternative methods and approaches to governance must be considered, trialed and adapted. This chapter explores the potential for SD to be used as a tool in policy-making, but why is it a good fit?

3.1 Overcoming Public Sector Shortcomings

Firstly, it is a practice familiar in dealing with uncertainty. Not only is it comfortable with ambiguity, but it is entirely based around exploring the uncertainty of our futures, rather than focussing on what life will or should be like (Dunne and Raby, 2013). We live in times of increased change and instability but thinking about multiple futures makes us more adaptive. Hill outlines that the true power of design is in moving past single solution based problem-solving. Instead, he proposes to use it as an investigative tool to

navigate Donald Rumsfeld's "unknown-unknowns" within the future of politics and society (2012, pg. 28). SD is a practice that occupies this space. Latour also sees the need to progress beyond an "all-knowing" approach and suggests, "Where matters-of-fact have failed, let's try what I have called matters-of-concern" (2005, pg. 9). SD is a powerful tool to provoke collectively and can be used to establish these matters-of-concern, the values and beliefs of the public, in order to shape the policies that will determine desirable futures. While strategic foresight is recognised as being a powerful tool for policy-making within shifting and mutable realities, few Irish governmental bodies are putting it into practice (O'Doherty et al, 2020). SD offers the platform and framework by which to do this.

Secondly, experimentation and learning through prototyping are at the core of SD practices. Speculative approaches provide a platform for experimentation without the formal and unyielding constraints of industry or reality (Dunne and Raby, 2013). Ideas, frameworks and elements of policies and public services can be explored and tested tangibly without significant investment. In this way, SD can drive radical change with less risk. However, rather than just being a thought experiment, a tangible artefact or prototype is developed and presented to augment discussion. Latour recognises the power of the physical object in politics, "objects – taken as so many issues – bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of "the political" (2005, pg. 4). Particularly in their ability to bring people together and establish points of disagreement, both as important as the other. Cottam agrees that prototyping is not simply about the "thing" but about the

"engagement, the learning and the interaction it generates" (2018, pg. 223).

Physical objects and props have been used across disciplines to challenge and change ways of thinking and being for centuries (Cottam, 2018, pg. 236). As already outlined, SD focuses more on the design outcomes, the provocation and discussions around the objects, rather than the artefacts themselves.

However, the importance of the quality of these artefacts cannot be underrated. Their quality directly impacts the quality of the discussion that they foster. In the context of policy-making, provocative objects, prototypes and experiments have the potential to provide a tangible point of reference for both policymakers and the public, enabling them to discuss and develop alternative and desirable outcomes outside the usual restrictions of industry or budget.

Finally, as previously alluded to, SD, at its most powerful, is a practice built around participation and engagement, a practice built around the collective.

When executed effectively, it facilitates and encourages participation, reflection and discussion. In part, this engagement is enabled by the physicality and tangibility offered by the prototype itself. For a policy or service to be truly democratic, it must be easy to understand and contribute to (Cottam, 2018).

Current governmental approaches to public consultation are none of these things; they are tokenistic and inaccessible. Latour calls for a tangible aide to be given to the politically disabled. We are so detached from politics we need something tangible as a way in (2005). SD is a powerful and tangible way to get involved, analyse, and adjust ideas collectively. In doing so, it has the power to bridge the empathy gap between the public and policymakers and give more agency to the public. It could also solve issues of disillusionment in government,

"When you see yourself as part of the future you embrace it. Conversely, if you see that you might be left out or you feel that something will be done *to* you, you feel critical and you may resist" (Cottam, 2018, pg. 255). Such an approach offers individuals the freedom to consider alternative futures, encouraging them to play a more active role in how it plays out. It allows and promotes them to contemplate where they stand in society and how their society reflects them as human beings. An open, accessible and collaborative approach to policy-making through SD can generate more effective, representational and policy outcomes.

3.2 Overcoming Speculative Design's Shortcomings

Incorporating SD into policy-making also resolves shortcomings associated with the practice itself - by escaping the museum-gallery sphere and, in doing so, fulfilling its potential as a vehicle for discussion and political change. As previously discussed, it is clear that the gallery or museum is not the most effective place for SD to have the political impacts that it claims to have. These traditional applications and means of dissemination strip the practice of its political agency, reducing it to "superficial spectacle" rather than "informed political debate" (Prado, 2017, pg. 78). In order to be truly political, SD needs to be directly and deeply politically engaged, not just superficially. Hill identifies a gap for design "within government as a genuinely strategic capability" (2012, pg. 32), which SD could serve to fill. Directly incorporating SD into policy-making practices also closes the gap between practice and changemaker. It gives the outcomes more momentum and increases their potential to cause tangible

societal change or produce dark matter or meta impacts (Hill, 2012).

Current means of application also limit SD's reach, as galleries and museums do not tend to be inclusive spaces or spaces that facilitate or capture discussion (Prado, 2015). They limit the production, documentation and application of discussion and debate - SD's design outcomes. If implemented correctly, the suggested alternative application would shift the focus back to the design outcome. It would increase the opportunity for more accessible and wider discussion, the ultimate goal of SD since its inception (Dunne and Raby, 2013). Democratic public consultation should include a diverse range of perspectives rather than just those coming across speculative pieces in museums or galleries, often by chance. Although simply changing the setting of the practice will have massive effects on this, speculative practices must work towards becoming even more accessible and inclusive. Currently, the projects can be quite cryptic and difficult to interpret or respond to (Prado, 2015, pg. 4). If SD is to be used in policy-making, the practice must shift slightly to put accessibility and inclusion at the heart of all projects without compromising on depth or scope.

3.3 Examining Current Use Cases

It is not surprising that such applications of SD are currently being explored in various government policy labs and governmental innovation groups such as Vinnova, Sitra and the UK Policy Lab. Vinnova - Sweden's Government Innovation Authority - mention their use of SD practices but have not yet

published many of the results of their work (Vinnova, 2022). Similarly, Sitra - the Finnish government's equivalent - mentions SD loosely across their website and event descriptions (Vinnova, 2022) and has many SD tools in their toolkit, which they use in their work (Sitra, 2021). However, similarly to Vinnova, there are limited reports on projects or use cases that incorporate SD.

Aforementioned design studio Superflux engaged in a project with the Government of UAE, exploring the UAE's National Energy Strategy. Superflux worked alongside foresight company Rorosoro to develop possible energy futures, represent them tangibly and then stress test the potential consequences, opportunities and general outcomes of the different futures alongside government, as seen below in Fig - 3 and Fig - 4 (Superflux, 2017).



Fig - 3 (Superflux, 2017)



Fig - 4 (Superflux, 2017)

The collaborative futuring activity informed the country's new energy policy, which mapped their plans for energy production and consumption until 2050, which was announced soon after the event (Mohammad, 2017). This project

highlights the power of bringing speculative practice directly into the political landscape. Additionally, it highlights the power in shifting the concentration from output to outcome. Although the outputs were considered and effective, which is essential in driving effective outcomes (Voss et al., 2015b), the most influential part of this project was the collaboration between the government officials and Superflux. Here, the power lies in the interaction with the outputs in a political context. However, it is interesting to note that policymakers and designers interact with the design outputs, rather than the general public. Although no doubt a powerful approach in catalysing political change in the face of uncertainty, this method of incorporation still fails to address the issue of disillusionment and fails to bridge the empathy gap between citizens and policymakers. It is not entirely inclusive and does not harness SD's potential to increase capacity for sustained public engagement.

An alternative application of SD in policy-making that does begin to engage the wider public can be seen in the project *Future of an Ageing Population (FAP)* carried out by research and design consultancy Strange Telemetry in collaboration with the UK Policy Lab. Six visual artefacts based around the themes of the future of work, services and transport for older people, see Fig - 5 for one example, were developed and used as talking points for publicly held workshops across three different UK cities, as seen in Fig - 6 and Fig - 7 (Voss et al., 2015b).



Fig - 5 (Strange Telemetry, 2017)



Fig - 6 (Drew, 2015)



Fig - 7 (Drew, 2015)

According to the report published after the workshops, the workshops were a success, "generating rich and lively discussion and positive feedback from participants and generated a lot of material" which was captured by a report to

feed into the policy-making process (Voss et al., 2015b, pg.8). Several key themes consistently emerged across all sessions despite not being prompted. This highlights the generative power of such a process in determining a collective and representative view of the future. Although the topics articulated were consistent, they were also diverse and nuanced, ranging from state power vs. corporate control to future forms of work and care to the role of arts and culture in the lives of older adults. This is recognised as being down to the complexity and highly detailed quality of the provocative images (Voss et al., 2015b) and again highlights the causal relationship between quality of design output and design outcome. One of the most interesting findings was that "across the workshops, there was strength of feeling from participants about systems being designed without them (and requiring adaption to), rather than in consultation with them" (Voss et al., 2015a) which in itself highlights the importance of genuine and influential public engagement in policy-making. The Policylab continues to use and develop SD across their work. However, it is still a young and malleable approach that lacks a framework for replication and methods for quantifiable evaluation of success. It is also an application that is vastly unexplored outside of this context, especially in the Irish context (Kelly and Ratcliffe, 2005).

3.4 The Irish Gap

This lack of exploration is not due to a lack of necessity. Quite the opposite is true. As already established, Ireland, alongside the rest of the world, is expected to go through major social, environmental and political shifts in the coming years

(OPSI, 2021). In fact, overcoming uncertainty is regarded as the most important element of contemporary Irish governance (Kelly and Ratcliffe, 2005). Despite this, Ireland still has no experimental policy lab or dedicated national Strategic Foresight institution. The European Foresight Monitoring Network sees this gap as a significant weakness that needs urgent addressal (Kelly and Ratcliffe, 2005). They recommend building the capacity for imagining, not predicting, planning or forecasting the future. There have been attempts at foresight based projects such as *Imagining 2050* conducted by researchers in University College Cork and Queens University Belfast. Although public participation tools were used - such as sense-making, empathy mapping, storyboarding and community mapping - there was a distinct lack of futures thinking (Revez et al., 2021). Visual prompts for tasks came from current magazines or were brought along by participants and, in other map-based activities, participants merely added to existing maps without future-focussed prompts. Similarly, the citizens assembly on the future of ageing did a call out for submissions via newspaper without prompts (TCA, 2017). In both cases, this restricted outputs and outcomes to the here and now, rather than pushing them to the future (Revez et al., 2021)(TCA, 2017).

Conclusion

It is clear that there is not just space but a need for more experimental practices to be developed and adopted within governmental bodies in Ireland and beyond in order to help manage uncertainty, become more experimental and overcome issues of disillusionment. SD is a potent tool that assists this in a tangible and

accessible way. While there is space, it is clear that the capacity for this kind of work will have to be created. There is currently a limited culture of futures thinking and foresight practices in Ireland. This lack of exposure and experience is the most significant barrier to SD's adoption (OPSI, 2021). However, it is equally evident that the practice itself needs to develop. Clear and transparent methods of delivery, evaluation and application of insights gained need to be forged. The development of which will not be straightforward as they are complex, dynamic and difficult to measure (OPSI, 2021)(Love, 2014). The process will need to be tested, adapted and malleable. Stakeholders and participants must present an openness to learn, fail and adapt (OPSI, 2021)(Cottam, 2018). There will need to be a sustained effort, perhaps with the erection of a governmental innovation hub or foresight body, as the outcomes of this kind of design are not easily traceable and often need time to take effect.

Incorporating SD into policy-making is a radical shift, but a radical shift in our approach is needed to overcome the limitations of our current modes of governance. The Beveridge Report, which proposed the vision for the UK welfare state, that then went on to inform Ireland's, was met with resistance by many for being too radical in its approach. Others saw potential in the optimistic vision. They saw it as a "rallying call" (Cottam, 2018, pg. 198) for change when it was very much needed. This, too, is a much needed rallying call for change. As with the Beveridge report, not everyone will understand, not everyone will agree and may need to be shown instead. Most important, perhaps, is that SD opens up and proceeds with humility. Humble in its potential for change and humble in the fact that it is a developing and learning discipline, as much as our

futures thinking ability. Such a version of SD could be incorporated into policy-making practices, together forming a symbiotic relationship to develop in tandem with one another and resolve each other's shortcomings. Perhaps this way, SD can develop through its "troubled adolescence" (Prado and Oliveira, 2015) and public sector policy-making through its respective old age.

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