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Rise of the policy designer—lessons from the UK and Latvia

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ABSTRACT

"Perhaps Policy Designer really should be a new job title" mused Bason, the former Director of the Danish Government's policy lab back in 2014. In 2017, Policy Lab in the UK Cabinet Office advertised the first UK job for a "Policy Designer" requesting skills, such as visualizing complex data, creating and testing prototypes in policy delivery environments, and facilitating workshops with people of all backgrounds. Since then, many UK central government departments have followed suit and by 2022, around 50 Policy Designers work in various government departments. According to Nesta, there are more than 200 government labs around the world and ~60 in Europe. Around ten of these are concentrated in UK central government and the first UK policy labs opened their doors in 2014 in the Cabinet Office and the Northern Ireland Department of Finance. However, the design for policy agenda is also on the rise in Eastern Europe; and Latvia has been identified as an example of good practice by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2018, the Latvian Innovation Laboratory was opened in the State Chancellery and now in 2022, it embarks on its third distinct phase of operation. This article charts the rise of government labs in the UK and Latvia to explore different experiences and identify good practices in building capability for policy design across Europe. The purpose of this research is not to make a comparison between the two countries, as they are on very different stages of their journeys, but to identify strengths and weaknesses in the supply and demand for policy design to drawn out lesson learned for other European countries. What has been the role of policy labs in the rise of the policy designer in the UK and Latvia? To what extent is there a professional community of policy designers in either country? Bobrow outlines seven preconditions for a professional community: self-identification as a policy designer, a professional association, journals, standards for certification, broader attribution of special expertise, a core foundation of knowledge, and capacity building programmes. This article explores the emergence of policy labs and policy designers in the UK and Latvia, the attributes, skillset, challenges, opportunities, and whether according to Bobrow's criteria policy design is a professional community.

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1. Introduction

There is an emerging cadre of designer across Europe—those focused on the transformation of the public sector by applying design approaches to public service and public policy development. In the early part of the last decade, there was an aspiration from government innovation lab leaders for the role of "Policy Designer" to be a recognized job role in government with a codified set of skills. "Perhaps Policy Designer really should be a new job title" mused Christian Bason, the former Director of the Danish Government's policy lab, MindLab (Bason 2014, 223). Laurence Grinyer, then Service Designer at the UK's Cabinet Office Policy Lab, also pondered about Policy Designer becoming a new mindset for civil servants: "The Policy Lab mindset promises to radically change policy-making for the better. From its culture to its people and its ways of working; I think it offers a glimpse of how the civil service might look in 10 or 20 years" (Grinyer 2016).

Each European country is on its own journey to applying user-centered approaches to policy with a significant spectrum of different capabilities. Across Europe, there are around 60 government innovation labs with ten of these in the UK (Fuller and Lochard 2016, 4–5). In the UK, in 2022, there were ∼50 Policy Designers working across various central government departments, with the very first role being advertised in 2017 by Policy Lab in the Cabinet Office. In the UK and Europe, design for policy is still a niche but fast emerging field of practice (Hermus, van Buuren, and Bekkers 2020, 21; Kimbell and Vesnić-Alujević 2020, 95). There are many lessons to be learnt from the UK experience of building capability for policy design and these examples can be combined with the experiences of other European countries to begin to build a picture of international good practice. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2021) has identified the Latvian Innovation Laboratory as an example of good practice. With three successive rounds of European funding since 2018, the Latvian Innovation Laboratory in the State Chancellery is embedding design thinking across the wider innovation ecosystem in Latvia.

This article charts the rise of government in the very different contexts of the UK and Latvia to identify good practices in building capability for policy design across Europe. It is not intended to be a comparison or benchmarking exercise but rather to explore the emerging communities of practice across the spectrum of policy design capability and draw lessons for further development. What has been the role of policy labs in the rise of the policy designer in the UK and Latvia? To what extent is there a professional community of policy designers in either country? Bobrow (2012, 75) outlines seven preconditions for a professional community: self-identification as a policy designer, a professional association, journals, standards for certification, broader attribution of special expertise, a core foundation of knowledge, and capacity-building programmes. This article explores the role of policy labs in the development of the policy design in the UK and Latvia, the attributes, skillset, challenges, opportunities, and whether according to Bobrow's criteria policy design is a professional community.

2. Design for policy in a European context

There is no blueprint for the use of policy design across European countries, every country is at a different stage of their journey and even within countries, different

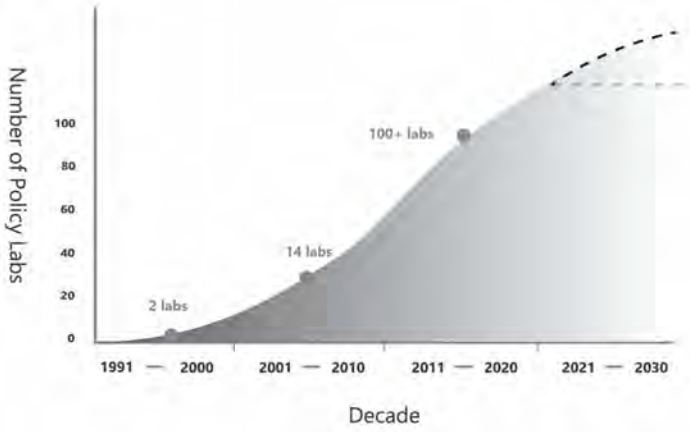

Figure 1. Proliferation of policy labs.

ministries are using design at varying levels of maturity and intensity. A number of practitioners and academics have sought to map the landscape for policy labs and policy design across Europe including Nesta, the EU Policy Lab, Apolitical, and OECD, among others (Puttick 2014; Fuller and Lochard 2016; Apolitical 2019; OECD 2020; Olejniczak et al. 2020). Mapping policy labs and capability for policy design is a challenge because the landscape is ever-evolving with labs opening and closing as well as a lack of consensus on the definitions of policy labs. One thing is for certain, there has been a proliferation of government innovation labs across the world since the 1990s when labs only existed in Finland and Singapore to 14 in the early 2000s (Puttick 2014) to more than 200 by 2020 (see Figure 1). The EU Policy Lab mapping revealed around 60 government innovation labs across Europe with ∼10 in the UK (Fuller and Lochard 2016, 4–5). However, it should also be noted that labs are closing their doors, such as Helsinki Design Lab and MindLab in Denmark. There is no data on what proportion of these labs use design in their arsenal of innovation methods or what proportion use design for policy.

At the European level, design approaches to policy-making have been explored by the EU Policy Lab in the Joint Research Center in the European Commission. In 2014, the Center established the EU Policy Lab as a "safe-space" to trying out new approaches and innovations in the context of policy-making. With the emphasis on creativity, collaborating, testing, experimenting, and co-designing, the Lab focused their work on four methods: Foresight, Modeling, Behavioral Insights, and Design for Policy (Rudkin and Rancati 2020). From 2014 to the end of 2020, the Lab ran eighteen projects often combining the innovation methods applying them to topics as varied as migration, future of farming, future of government, blockchain, and sharing economy.

In parallel, design approaches were also being mainstreamed across other European Commission departments. One of the eleven recommendations of the "FAB-LAB-APP" report (European Commission 2017) of the independent High Level Group on maximizing the impact of EU Research & Innovation Programmes, was for Horizon Europe to "stimulate co-design and co-creation through citizen involvement." In the

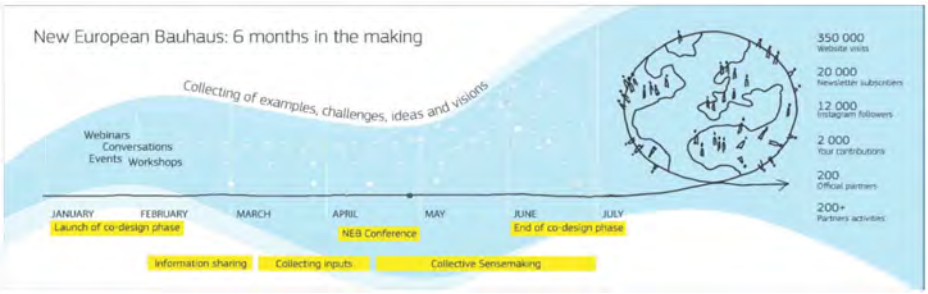

Figure 2. The New European Bauhaus co-design process. Source: European Commission (2021).

document, the experts advise that the post-2020 EU R&I programme "should aim to become the biggest co-created and co-creation programme in the world." Preparations of the new research and innovation programme for the European Union "Horizon Europe" embraced this ambition to be the biggest co-creation process in the world. The co-design activities undertaken in the process over the summer and autumn 2019 were on a mass-scale. The initial online consultation was open to the whole world and between 28 June 2019 and 4 October 2019 gathered over 6800 responses. Those views, together with in-depth co-design sessions, the comments and suggestions provided by over 4000 participants during the European Research and Innovation Days (Brussels, 24–26 September 2019) directly informed the Horizon Europe's strategic planning process (European Commission 2020).

A similar approach was taken to develop the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative that cuts across multiple domains of European Policy—including the Green Deal, Territorial Polices, Social Policies, Cultural and Creative Sectors Policy, Industrial & SMEs, Education and Skills and Research and Innovation (Figure 2). The idea for the initiative was kick-started by the European Commission's President, Ursula Von der Leyen, in her inaugural State of the Union address to the European Parliament in September 2020. From the start, the process was meant to be based on collaborative principles of design and set-up in three phases:

- Design—to explore ideas and shape the movement with all interested stakeholders in a broad participatory co-creation process.
- Deliver—when the New European Bauhaus projects in different EU Member States will be launched. All of them will be committed to sustainability, combined with art and culture; and each adapted to local conditions and with a specific focus, such as for instance: natural building materials, energy efficiency, demographics, future-oriented mobility, or resource-efficient digital innovation.
- Diffuse—to disseminate and promote a network of Bauhaus' with different features, always keeping in mind the transformation toward living together sustainably. In this phase, further Bauhaus' can be added across the EU and even globally.

The co-design phase was concluded in July 2021. The process garnered significant interest from individuals, organizations, political institutions, and businesses. A broad

network of the NEB partners was established to organize events, conversations, and workshops. Eighteen experts were invited to form a New European Bauhaus high-level roundtable acting as a sounding board for the initiative and to give their input on a regular basis, while the New European Bauhaus Conference attracted 8000 online participants. All the "harvested" input was analyzed and resulted in an EC's Communication on the New European Bauhaus setting out core principles, several policy actions, and funding possibilities to drive the initiative forward (European Commission 2021). The document also sets out the plan to establish a New European Bauhaus Lab: a "think and do tank" to co-create, prototype and test new tools, solutions, and policy recommendations.

The UK (alongside Denmark and Finland), was one of European Union's lead adopters of design in the context public service and policy design, and contributed to the development of the approach within the Commission and EU Policy Lab. For example, Kimbell and the University of the Arts London was one of the leaders of the EU Policy Lab project "Future of Government 2030+," which mentored six European Design Schools through a speculative design approach to reimagining the future of government (UAL 2020). Despite the UK's formal departure from the EU, the design agenda in UK government continues to evolve and mature. The launch of gov.uk, the single platform for all digital public services in the UK in 2012, has transformed the design agenda. There are more than 3000 designers working in UK central government departments; however, the majority of these are Service Designers and Interaction Designers. While service design is now well-recognized in UK government thanks to the Government Digital Service, policy design remains a relative niche area. While the "user" or citizen is the starting point for digital public services in the UK, the "user" is not the starting point for public policy development process in the UK. Policy labs are seeking to change this. Policy labs are multidisciplinary government teams using a range of innovation methods, often including design, to collaboratively involve the public and stakeholders in jointly developing public services and public policies (Whicher 2020, 4). The first policy labs in the UK were established in the Cabinet Office and the Northern Ireland Department of Finance in 2014 (Whicher and Crick 2019, 290). Since then, more than 10 service and policy labs have sprung up in central and devolved government departments.

Latvia is one of only a few countries in Europe to have a national design policy. The "Design of Latvian 2021" strategy was co-designed by the Ministries of Culture and Economics with various users and stakeholders across the Latvian design ecosystem (Whicher 2017). There are five thematic areas with around 30 actions in the design policy. One of the key thematic areas for action is Design and the State.

> "As a strategic tool, design is helping in the development of economics and society's welfare. Design is used in shaping cultural identity, as well as the image of the state." (Latvian Ministries of Culture and Economics 2017, 7)

Since 2017, several actions have been implemented toward achieving the goal that "Design is promoting the economic growth of Latvia as well as our society's welfare and environmental sustainability" (Latvian Ministries of Culture and Economics 2017, 7). For example, in 2018, the authors of this article delivered a six-month "Train-the-Trainer" programme in service design for the public sector delivered to a cohort of 30

innovation leaders across all ministries in the Latvian Government. This took place at the Latvian School of Public Administration (VAS). A further significant implementation mechanism of the design policy was applying for European funding to establish the first policy lab within the Latvian State Chancellery. In 2018, with a grant of €600,000 the State Chancellery established the Innovation Laboratory with the support of the OECD and PWC. It was established as a 1 year prototype or proof of concept to and the dominant method was design thinking and has subsequently secured two additional rounds of EU funding as well as internal funding.

3. Method

In 2012, Bobrow stated that "unlike policy analysis, policy design shows few of the trappings of a professional community" (2012, 75). It is timely to review if and how the community has developed in the intervening decade. Bobrow (2012, 75) identifies seven criteria for the existence of a professional community of Policy Designers: (1) "self-identification as a policy designer," (2) "a professional association," (3) a journal, (4) "standards for certification," (5) "broader social attribution of special expertise," (6) "consensually shared views of core foundation knowledge," and (7) "a widely accepted program for improving capabilities." Several years on, some of these elements have changed and some have not. Let us examine each component in turn with the caveat that this is part of an exploration in the UK and Latvia only.

This constitutes research through practice bringing together insight from research initiatives in the UK and Latvia that were commissioned to inform the strategic direction of the design and policy landscape in the two countries. The data collection for the UK was conducted between March 2020 and February 2022 as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Fellowship "Design Challenges of the Future: Public Policy" and ongoing research. The data collection for Latvia was conducted between November 2021 and February 2022 as part of a project to evaluate the Innovation Laboratory in the Latvian State Chancellery. For the UK, the analysis is based on 49 online interviews including 24 government policy-makers at national and devolved levels, 19 academics, and six other stakeholders. Interim findings were sense checked in two online workshops with 75 government and 13 academic representatives and validated through a peer review process with ten experts. There are ten government labs at national level and three at devolved level in the UK (see Figure 3) and the heads of each lab were interviewed as part of the sample. For the academic participants, a mapping exercise was conducted of all academic institutions with research or teaching capability in design and the public realm and again academics from each of these eight institutions were interviewed. Ongoing insight has been gathered through immersive observation with the lead author's participation in a monthly cross-government meeting of policy labs. The inquiry focused on the prevalence and demand for policy design expertise within UK government as well as the supply of design for policy expertise from academia and the design sector. For Latvia, the data was gathered from six half-day, online workshops with 25 officials from the Innovation Network across different departments in the Latvian Government as well as six one-to-one online interviews with past and current staff in the Innovation Laboratory. The workshops

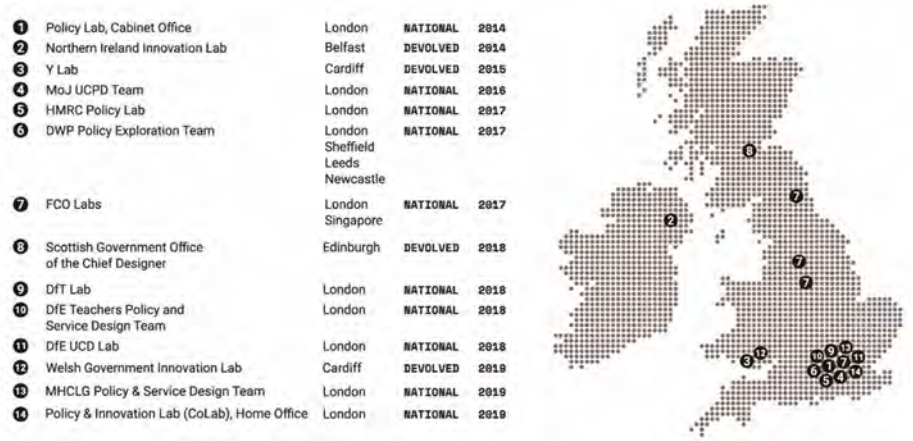

Figure 3. Map of UK policy labs and user-centered policy design teams, 2020 (Whicher 2020).

were conducted in November and December 2021 focusing on the "demand" for Lab services and the interviews were conducted from January to February 2022 focusing on the "supply" of Lab expertise in design for policy.

This is not intended to be a comparison or benchmarking exercise as both countries have further to go on their journeys toward mainstreaming design for policy and are from different geopolitical and cultural backgrounds but rather to explore different contexts for policy design and policy labs across Europe. The purpose is to examine the application of Bobrow's framework to these two countries to identify good practices from across the spectrum of policy design capability and identify lessons for further development.

4. Findings

Bobrow (2012, 75) stated that "unlike policy analysis, policy design shows few of the trappings of a professional community." Bobrow (2012, 75) identifies seven criteria for the existence of a professional community of Policy Designers: (1) "self-identification as a policy designer," (2) "a professional association," (3) a journal, (4) "standards for certification," (5) "broader social attribution of special expertise," (6) "consensually shared views of core foundation knowledge," and (7) "a widely accepted program for improving capabilities." Several years on, some of these elements have changed and some have not. Each component will be examined drawing on insights gathered in the interviews, workshops, and immersion in the UK and Latvia.

4.1. Self-identification as a policy designer and a widely accepted programme for improving capabilities

In Latvia, according to the research respondents, there are currently no civil servants working in government with the official job title of Policy Designer whether self-identified or not. However, design for policy is the main method of the Innovation Laboratory established in 2018 and with additional funding pledged from the European

Commission from 2022 to 2025. Furthermore, there is an "emerging cadre of multidisciplinary designer" working in various different Ministries including the Ministries of Economy and Culture as well as the State Chancellery. According to a respondent in the Latvian Innovation Laboratory, these designers, "although small in number (<15), are experimenting with policy design approaches." There was conjecture by interviewees that the design for policy scene is as yet too nascent in Latvia to have self-identified Policy Designers since there is low awareness of design itself. Thus there is not the "demand for and recognition of policy design in government." Nevertheless, there was also conjecture that this may well change in the coming years. Design agencies are identifying the public sector has a major design purchaser and aligning their services to upcoming policy agendas like "Digital Transformation" and "Recovery and Resilience." In short, there are grassroots initiatives both within government and within the design sector exploring and championing design for policy. Perhaps if this criterion were to be revisited in a few years, we "may well see Latvia's first Policy Designer in post." The Innovation Laboratory and Latvian School of Public Administration has recognized the need to build internal capacity for policy design across the Latvian civil service. For one member of previous Lab management, "People started to talk about the State Chancellery as a place where innovation and design happens."

In the UK, according to one Policy Designer interviewed, "there are around 50 Policy Designers operating in central government, particularly in policy labs and user-centered policy design teams." There are a handful of "self-identified" Policy Designers mostly concentrated in the Department for Education, Home Office, and Ministry of Justice. True, they are still small in number compared with the army of around 3000 Service Designers and Interaction Designers in the Government Digital Service and across the wider civil service at national, devolved, and local levels but Policy Designers do exist. According to multiple interviewees, it is generally considered that Policy Lab in the Cabinet Office advertised for the first Policy Designer in UK government in 2017 (they also advertised for the government's first Speculative Designer in 2019). The Policy Designer job advert stated that the applicant will:

- "Manage a range of projects with departments bringing design, data, and digital tools to the policy-making process;
- Commission external experts (e.g. ethnographers, data scientists, service designers) and manage their input into projects;
- Use practical design skills to improve the Policy Lab's suite of tools, techniques, and communications materials;
- Organize workshops and "sprints";
- Support the creation and testing of prototypes in policy delivery environments;
- Support the Lab's wider learning agenda: helping other civil servants to understand and use new ways of working." (Policy Lab, Cabinet Office 2017)

Like cataloging a new species, it can be determined beyond doubt that Policy Designers do exist even if they are a rare breed. Intriguingly, the title of Policy Designer exists not only in the UK. In February 2022, the EU Policy Lab advertised the

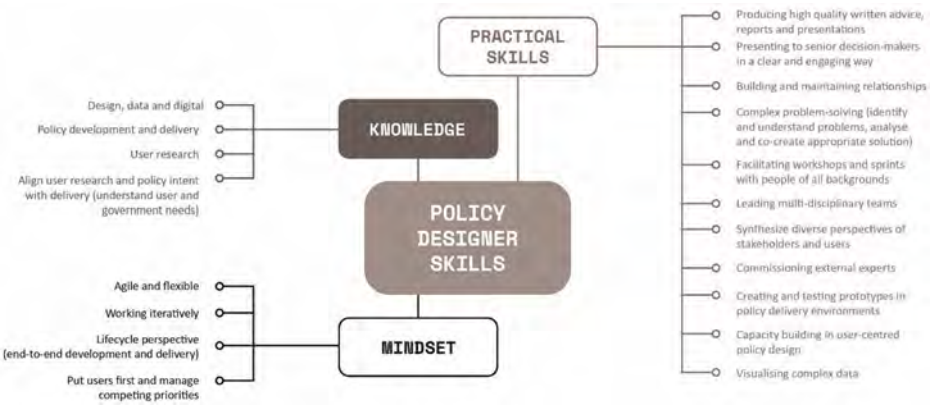

Figure 4. Skills of a policy designer (Whicher 2020, 11).

first job role of "Policy Analyst—Designer". The ideal candidate was, among others, expected to:

- "Provide conceptual support and novel perspectives to conversations on policy.
- Design and lead participatory processes using fit-for-purpose methods, tools, and artifacts.
- Harvest and communicate results from knowledge-gathering and sense-making processes.
- Develop and test prototypes of novel solutions to processes and procedures." (EU Policy Lab, Joint Research Center 2022)

The above begs the question, what are the skills of a Policy Designer? By examining the growing number of job descriptions for Policy Designers in the UK as well as collating insight from interviews and workshops, there are several requirements for a Policy Designer—namely, practical skills, knowledge, and mindset (see Figure 4). For one of the policy-makers interviewed, there is a "need to codify the skills of a Policy Designer to ensure high standards of design for policy practice." Codifying the skillset of Policy Designers will lead to its wider recognition and endorsement by civil servants. For practical skills, interviewees cited "complex problem-solving through co-design," "facilitating workshops and sprints with people of all backgrounds," "synthesizing diverse perspectives," "creating and testing prototypes," and "visualizing complex data" as required skills. Crucially, the ask of Policy Designers is significant—in terms of knowledge, they should have practical experience design, data, and digital expertise as well as understanding of the policy process in order to align user needs with digital delivery. The notion of "end-to-end policy-making" was also highlighted by multiple interviewees as being of central importance. This is the idea of continuity and consistency from policy intent, through developing policy options and prototyping them, and translating policy concepts into digital public services with citizens. For another interviewee, "It is no wonder that there are so few Policy Designers, working experience of both the policy process and design process is a big ask." Codifying the skillset of Policy Designers will lead to its wider recognition and endorsement by civil servants. To gain

broader legitimacy and validation these should be co-designed by users and stakeholders internal and external to the government.

4.2. Existence of a professional association

Interviewees reported that, At present, there is no professional association for policy designers in the UK or Latvia but perhaps this is an outdated concept in itself? Paid membership to professional design associations has been dwindling over the years. The two dominant design networks in Europe are the Bureau of European Design Associations (BEDA) and the global Service Design Network. BEDA is an association for associations (rather than individuals) and has specific working groups on design and policy since many of the design centers, clusters, and associations have major competencies in this area. The Service Design Network focuses predominantly on service design with a peripheral interest in policy design. Instead, respondents in both countries reported that "more informal Communities of Practice are on the rise."

In the UK, policy-makers noted that there are interest groups with membership exclusively for civil servants (you must have a gov.uk email address to be part of the communication channels). There are Communities of Practice for Service Design, User Research and in 2021, the first Community of Practice for Policy Design was established. There are currently around 100 members, some have the job title of Policy Designer but many are designers or policy-makers with an interest in design for policy. Interviewees from policy labs reported that there is representation from all the active policy labs in central government within the Policy Design Community of Practice. There are also some other self-organized groups in the UK civil service. Two years ago, the Government Digital Service has established a "Design Buddy" system where anyone in the central government can sign up to be part of an informal discussion group. Participants are randomly assigned to a group of 5–8 designers working in national, devolved, or local government with an interest in design. These groups meet weekly for eight weeks and then it is possible to sign up for a different cohort. Interviewees stated that "these informal initiative are powerful for building cohorts of civil servants with working knowledge of design for policy and public service development." There are also emerging practitioner-academic networks like the Designing Policy Network and Apolitical.

In Latvia, as reported by a number of participants, one of the "major successes" of the Innovation Laboratory was to connect with the Innovation Units in all the central government Ministries and convene an Innovation Network with representation from all Ministries. This network of around 30 innovation leaders has been active since 2019 and regular training and knowledge exchange events are organized by the Lab. A few of these innovation specialists are designers but the majority are generalist policy-makers. However, over the years several design training has been organized for them including on service design and most recently, at the end of 2021, on policy design. This Innovation Network operates a wheel and spoke model with the Latvian Innovation Laboratory in the middle and the Innovation Units as nodes. It is intended for there to be multilateral exchanges of expertise across the network—as such, there is a growing demand for design expertise. Many of these innovation specialists have

participated in the Innovation Lab projects and have "learnt by doing." As such, they act like "ambassadors for design methods within their own Ministries creating pockets of design knowledge." In time, there will be a "multiplier effect spreading design knowledge from these Innovation Units" across the Ministries. However, according to one member of the senior civil service in the Latvian State Chancellery:

> "The Lab is still fragile. There is still a risk that it could stagnate. It needs to be a fully-fledge, institutionally recognized body. Then we can improve, expand and scale up the design thinking approaches. There is not a culture of innovation in public governance in Latvia. Design is a completely new mindset. We need examples."

The Innovation Lab and the Latvian School of Public Administration (VAS) are the main engines of policy changes through design. Design is still emerging within the policy scene in Latvia and there is a need for the lab and VAS to consolidate and proliferate the knowledge.

4.3. Existence of journals

There are now academic journals, including this very journal, focused on policy design as well as a growing number of journals with special issues on the topic (e.g. Policy Sciences vol. 47, issue 3, September 2014 "New Policy Design" or Policy & Politics vol. 48, issue 1, January 2020 "Policy-making as designing: the added value of design thinking for public administration and public policy"). Furthermore, in the UK, design for policy has been identified as a research priority in several successive strategies of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)—the main funder of design research in the UK. According to the Design Lead in the AHRC, between 2016 and 2020 the Research Council invested roughly £52 million in design research across 124 projects with several multi-partner projects benefiting from grants of more than £3 million. It has also created a timeline of its funded design research since 2012 (AHRC 2021). Furthermore, there are a growing number of design for policy research projects. Indeed, this research is based on a project commissioned by the AHRC to inform future strategy and programme development by assessing the state of the art in policy design in the UK (Whicher 2020). Bobrow (2012, 75) also states that professional communities often possess handbooks identifying "the major instruments of a professional repertoire, and assesses their strengths and weaknesses to suggest best practices." A stake in the ground in this regard is the seminal book "Design for Policy" (2014) edited by arguably the most renowned expert in the field Christian Bason former Director of Mindlab in the Danish Government. Intriguingly, almost all of the contributors to the book note that design for policy is a nascent, emerging area lacking a theoretically grounding (Amatullo 2014, 152; Bason 2014, 3; Junginger 2014, 57; Staszowski et al. 2014, 155). However, the OECD has identified design for policy as an emerging innovation trend for government in their Observatory for Public Sector Innovation (OPSI). The OPSI has compiled a compendium of toolkits for public sector innovation from around the world and the myriad of design toolkits features significantly. For example, PDR's "Design for Policy PROMPT" toolkit

(Whicher 2019). Indeed, the OECD Innovation Scan for Latvia identified the Innovation Laboratory as an example of good practice.

> "Latvia notably invested in a whole-of-government Innovation Laboratory, and continues to support the Lab with communications, training, and pathfinder projects to an impressive degree. Together with complementary service design training for practitioners and top-level management, these actions represent specific decisions that can support individuals' capacity to innovate and a number of organisational priority projects. These have been important contributions to the public sector innovation journey of Latvia which are already demonstrating value." (OECD 2021, 2)

According to respondents in both government and academia, there is a growing body of academic and practitioners knowledge on design for policy. It could be concluded that the application of policy design in practice is in advance of theory. At its core, design for policy is a practice-based discipline.

4.4. Existence of standards for certification and consensual shared views of core foundation knowledge

Interviewees reported that there are "no standards for certification in policy design" although it has long been a criticism of design in general that there are no certification standards for practitioners—anyone can call themselves a designer, particularly with the rise of design thinking. The Service Design Network has an Academy of "certified" service design trainers, who are assessed every 2 years through the interview but have not yet branched out to certify policy design trainers.

The UK Government Digital Service has created a set of Design Principles which have been widely adopted across the UK government for developing new digital public services with the number one principle being "start with user needs":

1. Start with user needs
2. Do less
3. Design with data
4. Do the hard work to make it simple
5. Iterate. Then iterate again
6. This is for everyone
7. Understand context
8. Build digital services, not websites
9. Be consistent, not uniform
10. Make things open: it makes things better (GDS 2018).

There is currently no equivalent for policy and certainly, civil service respondents noted that "the user is not the starting point in traditional policy processes." In the UK, guidelines on policy development and evaluation are enshrined in the Treasury's Greenbook (2018). The UK policy cycle is called ROAMEF—Rationale, Objective, Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback. If you word search "user," "citizen," or "public" in the Treasury's Greenbook there are only two results. If the government understands that digital public services should start with user needs, why is

that not also the same starting point for policy development? One of the reasons is politics but there are others cited by interviewees like an "engrained hierarchical culture with aversion to failure," "over reliance on quantitative evidence," and "minimal change in policy processes in the last forty years."

Certification presupposes a clear set of skills and standards against which practitioners could be assessed. As noted by one government respondent, there is "currently no consensus on the skillset of a Policy Designer." The Government Digital Service has recognized the need for a specialized digital and data profession in the UK government—the Digital, Data, and Technology (DDaT) Profession Capability Framework outlines a clear set of "job families" and the skills needed to perform those roles. This framework is composed of six "job families" including data, IT operations, product, quality assurance testing, technical, and also user-centered design. Within the user-centered design job family there are several roles: Content Designer, Graphic Designer, Interaction Designer, Service Designer, and User Researcher. These job roles have been codified with a specific skills set. For example, the skills of a Service Design include agile working, communicating information, community collaboration, digital perspective, evidence and context-based design, experience of working with constraints, facilitating decisions and risks, leadership and guidance, prototyping in code, strategic thinking, and user focus. The Policy Design Community of Practice is currently working to define the skills of a policy designer that could be integrated into the DDaT framework.

A significant observation for the UK is the "gap" between the skills for which the government is recruiting (policy design) and the supply of design expertise in universities. While there are many Master's programmes in service design, there are no dedicated Design for Policy Master's courses. Any UK institution implementing a postgraduate Policy Design course would have a first mover advantage. Currently, many of the individuals taking up the posts of Policy Designers come from backgrounds as varied as Anthropology, Ethnography, and Geography.

The Latvian Innovation Laboratory has recognized that to develop a professional cadre of policy designers within the Latvian government, design should be "explicitly included in the catalog of professions in Latvia." There is also a need to codify a set of design standards to ensure that the growing number of design thinkers across the various Ministries all adhere to the same design principles. The Lab has plans to "co-design these Design Principles with the Innovation Network to gain endorsement and legitimacy." Perhaps more significantly, there is a major capability-building initiative by the Latvian School of Public Administration and Innovation Laboratory to training 80% of the Latvian civil service in design thinking as well as to have around 30 highly trained Policy Design and Service Design facilitators. This constitutes a significant investment in design for policy and the need to foster a shift in mindset and culture within policy practices in Latvia. For one participant: "policy innovation depends on personalities, how can we implement design approaches across the wider government?" Latvia also lacks a future workforce pipeline connecting academic institutions and the government. Nevertheless, there are a growing number of Design Management modules as part of postgraduate studies in business.

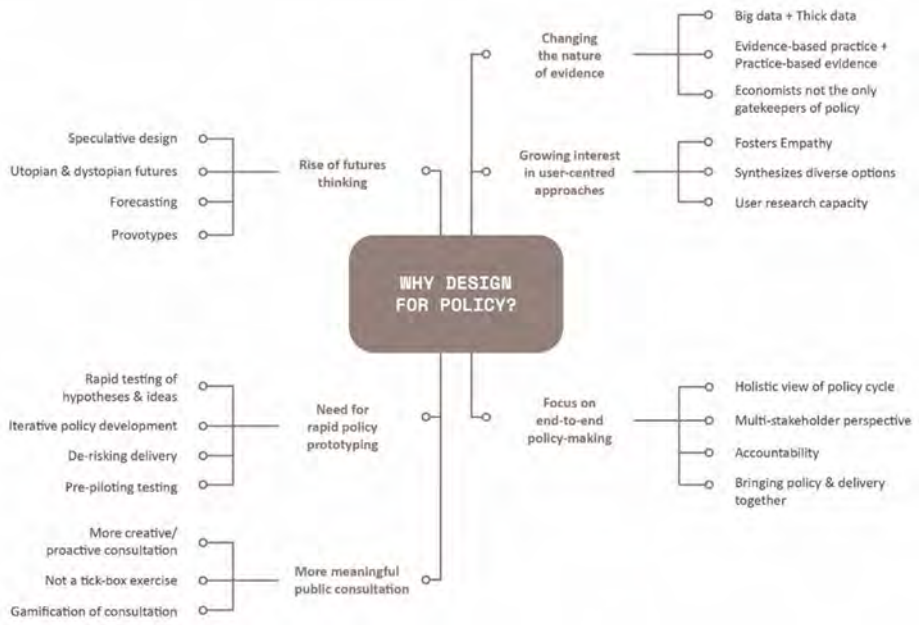

Figure 5. Why design for policy? (Whicher 2020, 15).

4.5. Recognition of a broader attribution of special expertise

Policy design is not well recognized as a sub-discipline of design by designers or design researchers and it is also not well recognized as a sub-element of policy by policy-makers or policy analysts. Policy design is a highly niche, yet growing, topic for a handful of research experts across Europe. Policy design has not really been acknowledged by the wider policy research community. In both the UK and Latvia, policy design expertise is concentrated in policy Labs. This raises the question, why policy design? (see Figure 5). In the UK, according to interviewees, there are several reasons for the rise of policy design: (1) the "changing nature of evidence to inform policy-making"; (2) "growing interest in user-centered approaches"; (3) a "focus on end-to-end policy-making"; (4) the need for "more meaningful public consultation"; (5) the need for "rapid policy prototyping"; and (6) the "rise of futures thinking." In the UK, the policy has always been evidence-based but this presupposes that the evidence is quantitative rather than qualitative. Policy insight tends to be justified by generalizations from large datasets. This is the "helicopter" view of the policy landscape. However, there is recognition now of the need to interrogate the numbers and understand issues at a more granular level. This can be achieved through policy design—design for policy is all about "humanizing the numbers" and "understanding the lived experiences" of policy stakeholders, users, and beneficiaries. For one policy lab interviewee, it is important to articulate that a design approach to policy is not about "supplanting or usurping empirical approaches but complementing and enhancing them."

Since user research has been identified a job role in government, there is a growing number of practitioners across the UK government. Their influences are "permeating beyond the creation of digital public service more upstream within

policy processes." There is also a need for more holistic, end-to-end policy-making. In the UK, as in many other countries, the policy process is siloed where policy-makers have "little accountability for implementation and implementation teams have limited involvement in policy development." This is part of a critical drive in UK government to bring policy development and service delivery together. Design is also being recognized in terms of its role in more meaningful consultation. Public involvement is a mandatory part of the policy process but this tends to be a "tick-box exercise." Design is being used to co-create policy with citizens. This entails risk as it is vital to manage user and stakeholder involvement effectively and not raise expectations but some policy teams are being more creative in the way they engage with the public. Prototyping has always been a core component of design. There is growing interest in "prototyping policy" the notion of rapid and iterative testing of low-fidelity and higher-fidelity policy concepts before major investment in pilot schemes. Finally, interviewees also reported a need to "radically reimagine the future of governance" and to develop more long-term perspectives for policy-making. More specialist techniques like speculative design are being applied to policy-making. Design for policy is by no means well recognized in the UK government but the work of policy labs and DDaT specialists is slowly changing practices. Design at least is very much part of the lexicon of the UK government.

The context is different in Latvia. Design is not part of the lexicon of government and the Innovation Laboratory and Latvian School of Public Administration still have significant work to undertake before building broader awareness of both policy design and service design. Interviewees cited a lack of examples and case studies of design for policy in a Latvian context. For one Latvian policy-maker, "Labs are the seeds to grow the use of design in government moving toward design capabilities being embedded in policy and service teams."

5. Conclusion

What is clear is that there is a growing appetite for design for policy approaches in government in part due to the work of policy labs experimenting with the approaches and seeking to infuse the methods and principles across the wider innovation ecosystems. From the experiences in the UK and Latvia, there are several examples of good practices and lessons that can be learned to further develop the design for policy capabilities of civil servants. First and foremost, there is a need to codify the skills of a Policy Designer to ensure high standards of practice. These skill sets should be integrated into the professional frameworks for the civil service to ensure that design is recognized as a policy competency. To gain broader legitimacy and validation the skillsets and job descriptions should be co-designed by users and stakeholders for maximum endorsement. This should go hand in hand with an exercise to build a solid skills pipeline for the future policy workforce. This means engaging with higher education institutions already engaged in delivering design and/or policy training to ensure that the skills being taught in universities are those required by the government. It is also important to ensure that aspiring design graduates understand that the public sector could be a

place for their skills. Any institution in the UK or Latvia with a Master's level training module in Design for Policy would have a first mover advantage.

What has not been explored in this research is whether Bobrow's criteria for a professional community is still relevant ten years after it was first developed. For example, is it still necessary to have a professional association? Informal Communities of Practice are more common across government departments and ministries—civil servants in the UK and Latvia tend not to be part of paid membership organizations. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is an emerging cadre of Policy Designer in the UK even if they are far outnumbered by Service Designers and Interaction Designers. Similarly, in Latvia, a new breed of multidisciplinary designer capable of operating within the constraints of the public sector is emerging. Perhaps more significantly, there is a major capability-building initiative by the Latvian School of Public Administration and Innovation Laboratory to train 80% of the Latvian civil service in design thinking as well as to have around 30 highly trained Policy Design and Service Design facilitators.

In short, there is a need to integrate design into the government skills capability framework, build a pipeline in universities for a future policy design workforce, promote good practices of design for policy and infuse design within the wider innovation ecosystem within a country.

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