

# Designing Designing: Design Methods Revisited

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## 1 Introduction

The attention to methods is central in design practice. In the context of IASDR 2023 this panel could thus have been suggested within any of the conference tracks. However, we are more specifically addressing the query highlighted in the Changing Communities track: “How can we innovate collaborative processes and codesign knowledge, methods, and tools while considering current socio-technological transformations?”

The panel focuses on the evolution and making of new methods, investigating the relationships between theory and practice through the entry point of methods. For example in emerging participatory and collaborative design practices, developing methods for community engagement (Wahlin & Blomkamp, 2022), for making publics (Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013; Lindström & Ståhl, 2014) and for creating commons (Bruyns & Kousoulas, 2022) often takes issue with the roles and agencies of design in reimagining and reformulating worldviews, norms, and practices. Generally speaking, developing design methods through experimentation and critical reflection seems essential to design, whether in commercial, public, pedagogical, or research contexts. Despite this, research conversations that explicitly take a starting point from design methods are fairly infrequent nowadays. With this panel, we wish to revisit and reopen conversations on design methods in discussing emerging design practices from points of view that highlight how designing is shaped by methods, and how methods carry ideas about what design and designing could be.

## 2 Topic background

A wide range of methods, tools, approaches, and processes for designing have been developed over time, shaping design as a discipline with its own purposes, values, measures and procedures (Giaccardi, 2020; Göransdotter & Auricchio, 2021; Göransdotter & Redström, 2018). Despite substantial contributions in terms of design theoretical work highlighting the importance of design's

own methodologies in knowledge contributions that differ from those of the sciences and the arts (Auger et al., 2017), these are not always readily acknowledged as “proper” research methods in a broader research community (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012; Redström, 2017). Still today, more than fifty years after the first design research conferences focusing on methods, the ways that design probes and articulates knowledge have not yet become established as in terms of what distinguishes design from other disciplines. As stated already by the chairs of the first Design Research Society conferences, the aim of the society was to discuss design as an activity rather than investigating attitudes towards design, or its end products; the DRS aimed “to provide facilities for the exchange of new knowledge about the design process” and “help to destroy the division which exists between the arts and sciences” (Blake, 1966).

As the Design Methods movement took shape in the 1960 and 1970s, it was emphasised that the development of new methods for designing aimed at finding ways to incorporate intuitive and artistic designerly practices and systematic and describable methods in a design process that would aim for something beyond the idea of solving specific problems (Alexander, 1970; Jones, 1970). Developing systematic methods in design was, for Jones, not only a matter of providing procedures for reaching design solutions to problems, but fundamentally re-designing how design as a process could be approached more flexibly, depending on the scale and context of the design situation. For him, the “world-wide dissatisfaction with traditional procedures” in design required a collective seeking of new methods, borrowed from other disciplines as well as developed within design, as well as “new procedures, (...) new aims and a different level of achievement.” (Jones, 1992, xviii). As design research evolved out of the design methods movement, and while design education changed, especially in the more technologically oriented design curricula in polytechnic settings veering towards finding systematic and rational methods of a design science, or aiming more to address processual complexities of “wicked problems” through design, the shared idea was that design needed to develop new methods for designing, and new understandings of the situations and contexts of design (Archer, 1979).

Many scholars have since then debated on if and how there should be ways of building knowledge especially suited to the way design is studied and practiced (Auger, 2013), also known as a designerly way of knowing (Cross, 1982, 2006; Owen, 1998). But we are still lacking a systematized shared framework (Daalhuizen & Cash, 2021) which describes methods and processes not only as tools to be applied in practice but as fluid and changing components that not only redesign designing (Giaccardi, 2022), but that are also knowledge building blocks that have a history, a contextualization, a validation, and measurement devices to evaluate their impact.

### **3 Aim of the panel**

The aim is to position a critical conversation on emerging design practices from the perspective of design methods. The ‘how’ of design is central here: design methodologies could be seen as proposals for, and explorations of what designing might become in response to societal, technological, and ecological changes. Design methods could also be seen as mirroring otherwise perhaps unarticulated ideas of design -- who should be engaged in designing, what should be designed, and for what purpose -- offering opportunities for observing and understanding ourselves and our practices through reflections. The attention to methods, thus, is central to design, and has

been so since industrial design was called into being by socio-technical, political, and colonial changes of the late 19th century. Since then, new design methods have continuously been incorporated and developed in response to societal and technological change – at some points in time more systematically and intentionally, and at others more incrementally. Design differs from many other disciplines in that it aims to approach understandings in terms of handling complexities as meaningful wholes rather than as particulars. To find ways to do that, design methods and processes often aim to find many ways of making change in relationally entangled and diverse ecologies. The continuous making and incorporation of new methods for handling change and complexity is an integral part of design’s own development process. How could this constant methodological fluidity be described as a strength, and as a reference for other knowledge-building practices?

#### 4 Possible discussion points

- Doubting disciplinary boundaries: exploring the emerging and historical ideas of “the nature of design” and the seemingly inherent and constant need within the discipline to address issues regarding consolidation and change through probing and questioning design methods.
- Recognizing practice-based knowledge: highlighting the difficulties of gaining recognition (academic, public, commercial) in how to assess, measure, and value the impact of design methods, and the ways of understanding specificities of design.
- Confronting emerging issues: investigating the relationships, boundaries, and futures of design methods with other aspects such as: new technologies, critical and speculative design, transitions, cultural differences, and the more recent debates on beyond human and human centred participatory methods.
- Discussing design cultures and geographies: unfolding the excluding and normative nature of design methods – global North and human-centric – and the inadequacies embedded in current approaches, processes, and methods in-light-of global and planetary challenges.

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