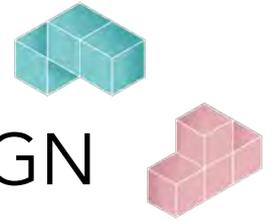# 12 PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this workshop is to support deeper discussions of the field of social design, which is increasingly becoming a contested space. To support this, we have created 12 principles of Social Design which we want to share with the Nordes community as a starting point for open conversation about the goals of social design and an area of academic inquiry and a field of reflective practice. In particular it explores social designs intentions towards 'the social'. Our plan for the workshop is to have a discursive structure that allows us to dig deeper into the principles and the issues that sit behind them. Participants will be invited to bring their own case studies to see how the principles perform against practice. The workshop will thus be used to get feedback, test the principles and improve them and ultimately to influence the direction of social design.

INTRODUCTION

In the design research literature, there have been productive intersections between studies of design and work in the social sciences. This has included using concepts from social science to analyse what happens in designing, including the construction of new 'socials'.

Researchers have analysed the social in design (Keshavarz, 2018), different socials operating in design (Tonkiss, 2017) and used concepts from social research such as 'infrastructuring' (eg Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010) or 'institutional logics' (eg Arico, 2018).

In regard to explicitly 'social design', Koskinen and Hush (2016) characterised different types of social design as molecular (small-scale), utopian and sociological. Others noted that social design practice may be optimised to 'work' at smaller scales (Chen et al 2015). Tonkinwise (2019) mapped out several ways that the 'social' is activated in research and practice in social design. Some researchers have highlighted the conditions in which social design has emerged. Julier (2017) pointed to the conditions shaping ongoing developments in design such as neo-liberalism. Kaszynska (2021) distinguished between different genealogies in social design. Building on research in service design, Kimbell (2021) argued that versions of social design practice exist within distinct institutional logics. In reviewing this emerging literature, we note a lack of coherence in defining the social, a focus on the methods for operating on the social, a normative intent to change the social world in particular directions and evidence of reflexive, critical and historical perspectives to account for its emergence and consequences.

Social design has been held back by an ambiguity and specificity of what is meant by the social. The problem is that the social seems to imply physical proximity and conviviality with others - something that design in the last decades has increasingly been successful in supporting via participatory and co-design. Yet on the other hand, the social also invokes a language of sociology and institutional structures that invites a bird's eye view on society as an organism that has its own structure. In this sense the problem of social design

is a matters of scale in terms of how to reconcile these different notions of social scale within design practice .

So far, the most successful way of cutting through this scale problem has been the 'sociology of associations' (Latour, 2005), also known as Actor-Network Theory, which offers a notion of the social that is made up of both humans and nonhumans and collapses notions of micro and macro scale (Callon & Latour, 1981). This socio-material approach has been popular within design theory such as Binder et al (2011) who propose design as the making of socio-material 'design things'. Yet it has proved difficult to embed them within everyday social design practices. One of the challenges seems to be that much of the world is caught in rigid scalar distinctions that focus on either human-centred design or on institutional framings of systems as technocratic entities. How can those advocating and developing social design practices engage meaningfully with these tensions of socio-material rhetoric and mundane institutional practices?

To address this challenge, we propose a workshop in which we offer 12 principles as a starting point for an open discussion about social design. We are academics involved in social design research and practice who are members of the Social Design Institute at the University of the Arts London. We have a number of motivations for this workshop: to create a social design field of inquiry; to support and regulate the development of a field of practice; to enable practitioners to understand, assess and critically reflect on their practice; to open up dialogues with colleagues; and to support teaching and learning. We have an online version of the principles that anyone is invited to edit and improve, share thoughts and offer counterarguments.
https://pad.riseup.net/p/LclTxq5rloll_VTzvgmu-keep

12 PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL DESIGN

This series of principles defines what social design 'is' and, in our opinion, what it should 'be'. The current 12 principles are divided into four areas.

THE SOCIAL AS AN OBJECT OF DESIGN

1. Social Design claims there is a distinct 'social' that is made through and with things.

2. Social Design acknowledges that there are many possible ways of operating on the social.

3. Social Design claims a hybrid space of social practice between technical systems and human-centered design.

METHODS AND PRACTICES

4. Social Design is an anticipatory socio-material practice that proceeds through intervening into and reconfiguring sites and worlds.

5. Social Design engages multiple perspectives, knowledges, disciplines: no single one has a privileged methodology for operating on the social.

6. Social Design shifts and translates across object and planetary scales, domains and sites.

NORMATIVE INTENT

7. Social Design is underpinned by normative intentions and undertaken with a view to creating social transformation.

8. Social Design forms issue-publics by creating shared, open-ended endeavours with communities through collective discussion about purposes, needs, values, and consequences.

9. Social Design builds new forms of democratic relations between places, living beings and things.

CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY

10. Social Design problematises the traditional modes and historical achievements of professional design, its Eurocentric assumptions, and its racialised and unequal consequences.

11. Social Design tries to mitigate against the unintended and damaging outcomes of designing.

12. Social Design is critically aware of its political, systemic, institutional and environmental situatedness.

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Workshop title: Exploring Social Design Principles

Motivation: The goal of this workshop is to support deeper discussions of the area of social design which is increasingly becoming a contested space. To support this we have created 12 principles of Social Design which we want to share with the Nordes community as a starting point for open discussions about the fundamental goals of social design. In particular what exactly its intensions are towards ideas of 'the social'. The idea of a principles is to have a formalised structure to dig deeper into these ideas and allow people to bring their own case studies to see how the principles need to be adapted to the practice. The workshop will thus be used to get feedback, test the principles and improve them and ultimately to influence the direction of social design.

Length of the workshop: half a day, delivered online

Format of the workshop: MS Teams or Zoom, as well as using shared online workboard such as Miro.

Tentative programme:

BEFORE WORKSHOP

The organisers share a draft paper that contextualises the 12 Social Design principles with a call out for participants for the workshop.
Participants are invited to contribute to the iteration of the principles online at
https://pad.riseup.net/p/LclTxq5rloll_VTzvgmu-keep
Participants are invited to share case studies that operationalise/manifest, modify or reject some/all of the principles by responding to the organisers with a 300 word case example to be discussed in the workshop.

WORKSHOP DESIGN

Welcome; explanation of workshop process

Part 1 – Reviewing the draft principles
Participants go into pre-assigned 4 separate break out groups, each one facilitated by the authors

- Read principles in small group
- Discuss first and second set (defining the social, methods and practices)
- Make changes to text if desired in

Plenary discussion – share two key insights from the break outs
REPEAT for third and fourth set of principles – people go back to same group and then go back to plenary

BREAK

Part 2 – Applying the draft principles to previous projects
We hear from 3 people pre-selected from our application process to share a project and reflect on whether the principles illuminate the case – i.e. testing to what extent the principles 'work'.

The discussion is enabled by the fact that all participants has now got some understanding of the principles (having done 2 rounds of small group/plenary discussion).

BREAK

Part 3 – Reflective discussion - genealogies of social design
Discussion questions

- Does it make sense to define principles of social design across different contexts, forms and practices?
- Do different forms of social design (institutionalised in different ways) lead to different principles and practices?
- Is there a need to define social design? If so, why?
- What forms of 'social' are mobilised through different forms of social designing?
- Is there a need to regulate/codify social design? If so, why? Who benefits and who is marginalised from such work?
- What might social design practice and teaching look like in the future if there was a shared/contestable set of definitions/practices/modes of evaluation?

Concluding – sum up, next steps

AFTER WORKSHOP

Invite participants to send papers for a special issue on defining social design.

Participant acceptance process and criteria:
People will be asked to sign up via an online form without any exclusion criteria. They will be asked to explain why they want to participate and how they want to contribute. Participants will be selected based on relevance of their proposal.

The workshop structure will be dynamically adjusted according to the number of participants (breakout rooms).

Workshop Location:
Zoom/Miro. In order to deal with data privacy there will be an announcement at the start of the workshop that the event will be recorded for use by the workshop organisers but the video will not be available online. The zoom link will only be shared at the last moment with signed up members to stop malicious intrusions.