KU Leuven Open Science Day

A malleable research inventory: Retaining knowledge and promoting collaborative research practice

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Abstract

The Research[x]Design group comprises researchers with diverse disciplinary backgrounds and research approaches. Data collection, often involving people in vulnerable situations and/or sensitive contexts, requires significant investments (effort, time); data are rich in ways valuable both for subsequent investigations and to inform design practice. Potential to align with movements towards research transparency is challenged by the nature of our data. Commitments to ethical committees and research participants limit data sharing possibilities. Simultaneously, responsible applications of open science are expected to benefit our research.

Steps are made towards ‘opening up’ our data while limitations related to ‘going public’ remain. In this context, we are developing a research inventory for in-house use, incorporating work conducted by master students, PhD candidates, postdocs, and others. Short-term goals relate to on-going knowledge transfer: as knowledge retention strategy, the inventory is intended to facilitate overview and access to past and on-going studies. Long-term goals include harnessing shared knowledge, supporting collaborations, and equipping researchers to explore (efficiently) the group’s growing output and research ‘heritage’.

To create our inventory, we used an Excel-document; accessible enough to not require specific skills and flexible to let individuals work with it independently. Contributing seems to encourage researchers to systematically assess their files, records, and commitments. While enhancing openness within the group, personal and contextualized data from small numbers of participants cannot be anonymized. As such, identifiability forms an immediate obstacle (under GDPR regulations) to further ‘opening up’ data, with technical and organizational measures required to safeguard them.

The inventory improves ‘searchability’ and ‘browsability’ of the research, increasing the likelihood of re-using data and extending work done in the past. It is considered ‘alive’ and ‘unfinished’, which will require care to remain malleable to how the group may wish to engage with it. The inventory is expected to support (practices of) scientific integrity and shift concerns from accountability and liability with respect to sharing research data towards an ethic of caring for what connects us as a group. The issues raised with this example may furthermore serve to illustrate possible challenges to open science applications where it concerns similar types of data.

Author biographies

[Pleuntje Jellema](#) (KU Leuven) is a postdoctoral researcher in the Research[x]Design group in the Department of Architecture. She has a background in interior architecture and human geography. Her PhD research focused on how the experience of people affected by cancer can inform human-centred design of cancer care facilities. In her current work within the [enable² project](#) she seeks to investigate how end-users in health sector contexts can benefit from methods integrating diverse user perspectives in design processes. She also contributes to the KU Leuven's Interior Architecture program as a design tutor.

Koen Coomans (KU Leuven) is partner at D E Architecten in Tervuren, Belgium. At KU Leuven, he is a research associate within the Research[x]Design group. His research focuses on the role of built space in various contexts, such as residential care in later life, mental health care for children, end-of-life care, and detention. He obtained his MSc in Engineering, Architecture from KU Leuven, and did his internship at D E Architecten.

[Peter-Willem Vermeersch](#) (KU Leuven) works as an engineer-architect at (Full) Scale Architecten in Leuven, Belgium. At KU Leuven, he is a visiting professor and part of the Research[x]Design group. His research focuses on how the lived experience of disabled people can inform architectural design practice. He obtained his MSc and PhD degree in Engineering, Architecture from KU Leuven, and did his internship at osar architecten in Antwerp.

[Ann Heylighen](#) (KU Leuven) is a design researcher with a background in architectural engineering. As a research professor of design studies she co-chairs the Research[x]Design group. Her team works at the interface of design research and social sciences: they study design practices in architecture and related design disciplines and explore how the spatial experience of people of various abilities, ages, and perspectives may expand prevailing ways of understanding and designing space. Application domains include designing (health)care environments and making built heritage more inclusive.