Aalborg Universitet

Bringing the forest around the table

How to support other-than-human participation in urban regeneration processes through design?

Zohar, Hadas; Neuhoff, Rike

Published in:
Proceedings of Nordes 2023

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
10.21606/nordes.2023.cv

Creative Commons License
CC BY-NC 4.0

Publication date:
2023

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication from Aalborg University

Citation for published version (APA):
Zohar, H., & Neuhoff, R. (2023). Bringing the forest around the table: How to support other-than-human participation in urban regeneration processes through design? In V. Rodrigues, C. Westin, & S. Holmlid (Eds.), *Proceedings of Nordes 2023: This Space Intentionally Left [Blank], 12-14 June, Norrköping, Sweden, Nordes.* (pp. 413-415). Design Research Society. https://doi.org/10.21606/nordes.2023.cv

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from vbn.aau.dk on: December 05, 2025

Design Research Society
DRS Digital Library

DRS Conference Volumes DRS Conference Volumes

12-6-2023

Proceedings of Nordes 2023: This Space Intentionally Left [Blank]

Vanessa Rodrigues

Carl Westin

Stefan Holmlid

Follow this and additional works at: https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/conference-volumes

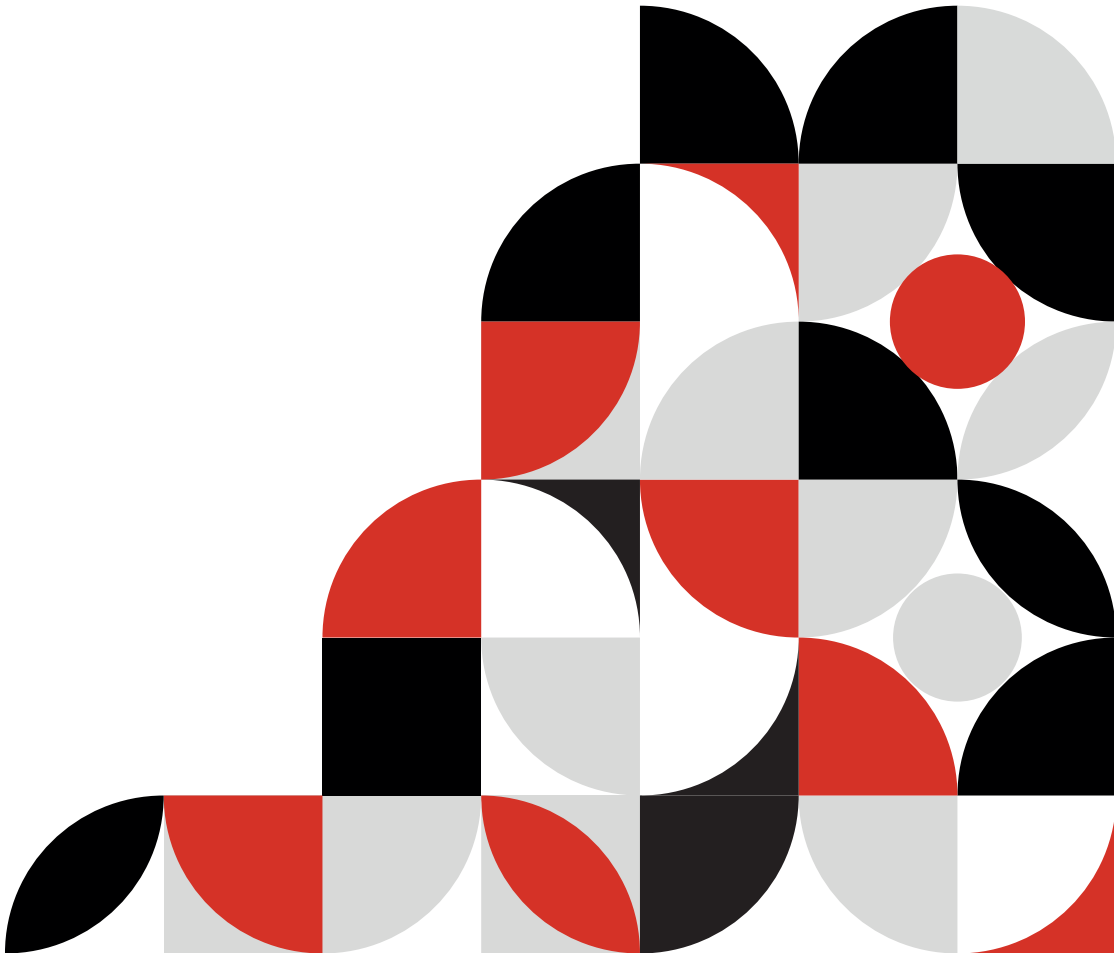
Part of the Art and Design Commons

NORDES 2023

This space INTENTIONALLY left [blank]

Proceedings from the
10th Nordic Design Research Conference
Norrköping 12-14th June 2023

Edited by
Vanessa Rodrigues, Carl Westin, Stefan Holmlid



BRINGING THE FOREST AROUND THE TABLE: HOW TO SUPPORT OTHER-THAN-HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN URBAN REGENERATION PROCESSES THROUGH DESIGN?

HADAS ZOHAR

AALBORG UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

HZO@CREATE.AAU.DK

RIKE NEUHOFF

AALBORG UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

RNE@CREATE.AAU.DK

ABSTRACT

Complex systemic challenges such as urban regeneration projects that strive for a positive long-term impact, must take into account views and needs of multiple stakeholders, both of humans and other species (e.g. animals, plants, landscapes etc). While human actors can directly engage and articulate their own perspectives, other species depend on humans to represent them. Humans who seek to represent other-than-human needs must be equipped with relevant knowledge, empathy, and imagination to do so. Additionally, they can benefit from having communication and representation techniques to support them in this task.

While participatory design suggests a rather rich toolkit to support the joint work of stakeholders, the representation of other species in this context is understudied. The purpose of the workshop is to address this gap. Through a combination of hands-on activities and discussions, participants will have the opportunity to collaboratively explore and reflect on how design can support the participation of multi-species actors in participatory workshops in urban regeneration projects.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

With the increasingly urgent global environmental crisis and its impact on all planetary systems, the call for sustainable futures is more important than ever (IPCC 2022). As the global population becomes increasingly urbanised, cities have emerged as both the roots of unsustainability and the arenas to address it. Problems associated with the many interrelated sustainability issues such as climate change, economic under-development, and social inequality are essentially urban in nature (Evans et al., 2016). Being home to a majority of the world's population, cities have the potential to drive significant change in sustainability practices. Their role as an experimental field, institutional interface, and focal point for reworking socioecological relations and sustainability is intensifying (Sachs Olsen, 2022).

In urban regeneration initiatives that aim to further urban sustainability, the future is constantly in the making, providing opportunities to collaboratively re-imagine how things could and ought to be (Dunne & Raby, 2013, Neuhoff et al., 2021, Zohar & Neuhoff, forthcoming). However, there is a widespread shortcoming that often prevents these initiatives from reaching their full potential, that is to say, to re-imagine potential futures as those of humans alone (Bridle, 2022). Over a long period of time, we perceived the city as a ‘humanist citadel’ (Franklin, 2017, p. 1), i.e. as a place that secures human needs and undermines the needs of other species. Regeneration processes provide

us with the opportunity to rethink this human-centred approach.

In recent years, entities such as rivers, forests, wildfires, weather systems, animal flocks and viruses, to name a few, have started to enter into urban political life. They are no longer seen as 'neutral' subjects, but as active, lively, fragile, powerful, and interconnected bodies that have been brought into the spotlight by the global environmental crisis (Franklin, 2017). This shift in perspective creates new subjectivities and sensibilities, recognizing the existence of pluriversal worlds and creating new relations with other-than-human entities from a position of humility and care, rather than superiority. This approach, scholars agree, is crucial to our long-term survival (Bridle, 2022, Akama et al., 2020).

In parallel, other-than-human design approaches have emerged, being recognized for their potential to expand our understanding of the perspectives and needs of non-human species (Sachs Olsen, 2022). As a response to the realization that "the environmental crisis is a design crisis" (Escobar, 2018, p. 44), the design community has begun to critically reflect on the fact that participatory design often undermines other-than-human participation (Akama et al., 2020), multi-species equity, and an understanding that human existence is intertwined with the lives of other beings (Haraway, 2007, 2016). By doing so, other-than-human design (sometimes also referred to as more-than-human, non-human, or multi-species design) is rooted in a relational worldview that acknowledges and values the interconnectedness and interdependence of all entities.

Applying an other-than-human paradigm in participatory design is a matter of broadening the scope of stakeholders involved in the design process. But perhaps even more importantly, it is a matter of framing a new ontology. Whilst traditionally, participatory approaches concerned a human-centered way of knowing in a human-centered world (Bridle, 2022) an other-than-human paradigm needs to ask: how can we create a multi-species way of knowing in a multi-species world? But this is not the only question that emerges, as other scholars demonstrate (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 61):

"How do we make the experiences of non-human others palpable? How do we hear, and how do we encourage others to hear, the non-human voices? How do we bring them into participatory processes [...]? Most importantly, how do we convince others, who are less familiar with such perspectives, that decentering human privilege is important and relevant for the future of interaction design?"

Then, we also need to ask how the knowledge, needs, and lived experience of non-human stakeholders can be communicated, or, to formulate it in the words of Sachs Olsen (2022 p. 322), how we can "enable other species to have a say regardless of their capacity to speak". Thus, applying other-than-human approaches in participatory design calls for rethinking 1) the ways of creating knowledge, understanding, and empathy; and 2) the ways this knowledge, understanding, and empathy is/can be conveyed to other stakeholders and external audiences. A process of mediation is needed since non-humans speak a different language than the common language of those (humans) more routinely involved.

In this workshop, we will collaboratively explore how to support other-than-human participation in urban regeneration processes through design. While human actors can directly engage and articulate their own perspectives, non-human actors depend on humans to represent them. Humans who seek to represent non-human needs must be equipped with relevant knowledge, empathy, and imagination to do so. Additionally, they can benefit from having communication and representation techniques to support them in this task. Participatory design suggests a rich toolkit to support the joint work of stakeholders, however, the representation of non-humans in this context is understudied. The purpose of the workshop is to address this gap.

REFERENCES

Akama, Y., Light, A. and Kamihira, T. (2020) 'Expanding Participation to Design with More-Than-Human Concerns', in Proceedings of the 16th Participatory Design Conference 2020 - Participation(s) Otherwise - Volume 1. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery (PDC '20), pp. 1–11. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1145/3385010.3385016.

Bridle, J. (2022) Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Clarke, R. et al. (2019) 'More-than-human participation: design for sustainable smart city futures', Interactions, 26(3), pp. 60–63. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1145/3319075.

Dunne, A. and Raby, F. (2013) Speculative everything: design, fiction, and social dreaming. Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London: The MIT Press.

Escobar, A. (2018) Designs for the pluriverse: radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds. Durham: Duke University Press (New ecologies for the twenty-first century).

Evans, J., Karvonen, A. and Raven, R. (2016) 'The experimental city: new modes and prospects of urban transformation', in The Experimental City. London: Routledge, pp. 1–12.

Franklin, A. (2017) 'The more-than-human city', The Sociological Review, 65(2), pp. 202–217. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12396.

Haraway, D.J. (2016) Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene. Durham: Duke University Press (Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices).

IPCC 2022. "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability." Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change." [H.-O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E. S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegrıa, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. In Press.

Neuhoff, R., Simeone, L., & Holst Laursen, L. (2022). The potential of design-driven futuring to support strategising for sustainable futures. *The Design Journal*, *25*(6), 955–975. https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2022.2121057

Sachs Olsen, C. (2022) 'Co-Creation Beyond Humans: The Arts of Multispecies Placemaking', Urban Planning, 7(3). Available at: https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v7i3.5288.

Zohar, H., & Neuhoff, R. (forthcoming). Expanding long-term thinking through life-centred design. Entanglements and Flows Service Encounters and Meanings. ServDes2023, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.