**LOPES — Story**

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**A Story of Design Research: Initiating a Change Network for Western Sydney**

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Visual communication design employs the unique languages of visualization and imagery for making sense and telling compelling stories. This poster will tell the story of a digitally facilitated design research network and a symposium held at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. The objective of the poster is to showcase research-based design practice that contributes to change initiatives across sectors of society and culture, with relevance to Western Sydney. It will outline the key design components that supported the formation of a network of researchers interested in amplifying the change agency of visual communications design.

In brief, the poster tells a story about how design compellingly tells stories to support and model change. A keynote speaker, Italian information designer Angela Morelli, described her practice as info-graphic digital storytelling that doesn’t simply transform data into meaningful information but engages audiences in knowledge about which they care. Considered in the context of Donald Schön’s (1983) reflective practitioner, Morelli’s challenge is to develop storytelling as an effective genre for the translation of research into visualization and for exploring visualization *as* knowledge. The symposium enabled participants to share research methods and their own design practices such as visualization strategies, storyboards, information graphics, fieldwork, and mapping techniques used to generate meaningful dialogues and knowledge about supporting community change.

The poster aims to provide a snapshot of six components that gave birth to and support this network.

1. *A research symposium event.*

Initiating Change by Design (ICD) was an interdisciplinary postgraduate research symposium that aimed to explore the unique capacity for research-based design to contribute to change initiatives across many sectors of society at a time when we face the unprecedented challenges of a climate-changed future and a matching demand for creative thinking. It was particularly focused on Western Sydney, as a contested biophysical, social, and cultural landscape with a rapidly developing urban fringe. ICD gathered a small group of international and local practice-based and theoretical design researchers, and postgraduate students to discuss their projects and share methodological approaches that can be brought to social change in the Western Sydney region.

2. *Workshop brief.*

Participants enrolled in workshops that addressed the question: *How can design activate public engagement in the commons in Riverlands, Western Sydney?* The focus of this brief was on how visual communications design may be brought to the project of making and sharing the commons—*commoning* in Gibson-Graham et al.’s (2013) terms—in Riverlands, Sydney.

The brief sought to explore what and where the commons are in Western Sydney, and how they are seen and negotiated by communities both inside and outside of the region. One of the most regionally distinctive and important commons in Western Sydney is its rivers. A map of Western Sydney is veined by extensive river systems. The Nepean and Hawkesbury Rivers, Parramatta River, and South Creek catchment traverse the region and exist in relation to extensive parklands and recreational areas. Equally, Western Sydney is layered by social and cultural landscapes that may not be as apparent to the naked eye. At present Western Sydney is defined by its relation to the Sydney CBD and often, intentionally or not, in a subordinate role. A further binary exists between the famous harbour and coastline and the rivers, which have their own unique ecologies (and are bereft of the cooling sea breezes enjoyed by coastal cities). In fact, there are myriad binaries that delineate Western Sydney as an imagined and experienced environment. ICD Workshop groups were invited to consider recoding Western Sydney as ‘Riverlands, Sydney’.

3. *Engagement with UWS design students and the award-winning Rabbit Hole studio to brand the event and build a website presence.*

We collaborated with Rabbit Hole coordinators to create a brief in keeping with the intent of ICD to harness the unique language of the image for making sense and creating ‘new knowledge’. The resulting designs were carefully considered and commensurate with the intent of the event, enabling a collaborative opportunity at the nexus of research and teaching.

4. *The identification of community partners with which to engage in conversation about regional and community change.*

Existing and potential partners were asked a range of questions about how they see the current problems and future opportunities for the region. Their responses supported the relevance and value of the brief and the role of visual communications design in envisioning possible futures for ‘the Riverlands’.

5. *Online host site for research network, resources, and community partners*:http://icd2014.wordpress.com/symposium/.

6. *Online journal publication*: Special issue of *Global Media Journal* (Australian edition).

The journal includes the research outputs of the network, such as peer-reviewed articles from keynote speakers, academic articles from postgraduates, interviews, transcripts, and commentaries on the workshops. As a materialization of the research network, it intends to capture the unique nature of design research and the dynamic process of the workshops in an online publication that includes visual essays, information design, and video, in order to bring this design special issue to life.

**References**

**Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J. and Healy, S.** (2013). *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities.* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

**Schön, D. A. (**1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action.* Basic Books, New York.