

Editor's Introduction

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The summer 2024 issue of the Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding highlights the importance of engaging end users, including the general public as stakeholders, in the design and regulatory policy development of signage. Signs and symbols play multiple roles in the development of signage and wayfinding systems. As sign designers, makers and regulators, we have an obligation to consider how signs and symbols reflect the character of a neighborhood or district, support brand identity and marketing for businesses, function as wayfinding for users, and support place making overall. Evidence based design is an approach used in many disciplines, including the built environment professions, to support decision making with findings derived from quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The articles in this issue use theory generation with perspectives from multiple disciplines, case studies with think-aloud user techniques and shadow methods, and an exhibition evaluation of the development of the language of symbols internationally.

The issue begins with "A Stakeholder Approach to the Regulation of On-Premise Signs" by the interdisciplinary team of Christopher Auffrey, Mathew Isaac, Steven Kopp, Hannah Marriot, Aparna Sundar, Charles Taylor and Franklin Velasco Vizcaino. The authors bring diverse perspectives to creating a theoretical model to expand the scope and depth of relevant stakeholder groups into policy and regulatory decision making. Stakeholder theory expands the concept of stakeholders to include sign companies, suppliers, businesses, regulators, consumers and members of the public at large. The authors recognize points of tension that can arise between goals such as economic prosperity, preserving cultural identity and the impacts of technology on sign fabrication for on-premise signage. The article is divided into sections representing perspectives such as differentiation of a business and shared community identity and national laws and local regulations. Their analysis highlights the need for a move away from policy and decision making based on anecdotal information towards use of academic and consumer research to critically navigate the interests of different stakeholder groups within unique contexts. The ultimate goal of using a stakeholder

model is to enhance placemaking, community well-being and advancing the growth of a “symbol-based” economy.

The next two articles provide research-based evidence to enhance our understanding of wayfinding. “The Role of Maps and Signage in Interior Wayfinding: An Exploratory Qualitative Study,” by Saman Jamshidi and Debajyoti Pati, uses participant observation and a think-aloud protocol. This exploratory work fills a gap in the literature which has extensive use of confirmatory approaches. The focus of the confirmatory approach is on finding the target with manipulation of attributes or environmental elements. The exploratory approach focuses on the wayfinding behaviors and thought processes while finding the target. The main research questions are 1) How do users use maps and signage in real-world interior wayfinding? and 2) What attributes of maps and signage can facilitate or impede interior wayfinding? The study group included 11 participants with wayfinding tasks in two complex university buildings. The findings suggest that maps are not a primary strategy for wayfinding thought processes and may actually create more confusion when maps are oriented differently within the building. The authors suggest further exploration of digital 3-D maps and use of room numbering, rather than names, that relate to zones such as floor level and corridor adjacency to enhance wayfinding in unfamiliar interior environments.

“The Journey to the Grave: Evaluating a Swiss Cemetery Wayfinding System Using Shadowing Techniques,” by Harald Klingemann, Jimmy Schmid, Andrea Umbricht, Daniela Rota, and Nicole Hametner brings another research based perspective to understanding how end users perceive wayfinding systems. The authors use observation methods to explore the effectiveness of a pilot wayfinding system implemented in the city of Zurich’s Sihlfeld cemetery. The research question focuses on navigation of funeral goers to the internment site with the goal of increasing on-time arrival. The use of an unobtrusive shadowing technique allowed the researchers to observe behaviors directly in the cemetery and identify critical points where mourners deviated from the predetermined ideal path. Over eight observation days, 49 people were shadowed as they navigated to 17 burial ceremonies. Up to 27% of the mourners arrived late to the burial site and deviated from the ideal path. Analysis reveals a multi-faceted

communication system is essential for achieving the goal of on-time arrival. Elements include enhanced prior communications directing mourners to the best entrance and to important signage that will be provided on site the day of the burial, site signage that supports orientation for augmenting wayfinding with digital maps or calling other people, and scheduling to avoid two burials in the same area of the cemetery. The authors emphasize that signage and wayfinding requires an interdisciplinary approach to support end users, especially in times of stress.

The issue concludes with an exhibition review by Craig Berger, “Give Me a Sign: The Language of Symbols at the Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York.” The museum curators use Henry Dreyfuss’s 1972 book, *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols*, as the launch point for their interactive exhibit. Dreyfuss’s text is the first compilation of symbols and semiotics bringing together examples from around the world. The exhibit includes interpretive materials around the development symbols for the Olympics, political movements, the accessibility symbol, and emoji development and adoption. The study of symbols has an important role to play in developing public signage and wayfinding, especially for regulatory buy-in for public transportation, healthcare, vehicular signage systems.

We hope you enjoy these articles and consider adding to the conversation with your own research work to expand our understanding of signage and wayfinding.