Creative Commission Opportunity: Visualising future energy systems

The University of Bristol are seeking an artist to collaborate on a project aiming to visualise future smart local energy systems.

About the project

How to draw a network? How to draw energy? How to draw intelligence? Digital futures are challenging to visualise. Even if digital technologies are embedded in the material reality (e.g. undersea cables, microchips), we often perceive them as inconspicuous and abstract. The current practices of visualising the potential of innovations focus on either highly technical network diagrams or uninformative futuristic aesthetics of blue, silver and black colour palettes.

In contrast, we'd like to approach the future from a different angle. Thinking about public values embedded the design of technologies, we will combine insights from computer science, social sciences and arts to will deliver creative representations of smart local energy systems.

Through the creative representations, we will initiate a debate around public values embedded in the design of future energy systems (openness-privacy, centralisation-distribution, flexibility-routine). Together with the artist, the researchers, energy stakeholders and citizens, we will visualise desired and possible innovations that aren't yet a reality. Ultimately, we aim to generate enthusiasm about digital energy innovation among the citizens so that there is visible public demand and political pressure for introducing sustainable energy policies (such as installing street-level microgrids, shared battery storage, retrofits in social housing or introducing an appropriate licence for landlords renting properties).

The project is funded by Bristol Digital Futures Institute, and the artwork is commissioned by Dr Ola Michalec and Dr Ruzanna Chitchyan.

About the artwork

We will commission a series of artworks illustrating the possibilities of the devices, networks and people involved in the smart local energy systems. We expect to co-design 5-8 illustrations (size A3-A1). This will take place in a process involving

negotiation between technical accuracy, the level of detail and space for artistic expression of future uncertainty. While there are smart energy diagrams available publicly, they overlook the many thought-provoking aspects of energy futures, e.g., representing flexibility, data flows, vulnerabilities, shifting demand, or Internet of Things devices. This is an important omission because it limits the potential for a public conversation on the topic. As such, this project aims to initiate an engaged and open debate on digital innovations in energy, so that future energy systems are designed with care for public values.

About the process

By 20th July 2021 – recruitment & kick of meeting with university researchers and community energy partners. We'll agree: artist's day rates, delivery medium, completion timescales, procurement of materials and IP rights.

The artist will receive:

- A detailed brief outlining 8 key themes around the topic of smart local energy systems that require their creative intervention
- A list of recommended readings to get to know the subject area
- An album with reference images serving as further guidance

July – Sept 2021 – iterative and coproduced development of creative outputs.

There will be two rounds of feedback organised by the university researchers where the artist will present their drafts and reflections to the researchers, community energy practitioners and members of the public.

By late Sept 2021 – delivery of the commission

Autumn 2021 – promotion of the final output through workshops, local media, exhibitions held online/on campus (this will be managed by the team at the University)

About the outcomes

It is crucial that the artwork creates a lasting impact among diverse communities in Bristol. Following the production of artwork, the university will promote it widely, across a range of platforms (public events, local media, meetings with policy makers), so that we:
a) raise awareness about digital innovation in the energy systems and explain key socio-technical concepts
b) provoke discussions about future possibilities and uncertainties
c) galvanise public support to create political pressure and introduce smart local energy systems widely across the city.

We will disseminate the work through the following channels:

- An online exhibition in Autumn 2021, with a long-term online repository hosted on BDFI website
- A physical exhibition (covid-19 contingent)
- a feature article in the local media (e.g. Bristol Cable, Up Our Street)
- workshops organised with local sustainability stakeholders (e.g. Bristol Energy Network, Bristol Green Capital Partnership)
- policy advocacy through presentations at meetings with Bristol Advisory Climate Change Committee, One City Boards, Bristol City Council as well as production of policy briefings in collaboration with PolicyBristol

About the artist

- Experienced in community art/ socially engaged art practice
- With a strong track record of collaborative work
- Able and willing to negotiate with diverse stakeholders; come up with own ideas and act on partners' feedback
- Passionate about sustainable energy
- An interest in communicating scientific/technological information
- Keen to work with technology-inspired aesthetics: be it sci-fi pop culture, soviet cybernetic, 1910s futurism (and many more!)
- Able to deliver this project effectively on time and on budget, in a freelance capacity (responsible for paying own tax and national insurance)
- Holds public liability insurance

Budget

£5250 for the commission
£750 for production materials (E.g. software license, art supplies, web hosting for an online exhibition, workshop materials, printing for a physical exhibition)

To apply please submit:

- a brief proposal (Max: 1 x side A4) outlining: your creative approach (medium, sources of inspiration, style); how would you respond to the brief; your experience of collaborative projects; your motivations and suitability
- a CV with relevant experience and references.
- a sample of your previous work you'd like us to see

Application deadline: 9th July 2021, 5PM

Please email applications to: Ola Michalec, researcher at the University of Bristol, ola.michalec@bristol.ac.uk

Further references to associated projects and partners:

Understanding disruptive powers of IoT in the energy sector (Power^2): https://petras-iot.org/project/understanding-disruptive-powers-of-iot-in-the-energy-sector-power2/

Skills needed for smart local energy systems: https://www.energyrev.org.uk/news-events/blogs/skills-needed-for-smart-local-energy-systems/

Bristol Digital Futures Institute https://www.bristol.ac.uk/bristol-digital-futures-institute/

Copyright and ownership:
The IP ownership of the artwork will be held in favour of the artist.

Bristol University have rights to use project photographs, images and videos for learning and participation activities, promotional and publicity purposes including social media, in digital and print format. The artist must acknowledge the support of Bristol University (including use of legible logos) in all relevant publicity and promotional material.