

Fostering —
/ˈfɒs.tər/ to encourage the development of ideas or feelings

— *resistance*
/rɪˈzɪs.təns/ aspect of relations which imposes limits on dominant power

Acknowledging notions of power exertion
and politics in design facilitation.

NATALIA VILLAMAN

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** The three analyses conducted in sections 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 include multiple sub-sections focusing on topics ranging from research approach, understanding the topic, the role of designers and researchers, power and politics, to facilitation, participatory design, practices of framing, staging & orchestrating, infrastructuring, and alternatives.*

Fostering resistance: Acknowledging notions of power exertion and politics in design facilitation

Author: Natalia Villaman
 Thesis supervisor: Eeva Berglund
 Thesis advisor: Ramia Mazé

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Degree: Master's Programme in Creative Sustainability (CS Design)
 Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture (ARTS)
 Helsinki, Finland

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Abstract

Design facilitation is among one of the most acclaimed approaches applied in contemporary collaborative projects. Intended as both the overarching process and the mediating act between a facilitator, typically a designer, and actors such as citizens, it has increasingly gained popularity due to the participatory, inclusive, co-creative, and empathic principles associated with it. The sudden recognition of the field of Participatory Design (PD) has nonetheless led to the use and (mis-)(over-)use of practice, causing an exponential loss of its political origin (Seravalli, 2014) if compared for example to the Scandinavian participatory movements in the '70s driven by political disputes regarding workplace democracy (Simonsen & Robertson, 2012). Design facilitation, among other areas of practice, has become a buzzword, rendering inevitable the adoption and adaptation of different definitions to it. This aspect, despite highlighting facilitation's versatility, leaves room for deliberate and convenient interpretations of its meaning, use, and ethical limitations. The research focuses on acknowledging and rendering visible the otherwise often unaddressed political nature of design facilitation by making more explicit its underpinning structures and components. It focuses on critically contrasting contemporary views of design facilitation, which are typically apolitical, against revised notions that take into consideration its complex power dynamics and political implications.

Delving into the interconnectedness between design, power, politics and participatory practices becomes an opportunity to explore contemporary mainstream notions within design that are worth being revisited and challenged from an alternative stance. The thesis is entirely theoretical and draws on principles of transdisciplinary research. Three lenses - critique, unpacking, and language use - are established and applied to an extensive analysis of literature belonging to design, philosophy, social studies, and political sciences. Combined with a systematic narrative approach

and critical reviews, the lenses enable the spotting of misleading discourses and misuse of terminology. Said approach aims to foster a better understanding of the complexity behind the explored theoretical notions and to evaluate their current use. The thesis also takes into consideration a plurality of voices by reviewing three doctoral dissertations that address these interconnected spheres and analyzing their research processes and drawing insight from the way they clash and overlap.

Finally, the conducted research aims to highlight the importance of unpacking concepts and areas of design to foster a more accountable practice and research, as opposed to merely moving on a superficial level. Resistance is explored and perceived as a way to react to a hegemonic, unbalanced, and often hierarchical model of facilitation which is often disguised as providing equally distributed agency and capacity to voice out concerns. Engaging in a critical, socially, and politically aware process allowed seeking and depicting alternatives to power imbalances such as designers deliberately resigning power, welcoming the ever-changing and unpredictable nature of human interrelations and adopting principles from prefigurative politics.

KEYWORDS: design, facilitation, politics, power, philosophy, PD, participatory design, resistance

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Glossary Of Terminology

Causality: Relation between cause and effect.

Concatenation: Interconnectedness between a series of things.

Counter-hegemonic practices: Set of practices which resist dominant ways of doing.

Culture of more: Set of practices and beliefs which praise the addition of elements by considering it the way in which innovation is achieved.

Framing: Process of delimiting something into well-defined borders.

Ideology: Sets of ideals or values through which sociopolitical systems are constructed and associated with.

Indispensable numerosity: Use of language that purposefully states that something is not singular to convey effectiveness.

Infrastructuring: Act of managing and rearranging different actors to support actions and practices carried out in a specific context.

Intent: Intention, purpose.

Intersecting: Act of connecting different spheres to make evident the uncomfortable, create new connections or reinforce existing loose connections.

Meta-narrative: Overarching narrative which shines a light on existing interconnections between different spheres.

Neutralization: Normalization of undiscussed power structures.

Normalization: State of neutrality achieved through practices that null dissensus and opposition.

Orchestrating: Volitional precautionary planning and coordination of the different components of a particular situation in a cunning manner.

Phraseology: Study of the manner in which language is used and organized.

Resistance: Specific aspect of power relations which imposes limits on dominant power.

Staging: Performance of the results derived from framing and orchestrating.

Thing: Immaterial something, free from physicality or personality.

Triumph-talk: Use of language strictly linked with connotations of success.

Unpacking: Engaged elucidation of issues that ought to be unravelled.

Urgency: Trait that renders issues of utmost importance.

“The political”: That which is concerned with sustaining, organizing and maintaining power structures.

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CHAPTER 1

Starting
point

1.6 *Aims of the thesis* —19
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Introduction —

Living in a rapidly changing world currently undergoing not one, but several and simultaneous socio-cultural, environmental, political, and economic crises, it is inevitable to contemplate systemic impact, causality, and uncertainty. As social beings are part of bigger structures, everyday responses to present-day problems are triggered by influencing factors and have a subsequent effect on different societal dimensions. For some, crises trigger response and resilience, which manifest through action. For others, contemporary problems feel distant and hard to grasp, especially if not directly affected by them, causing little to no reaction. Whether this is a conscious or an unconscious response, it is one of the many ways in which people manifest their intrinsic political nature. Daily tasks, conversations, and duties become then political instances in which decisions are either taken or not, voices are heard or repressed, certain groups benefit and others perish. Thus, a great ethical and moral responsibility derives from being able to “make politics” through active (or absent) engagement.

Being a designer, I have always considered this responsibility to extend to my profession, too. I claim design, both intended as an academic field and practice, to be highly political and to have a great role in making, sustaining, and influencing politics. Behind almost every product, system, context, process, and communication scheme lie design decisions made by professionals expert in problem-solving, persuasion, communication, strategy, and visualization, among others. For a large part of its history, design has been linked to fueling the prolongation of harmful practices such as marginalizing, inducing consumption, and stereotyping by beautifying, rendering appealing and sellable futile products, solutions,

and creating unnecessary habits or vain desires.

Efforts have been made to detach design from such stigmas and proposing a reutilization of design skills toward more meaningful ends. A concrete example is the *First Things First Manifesto* (1964) written by Ken Garland and co-signed by other 21 visual communicators. The manifesto was written as a means for voicing out the growing willingness of designers to repurpose the use of their skills. A short extract from it reads: “In common with an increasing number of the general public, we have reached a saturation point at which the high pitched scream of consumer selling is no more than sheer noise. We think that there are other things more worth using our skill and experience on” (Garland, 1964). The piece became a reference point for those experiencing discontent with the design regimes they belonged to despite not feeling represented by them.

The manifesto was renewed in 2000, yet the claims still resonated with those from the original manifesto: “The profession’s time and energy is used up manufacturing demand for things that are inessential at best. Many of us have grown increasingly uncomfortable with this view of design. [...] There are pursuits more worthy of our problem-solving skills. Unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention” (Adbusters, 1999).

Now, in 2020, these claims are still valid. Design skills ought to be used not only to address the aforementioned crises but also to understand the underlying causes behind them, as well as our roles, being simultaneously partly responsible for said crises and potentially being catalyst agents in countering them.

In this thesis, I will engage in discussions around design, politics and power in the hopes of addressing the urgent need to open up debates around the responsibility designers hold. Urgency here is understood as a trait that renders issues of utmost importance, requiring a careful and attentive engagement. Thus, this opportunity to research for six months aimed to open up “the time and space for thinking and doing politics towards directions based on lived experiences, struggles and knowledge” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 33).

1.1 Political design —

Design is a highly problematic term to use. Its uses have always been ambiguous given its various applications throughout history, which might - or might not - have been related to the historical changes it was undergoing at that particular time. Moreover, it is important to state that design can not be described or analyzed from a single point of view. Despite making a distinction between design as “designed things” or as “design actions and activities” (Keshavarz, 2016, p.88), nevertheless, different definitions will be inevitably encountered, as assorted uses and conflicting purposes might be associated with these distinctions (Julier, 2017).

Design, through history, has increasingly gained recognition and relevance, leading many authors, including myself, to wonder about its relationship with the political sphere (c.f Latour, 2008; Mazé, 2014, 2019; Keshavarz, 2016; Fry, 2011 and others¹). Pressing wicked problems, as well as external societal pressures, have every so often led to moments of reflection and repurposing of design (e.g as seen in [section 1](#)), which addressed different needs. Whether it was about

shifting towards a less elitist and exclusive practice or shifting the object of design from materiality to action platforms (Manzini, 2011), said reconceptualizations have affected the way design has been perceived and engaged with. For example, in *Economies of Design*, Guy Julier refers to design as a process of change, comparing the said process to neoliberalism (Julier, 2017). Additionally, he expands on the interconnection between design and politics by elaborating on how these two spheres worked together since 1980 through elements such as deregulation, the New Economy, financialization and austerity. In this relationship revolving around production, marketization and consumption, design had a significantly politically charged role.

In the context of the thesis, I understand design as a “study of human action that arises from social situations” (Margolin, 2010 as cited in Muratovski, 2016, p. 62), therefore focusing on “the social” (Björgvinsson, Ehn & Hilgren, 2010 as cited in Mazé, 2014) as the lens through which to analyze the object of design. Said focus inevitably places design as belonging to a larger and overarching social process (Muratovski, 2016) of inherent political nature since, as “the political” does, it organizes, sustains and helps to instate ideologies and processes.

The following chapters will explore in-depth how this political nature of design shapes and influences practice. The focus will be on design facilitation, part of the participatory design realm, which encompasses different actors, dynamics, means to participate and outcomes. In other words, the thesis will attempt to further delve into the underpinning notions that enable design to become a means to be a powerful tool to influence activities, environments, society and themselves (Papanek, 1984).

1.1.1 The political —

To further build a strong foundation for the following chapters, this section will expand on what I intend when referring to “the political”. Discussions around the difference between party politics understood as the activity of political parties, and “the political”, defined as how power structures are sustained, maintained and organized, have been at the core of many academic and everyday discussions, being able to encounter countless definitions that might vary according to the time, context or ideology under which they were developed. However interesting, discussions around party politics will be left out in this thesis to concentrate on the political nature of design.

In regards to ideologies, those sets of ideals or values through which we construct and that we associate to sociopolitical systems, it is crucial to remark that design, given its political essence, is therefore also inherently ideological, having taken part in endorsing socio-political ideologies throughout history (Mazé, 2019; Buchanan, 1985).

The political refers to practices, processes and overarching structures concerned with the active organization, sustainment

and the configuration of social order. (Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013; Mazé, 2014). The acknowledgement of the strong presence of the political in design becomes a means to take an explicit stand in regards to (re)making politics (Fry, 2011) in fields generally deemed apolitical. In *Design for Society* (1995), Nigel Whiteley underlines the presence of “unselfconscious and unthought-through ideological statements about design and its role in society” (Whiteley, 1995, p. 42) which is exactly the opposite of what the thesis will attempt to do by being as critical and explicit as possible.

As I analyze the interlaced relationship between design - especially design facilitation -, power and politics, it ought to be understood as a non-linear process. None of these spheres can claim autonomy from each other, as they are caught up in a loop of mutual-reinforcement. Design, having a huge stake in creating visions of the future and leading transformations, is simultaneously caught up in overarching power structures and exerting power within them. Moreover, it takes an active role in creating politics of change, which consequently affect power dynamics and distribution (see figure 1 below, adapted from Dovey, 1999).

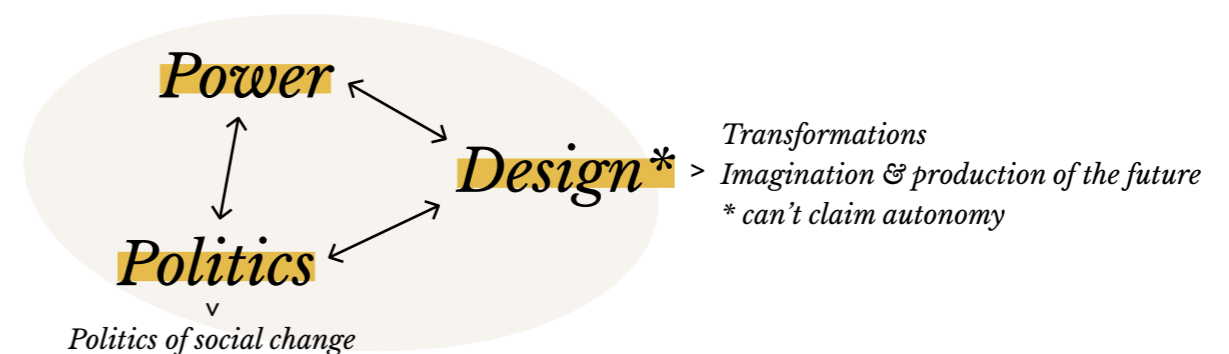


Figure 1. Design-power-politics, based on Dovey (1999)

¹ A more exhaustive list can be found in the bibliography.

By seeing design under this lens, it is easier to make visible the complex layers that configure contemporary societies. Additionally, this becomes a good starting point to reflect on its role in establishing, supporting or neglecting certain societal values and priorities (Whiteley, 1995).

1.1.2 Dualities in design —

In design, as in any other field, choices and decisions are constantly made. They are what move forward projects, ideas and actions. Nevertheless, bringing up the political in design also means acknowledging the existence of dualities. During these two years of master studies, I have been able to enhance my abilities to engage with my surroundings more critically by actively wondering about the intention, credibility and systemic picture behind discussions, literature, happenings, and so on. This has led to a stronger capacity to contemplate the inevitable - and often unacknowledged - dichotomies in design. By this, I mean the ability to think and be vocal about “the other side” of what is explicitly presented to me. Taking action, prioritizing needs, intervening, encouraging behaviours, making visible certain issues and voicing opinions are all expressions commonly used in making politics of change. These are used to convey effective decision-making, progress, and overall, to ensure that this is the *correct* way forward. However, we ought to state that *not* taking action, *not* prioritizing needs, *not* intervening, *not* encouraging behaviours, *not* making visible certain issues and *not* voicing opinions are also decisions. These are political, too (Akama & Light, 2018; Mazé, 2019) as they favour certain agendas, groups and interests over others.

It is a common practice, however, to attribute value to what is generally visible and direct our attention and efforts to

that, instead of actively trying to see what is not there. This can be the result of unawareness, of apathy or convenience. Whichever the case might be, all of these attitudes can be placed within what could be envisioned as the spectrum of political accountability of our everyday decisions and their subsequent effect on current societal regimes and possible futures. The same concept applies to design, in which, whether “it is made explicit or not [...] identifying and making a difference between what is real, now, and what is, or not, negotiable or preferable in the future is a political act” (Mazé, 2016 as cited in Mazé, 2019, p. 24).

Awareness about such (not so) subtle dimensions through which design also channels its political nature, in addition to its visible facade, is the first step towards a more accountable and transparent practice. However, to transition towards that scenario, designers are urged to engage in creating a new collective political imaginary (Fry, 2011, p. 15), thus envisioning a politically aware design discipline, on which to build on.

The thesis will be an active exercise of critically reflecting on the politics in design facilitation in order to better understand how to highlight the political nature of design and to experiment in dealing with broader and overarching concepts. It will do so by suggesting how to alternatively look at different aspects of practice to encourage a well-informed and critical construction of said future - yet urgent - political imaginaries. This section, and this chapter, sets the stage for this premise.

1.1.3 Ethical concerns —

Alternative ways of conducting both practice and research ought to take into consideration the political imaginary they are inevitably taking part in creating. The European Commission addresses the topic of ethics - particularly in research - in projects by highlighting the “clear need to make a thorough ethical evaluation from the conceptual stage”.² Ethics and ethical considerations are not topics to be taken into consideration just from the bigger point of view of ethics dumping³ in international projects (e.g research between high-low income countries, or involving the participation of sensitive groups such as survivors of traumatic experiences). In order to shift towards a more transparent and accountable practice, designers need to take a proactive role in spotting and evaluating possible ethical issues in their work.

The topic of ethics has been brought up also in design literature throughout the years and within different areas of design. Bruno Latour considers ethics to be one of the five advantages of the notion of design (Latour, 2008). The author here highlights the interconnection between the broad global expansion of design and how that implies an inevitable responsibility of considering moral and ethical matters. To the latter claim, it is important to add that such responsibility also comes from the possibility designers have to engage in transformational projects (Sangiorgi, 2011). The question of ethics in design has been also brought up in a slightly different tone, in the Case of Nigel Whiteley, who pledges designers not to “be just reactive, but proactive and environmentally committed. They must relinquish the attitude of ‘I-was-only-obeying-orders’, and assume greater responsibility” (Whiteley, 1993, p. 82).

Therefore, and agreeing with further claims made by Latour, ethics ought to

be a part of the discussion in design. In the context of the thesis, I want to stress the need to bring up such considerations especially in PD and facilitation, since contemporary issues and engagements require revised, transparent, socio-politically conscious approaches. Chosen - and not chosen - ways of doing create further politics of participation.

1.2 The role of designers and researchers —

Participating in, and even often leading instances in which possible futures are proposed entails a great degree of responsibility. As design becomes widely accepted as a means to tackle broad societal challenges, designers need to also willingly embrace the higher authority and influence they now possess as a possibility for catalytic action. Being concerned about immediate and proximate circumstances is not enough anymore to avoid risking design contributions to become mere band-aids to deeply wounded sociopolitical surfaces. Contemporary practitioners and researchers’ ought to widen their roles and field of vision and rethink how to tackle societal, economic, political, cultural, technological and environmental problems. Moreover, especially - but not exclusively - in participatory engagements, it becomes crucial to consider how designed actions, strategies and structures affect people. (Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013).

Thus, designers can not afford to be neutral anymore. Truth is, we never could, but nowadays designers’ exposure is greater and external pressures arise. In the past, lack of involvement in political design, concerned with societal issues and their implications, has led to a general neutralization, a crucial tool in creating

² Horizon 2020 Online Manual.

³ “Ethics dumping” – the dark side of international research. News article. (Schroeder, 2017)

undiscussed power structures. In other words, it could be argued that in the past neutralization has gone undetected thanks to naturalizing practices (Fry, 2011). This situation can be reverted if designers willingly opt to engage in a socially and politically committed practice (Mazé, 2019). Having the chance to write about a topic of my choice for the thesis, I decided to engage in a deliberate “rearticulation of politics” (Keshavarz, 2016), in this case within the context of design facilitation. Keshavarz argues for a notion of the political that endorses counter-hegemonic practices, those resisting dominant ways of doing, to redefine the way in which we see things, and expose long-existing hegemonic practices. Despite being a student, I hereby acknowledge and embrace my responsibility in producing further literature on design and will, therefore, attempt to be in line with what Rancière refers to as a “re-distribution of the sensible, of what can be said and what can be done, what can be thought and what can be heard, which is otherwise unsayable, undoable, unthinkable, inaudible” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 82 on Rancière, 1999).

1.3 Personal relevance —

Studying the correlation between design, power and politics comes from a very personal interest that reflects the merging impact of three different worlds I have been exposed to.

In the first place, origins and culture play a big role. Coming from a socially-conscious family, I have been exposed to societal issues first hand from an early age. Their engagement as members in a social housing cooperative and being sanitary operators in a shantytown implied our lives to be settled within a community in which its inhabitants faced nutritional

and sanitary risks on the daily. Socio-economic and political struggles, for this and other reasons, have always been a reality for me, and not a distant story heard on the news.

In Latin America, it is inevitable to be familiar with or to experience to different extents, injustice. Problems arise, multiple and simultaneous, and to them, there are always consequences for certain groups. In such situations, communities develop resilience over time, and the need to resist becomes pressing and evident. Activism has been a vast component of my life throughout the years, from engaging in student unions to defending environmental heritage, reporting illegal animal trafficking, to political lobbying for more fair asylum policies to fighting for women’s rights. Furthermore, being a trained cultural mediator⁴, I have been able to replace the so-called “culture shock” moments with “cultural realizations” that served as a launchpad for further action.

Finally, design. Having started in graphic design, I have gradually discovered the broadness of design as a discipline. Discovering its potential when connected to other disciplines such as international policy, human rights, environmental law or humanities opened up a world of possibilities I wanted to further and eagerly explore.

In these times of structural unsustainability (Fry, 2011) in which unsettlement is at the order of the day, it is inevitable to recall the *Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations* (UNESCO, 1997), created from the arising concerns on the role and responsibility of contemporary and future generations in sustaining humankind. In the context of the thesis, I would like to highlight

article 10.2 which focuses on education, claiming that: “Education is an important instrument for the development of human persons and societies. It should be used to foster peace, justice, understanding, tolerance and equality for the benefit of present and future generations” (UNESCO, 1997, art. 10.2). Thus, I intend to use my power position as a master’s student, plus the values derived from my socio-cultural awareness and activist involvement to engage in the creation of educational material that abides by article 10.2.

1.4 Focus area —

Design facilitation, the focus of the thesis has enjoyed an exponential increase in acceptance and demand during the past decades, extending to several areas of design. A thorough analysis of the concept and field will be carried out in chapter two. However, facilitation can be considered to be a design process within the realm of participatory design in which a leading figure - the designer facilitator - acts as a mediator between various stakeholders and towards a set goal. This is, for example, the case in which workshops are held bringing together neighbours, business owners, and civil servants to discuss the future of a particular city, and in which the facilitator mediates the conversation and leads the activities to be done.

Having gained vast attention, it is possible to notice how the use of the term tends to be mindlessly borrowed occasionally due to its participatory, inclusive and innovative connotations. It can be argued that the frequent and deliberate use or misuse of design (Fry, 2011) terminology can lead⁵ to generalizations (using the term as an umbrella term for any participative activity), hazy notions

of the role (regarding who gets to be a facilitator), unclear intentions (therefore unclear accountability) and loss of credibility (due to the embellishment around it). The recurrent use of the term has served me as motivation to attempt to unpack its significance and to investigate its connection to power and politics, intended as the political (Fry, 2011) in relation to design practice. Ambiguous terms become open to interpretation, and this can be a double-edged sword, opening a path towards deliberately misleading and deceiving crafted discourses as well. By looking into the links between design facilitation, power, practice, participation and framing, among others, I intend to join the academic debate on the political implications around design practice. Finally, the thesis responds to the urge to look at design from a critical perspective in order to provoke stronger politically explicit ways of doing participatory practice.

1.4.1 Research questions —

The research I carried out aimed at tackling the intersections between four vast spheres: design, facilitation, power and politics. Dealing with such immense worlds required a certain degree of scoping down to manage its complexity in a sound manner. The proposed research questions, therefore, intend to be a guiding narrative for developing the research process throughout the thesis.

RQ1 focuses on setting the stage for the research, as it encompasses the big picture and the approach to the topics. RQ2 aims to bring together PD and power by prompting further research into both areas and to contemplate their intersections. Finally, RQ3 was created to evoke further thinking about aspects

⁴ “A social agent who acts as a bridge between an individual (asylum seekers/refugees) and local authorities in order to facilitate communication, mediate legal processes, ensure basic human rights and bring down cultural and language barriers” (Villaman, 2018).

⁵ These categories have been established for the purpose of the thesis, based on preliminary analysis of relevant literature and discourses. Thus, they should not be considered to be definite or final, but are nonetheless useful for providing clarity and synthesis in this context.

to consider when envisioning ways to redefine participatory research and practice.

RQ 1: Through which lenses can we acknowledge design facilitation’s intrinsic political nature?

RQ 2: How is power exerted and what is the role of power relations in participatory interactions?

RQ 3: How can power balance-based models of facilitation, prefigurative politics and resistance contribute to possible alternative ways of achieving participation?

1.5 Research gap —

An aspect that has always seemed intriguing when it comes to master’s thesis is the spotting, studying and elucidating of tackled research gaps. Given the potentially vast role of design in tackling complex problems and the degree of participation, critical awareness, and responsibility needed to engage in transparent practice, it seems impossible to describe *a gap*.

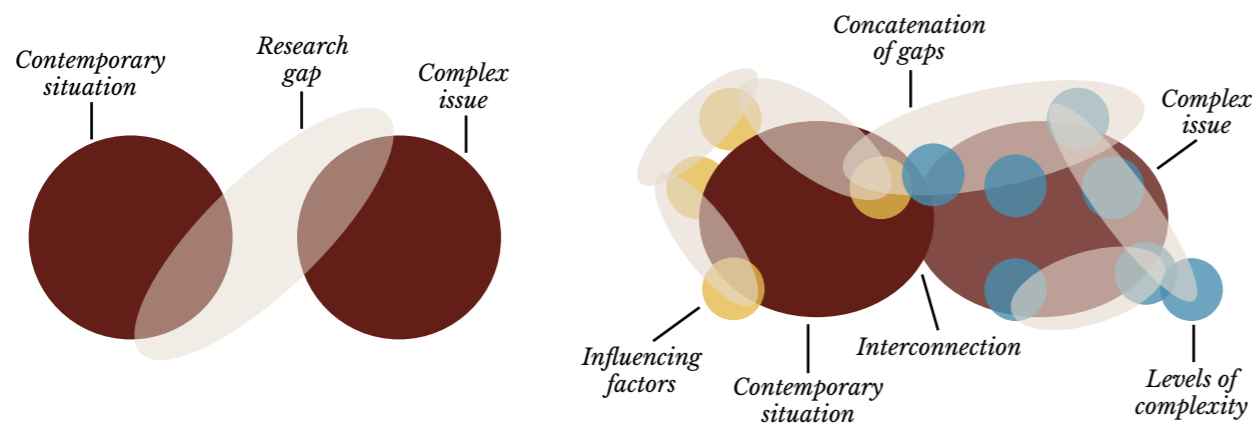


Figure 2. Research gap versus “Concatenation of gaps”

Personally, this notion has always conveyed a sense of linearity that does not outline the elaborate work researchers and practitioners engage with daily. Problems are not singular, nor they are isolated. They are dynamic, upheld by structures shaped by agendas, conflicts of interests, invisibilities and power. Thus, I will refer to a “concatenation of gaps”, an expression that I coin to highlight the spaces in which research focuses on to tackle a complex issue in a certain level, from a specific angle, in a set timeline.

This research is prompted by the urge to “examine and articulate the (powerful) role of design” (Andersson, Mazé & Isaksson, 2019, p. 1) by looking at the intersections between participatory design, facilitation, power and politics. Despite its primary theoretical contribution in the context of this master’s thesis, it is intended to provide value and significance to both theory and practice (Ridley, 2012) in the topics that it touches upon. The following section will explain in further detail what is encompassed in the concatenation of gaps that will be tackled throughout the chapters.

1.5.1 Current (unaddressed) issues —

The starting point for this research is the aforementioned individuated concatenation of gaps. In said concatenations, we can find both hypotheses and questions that I believe are not properly if at all, addressed in current research and practice.

Apart from what has already been elaborated on in previous sections regarding the political nature of design, another aspect yet not explored as much as it should be is power. Further reflections on this will be made in chapter three. Participatory and co-design are excellent starting points to contemplate power as they allow for deeper reflections on the implications of design practice on others. The thesis will address the discontinuity in design research regarding - especially within design facilitation - power exertion, (im)balances in agency distribution and unacknowledged implications of intentional actions. Moreover, it will attempt to further look into the role and responsibilities of the facilitator itself, not in terms of skills and methods only, but regarding ethics, ownership, accountability, empowerment and claims of power positions.

Finally, in concatenations of gaps, the methodological approach is also taken into consideration to tackle issues more exhaustively. Here, the focus will be on critique, unpacking and language. However, it is important to clarify that by defining these gaps, the intention is not to claim that these are discoveries, but rather to underline their long-existing nature, which often coexists with the deliberate decision of designers and researchers to look past them.

Not delving into these gaps could be the result of unawareness, or just the choice to not attempt to uncover something complex, threatening to the status quo,

or seemingly not as “designerly” (Cross, 2010) as other notions.

1.6 Aims of the thesis —

The main idea for the thesis was to take a concept within design practice that is currently being (over)used and for which there seems to be a common understanding on the mainstream level to then attempt to disarticulate it and understand its various underlying components. Thus, this larger aim was narrowed down by focusing on design facilitation and its relation to “the political”.

1.6.1 Primary aims —

As mentioned previously (see section 1.4), one of the main concerns driving this research is the deliberate inattentive use of design-related terminology to fit certain discourses or to render fashionable specific areas of practice due to their sellable, user-friendly and participatory connotations. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to shed light on different aspects which will allow acknowledging wilful intents of using design facilitation as a means to impose power, to allude to participation and to steer agency. Furthermore, it strives to be a critical and solely theoretical contribution as opposed to a practical approach to facilitation. The intention behind this choice was to further delve into the notion, aiming at expanding the discourse on the interconnectedness of these spheres and to avoid making an unavailing contribution which would risk to only serve the purpose of self-validation through a demonstration of first-person engagement. Finally, it intends to make visible practices that are “consciously fashioned to be the new expressions of older ideals” (Buchanan, 1985, p. 8 on Rams, 1984).

1.6.2 Secondary aims —

There are, however, further reasons to engage in this project. A personal interest in research led to a careful examination of the process of writing a master's thesis and therefore, it aims to provide insights on how to carry out research that looks into design through the lenses of different disciplines and by adopting notions from humanities and social sciences research. By conducting conscious theoretically informed work (Akama & Light, 2018), the chances of increasing methodological replicability for peers become higher; this will be expanded in further detail in the next section.

Finally, this thesis aims to join current debates on alternative visions of design and designing by allocating the time and resources that master students are privileged to have concerning content creation and to decide to draw attention to politically concerned issues, attempting to challenge mainstream visions and encouraging further discussions. At the same time, it aims at reducing the distance we pose from existing conditions (DiSalvo, 2016) and to proactively engage in more critical thinking and research.

1.7 Research approach, methodology and methods —

As briefly expressed in the research aims, one of the objectives of this work is to approach design research from a theoretical and alternative angle. Given the fact that the main concern of the chosen topic is to understand the underpinning notions in design facilitation, it was necessary to preemptively grasp the complexity of the topic itself and then find the most suitable research approach to tackle it. Looking at the mechanisms behind design facilitation and their interweaving with

notions of political and philosophical nature, required a different and tailored research approach that would tackle their complexity and interconnectedness. (Steinberg et al., 2011).

All decisions were taken after long consideration and exploration between different options, looking into the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and consulting literature tackling research from different angles such as policy-making, educational content, methodology reviews and academic articles. (Snilstveit, Oliver & Vojtkova 2012; Grant & Booth 2009; Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011⁶).

1.7.1 Approach: Transdisciplinary perspective —

In his broadly acclaimed *Design for the Real World* (1971), Victor Papanek outlines the importance of exploring what is beyond design by saying that “[t]he answer does not lie in teaching more design. Rather, designers and students have to familiarize themselves with many other fields and, by knowing them, redefine the relevance of the designer to our society” (Papanek, 1971, p. 159). As this thesis intends to look at different notions not only through the lens of design but also attempting to tackle said concepts from a philosophical and socially aware point of view, it seemed appropriate to draw on certain aspects of transdisciplinary research to build an initial approach to the wider context. Dealing with and analysing literature from different fields is, in fact, one of the main criteria for conducting this kind of research (Gaziulusoy & Boyle, 2013). Despite the challenge this perspective poses to individual researchers - or students, in this case - simultaneously it became an opportunity to further enhance personal research skills outside of standard design

education. After all, in dealing with issues of complex nature, it is imperative for us designers to learn how to approach cross-, multi- and transdisciplinary research, especially if aiming to make a valuable contribution (Muratovski, 2016). The use of transdisciplinary principles will be most visible in chapter three when dealing with notions deriving from philosophy, political and social sciences, but also in chapter four, where those learnings are directly applied to analyze and explore design facilitation.

Two particular theoretical notions complemented the purpose of this thesis in a suitable manner.

Firstly, the pyramid of transdisciplinarity developed by Manfred Max-Neef (2005, as cited in Gaziulusoy & Boyle, 2013) to understand the interaction and the enmeshment between different disciplines. In this thesis, I focus my attention on the levels concerned with values and the normative; by centring on different questions, these levels enable specific action. In the “normative level”, the idea is to find a scope, to establish a strong foundation for the research and looking through the lenses of disciplines such as design and politics. The “values level”, then, serves as a checking phase in which to reflect on the implications of actions through the critical perspective of ethics, values and philosophy (Gaziulusoy & Boyle, 2013).

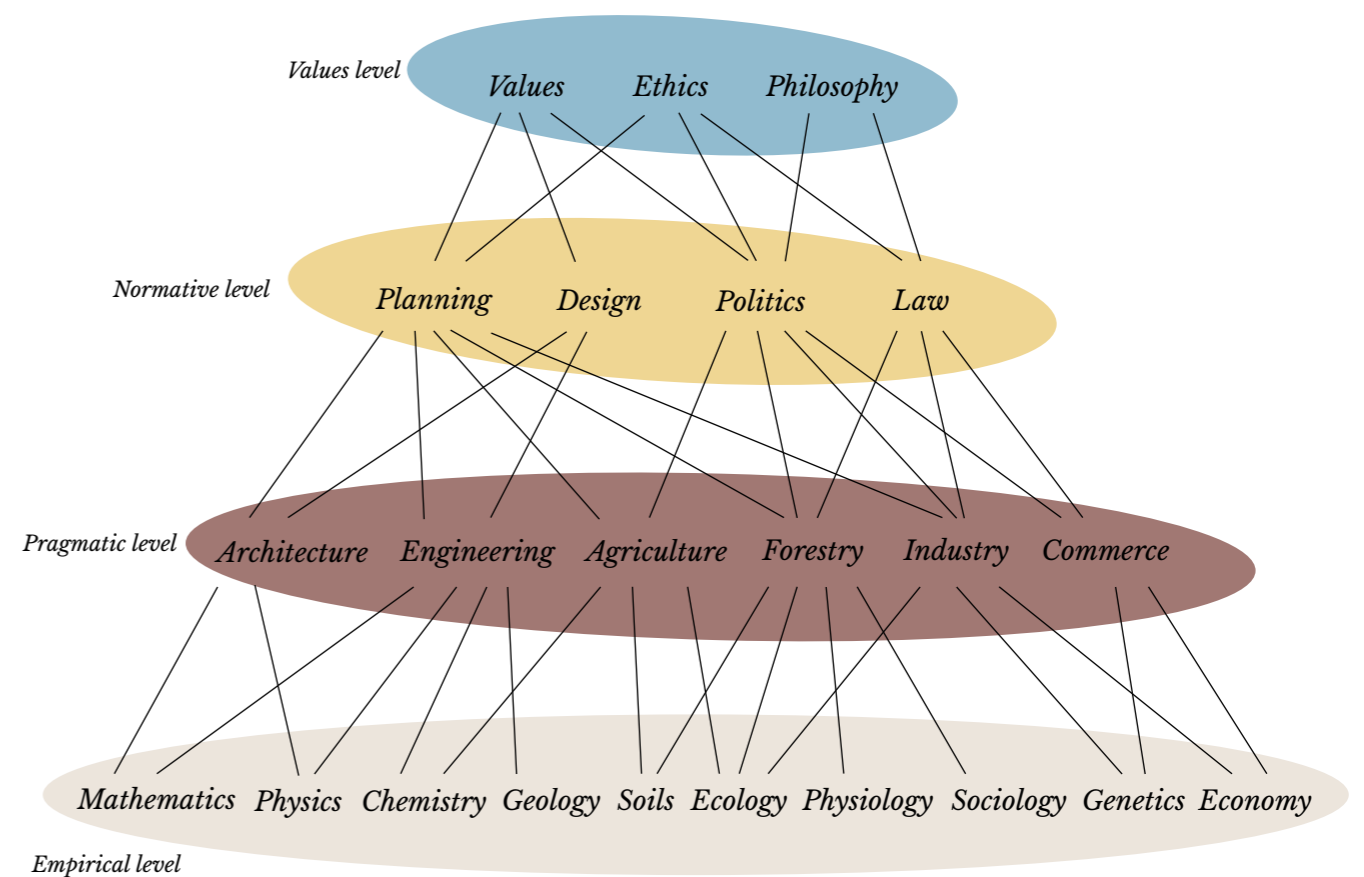


Figure 3. Pyramid of transdisciplinarity, adapted from Max-Neef (2005)

⁶ A more exhaustive list can be found in the bibliography.

Secondly, knowledge production and its employment was another fundamental aspect to look into. This thesis intends to recognize the importance of “systemic knowledge” by emphasizing the causality behind design mechanisms and power relations; it focuses on “target knowledge” by specifying what is the aim of this research and what it seeks to accomplish. Finally, it takes into consideration “transformation knowledge” by stressing and venturing in unpacking notions related to design facilitation to grant a better understanding on the topic⁷. Theorization and knowledge production is an aspect that has been carefully taken into consideration in the thesis. Throughout the chapters, in addition to the literature review, I will also provide glimpses of theory-building, by coining expressions and terms to refer to specific aspects of design facilitation, power and politics (e.g concatenation of gaps in [section 1.5](#)). The meaning and use of such expressions and terms will be explained in order of appearance.

1.7.2 Methodology: Systematic Literature Review & Narrative Synthesis approach —

A methodological choice was made keeping in mind the nature of this research; seeking for future replicability and conducting a recursive literature review demanded a specific approach to be designed. The process of designing the actual research plan proved to be a key moment as it made the rest of the project considerably easier, as terms were clear, allowing me to concentrate on the content and purpose. Here, the choice was to adopt systematic literature review as a methodological choice, which is intended to be comprehensive, systematic and transparent (Snilstveit et al., 2012), principles which become essential in facilitating reproduction (Grant & Booth, 2009). Said approach oversees

the overall plan, influencing and shaping different moments of the research process; its systematic nature guides and conditions how research questions are posed, through which methods to tackle them, how to draft concrete inclusion/exclusion criteria, how to synthesize, write conclusions and findings (Snilstveit et al, 2012). This approach helped in dealing with broad and vast spheres, as it allowed zooming in and out on different topics, yet still making sense to the overall picture.

Simultaneously, this methodological approach alone seemed not to be enough, as often it is linked with providing a practical holistic understanding of an issue (Grant & Booth, 2009) rather than telling a story. Narrative synthesis, intended as a “family of methods for synthesizing data narratively” (Snilstveit et al., 2012, p. 414) amended this issue by providing that missing narrative approach to the bigger picture. Through this, summaries, analyses, insights, hypotheses and findings are not simply recapped, but also brought together to spark further thinking and to ensure proper method selection. Applying a narrative approach considerably influenced my research questions, as they became part of the narrative, creating as a result an organic flow of information made of literature, theory, insights and personal reflections visible all through the thesis.

Observing masters’ theses in the field of design, different recurrent patterns came to light in terms of structuring plans and methodological approaches. Oftentimes, it is possible to observe that the choice of methods is done without a priori investigation on types of research approaches and methodologies, which leads to restricted choices that might not check all the requirements of the original research plan. Other times, method

selection focuses on seeking participatory action research which, if unjustified might add complexity to what could be an already elaborate topic. Finally, methods can frequently be picked without critical awareness of their potential to attempt to answer the posed research questions. Iterative revision and questioning of our choices is considered to be good practice in research in general, but also in the context of method selection. The next section will explain how critical and literature reviews have been conducted in this thesis and through which micro-methods.

1.7.3 Method: Critical review —

When attempting to unpack and broaden the understanding of a certain topic, it is important to do it from an analytical point of view in order to provide a holistic picture to the reader. “Critical reviews” in this thesis have been employed to better understand facilitation’ support systems and use that as a bridge to elaborating further conceptual contemplation. Grant and Booth (2009) define critical reviews as extensive analyses that go beyond mere description and compilation of the literature. On the contrary, they are composed of extensive research and a critical approach to quality evaluation, concept innovation and material synthesis from various sources. A causal approach prevailed over a descriptive one due to its aim to make visible those triggering relations (Muratovski, 2015) when it comes to pattern creation, behaviour change and interactions.

Finding such causality demanded exercising critical reading (Ridley, 2012) and writing (Taylor, 1989 and reformed by Hart, 1998 as cited in Ridley, 2012), in order to be able to present coherent and well-reasoned arguments. In reading, my attention focused on searching for

assumptions, evidence in the readings that would support the claims being made, but also paying attention to the context in which such texts had been produced, and what might have remained unspoken, left behind. Writing, on the other hand, had to draw attention to contrasting, exploring and organizing concepts; a solid narrative had to be created to bring together perspectives, theories and arguments to enable understanding. Furthermore, this helped create a view and reach conclusions through synthesis. These methods, used in all chapters, became crucial especially in chapters four and five, where I actively challenge and analyze design facilitation and doctoral dissertations to further unpack participatory practices. Critical reading and writing proved to be essential in evaluating literature, building theory and getting rid of assumptions.

Finally, self-reporting seemed something necessary in a theory-driven thesis in which there are no other stakeholders directly involved. Including diary studies (Martin & Hanington, 2012) as a further micro-method was useful for self-criticism, backtracking decisions, finding own assumptions and to collect information over these six months; notes on the literature were taken, as well as documenting interactions such as tutorings and meetings. The diary contained all decisions taken and the reasons behind them.

Critical reviews of literature will be present all throughout the chapters, however, it will especially serve as a foundation to conduct the analyses of the doctoral dissertations in chapter 5. Its critical nature, combined with a narrative approach and categorizing allowed me to process and draw insights from around 900 pages of research on different topics.

⁷ For in detail explanations on the three types of knowledge, see Pohl & Hirsch-Hadorn, 2007 as cited in Gaziulusoy & Boyle, 2013; 2017).

1.7.4 Method: Literature review —

Reviewing literature is done with the specific purpose of exploring and detecting publications on a specific topic; inquiring into what has been written so far helps pinpointing gaps (Grant & Booth, 2009), but also opportunities on which to build on with further research. A recursive approach (Ridley, 2012) was adopted in the thesis, as literature plays a key role throughout the chapters. Beginning with a literature search (Gash, 1999, as cited in Ridley, 2012), complemented with the snowballing technique (Patton, 2002) to explore the variety of publications on the different topics of interest, it was possible to structure the process further and to move towards critical analysis. Two practices have been fundamental in doing so: first, making use of literature architecture (Swales & Feak, 2000 as cited in Ridley, 2012). In this method, the literature is organized in such a way that it is possible to see which authors have referred to similar topics in order to improve and facilitate better cross-referencing in the thesis.

Secondly, finding an organizational pattern granted the possibility to better delve into something as multifaceted as design facilitation. Finding intersections (Wellington et al., 2005 as cited in Ridley, 2012) was brought into the process for the versatility it comes with, how it helps to explore that which is often overlooked, hidden, not deeply investigated or requires a broader analysis. Furthermore, the act of intersecting different things increases the chances of making evident the uncomfortable, of creating new connections, of reinforcing existing loose connections and finally, of creating the possibilities for new intersections - and the tensions they imply - to be explored. Intersections and the interconnectedness of spheres will be a recurrent theme throughout the thesis, as I will attempt to render visible the connections between

different disciplines and notions, especially in chapters three, four, six and seven.

See figure 4 for a recap of the approach, methodology and methods used.

1.8 Structure of the thesis —

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. This initial chapter concentrated on providing an overview of what the thesis is about, introducing the background motivations, presenting the focus and aims of the research, as well as outlining the chosen methodological approach. Chapter two will expand on design facilitation, from its historical beginnings in Scandinavia to a contemporary understanding of this area of practice. Chapter three concentrates on the philosophical understanding of power, its characteristics, power relations and its exertion. Chapter four aims to bring together both realms, power and facilitation and to unpack different underlying notions that are (in)visible and (un)clear in this participatory exercise. Chapter five, on the other hand, focuses on a critical and personal analysis of three doctoral dissertations that aim at challenging participatory practices from different angles. Chapter six will leave room for the lessons learned from the analyses, as well as reflecting on them through the three established lenses. Finally, in chapter seven conclusions will be drawn, and final remarks and proposals will be made.

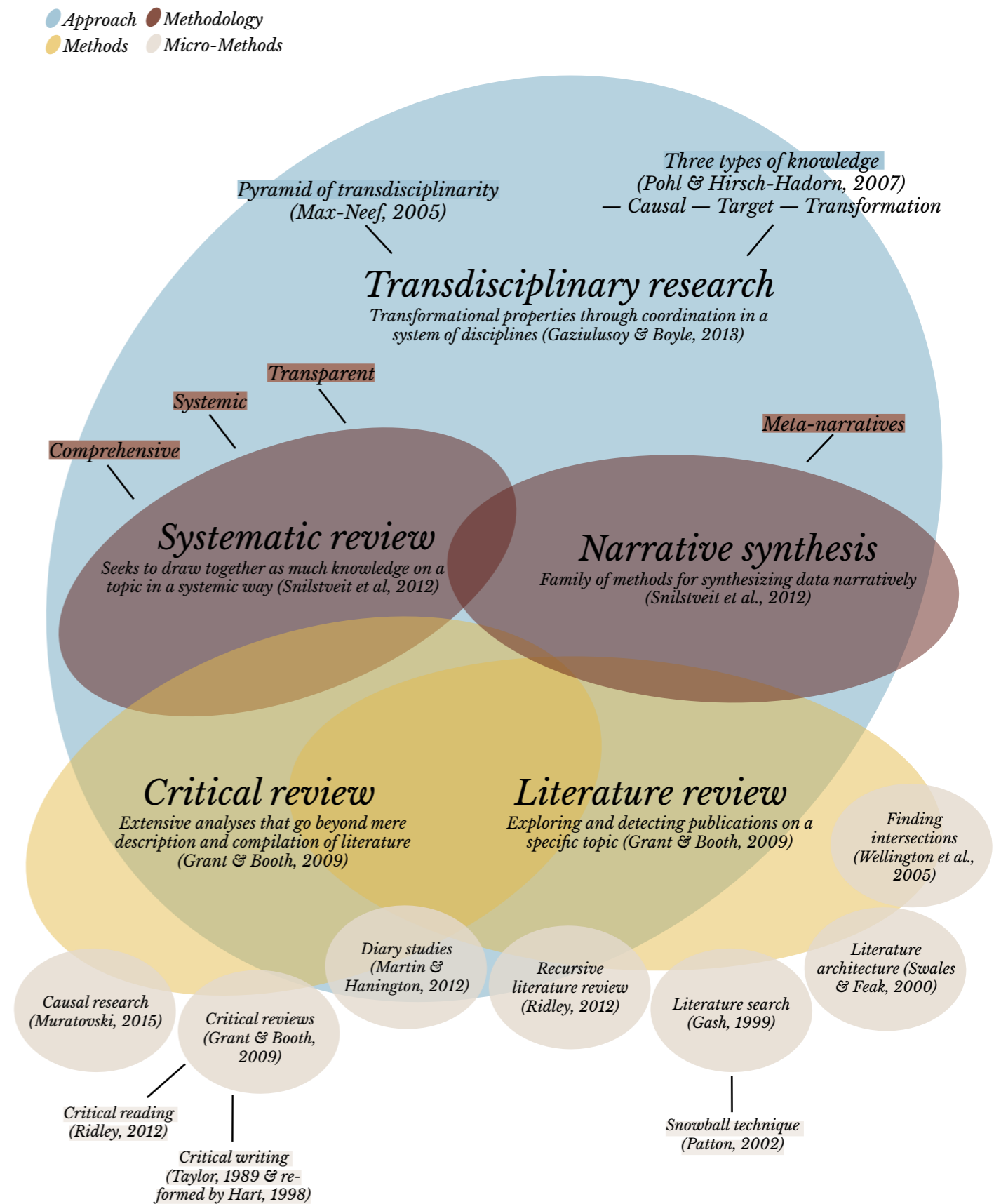


Figure 4. Research approach, methodology and methods

- 2.1 *Brief history of participatory design* —27
- 2.2 *Contemporary design facilitation* —28
 - 2.2.1 *Making the case for facilitation* —28
 - 2.2.2 *Definitions* —29
- 2.3 *The facilitator* —30
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CHAPTER 2

Design facilitation

A contemporary buzz(word)

- 2.4 *Lenses: Critique* —34
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- 2.6 *Lenses: Language use* —37
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Having provided an overview of the contents of the thesis in chapter one, as well as elaborating on approaches, methodology and methods used, this chapter will delve into design facilitation. Starting from a bigger historical view and looking at PD, I will then narrow down to different definitions of facilitation, its contemporary relevance, the role of design facilitators and their corresponding skills. Furthermore, the second part of the chapter will focus on establishing three different lenses through which design facilitation will be looked at in order to paint a broader picture, and which will be used as a reference throughout the following chapters as well.

2.1 Brief history of participatory design —

Participatory design finds its origins in social movements, as its first manifestations were intended to be a political response to the lack of fair work ethics in Scandinavia in the ‘70s (Gregory, 2003). Underrepresented groups, affected by these issues, had to find the right ways to be able to voice their opinions. Representation, power and conflict of interests were the workers’ daily struggles at the time, aspects that served as the foundation for striving for more democratic work policies.

Participatory design, as well as co-design⁸, have increasingly gained popularity in the past decades due to their emphasis in opening design processes to people. Given its aforementioned historical past, PD is nowadays highly acclaimed due to its connotations of inclusiveness, participation, invitation, engagement, equality, integration, emancipation and representation. The initial definition

of PD that will be used as a reference is that provided by Jesper Simonsen and Toni Robertson in their *Handbook for Participatory Design* (2012). However, throughout the chapter, it will be possible to see how different aspects of this definition will be singled out and analyzed from a stance that intends to highlight the socio-political implications of practice. In the context of the handbook, PD is defined as: “a process of investigating, understanding, reflecting upon, establishing, developing and supporting mutual learning between multiple participants in collective ‘reflection-in-action’. The participants typically undertake the two principal roles of users and designers where the designers strive to learn the realities of the users’ situation while the users strive to articulate their desired aims and learn appropriate technological means to obtain them” (Simonsen & Robertson, 2012, p. 2).

Participatory design’s rapid growth and strong linkage with the social, in which practice is configured by the structures it is embedded into (e.g people, places) (Akama & Light, 2018), highlights the need for researchers and practitioners to delve into defining best practices, techniques and ways of doing in different circumstances (Muller et al., 1993). However, this does not solely mean focusing on a practical solution-driven approach, but to also consider the bigger picture. The thesis will focus on looking at the bigger structures PD and design facilitation are entrenched in and to recognize their highly political (Gaziulusoy & Ryan, 2017) role in prompting collaborative visions of the future.

⁸ For an overview on the similarities and differences between PD and co-design, please refer to Seravalli (2014, p. 107) or Hirscher (2020, p. 25).

2.2 Contemporary design facilitation —

The upcoming section will focus on expanding on design facilitation, after its brief introduction in [section 1.4](#). Different aspects of the field will be explored such as different views on the theoretical notion and the dynamics behind the role of the facilitator itself. The chapter will also render further account on the skills currently associated with facilitators, skills that need to be developed and enhanced in the future, as well as providing practical examples on the use of language when writing and speaking about design facilitation.

Finally, three different lenses through which to look at facilitation will be presented, with the aim of gaining a broader and more critical perspective of the field. Looking at PD from these perspectives will enable making meaningful connections with areas such as power and politics, and to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms in participatory practices. The proposed lenses will be then used throughout the thesis as a means to strengthen and emphasize the urge to make efforts to explore specific areas within design to acquire new knowledge or to revisit existing notions to spark deeper discussions.

2.2.1 Making the case for facilitation —

Design facilitation is not a new field of action. A significant time of this area of practice can be traced back to the '60s in which design methodologists became active (Bayazit, 2004 as cited in Napier & Wada, 2016), especially in the German context, where it was thoroughly studied in Ulm University (Bürdek, 2015). Belonging simultaneously to the fields of participatory, co- and interaction design, it has increasingly been capturing people's attention throughout the years (Napier &

Wada, 2016) given its potential to bring different stakeholders together that would otherwise not meet.

Being a relatively new field, it required extensive work to make a case for it and to be both accepted and established within the design realm. To enter practice, and to be acknowledged as an expression of such, facilitation had to be defined and put into categories. After all, categorization, thematization and framing are ways in which humans make sense of things. Such processes help to establish order, to dictate what is considered to be legitimate, and which things matter more when compared to others. Following this line of thinking, practitioners within facilitation established their credibility by creating strong links to specific values such as participation, inclusion, sharedness, collectiveness and diversity.

However, the deliberate crafting of discourses can be a double-edged sword, a notion that will be explored throughout the thesis. Despite being useful for validating or endorsing a new area of practice, it can also be used to willingly leave out certain aspects of it. In order to critically form an opinion and analyze something, thinking of what has also been left behind is deemed of extreme relevance. One of the reasons for engaging in this type of research was the personal belief that design can be either a disruptive or normalizing practice. The choice between both ends of the spectrum is context-, interest- and agenda-based, thus making it compulsory to dig deeper into such ability when it comes to knowledge production.

My starting point in design facilitation, then, will be to view it as a normalizing area of practice which can be framed, packaged and sold as deemed convenient

according to the agendas that demand its respective execution. High focus will be placed in trying to make visible those aspects that are typically not highlighted when trying to make a case for something, such as its political nature, its balances, and underlying structures, such as power exertion. The focus will then be on unfolding these notions to gain a deeper and more critical understanding, making informed claims on key connections that ought to be made, and finally to envision alternatives.

2.2.2 Definitions —

Design facilitation's contemporary main applications include participatory processes that take place within relatively short-term projects and in which the designer acts as the mediator between the initiator of the project and the groups it affects, that is citizens, businesses and other actors. Generally, it takes the form of workshops, focus groups and other collective activities in which the problem is presented, and a schedule is followed in order to reach a result deemed fruitful for the project. However, the process is much larger. Before the engagement, it is necessary to gain familiarity with the brief and the people involved, as well as planning the facilitated instance in terms of location, duration, props, etc. Afterwards, a common practice is to process the collected data and feedback and integrate them into the project that initiated the facilitation process in the first place.

To make this notion more explicit, I will provide an example from my own experience. In a project in collaboration with the city of Espoo⁹, the multidisciplinary team I was a part of was commissioned to develop a solution that would tackle the lack of communication

and reach between Business Espoo and the local business owners. Our team held different participatory engagements, one of them being a collective facilitated instance. For this to happen, the team first did background research on the issue, to then invite different stakeholders to the meeting (e.g people from Business Espoo, from Espoo marketing and Enterprise Espoo). The workshop was used to test a strategic framework we had come up with, and therefore participants were guided into understanding and making use of the framework by providing them with examples and props to interact with. We had extensive discussions with the participants as well, in which they voiced their concerns and opinions in regards to the current state of things. Afterwards, we debriefed with our client and collected insights to further develop our final solution. This is what I will refer to as mainstream facilitation, usually found in short-term projects and composed by a priori framing of the participatory instance, guided processes, use of props and instructions to prompt action and the envisioning of collective designed futures.

Reaching one solid definition of what facilitation is has been relatively difficult, both for myself and in the literature, as it is an area of practice that has changed over time and, given its booming extension to other areas, it is also constantly redefined to fit accordingly. Pamela Napier and Terri Wada, who have written extensively on facilitation, with special lenses on its impact and role in education, have both defined and compiled different depictions of the term. Interpretations vary, going from a big picture understanding of design facilitation as the core of design practice (Unger & Nunally, 2013 as cited in Napier & Wada, 2016), as an "approach to problem solving" (Acumen +, as

⁹ The project was conducted as part of the 2019 Designing for Services course from the MA in Collaborative and Industrial Design at Aalto University.

2.3 The facilitator —

cited in Napier & Wada, 2016, p. 158) or as an “emerging role for designers” (Consultancy Thinkplace, as cited in Napier & Wada, 2016, p. 163).

Simultaneously, as the field rapidly changes, it is inevitably, whether consciously or unconsciously, readdressed and revisited by some authors. Napier and Wada first define facilitation as a “design skill set” and as a “distinctive capacity” (2015, p. 1;3), to then provide a different notion a year later, in which they refer to it as an “emerging type of design process” (Napier & Wada, 2016, p. 162) and therefore, a much broader conception. This is to say, in short, that in defining this area which aims at catering to people’s needs and voicing their opinion, it is possible to take different stands, which linguistically, politically and ethically speaking, have different layers of connotations.

To complement this initial picture in regards of design facilitation, it seemed coherent to also state words that are commonly associated with it or presented alongside. Some of these include “planning”, “management”, “innovation”, “strategies”, “leadership”, “participation” and “empowerment”, just to name a few. Meaning and intention become increasingly amplified when such terms are associated, and the risks of misleading, deceiving or just simply misusing soar. This is not to provide a pessimistic view on PD-related terminology, but to emphasize and incentivize the need to make proper use of terminology, as well as to possess a deeper understanding of what it means to enter a certain field. As it will be explored in the following chapters, a thorough understanding of influences, assumptions and consequences is a step towards more transparent, politically aware and accountable design.

In many, if not in all, of the previously described definitions of contemporary design facilitation, there is an implied understanding of an established entity which makes participation possible. At times, this is perceived to be a process, other times this is seen as skills and tools which can be used in participatory instances. In all cases, however, there is an implicit assumption that someone is responsible for this act. Facilitators, usually designers, are those who mediate participatory, co-creative engagements; furthermore, they plan, orchestrate and define the terms of said engagements, as part of the design process. In these collective activities, facilitators have higher agency than the invited participants.

As it can be seen in the history of PD, significant efforts have been made to render the relationship between facilitators, designers and participants, or users¹⁰ fair and equal when it comes to their role and the associated responsibilities. In their position claim paper, Napier and Wada (2016) argue that there has been a shift in adopted positions, moving from having designers acting as distant experts, to adopting the role of facilitators. The aim behind this deliberate shift was that of bridging the role gap that hindered proper participation and action.

In her doctoral dissertation, Anja-Lisa Hirscher (2020) outlines how this was tackled through the creation of tools and methods to facilitate better interactions and to enable reciprocal learning¹¹. Here, designers tried to find the most suitable ways in which to get the best out of these interactions; it is safe to say there are different sets of factors that put pressure on the facilitator. Generally, they are commissioned to lead and assist in decision-making (Napier & Wada, 2016)

regarding complex issues in settings where involving multiple stakeholders is desired. Different interests, agendas and influencing factors such as educational backgrounds, cultures, ideological and political beliefs, age, religious convictions, among others come into play, adding another degree of difficulty.

So far, the conventional way of dealing with such intricacy is through careful planning. Facilitators, as it will be explored in-depth in chapter four, make use of a set of practices that allow them to shape, redirect and prevent actions to be taken in engagements, as well as allowing them to unfold. Typically, the preparation, leading to a facilitated encounter, encompasses setting a location, defining which specific groups of people will be involved, the duration of the encounter, which activities will be done, how the discussions will take place, for how long, and what is the outcome that it is sought after. This becomes a clear demonstration of the agency that facilitators possess, an aspect which usually goes unnoticed. Facilitated instances are usually unquestioned in the moment, and justifying the reasons for such careful framing is not the norm. Furthermore, in workshops or other collaborative activities, the facilitator is seen as the one who is of reference in case of doubts on how to proceed, on what is right and what is wrong, and that who is expected to set the pace and expectations, act as a messenger and dictate whether efforts have been satisfactory or not.

For these, and for other reasons that will become more evident throughout the thesis, it seemed mandatory to question whether this seeming expansion in the role of design from designer-as-expert to designer-as-facilitator has been effective or not. Can shifts in attitude, mindset and action be identified? Or is this an alternative way to refer to another shade

of what is already the status quo? These are all questions that will be looked into in the following chapters.

2.3.1 Dominant use of language —

Having introduced the idea of the frequent misuse of PD-related terminology, this section is going to focus on providing a practical example for enabling better understanding. The chosen short excerpts are from Napier and Wada’s proceedings of the Cumulus conference titled *Design Facilitation: Training the Designer of Today* (2015). Here, the authors first elaborate on the role of tools in facilitated engagements, stating that: “these toolkits [for participation] give users a design process to follow..” (Napier & Wada, 2015, p. 2). In the quote, the choice of the used verb can be understood to be dominant, as following means to obey someone’s orders¹², implying a change in behaviour according to someone else’s wishes. Despite providing tools for participation, this becomes a clear case of how the notion of compliance is ingrained in our use of the language, risking to increase the role gap between designers and participants. By saying that processes are given to users to follow, it becomes mandatory, an instruction, and therefore not an invitation to develop their skills through participatory methods and tools.

“[D]esign facilitation requires the ability to move forward even with imperfect information. The facilitator **must be able to move people forward..**” (Napier & Wada, 2015, p. 5). In this case, the focus is on the characteristics a facilitator ought to have to ensure “effective”¹³ facilitation. In the paper, the responsibility of the facilitator in regards to enabling users to feel at ease with vagueness is highlighted. This is a sound claim, as ambiguity can be a very discouraging aspect in participatory

¹⁰ A more thorough analysis of the connotations of the use of the words “participants” and “user” will be addressed in the following chapters of the thesis.

¹¹ A more extensive and thorough account of this claim is addressed in chapter five.

¹² Definition extracted from Cambridge dictionary.

¹³ Quotation marks are used as this term will be explored in depth in [section 2.6.2](#).

engagements if not navigated with caution. However, the choice of words used to express how to overcome this places the facilitator distant from the participants; again, a dominant position in which the designer is the one that, from a distance, decides to make a change happen in a particular (and convenient) direction can be noticed.

These are only two isolated examples of the inherent strong connotations attached to PD terminology. Further cases will be highlighted in the different chapters to be able to understand this notion from different perspectives (e.g concerning framing practices, accountability, etc).

2.3.2 Contemporary skills and traits —

In order to keep creating a complete picture of the designer-as-facilitator, a quick overview of the main skills they should possess is needed. Said skills usually revolve around very specific qualities, pertinent to what PD stands for and reflecting the direction in which design is moving, towards a more empathic, inclusive and understanding practice.

It seems pertinent to recall the workshop organized by the Finnish Government Design Community “Julkis-muotoilijat” in August 2019 at Helsinki’s City Hall. The *Government Design Meetup* hosted, among other activities, a workshop titled “*Challenges in Bringing Design to Government*”. Here, all participants, myself included, were asked to join a discussion table based on our interests; one of the discussions revolved around the topic of “roles of the designer in/ for the government”. Together with the other participants, we discussed what are the main traits and skills designers should have in this complex environment.

The notion of the designer-as-facilitator did not take long to come up, and considerable time was spent thinking and mapping what makes a designer a facilitator. The results of such exercise are visible in figure 5 on the right.

Apart from being able to highlight which skills the participants (designers, civil servants, professors) associate with facilitators, the most interesting aspect is to stress where do we believe someone becomes a facilitator. Which are their unique traits? In the figure, it is possible to see that designers are typically connected to terms such as “simplifiers”, “mirrors”, “researchers”, “capacity builders” or “mentors”, all terms that to some extent convey a certain degree of closeness and connection. On the other hand, in this exercise, facilitators were associated with a stronger position, defined as “not one of them”, “traffic controllers”, “connectors” and “collaborators”.

Definitions are made, shaped and reinstated also outside of the academic setting, which becomes the reason why it is also important to look into and reflect on how different groups see certain established figures. Such insights are key for gaining a better and multiperspective understanding of perceived roles, attitudes and abilities; further delving into these notions can be the starting point for a thorough re-evaluation and reassessment of the qualities that designers and facilitators want to communicate and be associated with.

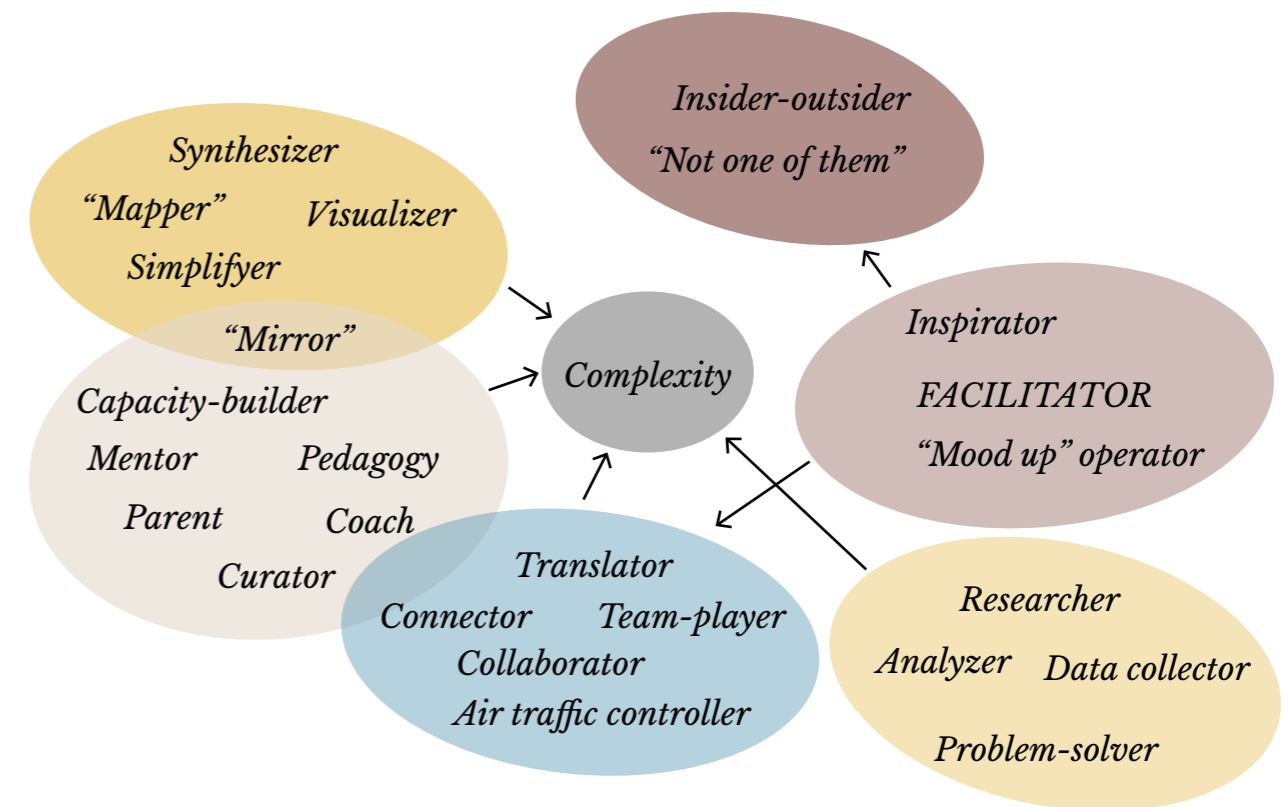


Figure 5. Designer roles in/for the government, adapted from photo.

2.3.3 Skills to be developed —

As mentioned in the previous section, an introspective look into skills that design facilitators possess is the starting point to acknowledging those that need further and stronger mastery in the future. For example, considerations are being made on how facilitation should be incorporated in educational programmes, emphasizing on the critical perspective needed in doing so, as “too many students learn how to make, but not why, or why not (to make)” (Napier & Wada, 2016, p. 160). In their papers from 2015 and 2016, the authors heavily focus on making a case for facilitation to be incorporated within design education. They accentuate the need for providing more than mere tools, and not forgetting

about key structures such as value systems in relation to PD and Human-Centered Design (Napier & Wada, 2016). A further and mandatory step, in this case, would be to consider the political and critical awareness students need to develop as a basis for engaging in a more transparent and conscious practice.

The need for “attunement” has also been in the discussion regarding PD practices and facilitation. Authors refer to it as the capacity to embrace uncertainty and as the faculty to contrast the urge of having structured processes (Napier & Wada, 2016); furthermore, it is considered to be the ability to read environments and interactions between people (Akama &

2.4 Lens: Critique —

Light, 2018). Readiness becomes then a complex skill to acquire due to its reliance on common sense and sensitivity. These are mainly ingrained or innate in our behaviour, thus making it hard to teach to a facilitator how to be aware, spot and act on relevant key moments. However, the importance of being prepared for uncertainty, especially in the context of design facilitation, will become more explicit in the course of the writing. Facilitation and participatory practices are complex fields, which comprise the co-existence of many layers. Designers ought to take into consideration the non-linearity of processes, as well as their unpredictability, the previously mentioned imperceptible factors and to be open to constant changing states.

From the point of view of knowledge production and research, such a phenomenon requires not only practical skills but also clear lenses, intended as filters for enhancing perception, comprehension and evaluation, through which to analyze design facilitation and to foster a deep understanding of underlying factors which constitute the field. In this thesis, three specific lenses have been chosen to look into facilitation to address the research questions and spark further discussion. These are critique, unpacking and language use. The use of lenses has resulted from the research process, inspired by the methodology and method choice. Critique has been chosen as an overarching lens as it draws upon notions of critical reading, writing and revising (see [section 1.7.3](#)), which underpin the whole research. Unpacking and language use will be considered as resulting from critique and related to creating a narrative synthesis (see [section 1.7.2](#)) across disciplines, notions and ideas (see [section 1.7.1](#)).

During previous years, the lack of critical thinking and doing has always stood out when reflecting on practice. Having been personally exposed to work environments in design, communication and education in Europe and Latin America, a conversation around the implications of practice and our responsibility always felt missing. However, this argument has always been a vivid one in the activist field, in which questioning attitudes, rethinking ways of doing and trying to get to the bottom of pressing issues is at the order of the day. Critique and self-reflection are critical aspects that design research and practice ought to commit to as the field becomes more and more interlaced with everyday matters of concern.

In contemporary research and practice, critique can be extensively found in fields such as humanities and social sciences, where critical approaches become a must in dealing with complex and wicked problems. However, in design “assumptions and preferences are typically not explicit, including [...] power structures” (Mazé, 2019, p. 23), and this becomes alarming. In design, the status quo still stands strong despite major steps forward from the era in which design was merely associated with advertising and creating fictitious desires for consumption. Critique provides a solid basis for exploration and to discover the many pluralities within design, needed to avoid homogeneity through generalization (Dovey, 1999).

It is crucial to understand that critique does not equal criticism, but rather an attentive and contemplative judgement in regards to what is being discussed. Critique implies an informed analysis before drawing conclusions, whereas criticism is a rather abrupt and not necessarily well-founded commentary.

Making informed judgements requires a deep and broad understanding of the topic being discussed, and directing the attention towards the issue specifically (Latour, 2004) instead of speaking in general terms.

Critique, however, might be an uncomfortable phenomenon to deal with. As Tony Fry argues in his *Design as Politics* (2011), critical views make supporters of the status quo uncomfortable, as it agitates commodity culture; he then goes on to say this might be one of the reasons why designers still turn a blind eye in this regard (Fry, 2011).

This thesis willingly opts for embracing and practising critique in regards to design. By doing so, it aims to prompt a reaction in PD-commodity culture by poking the current status quo and attempting to partially do what here I will call “making things crumble”, and acknowledging those otherwise disguised facets of design. Making things crumble here is intended as an intentional questioning and query in regards to something which allows an understanding of what maintains set structures on their feet, and what could otherwise be redefined through conscious efforts. This notion is in line with the very definition of politics given by philosopher Jacques Rancière, who defines it as the “breaking down, disordering and undoing of the order and stability” (Rancière, 1999 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 82).

The importance of making things crumble will be further noticeable when practitioners and researchers in the field of design fully acknowledge that even the mainstream can be disputed, refined and changed through well-informed, willing and persistent resistance. After all, undoubted acceptance does not necessarily mean something is “good”

(Murphy, 2016), but it is rather a strong expression of conformity or resignation.

2.5 Lens: Unpacking —

As mentioned in the previous section, critique here is understood as the all-embracing lens through which design facilitation will be looked into. Deriving from it is what I will refer to as “unpacking”. In [2.2.1](#), design was described as being a “normalizing practice” which gains legitimacy through its unquestioned recognition obtained thanks to its strong role in providing a means to tackle matters of concern. Design facilitation has established its legitimacy through iterative action in participatory settings, in which purpose and values have created a need for more of it. Settled practices claim their plausibility by being “well-packaged and sellable”, put into frame(work)s and categorized (as noted in [section 2.2.1](#)); however, it is inevitable to ask whether there is an active attempt to understand and discover how these processes came to be, which structures they fall into, and who is accountable.

I consider unpacking to be the engaged elucidation of issues that ought to be unravelled. Despite having made considerable steps forward in adopting and fostering new ways in which to collaborate (Napier & Wada, 2015), design - and especially design facilitation - are fields which could benefit from a periodical and critical unpacking to understand and make explicit within which frames designers are being proactive. This will enable envisioning more realistic and fair futures, as “structures and dynamics will influence the ability to get to that future” (Voß et al., 2009 as cited in Hyysalo et al., 2019, p. 2).

Explicitness is therefore what is pursued as a way to counter the tendency to leave

certain things unstated, and unspoken. A previous link to this has been made by referring to the (re)articulation of politics, thus redefining ways of doing and exposing hegemonic practices (see section 1.2). Design processes, tools and practice are highly political, and as will be analyzed in this thesis, power is constantly mediated and redistributed. Said negotiation of power and agency can be the launchpad to nudging into certain mindsets and behaviours (Abramson et al., 2014), thus if motives, means and intentions remain tacit and unexamined (Buchanan, 1985), the line between participation and manoeuvring inevitably vanishes.

The proposed analysis of design facilitation aims at arguing that unpacking is essential in conducting practice and research, as a superficial understanding

or execution is just one side of the coin (Napier & Wada, 2015). This work agrees with the claim Carl DiSalvo makes in *Design and Prefigurative Politics* (2016) in which he urges for a recurrent consideration of new ways of doing in terms of uses, modes and purposes within design (DiSalvo, 2016).

Building on these claims, research conducted in this thesis places itself in contemporary PD and design facilitation as a starting point, to then willingly engaging in a reversed-double-diamond approach (see figure 6). Thereby, it first defines what to concentrate on, in this case, the underlying political nature of facilitation to then strive for providing a deeper understanding of the issues, structures and agents involved in “the packaging” of this field.

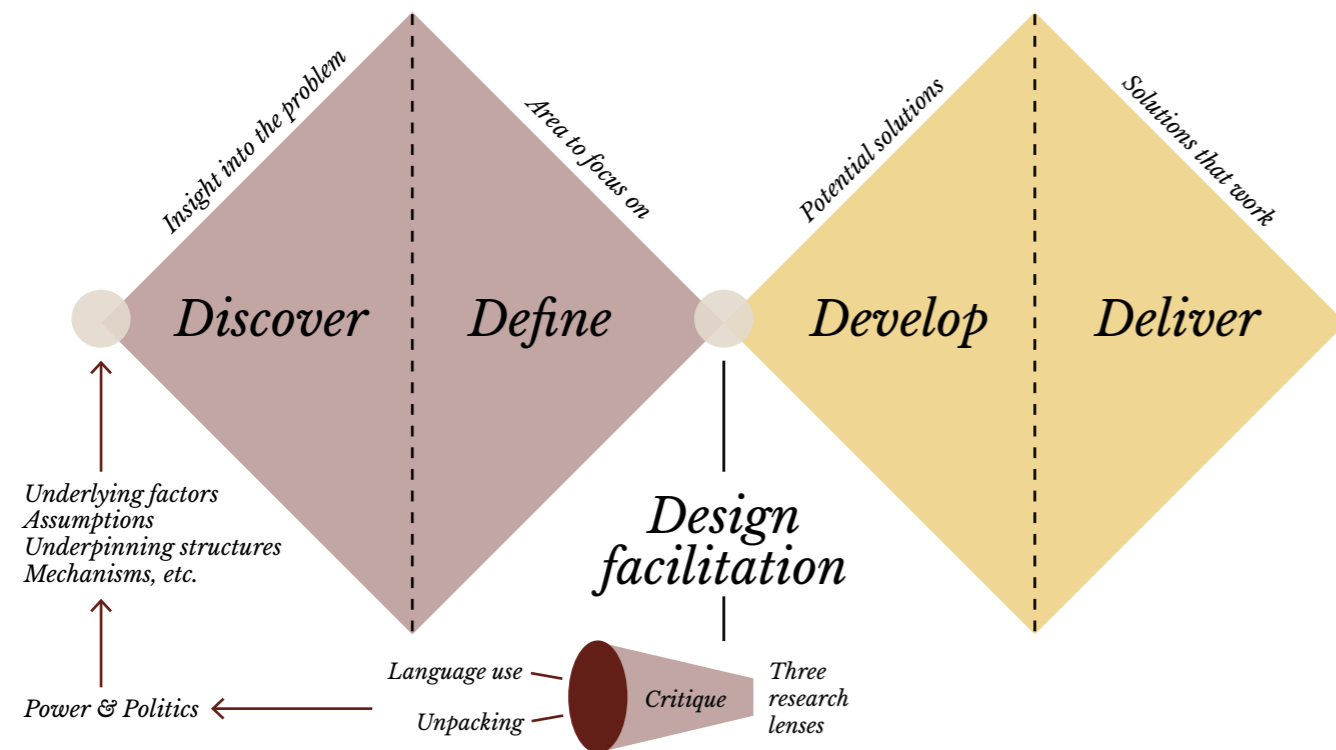


Figure 6. Reversed-double-diamond approach

2.6 Lens: Language use —

The final lens, already briefly anticipated in 2.3.1, is language use. In his *Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice*, Richard Buchanan proposes to look at design from the perspective of rhetoric. In this context, design is defined as “a mediating agency of influence between designers and their intended audience” (Buchanan, 1985, p. 4) which is inevitably linked to the field of communication and its persuasive nature. In this regard, connections can be immediately made to design facilitation and its ability to dictate the course of action, of engaging with multiple stakeholders and to affect agency distribution.

Building on this rhetorical definition of design, attention can be turned to a foundational aspect of communication: the choice and use of terminology. In general, vocabulary is entrenched in meaning; tone, intention, purpose can be spotted based on what it is being said, when, and how. When it comes to certain disciplines, such as design, the use of terminology further conveys intrinsic assumptions (Boyer et al., 2011) in regards to what is the status quo that is being upheld in that particular field of practice, or research. Moreover, it also allows getting a sense of the shifts in power relations, as it is historically claimed since the times of Aristotle that the rhetoric nature of language implies inevitable dominance (Buchanan 1985).

Both in PD and design facilitation, it is possible to encounter numerous interpretations (Muller et al., 1993) of existing jargon. Fields which have exponentially gained attention throughout the years have to some extent rendered their terminology public, and in PD and co-design, this means that everyone has a stake in it. Phraseology becomes then a bifold notion¹⁴ as it can be

used to constructively convey messages between interlocutor(s) and receptor(s), as well as being a means to deceive subtly and imperceptibly. This argument is based on the notion that design and its terminology follow the same principles as demonstrative rhetoric, in which terms are fundamentally “demonstrations or exhibitions, growing out of the past [...] and suggesting possibilities for the future [...] yet existing primarily in the present as declarations” (Buchanan, 1985, p. 20). In this quote, the complexity of phraseology becomes visible as it can set into motion the dynamics of time and meaning. Through these, it is very easy to create new persuasive visions of the future that simultaneously could also just be a mere reinforcement of the existing.

Yoko Akama and Ann Light pay particular attention to the way that PD is being written about and intend to cause a reaction in the reader in *Practices of Readiness: Punctuation, Poise and the Contingencies of Participatory Design* (2018). In their contribution, they concentrate on two specific immaterial aspects of practice: punctuation and poise. The authors engage in a critical exercise in which they relabel and reconceptualize notions of design practice to propose a more cautious and reflective way of communicating. “Punctuation” here refers to a vision of practice which is self-aware of aspects such as changes of state and gaps; on the other hand, “poise” alludes to a different shade of self-awareness, in this case being introspective, having designers contemplate their ways of doing.

To better understand the aforementioned claim of how vocabulary and word associations can be employed as a means to persuade and relinquish ownership, the following section will provide a practical example.

¹⁴ This delineation has been made for the purpose of the thesis and should not be considered final as it is based on a specific analysis of relevant literature and discourses pertinent to this context.

2.6.1 PD terminology to eschew accountability —

Once again, *Design Facilitation: Training the Designer of Today* will be used as an example due to its specific focus on design facilitation. Napier and Wada here elaborate on different categories of design activities and the corresponding skills facilitators ought to have to navigate through them (Napier & Wada, 2015 on Dorst & Lawson, 2009). In analyzing the way the authors reflect on these, some reflections can be made on two specific categories on how easy it is to leave behind explicitness through terminology.

- **Representing:** Described as a way to convey information and visualizing ideas or “making design moves” (Napier & Wada, 2015, p. 6), representing means being entitled to speak on behalf of someone else, as well as being perceived as the symbol for something.¹⁵ In this case, the chosen word has significantly stronger political and social connotations than the ones described in its explanation.

- **Evaluating:** The ability to make proper judgements, whose description will be quoted in length: “suspending or deferring judgement is not only a skill that people must practice in collaborative settings [...] but it must also be *instilled* into the individual so that a person is *contributing* fully and not *placing premature judgement* on their own ideas” (Napier & Wada, 2015, p. 6). In regards to this quote, there are three complementing remarks to be made. Firstly, the use of the word *instilled*, which means to deliberately push someone to have a particular feeling or idea about something¹⁶, having a strong dominant connotation. Secondly, said instillment should result in people *contributing* to something; if this term were to be matched with the previous dominant tone, it could be highlighted that this way, people would be complying fully to what is considered needed.

Thirdly, the thought ends by saying that, this way, people would avoid *placing any premature judgement*. Here, the idea of getting rid of possible obstacles inevitably creates a linkage to dichotomies such as consensus versus dissensus (see section 4.6), in which uncertainty is tackled through the elimination of behaviours that can compromise the bigger purpose.

2.6.2 A culture of “more”: PD and the “economic” language —

A final reflection on language deals with orthodox expectations concerning results and outcomes. Living in times when rapid pace, solutions and growth are key, this reflects on the way we communicate what we do, especially through what I would call “triumph-talk” and “indispensable numerosity”, whose meaning will be explored below.

An example of triumph-talk can be looking at how design facilitation is commonly linked to effectiveness; some mentions include “effective design facilitation” (Napier & Wada, 2015, p. 4), “effective facilitation of human activity” and “effectively” (Napier & Wada, 2016, p. 157;159) which leads to asking, is this a way to express that successful facilitation is that in which plans go undisturbed? In this case, value is calculated based on the degree to which harmony is ensured. On the other hand, indispensable numerosity here refers to the need of being perceived as those who embrace and engage in what I call a “culture of more”.

Facilitators, for instance, “must be able to carry out a *myriad* of different design activities” (Napier & Wada, 2015, p. 6) and possess the appropriate skills. Despite this being a valid claim made by the authors, it makes me wonder why do we promote

and assume that quantity is the solution? Design and facilitation would greatly benefit from the reconceptualization of notions such as “success” and “innovation”; oftentimes, genuine success and innovation do not necessarily mean “new” or “more”, but instead they come from a deeper, broad and thorough critical approach to issues.

The idea of presenting different lenses through which to look at design facilitation was to consciously be aligned to what Tony Fry describes as inverting design’s agency. In doing so, there is a proactive attempt to move towards igniting change rather than upholding the status quo (Fry, 2011). The next chapter will focus on underlying the political nature of facilitation by looking at power exertion from a philosophical perspective; this will create the basis for reflecting on practice from a more critical and well-informed standpoint. Reviewing notions of power becomes a useful starting point to unpack design facilitation as both spheres are strictly related to social relationships, agency distribution and deliberate actions.

¹⁵ Definition from Cambridge dictionary.

¹⁶ Definition from Cambridge dictionary.

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CHAPTER 3

Power

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3.1 Introduction —

In order to talk about power, it is fundamental to first make some preliminary disclaimers, as it is something that cannot be easily defined or belittled to a single definition. The discussion around what power is and how it comes into play in our everyday lives is extensive; different authors have developed their suppositions to this regard. These hypotheses ought to be analyzed from a critical perspective, keeping in mind the historical time in which they were developed, available resources and the authors’ influences.

The analysis of power in this thesis is mainly based on a personal critical review of some of Michel Foucault’s work throughout the years, as it serves as a strong foundation for a subsequent exploration of the similarities between power and participatory design in the context of facilitation. To make a useful contribution to current practice, I believed necessary to step away partly from design literature; the main intention here was to explore how the influence of theories from other disciplines can be found in design, and how it can be used to explain fundamental concepts that can be found in design practice.

3.1.1 Why power? Designerly and philosophical reasons —

Addressing complex issues such as the unpacking of areas such as facilitation requires a different approach to research, as when the object of design shifts, “one cannot just resort to routine knowledge and methods” (Frascara & Winkler, 2008, p. 4). In [section 1.5](#), I have already laid the foundation when referring to the very nature of problems, having stated how they are not singular, nor they are isolated. They are dynamic, upheld by structures shaped by agendas, conflicts of interests, invisibilities and power. Therefore,

designers ought to acknowledge that the projects they undertake, the skills they enhance and the people they collaborate with - just to name a few examples - are all part of bigger socio-political systems. Thus designerly approaches through research and practice are encouraged to broaden their view and start gathering insights from other disciplines outside of the sphere of design.

The thesis aims at approaching design facilitation from a plurality of views to complement the theory, but also to contrast it with existing design-related notions in order to spot assumptions, highlight the status quo and to find interconnections. Broadening the spectrum of research is intended to be an exercise of actively recognizing the different structural components - or isolated dots (Boyer et al., 2011) - within design facilitation to then subsequently build a bigger picture in which layers, gaps and interconnections become visible. Foucault’s work has been used and referenced vastly in different design literature, (see Dovey, 1999; Keshavarz, 2016; Arnold, 2002, among others) as the extent and range of his work or the topics he focused on can be connected in different insightful ways to design practice.

Furthermore, one of the objectives of this thesis is to inquire into that which is considered to be a matter of fact, an established way of doing things, such as contemporary facilitation; I believe that to fully understand a field, a concept, or different ways of doing, it is imperative to inspect its different layers as to individuate causality and its dynamics. As Latour puts it, there is in fact “no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving away from them and directing one’s attention toward the conditions that made them possible” (Latour, 2004, p.

231). Nevertheless, the literature reviewed here also focuses on the work of other significant contributors to the discussion of power.

The purpose of this chapter is attempting to explain how power comes to be exercised by people and brought into society. Firstly, the focus is going to be on opting for specific definitions of power, pertinent with the bigger purpose of this thesis, which is connecting power, politics and design. A thorough analysis of the significance of such definitions, together with an inspection of relevant characteristics will provide a suitable basis for a more complex examination of the procedures behind the exertion of power. Such analysis will be valuable to better understand the underlying values and connotations behind design facilitation.

The thesis will adhere with Foucault's deliberate will to forgo fabricating theories on power, as that would imply associating power to a set time placement, as well as an inevitable objectification and subjectification (Foucault, 1980 as cited in Kelly, 2009), characteristics considered to be contrary to the position he maintained in the '70s and early '80s. Power will be considered to be subjectless and decentered, attributes which will be explained later in more detail.

3.2 First notions of power —

For years philosophers, social scientists and other academics have studied power as a topic per se, having played a key role in developing theories on society, economy, politics and development, among others (Weberman, 1995; Rousseau 1950; Machiavelli, 1999; Giddens, 1986; Lukes, 2005; Bourdieu, 1990 and others). The variety of approaches in relation to the topic has led to a plurality of definitions, with authors finding

themselves in a position to concur, differ or be influenced by one another in certain aspects.

Foucault's work throughout the years, especially during the '70s and '80s, focused indirectly on the notion of what power is and how it enters the realm of human interactions. He conducted behavioural analysis in regards to control, discipline, sexuality, psychology in some of his best well-known pieces such as *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), *The History of Sexuality* (1976) but also in some of his lectures such as *Lectures on the Will to Know* (2013), *Abnormal* (2004), *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), *Security, Territory, Population* (2007) and more, which will all be referenced throughout the thesis.

An interesting aspect which I want to highlight, as mentioned in Mark Kelly's *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault* (2009), a compendium of Foucault's bibliography, is the fact that, at different points in time, power called for a reconceptualization (Kelly, 2009), a refined explanation of its exertion, characteristics and applications. Reconceptualizing means to (re)form a concept for something we are already familiar with, implying that new interpretations or elucidations have penetrated its original definition.

This is exactly the case with Foucault's initial understanding of power, to which he referred as a conglomeration of practices (Foucault, 2007 cited in Kelly, 2009) that can be understood through the relational analysis of inter-human activity. Despite this being a valid possible definition, it is safe to say that it is not enough, as it refers to many complex layers that ought to be expanded to provide a better understanding (e.g social

practices, inter-human relations) of how power comes to be exerted. Conducting an analysis in this context can be understood as a method to study power, as it is presented as a way to better grasp the magnitude of something omnipresent and multi-faceted; therefore, a grid of analysis will simultaneously render visible the different slants of power and enable comprehension as the landscape of observation is narrowed down. (Foucault, 1980; 2004¹⁷ as cited in Kelly, 2009).

3.2.1 Core characteristics of power —

The process of defining something as broad as a set of procedures demands a certain level of categorization to foster sense-making. Many characteristics would help to get a better understanding about what power is as a whole, but first I want to concentrate on three¹⁸ that I consider to be constants, despite possible reconceptualizations throughout the years; these are subjectlessness, decentredness and ubiquity.

Before moving to an explanation of each component, I would like to define the use of the words "thing" and "something" when referring to power. Clarifying the use of specific terminology serves a specific purpose, which in this context is to avoid providing contrasting notions of what power is and to set a comprehensible basis for the reader. In the thesis, when referring to power as a thing or something, the term will not be used in the way Martin Heidegger or Bruno Latour would argue, by attributing a certain (yet respectively different) degree of materiality to the subject in question (Latour, 2004; Heidegger, 1971). In this thesis, whenever the words "something" or "thing" will be used in relation to power, I intend to refer to an immaterial thing, free from physicality, or personality.

Having defined the use of needed terms, it is now possible to review the aforementioned characteristics of power. The first of these, and arguably the strongest one is power's ability to be independent and detached from any subject form. Humans play a key role when it comes to understanding anti-subjectivism in relation to power, not by being the object of this reciprocal communicative bond, but its vehicle. In fact, power is not considered to be something that can be applied to interactions in a finite way. Power is something that exists on its own, and cannot be objectified; thus it cannot be acquired as in the case of material things, it cannot be bought, given away or stolen. On the contrary, it is something that acts and operates, and despite not being freely available, it is to some extent negotiable (Bălan, 2010 on Foucault, 1980).

This first feature of power becomes a good starting point to insinuate that, given its abstract corporeal composition, power lacks a definite nucleus. Even though it is something that disperses and circulates, it is not considered to be something fluid, as that would again imply a mistaken notion, in this case of having a focality. Therefore it can be defined as decentered, not being characteristic of any particular group or class in society, not belonging to certain individuals over others. (Foucault, 1977; 1980; 2003; 1978 as cited in Kelly, 2009).

Imagining something defined as independent and dispersed, it would be a fair assumption to state that power, intended as a set of procedures, is ubiquitous. This means that its pervasiveness reaches every aspect of our every day, and every layer within any of them. Foucault argues that power is ubiquitous as its exertion is itself a possibility within any kind of relationship (Foucault, 1978; 1980 as cited in Kelly,

¹⁷ In Kelly (2009) works by and collections of Michel Foucault are referenced.

¹⁸ This delineation has been made for the purpose of the thesis and should not be considered final as it is based on a specific analysis of relevant literature and discourses pertinent to this context.

2009; Bălan, 2010). This is an aspect that will be further explored in the later analysis of how power shifts from latent to exert.

3.2.2 Resistance —

A parallel discussion can be had on the notion of resistance. The reason why this discussion is considered to be happening in parallel to power is that it can be understood to be a particular facet of power relations whose concept is not covered by that of power (Barbalet, 1985), therefore not reducible to it. Foucault claims that power is coextensive with resistance by arguing that whenever power is exerted, someone is inevitably resisting it. (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Bălan, 2010).

Throughout history, great thinkers such as Steven Lukes, Anthony Giddens, Max Weber and Thomas Hobbes have expanded on the topic, therefore the conversation around is considered to be immense. However, it could be stated that definitions and considerations regarding resistance vary significantly between theories who disregard the social aspect of power and those who do not (Barbalet, 1985). This, according to Foucault, represents a considerable misunderstanding of what power relations are all about, thus being blind to their strictly relational foundation (Foucault, 1976 as cited in Kelly, 2009). One of the reasons why resistance is reckoned to be an intrinsic characteristic of power relations might be due to our distinctive political subjectivity - intended as our mode of being - as social individuals. Here, the dynamic force that constitutes exerted power in relations can be referred to as social power. In this regard, a bigger conversation could be opened on the relation between participatory design and topics such as political subjectivity and emancipation within a socially

constructed system of power. However, they will be deliberately left out as they would require a degree of attention and thoroughness that the established structure for the thesis can not provide.

In *Power and Resistance* (1985), sociologist Jack Barbalet reflects on, contrasts and elaborates on the different streams of thought around the topic. The rest of the section will draw on some of those claims to provide an overview of how resistance is perceived in the thesis. First off, it is necessary to start by clarifying that resistance does not necessarily equal conflict. This is a common word association and an immense academic debate, as the term resistance is commonly used in activist and political discourses in a way to express the existence of a conflict. Despite being possible to link the two, resistance can, however, take many forms, and some of those are not inherently conflictual.

In the context of the thesis, resistance will be defined as a specific aspect of power relations which imposes limits on power. More specifically, it takes the form of those functions which thrust constraints on somebody else's initiative. In the latter sentence, the keyword to pay attention to is "initiative", as that is what resistance is opposed to. Barbalet draws on American sociologist and philosopher Alvin Gouldner to provide a clear understanding of this idea by making an example on how dynamics regarding safety issues play out: on one hand, he puts "workers who initiate bureaucratic forms, while on the other hand, the management group may be the barrier resisting them" (Barbalet, 1985, p. 538). Here, resistance is opposed to the initiative of workers, and power is exerted through the dominant hierarchy between the two parts.

Another key notion to better grasp how resistance functions is by expanding on power balances, a concept that will be present all through the thesis. Power relations imply an immanent imbalance in power distribution. Some have discredited these claims, such as sociologist Anthony Giddens who argued that to some extent, all agents involved in said relations have a certain - yet limited - amount of power. Giddens claims, however, prove to be ineffectual when understanding power relations to be asymmetrical in the first place. Thus, they would be deemed invalid by Foucault himself on various levels, for example in regards to how changes to power happen through a change in mode, and not form; and also not being able to consider power as something which is possessed and acquired. For the sake of simplifying as this is not a philosophy thesis, I will take into consideration two groups of actors: those on whose power is swayed towards, and those subordinate to that power. What is to be understood is that despite being powerless, the subordinate group can still influence the outcome of the power relation. This is achieved through an active mobilization of other social resources towards the objective of limiting the power of those in control, and that is the definition of resistance. Therefore, despite being caught up within the sphere of power, resistance can take a non-power form.

The chosen title for the thesis is *Fostering Resistance: Acknowledging Notions of Power Exertion and Politics in Design Facilitation*. Considering design to be an inherently political field, bringing up reflections regarding power becomes unavoidably necessary. Moreover, as it will be more visible in chapter four, in participatory practices such as design facilitation power imbalances are highly present, and resistance - both from designers and

participants - tends to be low, as design can be considered to be a normalizing practice (see section 2.2.1).

I hereby deliberately create a space for reconsideration and reconceptualization through first-hand resistance to the effects of existing power in design facilitation. Current social dynamics and power relations in facilitation are being reproduced and strengthened without thorough discussion on less-unbalanced alternatives. In the power relation between myself and the structural socio-participatory system upheld by design, I find myself in a subordinate position. Therefore, the thesis aims to influence the "conditions of reproduction of those social systems" (Barbalet, 1985, p. 542) by highlighting some otherwise often unaddressed factors while encouraging others to do the same. In other words, the thesis intends to foster further influence through an open discussion on invisible aspects of an imbalanced system that fosters compliance.

3.3 Power relations —

It is important to highlight a crucial aspect in regards to the meaning of the word power. Architectural and urban critic Kim Dovey reflects on power by saying that it is pluralism and has to be treated as such (Dovey, 1999). His main argument on this matter is that this multiplicity of notions and interpretations might add complexity when defining concepts and building bigger discourses around this topic; it is safe to say that when referring to power, it instantly places the conversation within the realm of power relations, as power can be defined as an intrinsic component of human relations. As mentioned before, these interactions are not the object of power, but they act as a vehicle for it; thus, each set of relations has to be understood as the result of different

dynamics (both positive and negative, as it will be explored when defining power's productivity) within relationships, and simultaneously an inherent component of said relationships (Foucault, 1976; 1978; 1980, as cited in Kelly, 2009).

With a set understanding of what power relations are, it is easier to comprehend further definitions of power (relations) given by Foucault throughout the years; still being loyal to the core attributes of power, he focuses his attention on understanding the mechanisms that have an effect on individuals and which are immanent in power. The philosopher will refer to power as a "mode of action upon the action of others" (Foucault, 2000, as cited in Kelly, 2009, p. 66). Towards the end of this chapter, I will expand on the role of actions when it comes to exerting power, and the notion of intent, key concept also for grasping notions related to design facilitation, PD and political implications. In short, I propose to define power relations in the thesis as those in which the actions of one prevails, intending to have a purposeful effect on the counterpart's behaviour (Foucault, 1997, as cited in Kelly, 2009).

3.4 "Designerly" characteristics of power —

Despite having already mentioned those characteristics at the core of the definition of power itself, it is good to also briefly mention those attributes that make for useful connections with design. The use of "designerly" to describe specific characteristics of power here refers to the term coined by Nigel Cross, who claimed that "there are things to know, ways of knowing them, and ways of finding out about them that are specific to the design area. [...] there are designerly ways of knowing, distinct from the more usually-

recognised scientific and scholarly ways of knowing" (Cross, 2010, p. 5). This term, despite being intended to be used within the design sphere, will be adopted and rearticulated in the thesis to refer to those characteristics of power that have a strong linkage to design. The previous section already reflected on one of these designerly characteristics, relationality, by connecting power to relationships between people.

Foucault considers power to be productive (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Bălan, 2010), which means that it also causes a positive effect, against the common understanding that it is just an exercise of oppression or repression. In *Discipline and Punish*, he further reflects on this matter by saying that power's productivity serves as a means to create the quotidian, fabricating behavioural patterns and gestures (Foucault, 1977 as cited in Bălan, 2010). In terms of design, a link can be made to Kim Dovey's notion of authority; he considers productivity to be a mode of power encapsulated within the realm of authority, referring to the unquestioned nature of certain structures which we indisputably comply with by believing they serve a bigger purpose (Dovey, 1999).

In his book *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (1999), Dovey analyzes the ways in which artefacts, especially in relation to architecture, exert or mediate power on people. He outlines three main approaches, two of which are relevant for this thesis: force and coercion. Briefly, they could be described respectively as the ability to allow/impair to carry actions through physical means and influence, manipulate through the illusion of free will. (Mazé, Andersson & Isaksson, 2019 on Dovey, 1999). Force is considered to be a limited exercise of power, as its main purpose is that of preventing non-compliance, instead of

generating action itself. In the case of coercion, the focus shifts on creating the illusion of empowerment, in reality being just a facade for controlled agency (Dovey, 1999).

"Coercion consists in transforming private, communal, group of cultural spaces into organizational spaces in which people perform actions directed towards the fulfillment of another's plan, refrain from performing actions subversive of the realization of another's plan" (Weinstein, 1972 as cited in Dovey, 1999, p. 13).

Lastly, a trait that could be considered to apply to almost every area of design is the strategic nature of power. Foucault reflects on this aspect in his lectures on the *Will to Know*, in which he refers to power as "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1978, as cited in Kelly, 2009, p. 47). This component, which can also be defined from a design point of view, referring to the practice of formulating and shaping decision-making (Helsinki Design Lab, 2010), will be highly useful to understand power exertion in the ensuing sections in the thesis.

3.5 Reaching a notion of power —

Reaching a definition of power that manages to capture its complexity is a task that will always be under revision, as human relationships evolve and are heavily influenced by the environment in which they take place. The conducted literature review proved to be useful for highlighting two definitions, shown hereunder, which I consider to be the most complete for the thesis; the two have been identified to be relevant in terms of analyzing and understanding philosophical definitions from a designer's

point of view.

"Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures" (Foucault, 2000, as cited in Kelly, 2009, p. 69).

"Power is the ability [...] to define and control circumstances and events so that one can influence things to go in the direction of one's interest" (Rorty, 1992, as cited in Dovey, 1999, p. 11).

At first glance, it is inevitable to spot a certain misalignment between the philosophers, as Foucault refers to power as the application of a force, and Rorty refers to its literal meaning, "potere"¹⁹, the capacity to do something. Here, I acknowledge that such misalignment is inevitable as Foucault and Rorty belong to different schools of thought. As a deeper philosophical and historical analysis is beyond the scope of the thesis, these reflections should be merely taken into consideration as a simple way to recap what power is. Despite this disagreement, the picture of power that both authors describe is that of something that comes into play at some point in human interactions and that has a clear objective: influencing somebody else's behaviour to benefit our agenda. By referring to actions between individuals, it is important to understand the underlying mechanisms; the reason for this exploration is to gain a better understanding of how and why facilitation and other participatory practices are currently being structured in the way they are. Moreover, it is meant to render visible aspects previously lacking in-depth investigation in similar research, or a direct link between power exertion and design facilitation.

¹⁹ Italian word meaning "power" and "to be able to", derived from the latin term *possum*.

3.6 Understanding power exertion —

This section will strive to delineate the different layers of complexity beneath power, and how it can shift from what I will refer to as “latent power” to “exerted power” (see figure 7). This explanation is my understanding and ensemble of the read literature on power, mainly looking at Kelly (2009) and reflecting on his view of Foucault’s work.

The idea behind this exploration is to understand how power comes to be exerted in interactions, putting down in words my understanding of years of philosophical theory from my position as a designer and researcher, also influenced by my background (see section 1.3). Subsequently, I will use insights from this analysis to further expand on power exertion within design facilitation.

My intention was also to visualize this, as to be able to make sense of the complexity behind power. Revising existing literature, power comes across as a two-faced force, which is both invisible but at the same time visible and with strong consequences. I took this as a graphic exercise to attempt to convey the message that power is an ensemble of procedures if looked at from a systemic point of view, and if willing to shake away common notions of how things are analyzed. Finally, a further aim is to be able to pinpoint key moments that can be transferred to design facilitation afterwards to substantiate my hypothesis on facilitation being an exercise of power itself.

A good starting point to understand how power is employed is by moving from its abstract and non-physical state to a still abstract but visible form. In this complex set of procedures, attention will be drawn to three key moments which I will coin as 1) latent power, 2) consolidation/funnelling and 3) exert power.

As previously mentioned (see section 3.3), power is considered to be inherent to human relationships, a built-in characteristic in power relations and simultaneously the result of their variations and contrasts.

As power is considered to be subjectless, it can be imagined to be something that *just is* present around us, 1) latent at all times, in every scenario. We can imagine it as floating in rooms, parks or conferences. This ubiquitous component allows it to belong to every type of, in this case, human-relational structure to be found in society. Power is embedded in such structures, and it is within those which it will be exerted. It is important to clarify that power structures do not *own* power, such as in the case of the state; what happens is that within that specific structure, internal and external systems of relations are built in order to exert said ever-present power (Bălan, 2010). In these two stages, power is untapped, as it is in a dormant state, yet not manifested or exercised by individuals.

The next step towards an exercise of power is what here I will refer to as 2) consolidation/funnelling. It is contested that power possesses a logic and intent of its own, both of which are caused by a self-organization of forces (Kelly, 2009). Force relations within power structures are constant and ever-changing, yet still not being exercised power. In fact, as argued in Kelly (2009), two other dimensions co-exist in this state:

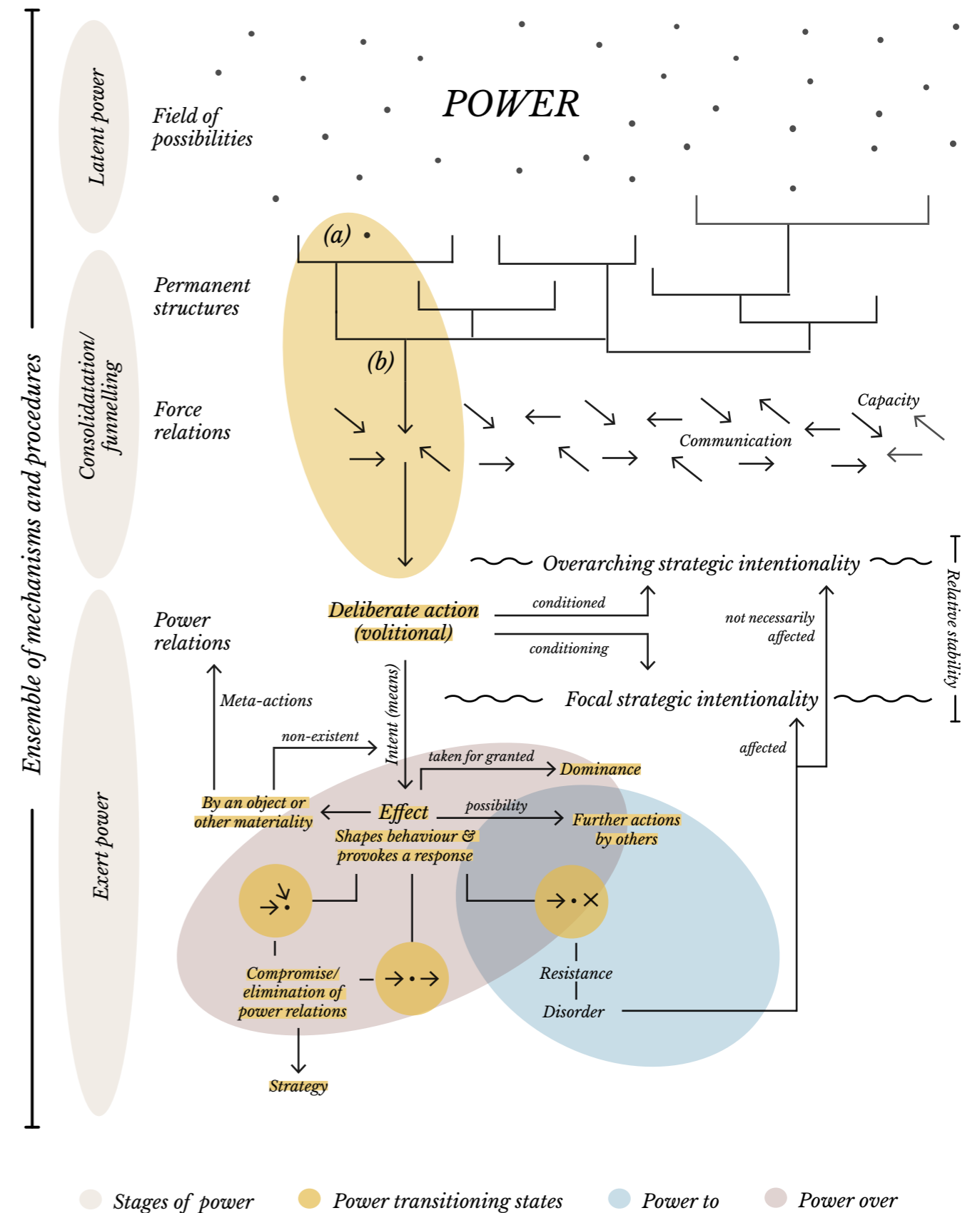


Figure 7. From “latent” to “exert” power, based on Kelly (2009)

communication and capacity. The first is understood as a way to exchange information and capacity as the potential of making something happen. In these scenarios, there is no allusion to exerted power, but to mere channels through which it could be deployed on ourselves and others, otherwise referred to as technologies of power (Foucault, 1975 as cited in Mazé et al., 2019). Sociologist Nikolas Rose also reflected on the topic, calling technologies of power “human technologies”, as humans are what power channels into. Rose defines technologies of power as “imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events” (Rose, 1999, p. 52).

The most relevant phase for also understanding design facilitation is the transition to 3) exert power. To make the process as unambiguous as possible, I am going to envisage taking one from the infinite field of possibilities (a) as an illustrative example (see figure 7). The chosen possibility is strategically placed within a set of consolidated structures (b) and, as previously explained, it channels itself into a body of active force relations. In human relations, what will turn power from latent to exerted will be action. Despite this sounding self-explanatory, several remarks ought to be made to define what an action is, in this context. Going back to Foucault’s most exhaustive definition of power in the previous section, he refers to power as an exercise on others through actions. ([see section 3.5](#)); however, not all actions exert power. In this case, actions can be divided into two big groups: casual and deliberate. Casual inter-human actions are those carried out involuntarily, meaning that these do not have at their core a defined ambition concerning those it engages with. They do not exert power, as they

do not imply ambition to coerce, force or manipulate someone else’s behaviour or actions. Casual actions behold the possibility to exert power, as it is latent in them; power is understood as capacity and will remain dormant until it will have an impact upon the people on the other end of the interaction.

On the contrary, deliberate actions are those charged with intent. They are thought out, intentional, planned actions that aspire to provoke a response in whoever they are directed to. The aim is to disrupt somebody’s otherwise stable state for personal profit, which varies according to the action carried out. This becomes a clear example of power relations in which the previously analyzed characteristics of power intensify at different levels in order to cause an effect. Such is the case of strategy, for example, which plays a strong role in shaping the outcome of deliberate actions. Furthermore, Kelly (2009) refers to different modes of power to draw attention to the assorted possibilities within exerted power. Strategy, in this scenario, is the purposeful balance or imbalance of power relations needed to reach the desired outcome; finding ways to persuade someone into action, null dissensus and reducing the possibilities for possible resistance are just some of the possible scenarios that can play out once deliberate actions come into play in relations.

The aforementioned scenarios, however, could fall under what I will call “macro modes of power”: power over and power to. The first, power over, makes sure to guarantee compliance in order to satisfy our urges (Dovey, 1999); after all, as Foucault puts it in his lectures *Security, Territory, Population*, power’s duty is also that of safeguarding power itself (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Kelly, 2009).

In cases in which the exercise of power is not contested and the sought effect is considered to be the norm, it becomes domination, intended as internalized, unquestioned actions that retain all the agency in the relationship.

Despite seeking to provoke an effect, deliberate actions can also cause a chain reaction, and therefore spark further action in the individual subjected to the initial process. I would place this under the second macro mode, power to. A concrete example of power to, intended as capacity to, would be this thesis. This piece of writing is a deliberate action, whose intent is that of looking at design practice from a critical point of view, to cause a reaction in those who read it. Simultaneously, it is intended to strengthen the faculty of fellow professionals to revise and reconsider practice from a different point of view or, as Latour puts it, to provide, through critique, common spaces in which we can discuss (Latour, 2004).

Objects, environments and other materiality can also exert power, despite not having an intent of their own. In Kelly’s analysis, these actions can be referred to as meta-actions, having to be traced back and finding who designated their use. Finally, it is worth mentioning that all deliberate actions, due to their close relation, are caught up in a loop of being conditioned and conditioning (Foucault, 1980 as cited in Kelly, 2009). Power’s innate strategic component, then, acts on two levels that I will refer to as overarching and focal. An invisible “overarching strategic intentionality” is created above us, which helps maintain the power networks that we create through relations. Nevertheless, through our deliberate actions, we foster “focal strategic intentionality”. Both strategies co-exist, thus being the reason why

disruptions in focal strategies cause instability in power relations, yet not necessarily impacting the overarching strategy.

3.7 Final remarks —

This chapter has given an overview of what power is, its core characteristics and how it comes to be exerted in the everyday. Having gained a better understanding of these, it will now be possible to look at design facilitation from a different stance. As mentioned in 3.1, looking at literature and discourses from other disciplines to shine a light on issues within design enables better spotting of assumptions, tacit and situated knowledge. Delving into notions of philosophical nature such as power allows understanding its core role in everyday matters, in relationships and behaviour. It also elucidated how inherent power is in the aforementioned matters, reinforcing previous claims about actions, disciplines being of political nature and not neutral ([see sections 1](#) and [1.2](#)).

The following chapter will focus on the intersection between power exertion and design facilitation, in order to outline specific aspects of practice that are typically left undiscussed, and which play a crucial role in creating the politics of the everyday.²⁰ Facilitation will be carefully and critically dissected into smaller yet paramount sections in which power and politics are vividly prompted and employed.

20 Title of Ezio Manzini’s book (2019) on how everyday politics/policies are created on the daily by those who inhabit the world.

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CHAPTER 4

Power and design facilitation

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Design facilitation is a complex and varied area of practice in which a multitude of factors, interests and motives come together. Despite belonging to the larger field of participatory design, it is not the only one it falls under due to its larger engagement with multiple stakeholders, settings and methods. Facilitation’s complexity and breadth can be better grasped by mapping out and attempting to visualize its many facets and layers. Attempting to portray within which realms design facilitation is encapsulated within and intertwined with is worth doing on two different levels: a macro and a micro view.

A complementary aim of this exercise is to explicitly underline what the perspective of facilitation is within this thesis and to deliberately visualize which aspects are being taken into consideration within the context of this master’s thesis, and those which are recognized but not analyzed in depth at the moment. Moreover, positioning oneself within the broad spectrum of design facilitation allows for future reference and comparison in respect to other authors conducting research on the same topic.

On the macro level, thus far a linkage

between design facilitation and different spheres²¹ such as power, politics, design and PD has been made. Figure 8 shows the innate and inescapable political nature of design and its subfields in a clear-cut way. However, it is important to clarify that despite being interconnected, power and politics do not fully overlap; latent power and casual actions, as described in [section 3.6](#) do not exert power as they lack deliberate intent, thus differentiating themselves from the political sphere. This figure is simultaneously meant to be a visualization of the macro level of design facilitation and is the mere result of my analysis regarding the interconnectedness of design and other spheres in the context of this study.

Regarding the phase in which power funnels and consolidates itself, a conversation could be started on whether power, as an immaterial, subjectless and decentralized force makes use of deliberate intent in its transitional state from latent to exerted through volitional actions. Recognizing the fact that engaging in such discussion would require extensive research on agency, immateriality and power, among other topics, this will remain a suggestion for further research in the future.

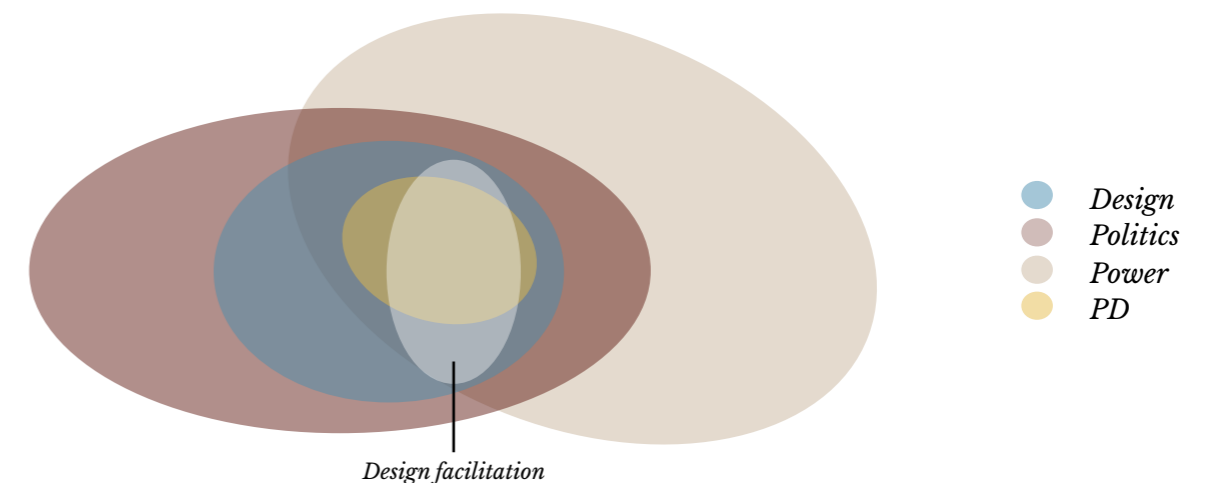


Figure 8. Macro level of design facilitation

²¹ Referring to Peter Sloterdijk’s notion of spheres within which humanity engages its activities.

The micro level brings a more detailed and focused view of design facilitation in which multiple spheres coexist. It is important to remark that this, as well as the macro view proposed above, are not static. Facilitation should be understood as being context-sensitive and ever-changing, thus seeing a constant (re) balance of the different spheres according to agency distribution, power relations and time. In other words, depending on the situation, spheres such as materiality or verblivity might gain higher prominence than others. Figure 9 shows an estimated depiction of the spheres that comprise design facilitation, as well as clarifying the extent to which they will be touched upon in the thesis.

The main focus of my research is the interplay and reciprocity between verblivity, power, agency and politics. However, these are heavily influenced, to different degrees by other spheres such as artefacts, environments and so on. Once again, larger discussions could be carried out on powerful relationships such as materiality and agency, or environments and power, and this is highly encouraged, but beyond the immediate scope of the thesis.

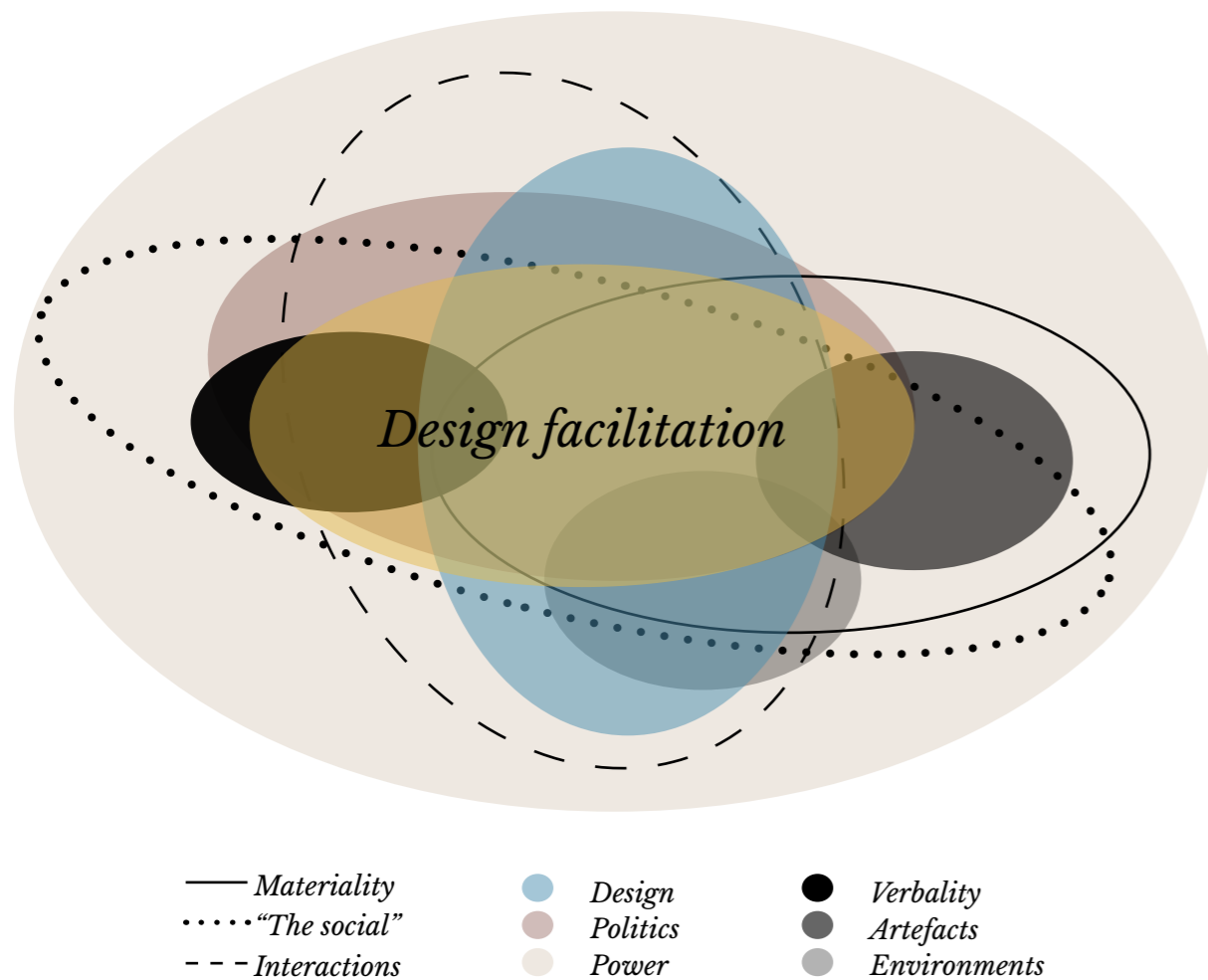


Figure 9. Micro level of design facilitation

4.1 Power embedded in design definitions —

One of the benefits of having engaged with the sphere of power is gaining the ability to look at design from a different stance. Namely, it becomes increasingly self-evident that the parallel between design-related notions and power-related notions are many.

Returning to the definition of power given by philosopher Amelie Rorty in *Power and Powers* (1992) mentioned in [section 3.5](#), “power is the ability [...] to define and control circumstances and events so that one can influence things to go in the direction of one’s interest” (Rorty, 1992, as cited in Dovey, 1999, p. 11). Taking this definition as a reference to characterize what power is, strong connections to two particular notions within design can be outlined. The first is Herbert Simon’s renowned definition of design in which he claims that “[e]veryone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones” (Simon, 1988, p. 67). Power exertion in the form of deliberate actions in the pursuit of prefigured and desired futures is the underpinning conceptualization behind this definition. Besides, it highlights the importance of careful planning in design processes, whose link to power will become more apparent throughout this chapter as it will be tackled from different angles.

On the other hand, connections to notions of power can also be found in future studies. Despite not being closely connected to facilitation as a field per se, it seems relevant to highlight as

design facilitation, in its way, focuses on creating and envisioning futures through participatory engagements. A widely known concept in future studies is the Futures Cone proposed by Joseph Voros, who specializes in strategic foresight (Voros, 2003; 2017).

Figure 10 shows its most recent version²² used by Voros and created to envision different alternatives when it comes to futuring. Focusing on the preferable level, reflections can be made on its driving force, characterized by normative value judgements, and in which power imbalances become increasingly prominent due to inherent conflicts of interests and agendas.

Design facilitation is entrenched in the sphere of power on many, simultaneous, dynamic and interlaced levels. The following sections will focus on expanding on these different micro-spheres in order to shed light on aspects that need stronger visibility and recognition. In *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Nikolas Rose briefly elaborates on adaptive strategies to deal with the myth regarding the state being the only actor in charge of law and order. Rose uses the notion of “responsibilization” to discuss how people are prompted to take an active part in what he calls “crime control” (Rose, 1999, p. 239). This thesis takes up the task of responsibilization by fostering the discernment of those practices within design facilitation in which accountability and ownership should be embedded.

²² Extracted from “The Futures Cone, use and history”, published on Dr. Voros’ personal blog.

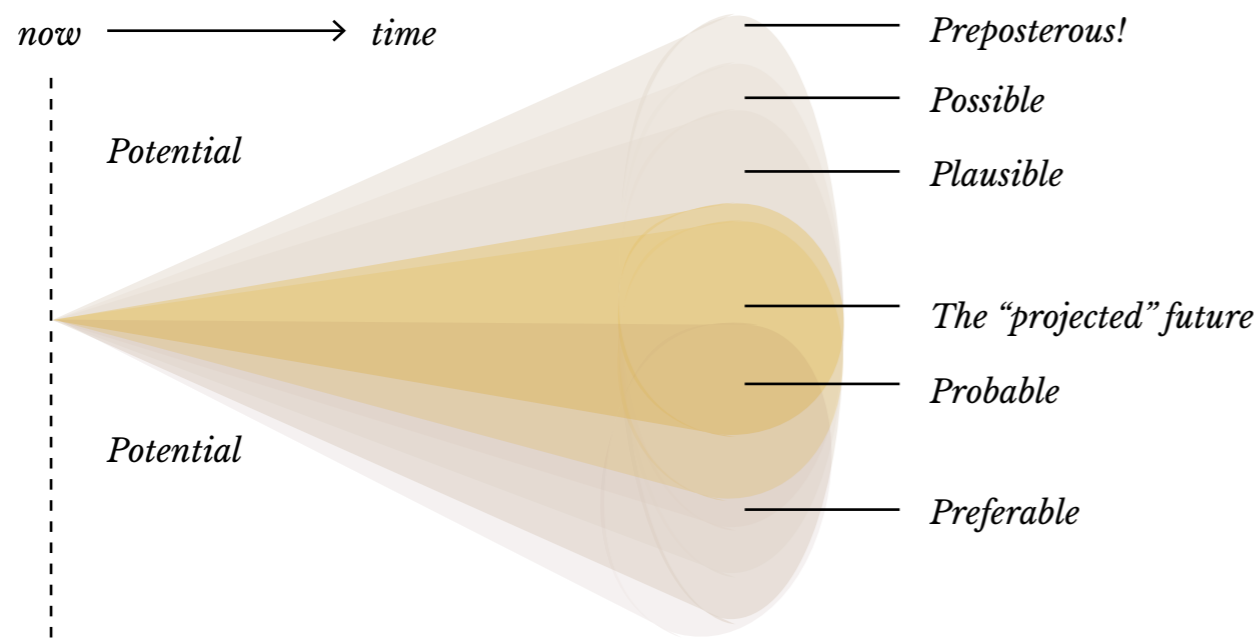


Figure 10. Futures Cone, adapted & extended from Voros (2003)

4.2 Framing, orchestrating and staging —

Another facade of design, aside from being a normalizing practice, is its configurative nature (Akama & Light, 2018). By configuration, I refer to the particular disposition or arrangement of different parts, whether functional or not, to serve a particular purpose. Latour argues that things do not *just* come to existence, but rather they are carefully designed (Latour, 2008); to refer to said carefulness, Latour resorts to the precautionary principle. This is a concept that has been around since 1970, referring to preventive measures taken - usually in the context of policy-making - whenever dealing with pressing and urgent situations for which the evidence is inconclusive (Bourguignon, 2015). Nevertheless, in this context, the author

refers to the ability that design possesses to plan and craft courses of action, as well as predicting possible outcomes.

This characteristic, applicable to design facilitation as well, has been widely discussed (e.g in relation to environments and relations) over the years by different authors (c.f Dovey, 1999; Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013; Latour, 2008). To different extents, they highlight design's capacity to (re)produce social norms, practices, as well as upholding well-established structures (Mazé, 2016; Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013). To clarify the use of terminology in the context of this thesis, distinctions will be made between the following three words: framing, orchestrating and staging. While seemingly overlapping, these terms comprise a succession of events with specific starting points and objectives. Being aware that these are existing

concepts within design discourses, the meaning and purpose that I attach to them in the context of the thesis will be made explicit below, to avoid misleading or confusing the reader in regards to how other authors use them.

- **Framing** will be understood as the process of delimiting something into well-defined borders; it is a practice that encloses, sets boundaries within which actions can take place.
- **Orchestrating**, on the other hand, refers to the volitional precautionary planning and coordination of the different components of a particular situation in a cunning manner.
- **Staging**, finally involves the *mise-en-scène*²³, the execution of what results from the two previous phases. In other words, it is the collective performance of the script.

Higher focus will be placed on framing, on the basis of being the starting point of this potentially performative process. Frames are ubiquitous in our everyday lives, as actions, decisions and judgement calls either trigger further action or defer possible consequences. On top of this, Dovey identifies an additional layer which he calls the “framed every day” and

comprises the influence of designers in creating the overarching frames within which actions happen and decisions are made (Dovey, 1999). The same issue is discussed by Latour, positioning himself in a similar position to Dovey by arguing that the environments which support human activity are also designed, as the artificial materiality (c.f Simon, 1969) that surrounds us (Latour, 2008).

Drawing on Dovey (1999), it is worth briefly reviewing this notion from the lens of language use. Frames and framing can act as a means for negotiating and sustaining a variety of power structures, depending on their use. Used as a verb, “to frame” enables creating a specific worldview through the delimitation of something into a set border. On the contrary, in the form of a noun, it conveys a set order and division which simultaneously gives guidance on our perception in an existing world. Moreover, Dovey makes use of the expression “frame-up” to suggest a type of framing which does not faithfully represent a reality but instead makes a deceitful claim (see figure 11 below). Throughout the thesis, it will become clear that the line between frames and detrimental frames is exceptionally thin.

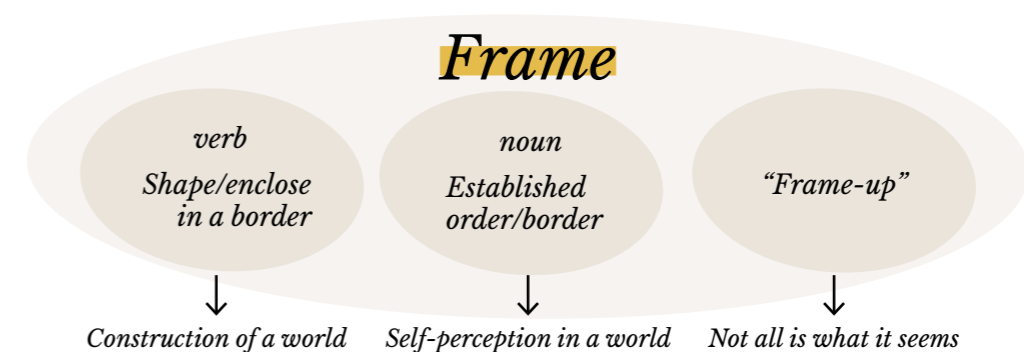


Figure 11. Framing, based on Dovey (1999)

²³ French term used in performative arts or cinematography.

A question that ought to be asked is then how do these frames look like? Are they isolated units or are they interwoven in bigger structures? Reflecting on the role of design in governance, Abramson et al. claim that power runs “through networks and norms, frames of actions and possibility that flow[s] through all scales” (Abramson et al., 2014, p. vii). Despite disagreeing to a certain extent with the affirmation that power runs through all scales since as argued in [section 3.2.1](#), power is a ubiquitous force that lacks a definite nucleus, Abramson et. al make a valid point. They imply that governance becomes possible through the passage of power between multiple and diverse frames, which resonates with similar expressions found in *Object as Image: The Italian Scooter Cycle*. In this contribution, mentions such as “support structures”, or “independent but interlocking frames” (Hebdige, 1988, p. 135;121) can be found, reinforcing the idea of diversity, independence, support and interconnection being key characteristics of framing practices.

Returning to the notion of legitimization, it is safe to say that frames are closely connected to it. Frames tend to be invisible most of the time, as they are embedded within our everyday lives; the more frames have succeeded in gaining legitimacy, they become increasingly imperceptible. Normalized framing - as seen in the case of design as a normalizing practice - eradicates the risk of opposition, resistance and hesitation.

The following sections will expand on how framing takes place within design and its many implications. In participatory design, framing can take a toll on participants unaware of such practices. This concern was already raised by Don Norman in his provocative piece *Human-Centered Design Considered Harmful* in

which he refuses to conform to the status quo in HCD. Here, he alludes to framing by repudiating mainstream discourses. “None of this ‘tools adapt to the people’ non-sense - people adapt to the tools” (Norman, 2005, p. 15). In my thesis, this and other concerns will be taken into consideration and analyzed from the perspective of PD and design facilitation to shed light on the role and power of framing.

4.2.1 The role of creativity: a subtle layer of framing —

Having designers as leading actors in participatory engagements, it is imperative to concisely discuss the role of creativity in what I am going to refer to as “subtle framing”. Despite being commonly associated with moments of genuine, relaxed and natural acts of openness of the mind, creativity is also subject to framing. Jacob Levy Moreno, renowned father of psychodrama, argues that “spontaneity is framed by what we are ready for” (Akama & Light, 2018 on Moreno, 1955) therefore debunking orthodox claims of creativity being an unbounded field of possibilities. On the contrary, creativity can be alternatively defined as a process that attempts to innovate within set extremities, and being either aware or oblivious to their existence. It is important to remark the clear difference between these two scenarios in terms of dominance and agency distribution. In facilitation, if the designer were to be aware of the frames within which to enable participants to be creative, this would result in a clear case of a crafted illusion of creative contribution; by doing so, participants would be given partial agency as their actions would be unconfined as long as they stay within the boundaries crafted for them.

Another example of crafted creative

contributions can be sometimes in pre-workshop warm-ups in which participants are asked to interact, perform and lead certain activities. The idea behind such tasks is to “allow people to get into an open mindset and free themselves from the stress or pressures of their day-to-day lives” (Napier & Wada, 2015) which personally raises three main questions. Why would people be required to get into a certain mindset? In participatory instances, would it not be better to emulate reality as much as possible given the engagement with real-life issues and participants? And finally, is this a way to encourage the creation of personas²⁴ that would admittedly benefit the overall agenda?

4.2.2 Framing in practice —

At this stage, it seems pertinent to provide a practical example to better understand how framing could take place within design facilitation. Napier and Wada (2015, p. 11; 2016, p.171) propose a framework for planning and enabling effective²⁵ facilitation that can be used in teaching contexts to remind students about what they ought to pay attention to in participatory settings. The purpose of this example is not to discredit the intention

behind the creation of educational material to teach facilitation in higher education contexts but to highlight how framing is deeply-rooted in our ways of doing. In the framework (see figure 12), a breakdown of the components that comprise design facilitation such as time, people and methods can be seen.

In this deliberate and explicit exercise of framing to serve a bigger educational purpose, there are two aspects that I would like to highlight. Firstly, emphasizing the oversimplification of the included components; if aiming at “effective” facilitation is the main goal of such framing, then acknowledging the existence of elements such as uncertainty, dissensus and resistance should become mandatory. Secondly, drawing attention to the “people” category, which is described as an “empathetic and sympathetic understanding of the audience” (Napier & Wada, 2016). Regardless of being a significant component of any participatory engagement, enclosing them within a box and defining them as an “audience” and not peers, participants or co-creators poses great distance and increases the role gap that facilitation and PD historically aim to blur.

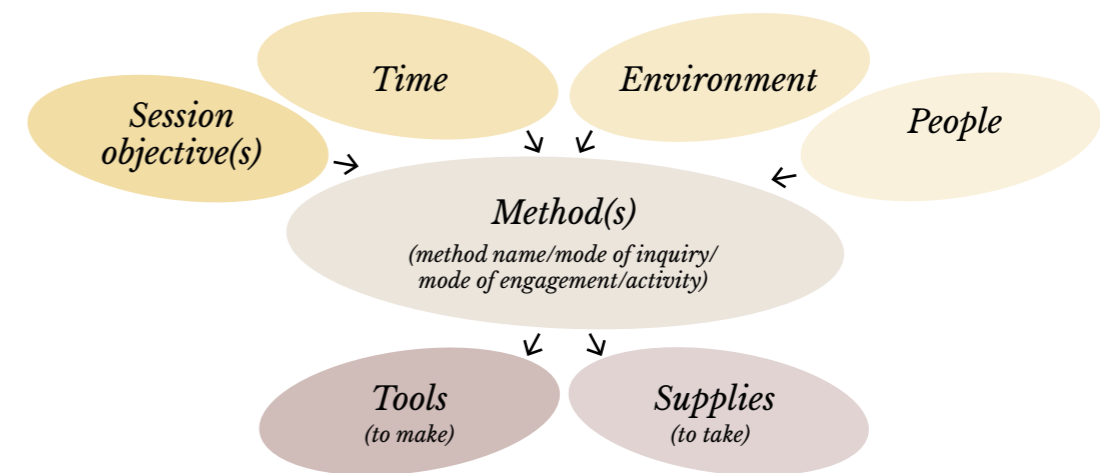


Figure 12. Facilitation framework, adapted from Napier & Wada (2015, p. 11; 2016, p. 171).

²⁴ Personas – A Simple Introduction. Blog Post (Dam & Teo, 2020)

²⁵ The “economic” term is purposefully as it was deliberately used in the original source

4.3 Hierarchy: “empowering” from a place of authority —

This section will provide an overview of three vast yet intersecting areas that can be found in design facilitation and PD as they are built on human interaction and relationships. Hierarchies, empowerment and ownership are widely discussed topics in many fields such as political science, governance, migration, philosophy, among others. The aim of this section is to understand their particular application in designed participatory engagements led by a designated facilitator.

4.3.1 Authority and hierarchy: a dominant position —

In prior sections, ways in which design gains acceptance have been considered. However, in narrowing down and looking at designers themselves, the same question ought to be asked. How do designers gain legitimacy? Buchanan points out two fundamental moments through which designers establish a hierarchical and dominant position. First, by setting the basics; designers can make use of their leading positions to sketch and outline environments that will serve as the foundation to then invite people to participate in them (Buchanan 1985). Buchanan’s claims also resonate with what has been discussed in [section 4.2](#) on the invisibility and unquestioned nature of frames. Designed environments (e.g workshops, focus groups) can be conveniently undiscussed spaces as people tend to accept them as a result of the combination of two powerful factors: spaces being the result of a designed - legitimate - activity (Buchanan, 1985), and the fact that said space will be used to serve a bigger and common purpose (Dovey, 1999). The notion of invitations to collaborate will be explored in [section 4.4.1](#), however, it is considered what makes engagements participatory. Nevertheless, it could be argued that participation and

collaboration are an innate component of design, and the difference between “design” and “PD” and “co-design” resides in how visible the collaborator is allowed to be.

The second key moment highlighted by Buchanan is persuasion. Design as a discipline has a history-long relationship with the notion of persuasion in fields such as graphic design, for example. In this context, the author refers to the act of persuading people into embracing new ways of doing. The aforementioned process of subtle seduction takes different forms such as displaying common concerns, looking authoritative and speaking in a familiar register (Buchanan, 1985). Dovey strengthens these claims in his book *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* in which, elaborating on authority, he refers to what he calls symbolic gestures. These are voluntary actions of persuasive pseudo-resignation of power, such as encouraging someone to lead an activity, draw something, allowing them to speak up, etc. (Dovey, 1999).

The question to reflect on now becomes, to which extent can this hierarchical domination be unconscious and to which extent can it be a purposeful legitimization of our designerly authority?

4.3.2 Empowerment —

Oftentimes different versions of the term empowerment can be spotted, especially in the media. The term arose within social movements (Cruikshank, 1993) and activist groups, especially to express a process of proactive fighting back the oppressions that the system would pose against minorities comprehending repressed and unprivileged groups of people.

However, in *Revolutions Within: Self-Government and Self-Esteem*, political scientist Barbara Cruikshank highlights how the concept is also often heavily connected with the notion of self-esteem. It could be said that having gained attention during the past few decades, and having expanded to other spheres, empowerment - as in the case of facilitation - has become itself a buzzword. As explored in [section 1.4](#), whenever terms become fashionable and widely used in different contexts, they lead to generalizations, hazy notions of the term, unclear intentions and loss of credibility. On this basis, this thesis proposes empowerment to be understood as a trifold notion²⁶, whose dimension will be explained briefly.

The first dimension is the aforementioned nature of the term within the social sphere, closely connected to matters such as resistance ([see section 3.2.2](#)), representation and willingness to fight back. Going back to its historical origin, such joint effort to fight back oppressions towards minorities could be considered to have a strong impact in visions of the future as, quoting professor of social psychology John Drury, “empowerment is the fulcrum whereby particular crowd events can become social movements, and therefore hence how social change can occur” (Drury, 2007)²⁷. Here, the act of empowering is something fostered within communities and enacted collectively by them, moving towards a common purpose.

The second and third dimensions, on the other hand, are strongly linked in many ways. The former, which I will define and refer to as “ego-empowerment”, revolves around the prior notion of self-esteem. It is commonly associated as a process of “awakening” or gaining the capacity

to act on oneself in more rewarding and conscious ways. Ego-empowerment tends to be a solitary and introspective process, either sought for or impromptu. The use of the term empowerment for this purpose has been previously contested, as it belittled revolutionary connotations into “a model of personal recovery” (English, 1992 as cited in Cruikshank, 1993, p. 327).

The latter and third dimension, which I am going to define as “illusory-empowerment”, is the one that will be linked to PD and design facilitation. The dictionary definition of empowerment points in two directions: the first one being higher capacity in acting and therefore, the state of being empowered to do something. The second one refers to the act of giving someone or something the freedom to act or express themselves. However subtle, it is possible to notice a slight difference between these two conceptions. If intended as an act of giving someone the freedom to do something, it becomes a top-down act. At the same time, this definition suggests that whoever becomes “empowered” was previously entrapped into something bigger, and is now gaining autonomy from it (Dovey, 1999).

The reason behind calling this illusory-empowerment is because, when agency and power are unevenly distributed, the dominant side can control the dynamics of the relation. Therefore, said given freedom can be partial, limited, or it is conceded as long as it responds to a bigger scheme. In the words of Dovey, an alternative use of empowerment can be “driven by the desire to harness the capacities of others to one own’s” (Dovey, 1999, p. 11).

²⁶ This delineation has been made for the purpose of the thesis and should not be considered final.

²⁷ Drury, J. (2007) *Dynamics of (dis)empowerment in recent social movement participation: Collective identity and social change*. [Lecture slide nr. 5].

Hence, can we talk about empowerment in design facilitation? Social-movement-empowerment is definitely at the core of participatory practices when it comes to shaping possible futures (Sclove, 1995), and in those engagements, diverse representation, multiple voices and collective action are needed. But that does not apply in the case of illusory-empowerment, as it can become a means for merely ensuring efficiency ([see section 2.6.2](#)), consensus and eschewing ownership and accountability by shifting the burden and the responsibility to the participants. Moreover, illusory-empowerment implies careful framing and staging, which clashes with the very nature of the term. Having arisen in movements driven by mutual support and fraternity, it is considered to be the unpredictable outcome of collective action (Drury, 2007), ergo not a prefigurative and orchestrated process. It is then recommended to rethink the use of this term or to find more appropriate and accountable alternatives.

4.4 Agency —

To build an even more holistic picture of what makes facilitation and other PD-related practices politically accountable, it is worth considering and expanding on matters such as agency distribution and the question of who is invited to participate in gatherings. This will allow piecing together what has been contemplated so far but also to be able to more critically engage in the upcoming sections of the thesis.

A discussion around the notion of agency could be a potentially enormous one. Throughout history, it has been a topic of discussion in many fields, especially in philosophy and sociology (e.g. action theory and structures). In a broad and simplified sense, agency can be described

as the ability to alter the world we live in (Dovey, 1999). A good exercise would be to analyze how different fields perceive this notion and the impact this has on their practices, from its applications in psychology to political economy. However, in order to avoid diverting extensively from the main topic of this thesis, the explanation that will be used as a reference²⁸ is the one given by Albert Bandura, whose definition compiles years of his work and contributions in areas such as psychology and social cognitive theory. Here, he describes agency as the “human capability to influence one’s functioning and the course of events by one’s actions” (Bandura, 2017).

In this summary, Bandura proceeds to list four functions through which agency is generally exercised and three forms of agency through which things can be influenced. These will be listed here, to then single out those relevant when it comes to design facilitation.

The four discussed functions are intentionality, temporal extension of agency, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. In this case, I will focus on two of them. Intentionality refers to deliberate or volitional actions ([see section 3.6](#)), which are materialized through plans and strategies. The second relevant function is temporal extension which, in short, refers to the premeditated nature of those actions driven by the desire to achieve a particular goal.

When it comes to the ways in which agency can be used as a means to persuade, Bandura outlines three different forms: individual, proxy and collective agency. Of particular applicability to the field of design facilitation are the latter two. In previous sections, extensive reflections have been made on the capacity facilitators have to prompt participatory action in a framed way to

favour certain possible outcomes over others ([see section 4.2](#)). This specific mode of influence is what Bandera defines as proxy agency. On the other hand, PD practices and design facilitation also make use of collective agency, which is what is encountered whenever a group of people make the necessary efforts altogether to influence their futures.

It is safe to say, that just merely acknowledging different types of agency is not enough when it comes to design facilitation. Agency is an unevenly distributed force (Mazé, 2014; Gaziulusoy & Ryan, 2017), and this is an aspect that ought to be discussed from a plurality of stances. Here, I urge fellow designers in engaging in further research on the connections between agency and power, negotiations of agency in designed engagements and the implications of such imbalances in different contexts, just to name a few topics.

4.4.1 Determined participation —

In discussing agency distribution, especially focusing on proxy agency, it is crucial to draw attention to how participation is determined in collaborative engagements. In instances taking place within a specific time frame and place, it is clear that not everyone can participate, because of physical, economic and other constraints. However, it is necessary to wonder about the two sides of participation: who gets to participate, who does not and also, who decides who is fit for these engagements? In other words, selective participation is, to a certain extent, an inescapable fact. What research and practice can do is to proactively “enter into and understand some necessary complicities and complexities” (Dovey, 1999, p. 208) within such processes.

Keshavarz and Mazé reflect on this matter

in *Design and Dissensus: Framing and Staging Participation in Design Research* (2013) by underlining the creation of a “participant’s subjectivity” (Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013, p. 12 on Dave Beech, 2010) which qualifies them as valid participants in specific participatory engagements. Furthermore, they refer to the influence leading designers have in this type of activities. This can be easily applied to design facilitators, which, apart from delineating baseline factors such as context, methods and tools, can also demarcate who might be a pertinent candidate for the stipulated activity.

4.5 Control and order —

In this final part of the chapter, some extra remarks need to be made in order to create an exhaustive picture of the intersections between design facilitation and power exertion. In exploring existing regimes, it is crucial to be as attentive as possible to the multifacetedness that characterizes them, and this calls for a broad and lengthy revision. This section focuses on the connection between notions of control and sense-making, with special attention to the role of creativity as the glue between these two components.

Notions of control and order are deeply ingrained in current practice. A specific part of the thesis was going to be titled “dimensions of power”, in which the idea was to identify different factors that usually define facilitated engagements (e.g. time, physicality, materiality, participation, etc.) to then use that as a launchpad to spotting common “facilitation schemes” within contemporary practice. Despite this seemingly being an inviting exercise to do when making the research plan, it was then discarded. Reflecting on the reviewed literature here in this thesis, I have gained a more critical view on PD, facilitation

²⁸ Adapted from his personal website ([see bibliography for the link](#))

and the structures that underpin them. Possessing further expertise on the topic thus led me to the realization that aiming at spotting and categorizing facilitation models now appeared an attempt to subconsciously put things in order when facing complexity, messiness and uncertainty. It was then decided not to engage in this exercise, as it felt like it would have favoured yet another framing activity, rather than fostering further unpacking.

Participatory engagements such as facilitated instances demand a certain order to be established to avoid complete chaos, which would greatly harm the project under which they fall into. Order is established through some of the aforementioned dimensions of power, which help create a specific context within which to stage (see section 4.2) activities. Well-defined contexts enable meaningful interactions “by generating real and possible relationships and intended and unintended effects for viewers and users” (Appadurai, 1986, p. 264). According to this definition provided by Appadurai, this could prompt a myriad of possibilities, and this is exactly where being critical and transparent becomes key. What will be allowed and what will be prevented? What are the reasons behind this? As well as being an excellent starting point for genuine participation (Hirscher, 2020), the deliberate rearrangement of influencing factors can endorse coercive practices by intentionally toggling on and off participation and visibility (Dovey, 1999 on Barnes, 1988). These claims resonate with what was discussed previously (see sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4) regarding limited participatory agency, which in this case takes the form of partial freedom to act within set frames created to enable certain preferred futures (Fry, 2011).

4.5.1 Creative sense-making: what kind of picture are we painting? —

Moreover, in projects involving any degree of collaboration between different participants, gaining a clear understanding of what is going on - not necessarily being on the same page and fully agreeing with each other - becomes crucial. Sense-making, whether on a personal or collective level, plays a big role in how projects develop, and here, the facilitator’s agency can often prevail. In *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990), Appadurai proposes different dimensions of global cultural flows for analyzing gaps not thoroughly explored at the intersections between spheres such as politics, culture, etc. Design facilitation could very well be considered to belong to “mediascapes”, defined by Appadurai as “image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality [...] out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives [...] they help to constitute narratives of the ‘other’ and proto-narratives of possible lives” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 299). This definition makes the prefigurative and imaginative nature of design facilitation particularly stand out, as well as pointing out its intentionality of envisioning and working towards possible futures. In sense-making to secure getting to creating visions of the future, materiality plays a decisive role.

As described in section 4, materiality here is considered to englobe not just artefacts and designed contexts, but also the agency and power they possess. The role of creativity in practices of subtle framing has been explored in section 4.2.1, as its close linkage to imagination is a fundamental ingredient of power exertion through the creation and direction of desires (Dovey, 1999). In other words, in design facilitation, it is possible to stimulate the imagination and creativity of the participants through the use of well-defined materiality (e.g.

games, post-its, posters, cards) in which generally, participants take the lead. Despite being able to engage in a moment of independent sense-making, without needing a facilitator, this activity is heavily influenced by the objects whose selection and use are determined by the facilitator. This is what has been already referred to as meta-actions (see section 3.6) in which power is exerted by materiality, despite not having an intent of their own. In meta-actions, two powerful elements come together: the capacity of the facilitator to engage people in creative activities and the ability of design to strategically narrow down possible outcomes and to make “a particular designed possibility appear both credible and grammatical” (Appadurai, 1986, p. 262). This is also applicable when it comes to design research if we replace materiality with vocabulary and facilitators with researchers.

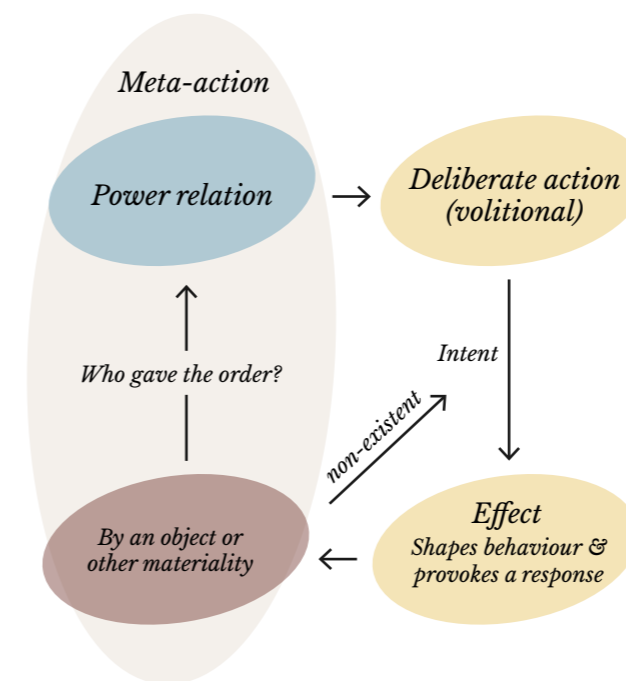


Figure 13. Meta-actions in creative sense-making

Extensive reflections are needed then also in regards to the relatively recent considerations of designers and facilitators as translators and messengers. These are expressions whose mise-en-scène requires clear and explicit explanations in terms of how relevance is decided, communicated and on which basis information is being discarded. After all, communication can be designed as it is a way to support social discourses (Frascara & Winkler, 2008).

4.6 Consensus & Dissensus —

As explored in section 1.1, design is inherently political, therefore being necessary to treat it with the same thoughtfulness as any other political matter. In section 1.3, I have briefly touched upon structural unsustainability, through which social beings are deliberately defuturing, and in which political regimes play a big role. Regimes are present in design as well, and here I have referred to them as the “mainstream” or the “status quo”. Despite acknowledging their existence, in the thesis, there has been a deliberate intention of not conforming to the status quo by deciding to explore it from an alternative angle (see sections 2.4 or 2.6.2). In regards to design facilitation and PD practices, regimes are being established and upheld by the iterative use and creation of familiar processes and methods.

Regimes become a solid foundation to sustain the current “balance” that enables design-as-usual, not affecting existing structures. However, there is a reason why balance is being used between quotation marks. The claims being made in previous chapters highlight that contemporary design regimes can be the result of strategically orchestrated power

structures that actively prevent resistance, and dissensus. In this case, there is a clear power imbalance which is manifested through uneven agency distribution, and power to favour certain agendas over others. Therefore, what is seen as “balanced” is just the tip of the iceberg, often deemed apolitical, and continuously reinforced by design-as-usual. Exploring and acknowledging the political nature of design is realizing that design regimes are created and sustained in the part that is not visible.

A clear example of the reinforcement of the status quo in design facilitation is consensus. Ensured collective agreement tends to be a common practice within participatory practices, in which consensus or, as mentioned in [section 4.5.1](#), being on the same page means that activities can proceed. Keshavarz and Mazé reflect on this matter by arguing that design is caught up in a culture of harmony, and that consensus can be considered to be a form of power stabilization (Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013). Building on their claims, and once again highlighting the double sidedness when it comes to politically charged practices, it is safe to say that whenever consensus is sought for, dissensus is inevitably and actively obstructed. In other words, “the interactions that cannot be planned (which ultimately means the human interactions) are seen as a problem to be minimized” (Manzini, 2011, p. 3). Despite being directed at the sphere of service design, these claims resonate in PD as well. Manzini here also points out that said precaution is taken by deciding a priori what is to be considered acceptable behaviour.

However, it is necessary to wonder if, in times of uncertainty and defuturing, it is possible to allow ourselves to

sustain a culture of harmony, especially when dealing with matters of concern (Bannon & Ehn, 2013 as cited in Akama & Light, 2018). On the contrary, it seems incumbent to look for alternatives, however threatening they might seem. In [section 2.4](#), the need for making things crumble has been raised; it is inevitable to wonder, then, whether design facilitation is generally implemented in short-term projects in order to avoid the destabilization of power. Do dissensus and resistance menace the perpetuation of design regimes?

In thinking about alternatives, it seems relevant to explore the implications that nurturing pluralities would have on design facilitation and PD, as opposed to reinforcing further practices that erase contestation. This interest is shared with other authors such as Gaziulusoy and Ryan, who urge for a type of practice that embraces the “articulation of not only alignment but also of the conflicting perspectives that can occur” (Gaziulusoy & Ryan, 2017, p. S1917). The idea of nurturing pluralities will be further explored in chapter seven.

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CHAPTER 5

Critical analyses

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5.1 Introduction —

This chapter complements the theoretical discussions elaborated in previous chapters. In describing the aims of the thesis ([sections 1.6](#), [1.6.1](#) and [1.6.2](#)), the reasons why not to engage in a practical case study-type of work have been elucidated. Acknowledging the need for a concrete glance into contemporary practice, here I look at and reflect upon three doctoral dissertations which all tackle design practice from a critical point of view. This makes it possible to contemplate an even bigger picture of design facilitation, as taken together, the dissertations encompass several years of conducted literature reviews and practical engagements.

5.2 Critical analyses: a plurality of voices —

My thesis deliberately attempts to find an alternative way to look at design practice through a theoretical perspective ([see section 1.6.1](#)). To consolidate the discussion, I will bring together and reflect on a multiplicity of voices through a critical review, previously defined as as extensive analyses that go beyond mere description and compilation of literature (Grant & Booth, 2009) ([see section 1.7.3](#)). Expanding and putting facilitation out there to be further reviewed can only be justified by the manifold acknowledgement of the need to do so. In the following pages the focus will be on understanding which aspects of participatory practice are seen as most relevant by the authors of the explored dissertations, what is their view and consideration of design facilitation and how do they envision the future of practice through possible alternatives.

Previously, I explored the realm of design as a discipline in chapter one, design facilitation in chapter two, power

exertion in chapter three; the intention behind this storyline was to create a narrative for each chapter, providing a separate understanding of each explored world. However, as Latour puts it in *A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design* (2008) referring to Peter Sloterdijk's remarkable work on Spheres theory, "we move from envelopes to envelopes, from folds to folds" (Latour, 2008, p. 8) and therefore, an additional step became visible: the need to highlight the interdependency and interconnectedness of the formerly mentioned realms. In chapter four, these different envelopes are brought together purposefully to create intersections which would help us see design practice under a more critical light with the intention of "making things crumble", to explore the uncomfortable, with the sole purpose of encouraging the revision of an area of practice currently perceived and packaged as empowering, user-friendly and politically correct.

The aim of this chapter is to create a narrative around how Mahmoud Keshavarz (2016), Anna Seravalli (2014) and Anja-Lisa Hirscher (2020) discern this continuous passage between said envelopes, to provide the reader with additional points of view. Being fully aware that attempting, to some extent, to unpack and make visible the connections between immense concepts such as power, politics, design and facilitation is a difficult task, I acknowledge the risk of leading to a high degree of ambiguity, or abstractness that might be misleading for the reader. The objective here is not to reinforce the hypotheses generated in the initial chapters of this thesis, but to support a plurality of visions, and to stimulate further discussion on design facilitation.

The post-analysis part will consist of a

meta-narrative which links the initial theoretical findings with reflections and further findings from this personal critical exploration. As previously mentioned, moving through intersections is useful for "exploring that which is often overlooked, hidden, not deeply investigated or requires a broader analysis; furthermore, the act of intersecting different things increases the chances of making evident the uncomfortable, of creating new connections, of reinforcing existing loose connections and finally, of creating the possibilities for new intersections to be explored" ([see section 1.7.4](#)).

5.2.1 Criteria for choosing the selected bibliography —

Based on the principles of systematic literature review ([see section 1.7.2](#)), introducing the reasons behind the selection of literature for this chapter becomes fundamental.

The selection has been made during a conversation with Ramia Mazé, advisor for the thesis, after discussing the need to better ground the theoretical discussion, and to create a launchpad for future research on these topics. The first criterion for inclusion was a certain degree of relation with the topics of this thesis: PD, politics and facilitation, mainly. As a second requirement, the researched topics among the selected literature had to be different among each other in order to provide higher possibilities of creating insightful intersections; approaching the same general topics from different - and specific - points of view opens up a pool of possibilities when it comes to building a bigger and broader picture or, as mentioned previously, a meta-narrative. Finally, both criteria combined would ensure diversity, lower the chances of repetition between the researchers and reduce the likelihood of a consensus on

design and facilitation, crucial aspects to consider in actively challenging the statements and hypotheses in this thesis.

Anna Seravalli (2014) writes on the making of commons in open production practices in the Swedish context and how co-production practices play a crucial role in defining which futures are being developed. Mahmoud Keshavarz (2016) focuses on design-politics and the analysis of articulation practices in passports, camps and borders. Finally, Anja-Lisa Hirscher (2020) concentrates on participatory design, the possibilities within the field and its impact when extended to different contexts, people and time.

5.2.2 Criteria for analyzing the content —

To ensure a thorough and critical analysis of the dissertations, the idea was to have a step-by-step "guide" to guarantee equal and fair treatment among the three dissertations, thus avoiding a stronger emphasis on the ones that would maybe help to make a better case when arguing for my hypotheses. Defining the process was a conscious delimitation of the possibilities of being impartial, and served as the foundation for a more organized and detailed investigation.

The starting point was to fully read the dissertations, taking notes and highlighting relevant terminology, notions, sections and quotes. This exercise was crucial in processing large amounts of information, as the objective was to be able to single out the most important information in over 900 pages of research. Following up, a separate document was created in order to gather the most relevant parts of each dissertation, keeping sense-making and synthesis as top priorities. Everything was executed using a case-by-case approach,

which helped reveal the bigger picture each dissertation was trying to paint and made it easier to revisit the findings when needed. Each document started with what I consider to be the two main starting points in a dissertation: research questions and aims. Studying the motivations and the questions these authors aimed to tackle was a key step to help me understand what drove the research, what was their angle and what could have been the limitations they faced.

Next, different categories were created²⁹ to cluster findings and insightful bits from the dissertations. Establishing the same categories for all three dissertations proved to be a good method to focus in the same way on every document, but also, it was useful to understand on which topics the dissertations focused on primarily, which ones were still not strongly present, and how they clashed with each other.

The categories were:

- A. Understanding the topic
- B. Research questions
- C. Aims of the dissertation
- D. Design
- E. Role of the designer/researcher
- F. PD/participation
- G. Power
- H. Politics
- I. Framing/staging/orchestrating
- J. Dimensions of power
- K. Alternatives
- L. Consensus

It is important to clarify that dissertation-specific categories were also created in each case, which simply served the purpose of allowing a more extensive understanding of and to cluster additional insightful theory that didn't belong to any of the predetermined categories. (e.g in Seravalli, 2014 “commons”, in Keshavarz, 2016 “undocumentedness”

and in Hirscher, 2020 “experiments”). Categorization was brought in as a mere tool to organize information which, as stated previously, allowed for better processing of a considerable amount of data. The reason behind this disclosure is acknowledging that putting concepts into different boxes conflicts with previous statements made in the thesis. Said statements intend to blur the lines between terms like power, politics, facilitation and participation; they contemplate a more critical and merged view of the terminology; thus, assigning terms to delimited categories without an appropriate explanation can come across as yet another deliberate exercise of academic framing and to some extent, of terminological disarticulation.

Next, it was time for reflections. The starting point here was to look at how the authors' research supported their arguments, helped to debunk certain hypotheses, or helped to shape the way in which they understood and communicated about the chosen topics. Apart from being a good starting point to then move to concrete examples presented in the dissertations, exploring and contemplating the researchers' academic approach seemed appropriate as that is the prevalent approach for this master's thesis as well. The second area of reflection concerned the authors' take on the design-related “envelopes” touched upon in the thesis: PD, design facilitation and the role of the designer. As in the case of their established research questions, this particular exercise was highly effective when attempting to understand the position a researcher might have taken (or not), their influences and assumptions.

Having gained an understanding of the foundation of each dissertation, it was time to look for further insights.

The next step was to try to spot different discourses on power and politics. It is important to highlight that in these analyses, the findings came also from noticing where or how different aspects could have been explored further by the chosen author, and also trying to understand the reasons why they chose not to elaborate on said dimensions (e.g out of scope, not considered, etc.). The last step was to look for reflections on possible alternatives regarding the relationship between their chosen topic and participatory practices such as facilitation, as well as notions of power and politics. These reflections have taken different shapes, such as presenting themselves in the form of clear statements or hints when mentioning the need for further research; the degree of explicitness also differed from author to author.

The conducted analysis is compact, designed to fit within a my thesis and to complement the work carried out in the previous chapters. Each dissertation provided numerous insights, new information, as well as clear and thorough reviews of existing literature on their topics of choice. The reader must understand that one could write an entire thesis on each dissertation, as the topics they revolve around are vast, sensitive and highly complex.

5.3 First analysis: Seravalli, A. (2014). Making commons: (attempts at composing prospects in the opening of production) —

5.3.1 Abstract, research questions and aims of the dissertation —

This first analysis focuses on the work of Anna Seravalli, a researcher and lecturer from Malmö University with experience in carrying out co-production processes through her involvement in different organizations (Fabriken, STPLN, HWA, workshops, etc). The main focus of her doctoral dissertation, published in 2014, was to explore the world of commons, mainly looking at the “making” of commons, to understand how different participatory practices shape, create and have a saying in deciding which possible futures triumph, which do not, and which become possible presents. Here, the emphasis is placed on the materialization - intended as concretization - of ideas rather than the ideation; it is about fabricating commons, as opposed to wondering, exploring or envisioning them. By using the term commons, she refers to a “pool of resources or facilities, as well as institutions that involve some aspects of joint ownership or access” (Ostrom et al., 2002 as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 60).

The author defines the width and depth of her research by stating the questions that will guide the process, or, as she calls it, the programme, referring to a specific way of articulating knowledge generation by combining practice and theory, with the end goal of enabling more open and participatory commoning practices, in this scenario.

The research questions were presented as follows:

- RQ1:** What kind of co-production practices are emerging in the opening of production?
- RQ2:** To what kind of (alternative) futures do they relate? Which of them may move forward as possible presents?
- RQ3:** How can design be at play in co-production practices as a matter of making possible presents?

²⁹ These were created specifically for the purpose of these analyses, as should be taken as a guide for ensuring thorough exploration and a coherent narrative.

Gathering a better understanding of the aims and extent of these questions required further exploration of two key concepts present in the dissertation: defining the meaning of “the swamp” and of the opening of production.

5.3.2 Understanding the topic —

Seravalli begins her dissertation by well stating what is she looking into and from which perspective, placing herself as a researcher looking into problems belonging to the swamp, an area in which “problems are messy, confusing and incapable of technical solution” (Schön, 1995 as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 20). This is a useful starting point to justify the focus on making commons rather than exploring the underlying structures, triggers or influencing factors that are attached to commoning as participatory practice. By focusing on finding alternative practical ways to approach the opening of production, the author strengthens Latour’s claim on how, if pursuing change, designers ought to engage in substitute ways of doing (Latour, 2010 as cited in Seravalli, 2014).

The opening of production, on the other hand, refers to production practices heavily influenced by four different traits, two of which seemed of high relevance in regards to the topics explored in this thesis. The first trait contemplates the roles of different actants in production and their relationships, arguing for a strong reconsideration and rearrangement in order to avoid explicit dominance. In the second trait, the word facilitation is used to put forward the notion of beyond use-value, meaning facilitating (enabling) knowledge exchange among those involved in the production process.

Establishing a solid understanding of the foundation of the dissertation rendered

the aims visible. Seravalli focused on contemplating what kind of design is needed to foster social innovation in the context of commoning; she does so through the exploration of the importance of end-user inclusion, shared ownership and management of processes and resources and finally, the role of this resulting collaboration between the different actors.

As theoretical exploration and findings comprise a considerable part of a doctoral dissertation, thus, it was important to accentuate the academically-driven storyline that shapes the overall discourse on making commons; in Seravalli’s work, theory both challenges and underpins her practical experiences.

Embarking on an exploration of issues belonging to the swamp demands different approaches and a good understanding of the different domains through which one has to move across in order to avoid getting lost in its complexity. A mix of academic and practical concerns become the fuel that feeds this research on alternatives in the opening of production. While reflecting on this, multiple inevitable questions then came up: Which dimensions have merged in the swamp of commoning? And how does the author read them? How to go from a (non-)accidental merging to possible new futures? It is safe to say that the nature of the chosen issue is closely related to discourses of power balance, necessary to foster new openings of production. All through the analysis, it is possible to spot the importance of political and power rearrangements to foster new openings of production.

5.3.3 The designer’s role —

In the dissertation, attention is drawn to design both as a discipline and design practice. Two vast areas are deemed appropriate when it comes to contributing to the opening of production: design for social innovation and participatory design. Different reasons are brought up throughout the chapters that can be recapped by referring to the discipline of design as an approach to deal with complex issues that require co-creation of practices and solutions, and in which designers should be highly engaged. In the case of design practice, here it represents not only an ongoing process but also an “oscillation between the particular and the whole” (Schön, 1983 as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 47).

The type of proposed practice implies significant responsibility for everybody involved in the process. The author explores extensively the role of participants and the designer; in this analysis, the focus will be on the latter. Latour (2010, as cited in Seravalli, 2014) proposes an alternative method to better comprehend the possibilities of co-creating possible futures called “compositionism”. In the dissertation, Seravalli draws on this as means to navigate the swamp and to understand the bigger picture, or as Latour argues, to observe how things suddenly switch from matters of fact to matters of concern. Compositionism shapes how the author perceives her role and agency. Thus, she decides not to call her encounters experiments but engagements instead, given her active involvement and deliberately placing herself on an equal level. Here, the latter part is sought to avoid neutrality, while the concept of expert dominance is not touched upon, leaving room for a deeper discussion on the political implications of hierarchies in collaborative practices.

However, challenging the role of the designer seems to be at the core of the opening of production, acknowledging the ethical and practical layers involved. Special emphasis is placed upon the proactiveness needed when it comes to creating possible presents: “if we want to solve big social problems we need more than design thinking. [...] if we want to achieve long-term social transformation, we must be equipped to develop, test and spread robust theories of change” (Schulman, 2010 as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 25-26). Finally, in regards to the role of the designer, its role as facilitator is initially linked to the field of design for social innovation, where designers enable social encounters, empower innovation, meet social needs and enhance relationships (Murray et al., 2010 as cited in Seravalli, 2014). Notions of empowerment in co-design or participatory practices are not challenged.

5.3.4 Power and politics —

Nevertheless, commons co-exist with notions of power and politics. Throughout history, they have been defined, contested and negotiated in different realms, given their close connection to resource use, entitlement, profit, just to name a few. As referenced by Seravalli, Benkler (2013 as cited in Seravalli, 2014) refers to commons as an institutional device characterized by the absence of asymmetric power to determine the disposition of the resource itself. By providing different theoretical and historical connotations attached to the term commons, ranging from collective institutional discourses to law, to Garrett Hardin’s *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968 as cited in Seravalli, 2014), the author defines commons as a manifold notion. However, there was a recurring characteristic between the different stories: using commons either as a word, phenomenon or resource implies a

certain degree of collaborative ownership.

Through her engagements with different groups of people, Seravalli had to take into consideration and manage different layers of power relations. First, it is important to understand that the concept of a case study carries different levels of power exertion within itself, as well as dealing with and creating different sets of values along the way. In the dissertation, it is argued that case studies can become the lenses through which to explore how power and values are created and managed in action, how they influence the whole process and when do they come into play (Flyvbjerg, 2004 as cited in Seravalli, 2014). In practice, this translates into smaller and tangible - deliberate - actions, which are typically overseen by the designer. Seravalli argues that the designer is the one that has the agency to decide how things should proceed, in which order, through which tools and who should be involved in the process. Designers are the ones that set the stage, the unfolding, the conclusion. In terms of commoning, this “implies not only articulating how making commons is performed, but also tracing what happens on the battlefield (Latour, 2005 as cited in Seravalli, 2014) - which commons get to be successful and why” (Seravalli, 2014, p. 81-82).

Particularly useful in this context is the author’s recognition of the fine line between empowerment and control, as participatory practices tend to engage with different stakeholders to co-produce solutions for the future while simultaneously selecting what is considered to be insightful and benefitting from their contribution. Seravalli’s choice of term for what my thesis referred to as control due to its close relationship to power over, was exploitation. Despite being a heavier term, it suggests a certain

degree of deceit, in which those involved are under the illusion of providing meaningful contributions when in reality those are then carefully selected and utilized according to the previously established orchestration.

This empowerment-exploitation relationship, however, is yet another twofold moment, as users can - and do, as seen in the examples Seravalli provides - manifest resistance towards explicit attempts of framing and limiting. These relationships, especially in co-creational shared spaces, are interdependent, as both parts need the other to function. At the same time, this means that power negotiations begin when one of the two parts, especially when it is the case of the users, refuse to adjust to the structures they have been asked to conform to. Alternative ways of doing become crucial when it comes to finding the right balance in exerted power, in the distribution and definition of roles, to avoid let-downs and most importantly, the loss of the key values for the opening of production mentioned in the dissertation: openness, sharing and collaboration. In thinking about alternative approaches to avoid control, the author reflects on the need to have open programmes, being open to the unexpected and giving up on the idea of having total control over these interactions; in her attempt to avoid expert dominance to rebalance power relations and hierarchical assumptions, she decides to shift “from a planned and controlled way of operating to trying to be part of what was evolving” (Seravalli, 2014, p. 77).

Reworking power relationships in participatory practices, from values to actions and practical implications means deliberately blurring those pre-existing limits, set boundaries and established roles present in the battlefield (Latour,

2005 as cited in Seravalli, 2014), a term used to describe “where diverse agendas, actants and perspectives come together, and where different prospects encounter and struggle to become legitimated presents” (Seravalli, 2014, p. 73).

5.3.5 Facilitation —

To analyze Seravalli’s take on PD and facilitation, it seems appropriate to start by first rendering her positioning visible, as to get an idea of what her starting point is, what might be her concerns and reflections after having experienced this first hand. As this is one of the core concerns of this thesis, the following extract from the dissertation will be intentionally quoted in length as to respect the author’s writing voice and prevent loss of meaning and intention.

“[...] what I have been doing in the engagements can still be considered as a form of design and in what terms. A possible way to frame this kind of practice is to rely on the participatory design tradition and ideas emerging in the design for social innovation field about the designer as a facilitator of others’ designs [...] However, I often felt that such definition did not quite fit what I was doing, as rather than facilitating, I was engaged in prototyping and making. With the exception of the first co-design workshops about Fabriken, I never worked as a facilitator. I never had that role, as being a facilitator implies that others recognize you as having such a role [...]

Building furniture, setting up a common garden outside Fabriken, and meeting with civil servants has not been a matter of facilitating, but rather a matter of trying to change a specific situation and, at the same time, exploring and understanding what the situation is about [...]

The idea of the single designer driving the process is substituted for the idea of a designing network (Jegou et al. 2008) which accounts for the system of actors involved in the making. Such involvement can present conflicts and tensions, as actors have diverse interests and move in various directions. When it comes to my role, I have been a node in the network; I did not stand above the network or in its center, but rather, just been a part of it” (Seravalli, 2014, p. 199-200).

In the previous reflections, different conscious or unconscious thoughts on facilitation as a participatory practice can be spotted. Analyzing reflections, and not just theoretical claims, becomes key to single out assumptions, influences and how self-reflection affects the values reflected in how collaborative practice that involves and affects others are carried out.

In the beginning of her reflection, Seravalli mentions that she had an engaged approach rather than doing facilitation, which inevitably sparked some questions during the reading. Does this mean that facilitation implies a certain distance between the designer and the users? Is it not possible to engage in prototyping with users in an exercise of shortening that distance? This understanding of design facilitation suggests that the author does not see it as an engaging way of commoning, but rather as the performance of an individual who leads and hierarchically frames discussions regarding possible futures. One of the reasons why she does not believe she had been facilitating engagements has to do with her interpretation of facilitation as a position claim, which is understandable, as that is the way in which facilitation is generally sold, or packaged. This is further reflected in her association of making commons

with familiarizing ourselves with the context and changing situations; does this mean facilitation is, to some extent, a superficial operation? Does the facilitator just execute a plan from A to B without diving a priori into the why and for who of the situation?

Finally, Seravalli highlights that when dealing with designing networks, there is a higher chance of dealing with conflict and tensions; this aspect is seen as an optimistic possibility, in the sense that by not using a hierarchical model, the likelihood of nurturing pluralities is higher. A personal interpretation of this claim is that facilitation is considered to fit within and feed a culture of harmony, in which resistance and disagreement are carefully prevented. This final remark goes back to discourses of consensus and dissensus, as mentioned previously in 4.6 (also c.f. Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013). Further ahead in the dissertation, the author goes back to this notion and acknowledges how in participatory practices consensus is deemed to be mandatory, and resistance is something that ought to be controlled: “conflict and disagreement seem to be unavoidable elements in participatory design in practice, and have to be acknowledged and managed” (Sjöberg, 1996 as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 185).

5.3.6 Participatory design —

As discussed in chapter two, participatory design was born in the attempt of increasing workplace democracy in Scandinavia. Seravalli explores the history of participatory design to further understand what affects participatory practice, but also to gain a better understanding of how to be a designer in the swamp and its multiple complex layers. Some insightful connections are made between PD and interaction design due to their close relation to users, and co-creational processes. The author makes

a compelling claim when it comes to the historical shaping of PD approaches. She argues that, by gaining popularity in different design fields, PD approaches began to be extensively used and adapted (e.g. in service design); this deliberate use of the term and approach, however, lead to a generalization of the notion of participation. Nowadays, its definition tends to fall under co-design (Sanders and Stappers, 2008 as cited in Seravalli, 2014), and the major element lost in this transition is the recognition of the initial struggle for political representation and equality (Seravalli, 2014). The notion of generalizations in design terminology resonates with the initial claim in this thesis regarding the use of facilitation as a buzzword (see section 1.4) due to its connotations of participation, inclusivity, engagement and diversity, leading to not only generalizations but also hazy notions of roles, unclear intentions and loss of credibility.

5.3.7 Framing, staging & orchestrating —

An aspect worth analyzing - in this, as well as in the other two dissertations - are the different reflections of the authors on three particular actions; these are framing, staging and orchestrating (see section 4.2). Seravalli places problem-setting at the core of design practice, highlighting the role of the designer in framing the issue (putting it into context) and deciding a way forward (defining a plan of action) (Schön, 1983 as cited in Seravalli, 2014). Framing here is described as a form of inquiry used to better understand an issue, and not only as a way to redirect action. However, the author acknowledges how framing can easily become an exercise of controlled inquiry conducted through careful exploration and selective judgement. Furthermore, emphasis is placed upon what the author refers to as the self-reinforcing system of knowing-

in-practice (Seravalli, 2014), which means, in simpler terms, our reluctance to step out of our comfort zone. In the dissertation, such reluctance is explained through our conscious efforts to force unknown situations to fit into existing frames, thus avoiding being thrown into uncertain situations. The risk that this kind of framing brings is, however, that of becoming manipulation; by pressuring things into smaller, bigger, or different-sized frames, the designer attempts to avoid this uncertain state “he would experience if he were to allow his system to come apart” (Schön, 1983, as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 49). Schön’s words echo with the discussion carried out in section 2.4 regarding the need to “make things crumble” in order to uncover new insights or to develop a more critical point of view on facilitation. Therefore, proactiveness is used to counter this otherwise sheltered position that is adopted either consciously, or unconsciously.

In the dissertation, the author draws on reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983 as cited in Seravalli, 2014) as a way to counter this practical dilemma and to increase her awareness on the ways in which framing influences her understanding of the situation; in other words, she decides to focus on inner reflection to foster a conscious articulation of the framing process.

It is important to highlight how mainstream framing processes also affect the people involved in participatory processes. An active process of composing is that in which designers also define who gets to participate, who does not based on specific metrics, such as age, occupation, skills, as mentioned by the author: “the idea of democratic and open innovation still concerns a very small portion of the entire population who has the skills, time and resources to invest in

these side activities (Björgvinsson et al., 2010 as cited in Seravalli, 2014). There are still [...] huge issues in relation to who gets to participate, to which extent, and what even counts as innovation” (Seravalli, 2014, p. 112). In an ideal scenario, equipotentiality (Bauwens, 2006 as cited in Seravalli, 2014) would be the foundation of participation, therefore eliminating the need for scouting the fittest participants for designed activities and avoiding pre-establishing hierarchies.

5.3.8 Infrastructuring —

Framing, staging and orchestrating can be also spotted in sections relating to infrastructuring in the dissertation. The term here is used to describe a process of carefully managing and rearranging different actors to support actions and practices carried out in a specific context. In this section, countless parallels between infrastructuring and design facilitation can be made, as the elements they touch on are pillars for both practices, such as “language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria codified procedures, regulations and contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes all the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable institutions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensibilities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared worldviews” (Wegner, 1998 as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 68). It is arguable then, that facilitation is, to some extent, a form of participatory infrastructuring. The challenge resides in how to create and maintain structures and practices that do not conform to conventional frames but are created ad hoc for the specific issues they deal with.

5.3.9 Alternatives —

To conclude this first analysis, it is worth going over the author's reflections on possible alternatives for the future. In this section, it is useful to look at these plausible futures also through the lens of design facilitation, and not just thinking about the opening of production. To begin with, shifting the attention again to the roles of each actant in participatory practices. The dissertation mentioned a possible methodological approach to tackle power imbalances in commoning that could very well be applicable to design facilitation; Participatory Action Research (PAR) seeks higher ownership and accountability through a more balanced, critical and aware participation between researchers, designers and users in order to embrace uncertainty and spontaneity (c.f Napier & Wada, 2016). Once again, this means going out of pre-established boundaries, methods, approaches that are designer-centred and, as Seravalli proposes, shifting towards measures that would benefit those involved in the process.

The author often reflects on how to create the adequate conditions that would lead to alternative openings of productions, and therefore, new ways to navigate the swamp. High interest is paid to grassroots initiatives and their political influence in the making, shaping and moulding of structures.

Some of the crucial aspects needed in the making of alternatives also resonate with changes needed in the field of design facilitation already mentioned in this analysis. The need to get closer to power balance, for example, through active experimentation and shuffling of existing roles, and by broadening the understanding of creative agency, extending it to users, "as creativity here is not intended as a characteristic of the restricted elite, but rather as a diffused potential" (Meroni, 2007

as cited in Seravalli, 2014, p. 105). In design facilitation, challenging the hierarchical role of the facilitator by experimenting with new participatory models, documenting responses, giving up on the idea of having someone to look up to, someone who can give and take away the participant's agency to express themselves, to disagree. The latter argument leads to further reflection on consensus-driven activities, which is something Seravalli reflects on by asking herself how to find a proper balance between the advantages and disadvantages of such practices. In the creation of alternatives, both in commoning and in facilitation, the strategic nature of design (and power) becomes key as people and designers respond and act according to different induced or imposed tactics and strategies. In the dissertation, the author reflects on what should be kept in mind when dealing with strategic actions, highlighting that values, expectations and people's hopes should still be a priority.

Finally, a theoretical concept reviewed in the dissertation seemed highly relevant when thinking about new ways of doing facilitation due to its experimental, non-dominant and participatory connotations; this is the case of boundary organizations. When referring to boundaries, here Seravalli does not refer to delimiting action in order to prevent resistance; boundary spaces are those arenas and engagements in which conflictual contact is a possibility, as they welcome interaction between diverse and non-aligned actors. Boundary objects play a key role here, as they become abstract or concrete mediators in participatory non-consensus-driven interactions.

Boundary engagements are executed based on awareness, sensibility and systemic reflection, as one should preventively take into consideration

others' agendas, possible obstacles, and how to navigate through them, not by preventing such discrepancies to happen in the first place, but by being prepared to deal with the unfamiliar, as unsettling as that might be. As the author mentions, these alternative ways of acting ought to be spotted and constructed. "Exploring boundaries also requires the ability to articulate and understand the differences between the involved actors; it is not enough to find or construct a common ground. [...] Differences play a critical role in collaboration" (Seravalli, 2014, p. 175). Consensus-based activities might seem instantly efficient, but their fruitfulness might not be visible in the long run; in other words, framing and orchestrating can be seen as temporary patches to discrepancies instead of focusing on how to spot, navigate and make use of them a priori.

5.4 Second analysis: Keshavarz, M. (2016). *Design-Politics: An Inquiry into Passports, Camps and Borders* —

5.4.1 Abstract & understanding the topic —

Mahmoud Keshavarz is a researcher from Uppsala University and activist whose work focuses on the convergence between design and social movement studies. His doctoral dissertation, published in 2016 was chosen for this analysis and focused on studying the impact of designed artefacts such as passports, camps and borders in the politics of movement. Furthermore, he paid particular attention to the agency of design and designing in migration politics and notions such as access, visibility, prevention and control. High focus is put into the "will" to move

of bodies and the incapacity to do so because of set structures fueled and shaped by design.

He uses two important core concepts - bifold and complexity - that the reader can go back to in order to better interpret, analyze, and adopt a critical point of view. First, the notion of things being bifold, or in the words of the author, acknowledging the two sides of the same coin; thinking about the duality in concepts such as passports, for example, whose possession is mandatory for all of us, means that its shortfall becomes a "means of power imposition, discrimination, management and control" (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 126). Furthermore, reflecting on interactive experiences, he stresses the fact that perhaps the aim of such practices is that of keeping ourselves distracted and engaged while the invisible is created.

The second notion present all through is complexity. Designers often deal with complex issues such as sustainability, human rights, health, just to name a few; this is something that Keshavarz also recognizes when it comes to politics of movement and undocumentedness, stating that after all, everything is interconnected, and each action fosters a particular structure. Undocumented workers, for example, inevitably end up contributing to the local economy of the state who made them "illegal" in the first place (De Genova, 2002 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016). Interactivity has its share when it comes to complexity as well, as the author claims it is a political and economic artefact used to influence us, contrary to our belief that it emerges from the technological era we live in. Structures and complexity here, go hand in hand, and as it will be more visible in the analysis of power and politics done by Keshavarz, the notion of interconnectedness will inevitably be

present to describe such multilayered happenings.

In further understanding the topic dealt with, it is vital to clarify the use of terminology. In the dissertation, Keshavarz deliberately uses alternative terms to refer to what mainstream politics calls “illegal immigrants”; in this analysis, that choice is going to be fully respected and agreed upon, therefore all mentions will use the terms “undocumented” and “migrant”. This selection is made as a response to methodological nationalism (Wimmer, 2002, as cited in Keshavarz, 2016) thus making a careful use of terms all through to avoid entering mainstream discourses from dominant nations, states and societies.

Undocumentedness here is “understood as those moments and places in which bodies that are not supposed to be seen or active are actively on the move or present, thus challenging the legalised frameworks of the nation-state and its borders” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 25). Once again, different layers are visible, as in the context of nation-state politics, the mobility of those they consider - and turn into - “illegal bodies” threaten and challenge the status quo in terms of legal frameworks and movement politics. Saying that nation-states turn undocumented bodies into illegal bodies reinforces the author’s claim that undocumentedness is a produced marginal condition, legally entitled to preclude people, and assigning them a set social and economic status.

5.4.2 Research questions, aims of the dissertation and critique —

A different structure showed up when analyzing the dissertation’ structure and research questions. Keshavarz clearly states that his dissertation does not follow

the traditional layout visible in design research, but instead, his research is the result of various accounts, coming from personal stories, philosophical and political ideas, and the voices of others. Despite not formulating research questions, the researcher does refer to transdisciplinary research as the perspective he will draw from - as noted in this thesis as well in [section 1.7.1](#) - due to its engagement with theory from different realms. Furthermore, it was possible to observe a strong commitment to critique as a practice, and as a principle, even. Drawing on Foucault and his understanding of critique as an attitude, Keshavarz reflects on the causality behind critique; it ensues as a reaction to something that is happening, or as a form of resistance towards certain principles. In the words of Foucault, critique is “the art of not being governed or better, the art of not being governed like that and at that cost” (Foucault, 2007 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 216).

As a critique of this thesis on design facilitation, it seems relevant to highlight Keshavarz’s reflections on how to practice critique in design. Here, he specifies that when conducting research, critique should not be understood as one among many methods or approaches through which to look at issues, but rather as a practice itself (Dilnot, 2008 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016). A critical and transparent way of conducting research was then to also point out the shortcomings of my thesis, and using this analysis also as a self-reflection moment to realize own assumptions as well as to notice how academic frames are unconsciously and comfortably left uncontested, unchallenged. Therefore, this aspect has been acknowledged but not edited with the intentional purpose of showing the intrinsic presence of preexisting frames.

Next, in looking at the aims of this dissertation, different influences can be spotted. Some of them felt peer-directed, such as inviting colleagues, fellow researchers and other scholars to rethink the way research is being conducted, or clearly stating the importance of taking advantage of our privileged positions to grow the discussion on certain topics. Other aims were visible through a research-driven approach, by choosing to make visible the complexity behind the intersection of politics and design, as well as looking at allegedly common things where politics seems to be absent and uncover those ties. Here, the focus is also on interactions and their role in maintaining and transforming regimes. Finally, some of the aims are driven by Keshavarz’s activist background, which led him to focus on something as an attempt to resist the status quo, to challenge mainstream politics, and expose the deliberate creation of marginal groups through legally accepted material realities. Overall, his work is the result of iterative questioning of politics, ethics, root causes and roles with the aim of developing sensitivities and making a critical contribution to knowledge generation.

5.4.3 Design —

This section will focus on the author’s use of theory and how it shaped or supported his views on a variety of topics. Given its relevance for this thesis, reflections on design will be the starting point.

For Keshavarz, design is inherently social and political. Going back to his former claims on critique being the very form of practice, he proceeds to state that “[o]ne of the tasks of design studies is to question the ‘best practices’ of design, which can eventually change how design is practiced” (Clark & Brody, 2009 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 28). In his

many reflections on design practice, one main issue comes up: designer’s neglect when it comes to associating, spotting and accepting design’s presence in shaping historical, political and socio-economic regimes. Design processes and artefacts are usually deemed apolitical, and there is a huge shortfall in looking for notions of power and politics in areas that are taken for granted, assumed to be well-defined already. A further personal reflection on Keshavarz’s thoughts focuses on how the connection between design and politics is communicated in general. Oftentimes, reading between the lines, the tone used aims at conveying newness, almost as if connecting these areas were to be something innovative, or unprecedented. The focus is on buzzwords as “uncovering”, “unveiling”, “revealing”, “introducing” or “finding”; however, the reality is that these connections have existed all along, and what is new or striking about this is that people are only now starting to acknowledge and be alarmed by them.

Design, therefore, does not simply enter the realm of power and politics. It is part of it, and in his dissertation, the author aims to make this claim visible, and reinforce the idea of design as having the power “to change the material history and practices of our societies” (Tonkinwise, 2014 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 28). Design, then, ceases to be a tool for spotting touchpoints for political engagement, but simultaneously becomes the source of it; such duality is considered key in understanding politics of movement and migration. With the latter statement in mind, Keshavarz sees design as more than a problem-solving practice, thus proposing another bifold notion; here, design should be also considered to be a problem-recognition practice, with the political component of having the agency to act upon those

problems. In this regard, however, design also possesses the ability to frame, stage, and orchestrate, as seen in this thesis and Seravalli (2014). Design is understood as a discipline with the ability to orchestrate perception, dictate courses of action, and to merge things (Highmore, 2009 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016); this aspect will be looked into detail later in this analysis.

5.4.4 *The researcher's role* —

Keshavarz focuses on the interconnectedness of design and politics, a connection so strong that it is impossible to discuss them as separate fields, leading him to coin the term “design-politics” to refer to the “myriad of ways practices of design and politics, historically and materially, reinforce and legitimise each other” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 93). In this definition, actions have a decisive role, as the focus should be in proactively engaging in making and taking decisions, rather than executing instructions. (c.f Whiteley, 1993; Seravalli, 2014). In regards to undocumentedness, the author focuses on design's ability to normalize practices (see section 2.2.1) through public legitimization.

Instead of focusing on the role of the designer, Keshavarz focuses more on the role of researchers, as privileged knowledge producers when it comes to design-politics. In a self-reflection, the author immediately proceeds to recognize his advantaged position, referred to as power position (Keshavarz, 2016), acknowledging how his own dissertation, and research in general, have the ability to set things in motion. Research has the power to prioritize certain topics over others, to give visibility to specific issues, and those choices are made on the basis of interest. In this regard, special attention needs to be paid to the chosen approach to conduct research,

to avoid unconsciously, or consciously, objectifying people instead of focusing on the bigger picture (Freire, 2005 [1968] as cited in Keshavarz, 2016). What researchers need to pay attention to, according to Keshavarz, is on the intersection between the studied relations, the “-” in his design-politics, which goes back to what Rancière refers to as the politics of the gap (Rancière, 1992 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016), the space in which re-articulation and intervention become possible.

5.4.5 *Power and politics* —

One of the more vastly explored topics in this dissertation were notions of power and politics, given their interconnectedness to the other envelopes in our daily lives, as pointed out by Keshavarz but also argued in this thesis. In his work, politics is discussed exhaustively, therefore, only certain aspects are going to be analyzed here, since as mentioned before, an entirely new thesis could be written reflecting on each dissertation. One of Keshavarz's first concerns is to define the use of terminology concerning politics. An extensive review of different connotations to the term is conducive, focusing on “the political” intended as a line of thinking and doing politics, different from party politics (Schmitt, 1996[1920]; Arendt, 1998[1958]; Mouffe, 1993 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016); in this critical analysis, he reviews different takes on the term given by different authors such as Mouffe, Schmitt and Rancière. However, in the dissertation, he chooses to call the political “politics”, and party politics - or mainstream politics, as he calls it - “police-politics”.

Design-politics inevitably leads to discussions on power or, as argued for in this thesis, design-power (see chapters three and four), given their

interdependence and interrelation. To highlight this aspect in the work of Keshavarz, it is possible to spot his take on design-power by talking about the power to design in camp-making; the author argues that such practice is not an exercise of power over, but rather, it is a given possibility to design domination. In this context, “power to design [...] gives possibilities of manipulation, experiments, extension through materialities” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 257). In this sense, the power to design can be seen as an exercise of carefully orchestrated practices which will further reinforce and legitimize existing power structures, thus referring to illegalized bodies rather than illegal, to emphasize the making. A parallel can be drawn to the previous analysis in regards to forcing things into existing frames to avoid uncertainty (see section 5.3.7).

Power to design is also visible in the making and crafting of discourses. Keshavarz points out how terminology plays a big role in communicating the importance of dealing with certain issues rather than others. Emergency, for example, is used to set temporary attention to specific problems, rather than talking about urgency, which aims at drawing immediate and dedicated attention. Such contradictions on the use of terminology in the dissertation are associated with individual privileged positions who have the capacity to divert discourses on account of their power exertion. Drawing on the topics discussed in this thesis regarding design facilitation and power, it is safe to state that deliberate manipulation of discourses towards preferred ideologies leads to an inevitable power imbalance and its ineludible consequences on the cultural, political and socio-economic world. In these scenarios, power becomes - in the words of Keshavarz - a performance of regimes

of practices. Interactions and their crucial role come into play once again, as they are the vehicle through which power relations are established, exerted and maintained (see section 3.3); here, it is discussed that interactions can both spark further action and nudge into compliance with mainstream discourses. Such claims resonate with the previous analysis on power exertion and deliberate actions in section 3.6 of this thesis.

It is imperative to go back to one of the design-driven characteristics of power, that of strategic intent (see section 3.4). In the dissertation, Keshavarz links passports to the Foucauldian notion of technologies of power (Foucault, 1975 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016), also discussed in 3.6, to point out how certain artefacts manage to seem apolitical when in reality, they are highly political; this is a tactical move which successfully manages to avoid questioning, as, through legitimization, it convinces people of a bigger purpose. The author defines the ability to “combine and propose such technologies in a way that looks appealing, rational, desirable and inclusive” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 151) as the persuasive power of design (c.f Dovey, 1999 on seduction in power). Passports, while establishing new power relations - something Keshavarz refers to as “thing-power”, drawing on Bennett (2004 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016) - are themselves caught in other power structures; this aspect is strictly related to the strategic characteristics of design-politics and power. The inevitable tactics and interconnectedness behind design-politics reminds us of the overarching and focal strategic intentionality discussed in section 3.6.

5.4.6 Resistance —

Finally, as with deliberate actions, the politics of movement face different layers of resistance. One of them is forgery, for example, which Keshavarz claims to be a critical design practice due to its power exertion and radical approach to challenging the status quo. In this regard, the author claims that “[n]o matter how momentary or small in scale, or how unexpected and different in medium these struggles and resistances might be, they play an important role in the struggle [...] attempts are made in order to enact the possibilities of practicing the ‘art of not being governed’ in a Foucauldian sense, which is a critical and political attitude towards the past, present and the future” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 266). These counter-hegemonic resistance-driven practices are considered to be an enactment of the previously defined concept of will, and therefore, a political movement of resistance on its own (Ahmed, 2014 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016). Further connections can be made to claims in [section 3.2.2](#) on how resistance is a facet of power relations which opposes somebody else’s initiative. In the thesis, it has also been argued that despite being caught up within the sphere of power, resistance can take a non-power form.

5.4.7 Facilitation —

Keshavarz makes some remarks in regards to facilitation and its link to politics and power as well. Facilitation here, concerning political systems of movement, is referred to as the enabling and disabling practice that aims at regulating mobility of bodies; it is something that creates realities - or possible presents (see Seravalli, 2014) - and which is fueled by politics of temporality, thus treating situations as discardable, looking at quick fixes without necessarily considering long-term implications (Feldman, 2012 as cited in

Keshavarz, 2016).

5.4.8 Participatory design —

The previous remarks make for a good connecting point to further analysis on the author’s views on facilitation, PD and participation. Keshavarz often focuses on the intersections between different realms within design such as participatory design, co-design and design for social innovation. In regards to participatory practices and how they normalize power exertion, the author will be quoted in length, to avoid paraphrasing the tone of his positioning and intention:

“People participate to express their shifting interests and values and practice their rights in the social sphere (in the best case), while remaining recognisable by their very attributed identities that facilitate the status quo; identities that make designers turn their attention to those bodies in the first place, as potential collaborators or participants of a design project. Participation, then, becomes a means of affirming the identities that could be used to sustain certain practices of power within the current neoliberal rationale. By producing multiple choices but only within a given framework, participation adjusts and adopts to power structures for the sake of facilitating participatory potentials, by giving a sense of collaboration without taking into account the politics of different and contradictory positions, hierarchies, conflicts, dissents and norms that actually constitute the ontological features of politics” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 104).

As mentioned in the analysis of Seravalli (2014), Keshavarz here also focuses on the fact that contemporary discussions on PD focus on the creation or adaptation of methods, techniques or approaches to force things into existing frames, not to

break the current scheme, but to be able to more efficiently stage participatory experiments. Quoting Dilnot (2015 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 363), the author remarks the provision of a “service to another’s problem, but service within the framework of an already given, already anticipated, solution and service to another’s (private) interest”. This type of illusionary participation has high connotations of dominance as it is portrayed as a democratic experience (Keshavarz and Mazé, 2013 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016) when in reality it is a matter of tactical staging. The author’s claims resonate, to some extent, to the claims made in the thesis regarding the different forms of empowerment used within PD ([see section 4.3.2](#)). For these very same reasons, the author decides to discard the term “participation”, as it does not paint the picture of what is actually happening; instead, he chooses to use “part-taking” the process of co-creation in which users are involved in.

Part-taking does resonate, to some degree, with what happens in design facilitation. As passports become the enablers and disabling of passporting politics, designers become part-takers in participatory practices; deciding the terms under which engagements are going to take place such as time frame, users, activities, setting and so on, therefore configuring what Rancière refers to as the “re-distribution of the sensible” (Rancière, 2006 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 82). Therefore, in the case of facilitation, the imbalanced distribution of agency allows prioritizing certain aspects versus others, to define the visible, the invisible, the important and the dull.

The discourse continues touching notions of consensus, as explored in this thesis and the previous analysis, by restating that participation should

not be about uncontested agreements, as that is against the nature of human relationships themselves. What designers are willingly doing is designing “systems of compliance” (Fry, 2015 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 49) and designing to “excommunicate” (Thacker, 2013 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 53), which, in simpler terms, means intentionally preventing dissensus. According to Keshavarz, this aversion might be due to the linkage between dissensus and notions of harmful confrontation when instead, it is all about making visible the sensible, the gap, the invisible.

5.4.9 Framing, staging & orchestrating—

Framing, staging and orchestrating also seem to be highly relevant in the dissertation, being found at the core of practices related to the mobility of bodies. Framing, here, is mainly resorted to as a synonym of limiting and pre-defining or, as decreasing the agency to reset and redefine what Seravalli (2014) previously referred to as engagements. Here, the author calls engagements “interactions” and points out that for interactivity to occur, frames have to be present as hosting spaces or as he calls them, interfaces. In this context, frames become interfaces and power is exerted and performed within them. If we were to replace “interactions” with “facilitation” and “interfaces” with “participatory moments”, the interplay of power relations and negotiations within design practice becomes more visible. It is crucial then to acknowledge pre-existing frames which are a product of design.

Another relevant aspect in relation to framing brought up in the dissertation is its causal component. Unpacking and researching on alternatives depend on the previous framing and delimitation of the issue discussed. Keshavarz calls this

“de-framing”, referring to boat people crossing via international waters, who have been framed as victims, therefore now allowing him to de-frame notions related to migratory politics. Nevertheless, the author further explores the different facets of framing and how it affects agency distribution; from the perspective of the people involved in PD practices, he uses Deleuze’s (1992 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016) notion of “modulating individuals”, meaning that framing is a fluid process of constant change and redefinition aiming at suiting the environment. On the other hand, this framing process is controlled by those with a higher agency (e.g. *designers in facilitation*) who set the pace, redirect resources, efforts and emphasis on what fits their “regimes of perception” (Keshavarz, 2016, p. 338). This concept is further reinforced by drawing on Butler (2009 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016), who states that framing, and therefore perception, is not just about what is rendered visible and whatnot, but also in how this is done. In design facilitation, a strong power position is claimed whenever people’s attention is redirected to certain aspects rather than others, or when people are told what to look at and when they are not allowed to explore further.

In this thesis what is referred to as “finding intersections” (see [section 1.7.4](#)), Keshavarz calls articulations. Through his writing, he aims at pointing out these articulations between different practices; moreover, he uses material articulation as a method for the dissertation. His specific view on the topic is that connections are made and unmade continuously, they are conscious and unconscious thus allowing for constant re-articulation of matters of concern. He sees design as an articulatory practice on two levels: first, through the creation of material artefacts and then through the relations they create. As in

the case of (de)framing, articulation is about the interrelation of articulating, rearticulating and disarticulating. The last two are forms of unravelling the complexity within multilayered - articulated - issues; however, as pointed out before, the bigger picture might not always be visible, and therefore such issues might appear disconnected, apolitical at first until their complexity and interconnectedness are shown.

5.4.10 Alternatives —

For Keshavarz, a first step forward is that of rethinking the way practice itself is conducted, letting go of existing frames and willingly creating alternatives. Here, he emphasizes that in order to rework existing frames - hegemonic practices (Mouffe & Laclau, 2010 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016) - counter-hegemonic practices need to be put into place. Their aim will be that of rearticulating widely undiscussed structures and entering a “different configuration of power” (Mouffe, 2008 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016, p. 81). Counter-hegemonic practices are therefore articulated through the exposure of otherwise undisguisable or unexplored frames.

Another of the highlighted components to which to direct our attention to is ethics. For Keshavarz, ethics is closely connected to ownership and accountability (Butler, 2005 as cited in Keshavarz, 2016), and should be understood as a fluid process in constant change, as our discourses clash with those of others in interactions. Lastly, he remarks the importance of Rancière’s theory of the gap and therefore, finding alternative ways of engaging.

5.5 Third analysis: Hirscher, A. (2020). *When skillful participation becomes design: making clothes together* —

5.5.1 Abstract, research questions and aims of the dissertation —

The last of these three analyses focuses on the work of Anja-Lisa Hirscher, a researcher from Aalto University. Her dissertation, yet unpublished at the time of writing this thesis, was kindly shared by her for the sole purpose of this analysis. The author decided to centre her research within the field of PD research, as it served the purpose of acting as a solid foundation for what she wanted to investigate: the interrelation between design, participation and use within alternative contexts and forms.

Hirscher conducts a thorough analysis of participatory design, an aspect that will be visible throughout this whole summary, which begins by highlighting the research gap she is looking into, and where to place her contribution. According to her, stronger attention needs to be put in looking at specific relations within PD, especially in long-term dialogue: the interaction between users and designers; how, why and when does this engagement come to be; the user’s role in the projects; how do designers and contexts influence such processes (Kraff, 2018; Halskov & Hansen, 2015; Vines, Clarke, & Wright, 2013 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). In pointing out this gap, Hirscher’s claims resonate with the main reasons for conducting this master’s thesis, which is indeed questioning and highlighting the influencing mechanisms that underpin facilitation within PD contexts. Bridging this gap for Hirscher meant setting specific aims that would have shaped her research, such as attempting to look into

the different ways in which participation can take form in engagements, between different communities, in different time frames, and with different scopes. Her focus was narrowed down to participants’ interaction in practice within extended PD, which she defined as when “PD extends towards communities, organizations, neighbourhoods or spaces of peer production” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 28).

The author puts these concerns into the following research questions, which are addressed throughout the dissertation:

RQ1 What happens when participants (designers and users) make together in extended participatory design (PD) contexts?

1.1 How can we better understand extended PD contexts, including alternative spaces of peer production?

1.2 In making clothes together, how are roles, use and participation experienced and changed over time?

1.3 How can acts of use become “skillful” and be changed by (social and material) infrastructuring?

Her focus on methodology is also very explicit, as she clearly explains how she used a combination of RtD approach (Brandt et al., 2011, Koskinen et al., 2012 as cited in Hirscher, 2020) which she then combined with experiments influenced by the RWL approach (Real World Laboratories), qualitative research inspired by social sciences, principles from transdisciplinary research and mode 2 research (Dunin-Woyseth, 2011 as cited in Hirscher, 2020).

Having understood the structure and planning behind the dissertation, it was time to further explore the topic to join the author in understanding the interplay of roles when facilitation is used to co-

produce clothes.

5.5.2 Understanding the topic —

During her research, Hirscher engaged in first-person experiments to investigate the dynamics in action when participation is prompted in “alternative spaces of peer production” (Hirscher 2020, p. 23). One of the conducted experiments took the form of a co-sewing café, defined as a common space for production in which the participating actors could jointly create and develop knowledge on design. Said space falls into the category of makerspaces, which, following Kohtala, Hirscher defines as participatory spaces (e.g workshops) for shared production (Kohtala, 2016 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). Here, she refers to an infrastructure designed for this purpose, and within which, 42 workshops have taken place throughout the experiment.

The co-sewing café aimed to create a space in which knowledge creation could be set in motion through practice (Gaver, 2012 as cited in Hirscher, 2020) and to challenge the common understanding of hierarchical roles in design, and the eternal division between designer and user.

5.5.3 The designer’s role —

To challenge mainstream definitions of different roles within PD practices, the author acknowledges design’s part in the deliberate construction of futures (Zimmerman & Forlizzi, 2008 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). In this regard, Hirscher writes about design as a problem-solving practice which is indeed solution-oriented, in contrast to Keshavarz (2016), who proposes a bifold notion of design in which this problem-setting component would be highly visible, given its political nature and agency ([see section 5.4.3](#)).

Seravalli (2014) also touches upon this, considering problem-setting as a core feature of design ([see section 5.3.7](#)).

Hirscher then looked at and defined her positioning in relation to practice. Rightfully so, in order to critically observe roles within design practice, an inward-look becomes a mandatory exercise. Thus, defining herself as an “introspective designer” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 53), she also positions herself within the different research paradigms, expressing her affinity towards constructivism. This becomes a solid foundation to challenge her assumptions and guide her role in the experiments; here, the common factor was her proactive engagement, which then took different forms: that of being a designer, facilitator, practitioner or researcher, according to the situation. It is important to acknowledge her realization regarding how her role inevitably influenced the process.

The starting point in analyzing the role of the designer comes from the orthodox acceptance regarding agency in decision-making, as well as the often unquestioned nature of this claim. The author here reflects on how designers, throughout the years, have been attempting to challenge conventional approaches by proposing new ways of doing practice; in her attempt, Hirscher wants to highlight the role of designer as that who provides “stronger participation in design and production processes” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 25) and therefore, contributing to practice and theory simultaneously. As it can be noticed throughout the dissertation, emphasis will be placed on blurring the line that separates users versus designers, and thus, the titles and division of sections in this analysis is only merely informative for the reader.

5.5.4 Participatory design —

Out of the three reviewed dissertations, Hirscher (2020) places almost the entirety of her focus on the world of participatory design. Looking at something so broad and complex such as behavioural dynamics, interchange of power and infrastructuring processes called for an extensive review on the field of PD itself. Studying its history and the influencing factors behind its evolution throughout the years served as a basis for further understanding of how to tackle the issue at hand. Together with Seravalli (2014) and Keshavarz (2016), Hirscher (2020) explores the interchangeability within the fields of co-, participatory and interaction design due to the values they support. However, Hirscher here outlines the stronger political agenda behind Scandinavia-based PD, something that can contribute to an even more accentuated division of roles (Redström, 2006; 2008 as cited in Hirscher, 2020).

The intention behind PD was creating a dialogue between experts; on one side, designers, experts in problem-solving, design thinking and mediation and on the other side, users, experts in their own everyday experiences (Ehn, 2008 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). An initial recognition of this strong division of roles was carried out years later and practitioners came to the realization that traditional participation had to change. Tools and methods were developed to bridge this role gap between designers and users and to enable mutual learning, understanding (Hirscher, 2020) and to develop a common language between the two. Having already been granted the leading position, facilitators, adopting a proactive attitude, attempted to solve this issue. Despite the benevolent intention behind this action, however, some aspects were overlooked. Tools, while being a very efficient way to increase inclusion and mediate participation, are highly political and thus, they exert power,

too. Returning to previously analyzed concepts in this thesis, it can be argued that such mechanisms are constructed within pre-existing notions and frames ingrained in design practice. Therefore, by attempting to create seemingly apolitical, gap-bridging tools to enhance mutual comprehension, this action further enhanced the already power imbalance. Nowadays, PD continuously tries to make additional efforts to bridge this gap (Kensing & Greenbaum, 2012 as cited in Hirscher, 2020), which still exists, to different extents in different settings. In this regard, Hirscher writes about “blurring and negotiating roles”, acknowledging a parallel to Seravalli (2014), which I have also referred to, in which she calls this practice as a “shuffling of roles” and “beyond use value” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 37 on Seravalli, 2014); in this thesis, this has been alluded to as taking a non-dominant position ([see section 4.3.1](#)), phrasing that deliberately intends to suggest a heavier political connotation. In the dissertation, the author draws further attention to the similarities and differences between her research and Seravalli (2014), pointing out common discourses, methodological approaches or general topic interests.

5.5.5 PD terminology —

Going back to the discourse on roles, the author identifies a gap in researching the implications of the negotiation between design, production and participation when they take place in similar - extended - contexts. Negotiation here takes into consideration values (Iversen et al., 2012 as cited in Hirscher, 2020) and aims at balancing relationships to nurture new and more open ways of participating (Pihkala & Karasti, 2016 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). The latter claim leads to a further observation on how terms are deployed in the dissertation, a

fundamental aspect to look at when trying to define alternative approaches to PD. To begin with, Hirscher defines participation as “skillful acts of use” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 59), pointing at one type of participation derived by a specific use of spaces. This definition differs from Keshavarz (2016) who, as seen in the previous analysis, views participation as “part-taking” (see [section 5.4.8](#)) as it highlights aspects such as decision-making and careful orchestration of processes.

Furthermore, Hirscher looks at the implication of categorizing as “users” those participating agents in co-creative processes. She explains that terminology acts as a limitation, as it carries the assumption that there already are “users of things not yet designed, thus obscuring the complexity of what actually happens as someone starts using a thing, as someone becomes a user” (Redström, 2008, as cited in Hirscher, 2020, p. 24). Once again, it is possible to draw a parallel to Keshavarz (2016) in this regard, as he also writes about those at the other end of the spectrum. In his dissertation, he touches upon how certain terms are willingly used to marginalize, to create gaps, to design people instead of processes (see [sections 5.4.1](#) and [5.4.5](#)). In her dissertation, Hirscher makes a similar claim, stating that, by separating roles, specific skill sets to each agent are being inevitably assigned; however, she also states that in extended PD, this division becomes blurred as the participants might become equally - or more - expert than the facilitators. It is for this very same reason that in this thesis this gap is also referred to as dominance, highlighting the fact that, in the search for alternatives to facilitation, designers need to surrender their normalized hierarchy to then adopt a non-expert-dominant position. The author proposes an alternative in her narrative, in which she refers to

collaborative practices as those in which there is a “participation of participants” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 35), which aims at erasing the gap between participants, to abstain from creating hierarchies and attempts to balance power.

5.5.6 Short-term versus long-term participation —

Another important aspect to look at is time in participatory engagements. The author argues that extended PD also comprises different time frames, which plays a big role in the blurring of roles that she previously writes about. As argued in [section 2.2.2](#) in this thesis, contemporary facilitation tends to take place in short-term projects, even being a one-time happening, usually in the form of a workshop; in those engagements, different and diverse stakeholders are brought together to voice their opinions and reach a consensus on a topic. The author claims that, despite having extended to broader contexts such as politics and social issues, PD is still used in relatively short-term projects. However, as participation is moulded and shaped over time (Saad-Sulonen et al., 2018 as cited in Hirscher, 2020), a transition is needed. Here, bridging the gap designer versus user is referred to as “becoming” a participant, process in which “genuine participation” takes place (Hirscher, 2020, p. 28), alluding to the transition from a mere informant to an acknowledged participant (Simonsen & Robertson, 2012 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). Aiming at genuine participation is something that can also be spotted in Seravalli (2014) and some of the traits characterizing the opening of production: shuffling existing roles and enabling beyond use value (see [section 5.3.9](#)).

5.5.7 Power and politics —

As in the other analyses, and due to the relevance to this thesis, it is imperative to scout for notions of power and politics in the dissertation. Despite not explicitly focusing on questions of political nature, Hirscher does focus on the key role of power in participatory practices, and especially in facilitation. A brief discussion on politics would have been appreciated since, as mentioned previously, Scandinavian PD brings about a stronger political agenda; having conducted experiments in Germany, Finland and Italy, it would have been interesting to touch upon the differences in political engagements that manifested in these very different extended PD settings. Hirscher strongly associated PD with notions of power balance, negotiation and articulation, all claims that resonate with what has been discussed in this thesis; such belief led her to call for a more critical and self-reflective practice, in which designers should question the impact and values their actions inflict.

As in the case of Keshavarz (2016), who acknowledges his power position (see [section 5.4.4](#)), Hirscher (2020) acknowledges hers as well, highlighting the responsibility designers, facilitators and researchers carry when it comes to knowledge production and power relations; once again, the claims made in this thesis are of similar nature and attempt to further open up the discussion on our accountability in matters such as agency distribution, power balance and political implications in PD practices.

A common concern between Hirscher (2020) and this thesis is empowerment. Hirscher describes it as an emancipatory process in which decision-making capacity is given to participants. Her focus in this claim is that of acknowledging the ingrained power imbalance in PD, which requires the liberating nature of

empowerment to provide alternatives to the division of roles. Complementary to this, notions explored in [section 4.3.2](#) seem relevant; empowerment understood as “power to”, appears to be one of the most appropriate alternatives to an otherwise hierarchical practice. Redistributing agency and aiming for emancipation allows participants to further express their voices, concerns and opinions. However, in the thesis empowerment is seen as a trifold notion with very different implications. Empowering, practised within mainstream frames of participation can be yet another facade of contemporary PD. In other words, if the effort comes from the same place in which the problem originated, then genuine participation cannot be achieved. Framed empowerment leads to the illusion of free will within (pre)set boundaries and thus, the first step to “genuine empowerment” needs to be that of acknowledging existing frames and attempting to act outside of them (see [chapter 7](#)).

5.5.8 Facilitation —

Contemporary research has focused its attention and advocated for facilitators as those who can take on a proactive, enabler and catalyst role to bridge this unbalanced role gap. The author points out, however, that currently, available research tends to be conflicting in terms of how this transition should happen, if at all. Moreover, further discordance can be found in terms of whether this being a role is the right move or not; thus, they signal the need for further research on facilitation, its role and the structures it falls into. This thesis aims at exploring that research gap, with a more concise focus on the use of terminology and its connotations; said focus attempts to create a wider understanding that certain uses of participatory terms, despite aiming at

bridging the role gap, actually widen it. Terms such as “enabler” to describe the facilitator, intends to show that people can voice their opinions; however, the term enabler also relates to notions of power, dominance and control. Someone who enables someone to do something can also take that agency away, can limit your participation, control your permission to undertake action. The objective of the thesis is not to provide a pessimistic view of design facilitation, but to acknowledge its political nature to a greater extent.

Hirscher looks at how relationship building could be beneficial to build trust and to move away from the hierarchical roles and to shift towards “diffuse design” (Manzini, 2005 as cited in Hirscher, 2020, p. 166) in which participants are also in charge of designing. Similarities can be found in Seravalli (2014), who argues for a non-elitist view on creativity, but rather as diffused potential (Meroni 2007 as cited in Seravalli, 2014) as seen in [section 5.3.9](#). An interesting take on facilitation is provided by Fuad-Luke (2009, as cited in Hirscher, 2020, p. 40) who sees facilitators as “design activists” that can take different roles such as authors, co-authors and who make things happen. In her dissertation, the author recognizes how research has influenced her methodology and urged her to rethink practice; in her experiments, she undertook the role of facilitator many times, providing support and advice when needed.

Through first-person engagement, Hirscher was able to analyze what she calls “the spectrum of use and design” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 106) in which she highlights different moments in the relationship between design, use and participation. The idea here was to show how to move from role-based production to genuine participation and to underline

how such shifts call for new facilitation models (see figure 14).

On one end of the spectrum design-before-use, which is what takes place in contemporary facilitation; things are designed with the user, seen as a designed group of people who participate in a carefully articulated process. On the opposite side, design-in-use, or design over time, which aims at dealing with participants instead of users, and to have a joint designing process, that extends in time and space, and which does not end once the facilitator leaves the project. In the middle, the gap; here, it seemed important to also add necessary elements to bridge the gap, such as loss of expert-dominance, power balance and higher political accountability (see figure 15). In bridging the gap, Hirscher urges for PD processes in which participants become skilled by having designers “encouraging them to develop and deploy their skills within and beyond the PD process” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 90). The choice of words is significant here, as there seems to be a deliberate use of non-dominant terminology by replacing “enabling/allowing” them with “encouraging” them.

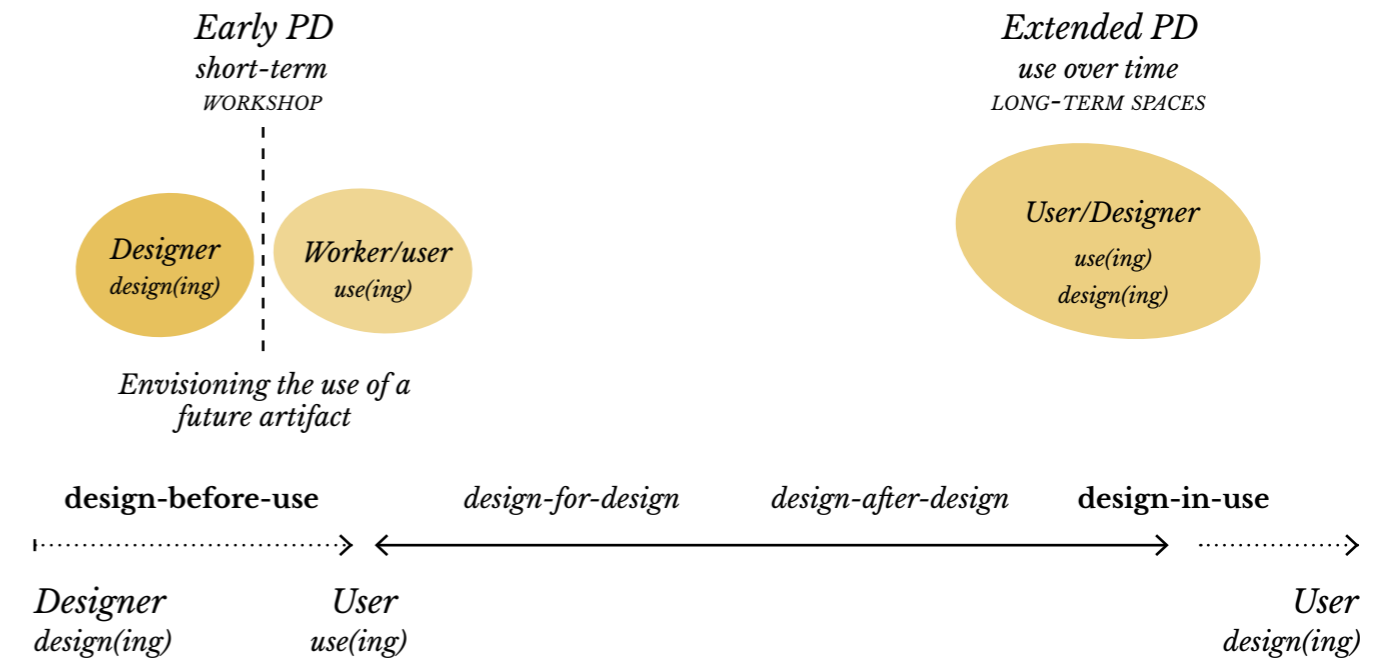


Figure 14. The Spectrum of Use and Design, adapted from Hirscher (2020, p. 84)

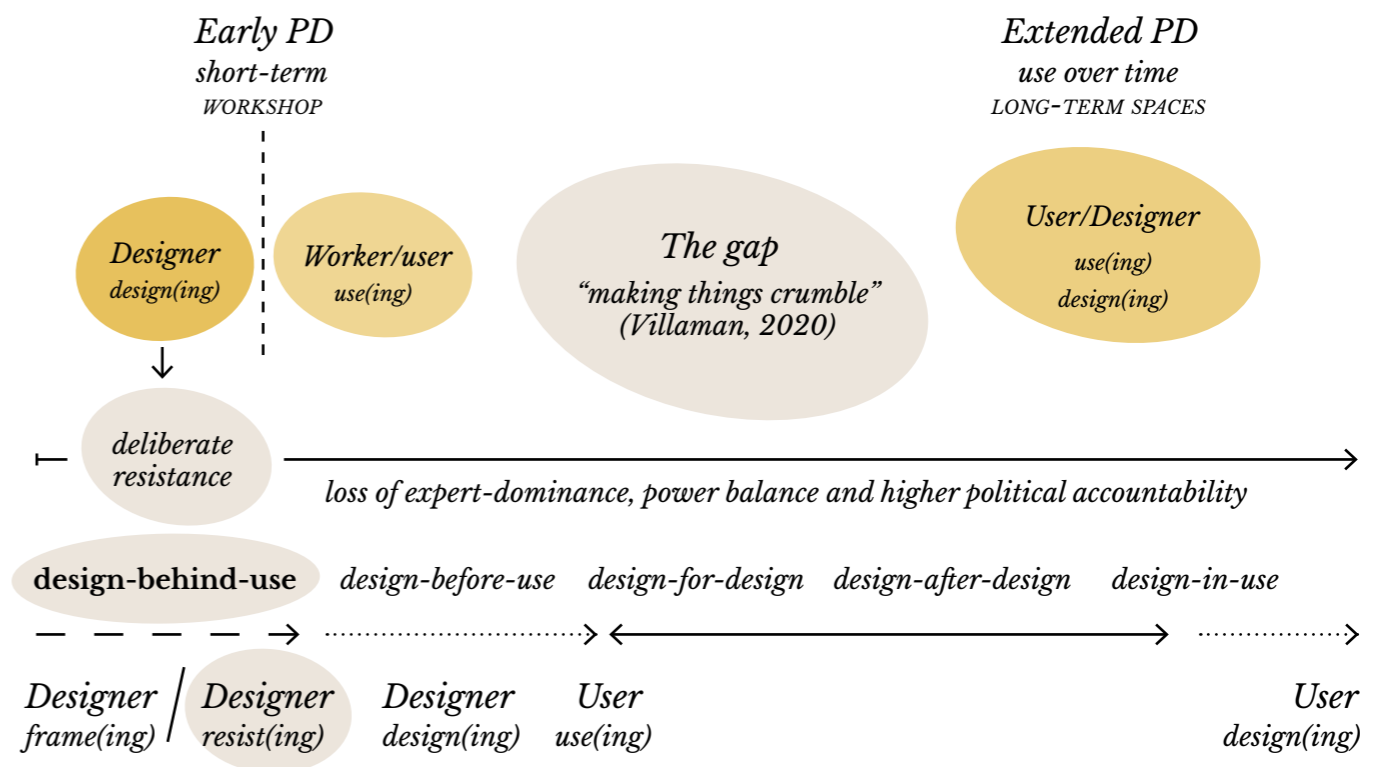


Figure 15. Revised Spectrum of Use and Design, adapted from Hirscher (2020, p. 84)

5.5.9 Framing, staging & orchestrating —

As mentioned before, the author aimed to explore the intersection between use, design and participation in different contexts and timeframes to find alternatives to an otherwise restricted practice in which pre-defined expectations are always present. In contemporary PD, agency is distributed by the designer, the facilitator, which deliberately enables or restricts freedom of action according to the needs of the bigger strategy. Hirscher has also highlighted the research gap in this regard, and the need for alternatives as “while much emphasis in PD has been on methods and process, there has also been interest in means for tailoring and reconfiguring systems in use” (Mazé, 2007 as cited in Hirscher, 2020, p. 83).

In her experiments, Hirscher also concentrated on the community aspect of PD. Drawing on authors such as Ehn and DiSalvo, she emphasizes the urge to create spaces in which the community can meet and jointly work towards tackling a common concern (Ehn, 2008; DiSalvo, 2009 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). Thus, she centres her research programme on extended PD, which allows her to embrace the unexpected, the uncertainty that can arise from extended contexts. This is a conscious effort to create new and flexible frames in which to foster genuine participation, as the programme and practice feed on each other, generating knowledge and refining action. Furthermore, her (re) definition of participation as “skillful acts of use” proposes an alternative framing in which the basis for participation is not orchestrated action, but the use of skills. In this way of seeing participation, she embeds values such as sustainability, diversity and common ownership through active negotiation with participants at all stages of the process.

5.5.10 Infrastructuring —

The author highly focuses on infrastructuring, as it was the lenses through which she developed participation over time (e.g through the 42 workshops conducted). By understanding it as the basis for creating and maintaining social, material and spatial participatory structures (Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013 as cited in Hirscher, 2020), I will highlight three main notions the author links infrastructuring to. First, negotiation: as mentioned all through this analysis, participation develops over time and therefore, this is a continuous process of negotiation of changes, values which require subsequent adjusting and re-design (Björgvinsson et al., 2010 as cited in Hirscher, 2020). Secondly, a key concept in infrastructuring is use. Here, it is understood as the ability to influence the infrastructure itself (Ehn, 2008 as cited in Hirscher, 2020), which then becomes dynamic, open and effectively blurs pre-existing categories. Finally, the third notion is time. As previously discussed, many benefits come with focusing on long-term participation; infrastructuring, in this regard, becomes a viable alternative for bridging the time limitation (see figure 14 in [section 5.5.8](#)) that prevents genuine participation to take place. Hirscher acknowledges a parallel to Seravalli (2014), who also highlights the importance of infrastructuring in long-term participatory engagements.

5.5.11 Alternatives —

In looking at the future, the author hints at different alternatives. Certain aspects of current practice need to change in order to open up new ways of facilitating and producing together; to blur the contemporary division of roles, the role of the designer needs to be rethought. Hirscher brings up the notion of designers as “hacktivists”, which is compared to a negotiator, orchestrator and facilitator

as opposed to a mere innovator. In this definition proposed by Von Busch, in which the designer is also referred to as an “agent of collaborative change” (Von Busch, 2008 as cited in Hirscher, 2020, p. 40), it is possible to see how difficult it is to deploy an effective use of terminology in PD, as it is interlaced with notions of control and power over. The contrast is evident as viewing the designer as a collaborative, activist agent for change suggests a horizontal organization while notions such as orchestrator and facilitator rather advocate for the mainstream hierarchical way of doing. This is to say that breaking existing frames is a difficult task, as there are many layers to pay attention to, such as language, to effectively transition to a more equal participatory practice. This latter claim resonates with what Hirscher draws attention to, the need for further discussion on the impact on power imbalances, situated knowledge and their relation to PD (Eriksen, Brandt, Mattelmäki & Vaajakallio, 2014 as cited in Hirscher, 2020), which is one of the aims of this thesis, to join such discussions.

A further way of tackling issues in PD such as expert dominance is by not designing to completion. The author deployed a strategic method, “half-way clothing” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 50), in which participants had to take the responsibility of finishing the product after having worked on it together for the first half. Here, the participants become designers and bring the process to completion. The frames in which participation is performed are therefore opened through the deliberate resignation of power by the designer, an aspect that will be elaborated further in chapter seven. Facilitators willingly give up on their role and they give the space needed for the process to continue. To conclude, and to further explain this notion, which Mazé refers

to as “an experiment in loss of control” (Mazé, 2007 as cited in Hirscher, 2020, p. 85), the author will be quoted in length:

“In their paper, Huybrechts, Hendriks, Yndigegn, and Malmborg (2018) discuss how to design for participation over time, with a design approach named ‘scripting’. They dedicate special attention to handing over the facilitator role to other actors to ensure continued participation in community-based projects (Huybrechts et al., 2018). The negotiations of these roles are thus to be enabled by the designer [...] The enabling of participants to become equal partners, eventually taking over the role of a facilitator, requires the design (i.e. makerspace) to be open and adaptable. However, the initiating designer also has to ‘step back’ and hand over their decision-making power to participants” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 85).

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

6.3 Learnings from the established lenses —100
 6.3.1 Critique —100
 6.3.2 Language use —101
 6.3.3 Unpacking —101

This chapter aims at initiating further discussion based on the reflections and findings from the previous chapters. First, I will revise key learnings from the analyses in chapter five; following that, I am going to expand on how, by bringing together knowledge from different key areas, and moving through thematic intersections, further insights can be provided regarding what is in the highlighted concatenation of gaps. Finally, a short-reflection will be made on assumptions, mindset change and self-reflection during this process.

6.1 From meta-narratives to intersections —

The first four chapters of the thesis focused on reviewing and elaborating on existing theory on design, facilitation, power and politics. This was conducted through a systematic literature review, complemented by a narrative synthesis approach. The latter enables to spark further reflection and discussion on summaries, analyses, insights, hypotheses

and findings in a narrative manner (see section 1.7.2), avoiding the risk to solely provide a descriptive report of existing opinions on the topic. Chapter five, on the other hand, has made use of the narrative approach to address the three doctoral dissertations, analyzing the authors' literature reviews, visions on practice and generating own insights that related to the focus of the thesis.

This and the following chapter will aim to bring together these two vast narratives into one meta-narrative that elucidates what is at the intersection between them (see figure 16). This is going to take place on two levels: looking back, and looking forward. Chapter six will focus on looking back at what has been touched upon so far, contemplating and reflecting on it through the lenses established in chapter two: critique, unpacking and language use (see sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6). Chapter seven, the conclusion, will reflect on alternatives in terms of general direction to take for facilitation as a field, as well as more practical ways of doing.

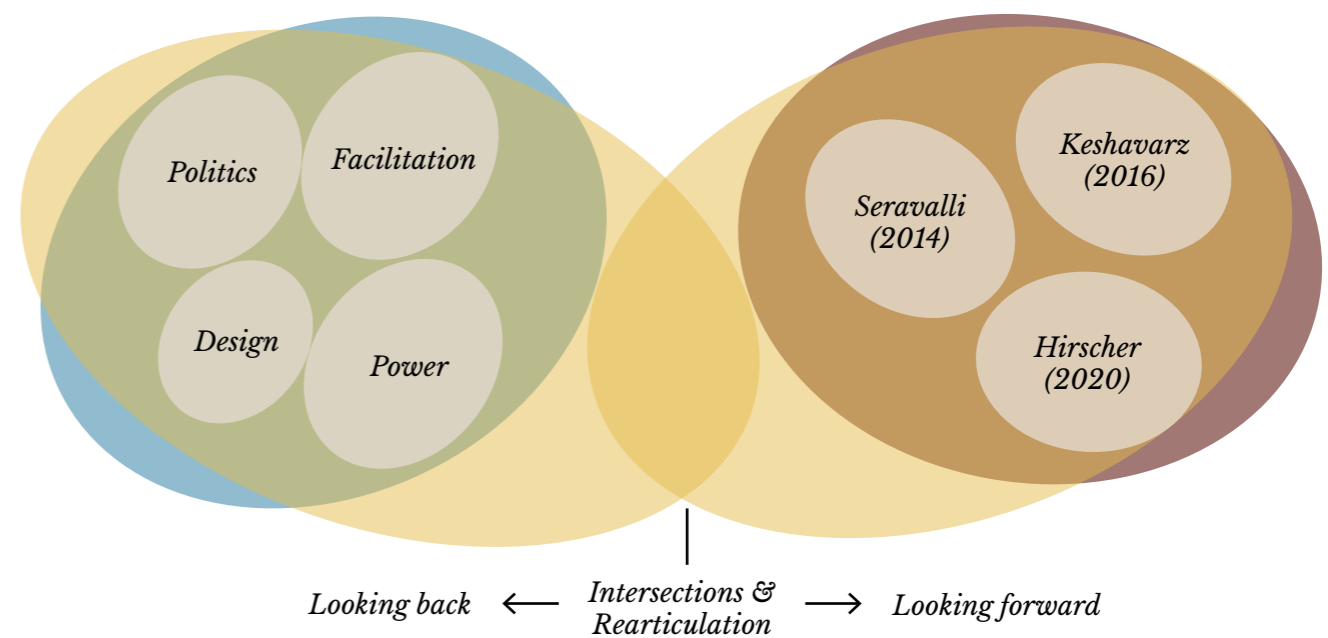


Figure 16. Meta-narratives and their Intersection

The meta-narrative proposed here can be understood to be the gap in what Rancière calls “the politics of the gap” and that, as elaborated in [section 5.4.4](#), is the space in which re-articulation and intervention become possible (Keshavarz, 2016).

6.2 Learnings from the analyses —

Going through the three doctoral dissertations analyzed above has resulted in a very fruitful exercise. Apart from learning in-depth on the specific topic discussed in each of them, the research conducted by the authors allowed for a broader understanding of several complementary areas such as design, politics, participatory practices, commons, migration, and so on. One of the main benefits of this exercise was being able to look at practice through a plurality of lenses, and not just a personal one. A key reason for wanting to do these analyses was the fact that, in reporting, reflecting and writing on said topics, the authors also had to make decisions related to terminological choices and phrasing. Creating a bigger picture, rich in diversity and composed of different layers of meaning allowed for a more critical inquiry into the world of PD and facilitation. It is important to remark that the conclusions drawn here come from a reflection against the relevant topics of this thesis, keeping in mind the main focus of the conducted research: unpacking, language use and critique. Further reflections could be made on commoning practices, mobility politics and spaces of peer production given their relevance, however, they will be left out purposefully as they go beyond the scope of this thesis.

Firstly, there is a notable need to carry out more research in the field of participation.

Current research within PD focuses on more narrow angles such as tool development for participation (Hyysalo & Hyysalo, 2018; Vines et al., 2013 as cited in Hirscher, 2020), which despite being useful for refining contemporary ways of doing, it is not enough. As participatory practices such as facilitation extend and expand to unknown territories, the need for newer and more refined research approaches becomes visible. Furthermore, as previously stated in this thesis, gaining a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms behind facilitation would greatly enable a more conscious revision of practice.

In other words, research ought to focus more on spotting and investigating the different intersections between areas such as PD, practice, research, facilitation, politics and power. Doing so becomes an exercise of deliberate unframing and unpacking of mainstream notions so far well-rooted in practice. Willing redirection of efforts towards uncovering unexplored areas, as well as further delving into existing underlying connections could potentially prevent developing “patching” ([see section 1.2](#)) and temporary insights to instead focus on a conscious, informed and long-term approach.

Secondly, an evident conclusion from the analyses is the malleability of participatory terminology. All through the three dissertations, it was possible to see how multiple, divergent and complementary claims can be made by adapting participatory terminology to fit certain discourses. As mentioned in [sections 2.6](#) and [2.6.1](#), higher attention needs to be drawn to the political implications of the volitional use of PD terminology to eschew accountability and to convey certain values that reflect the image of facilitation that better fits certain

agendas. Further research is needed on best practices in terms of communicating participation in a transparent way, and with enhanced ownership.

Thirdly, the focus shifts to design facilitation as an area of practice. Dealing with different topics among themselves, the dissertations made it possible to build a bigger picture of the authors’ visions on facilitation from their point of view, in relation to what they were looking into. Looking back and comparing their reflections, the authors view facilitation mostly as a position claim, rather than an area of design. In other words, the authors recognize the mainstream notion (as in the meaning of the term) of the design facilitator as an agent that enables interaction between different stakeholders, but in use, it is referred to as a power position claim. It is seen as creating a distance in roles, as imposing a hierarchical detachment between participants that mainly serves the purpose of legitimizing and normalizing the actions of the designer in PD contexts. In other occasions, facilitation is not seen as a physical role undertaken by a designer, but as a bigger, overarching act of power exertion ingrained within design as a discipline.

The last takeaway draws my attention back to the political nature of design.

Seravalli (2014), Keshavarz (2016) and Hirscher (2020) acknowledge and explore - to different extents - where design and politics meet. As mentioned in [section 5.4.3](#), there is nothing innovative in claiming that design is a political practice; design is and has always been, political. However, present-day external pressures (e.g climate change, global income inequality, biodiversity loss, social injustice, etc.) have led to a stronger clash between the forces who deem to consider design as apolitical and those who are opposed to such vision. Challenging the status quo, redefining values and undergoing a critical self-reflection is an arduous task, and inconvenient, in the case of a discipline that is well established as it is, nevertheless necessary. In tackling modern systemic issues, revising and rearticulating the processes and structures that have led to contemporary times becomes mandatory. As researchers and practitioners, acknowledging and exploring the political nature and potential of design is an inescapable step that ought to be made given the responsibility towards the socio-political, cultural, environmental and economic world we live in.

The figure below should be used as a reference for understanding and recapping the positioning of the authors of the dissertations and myself.

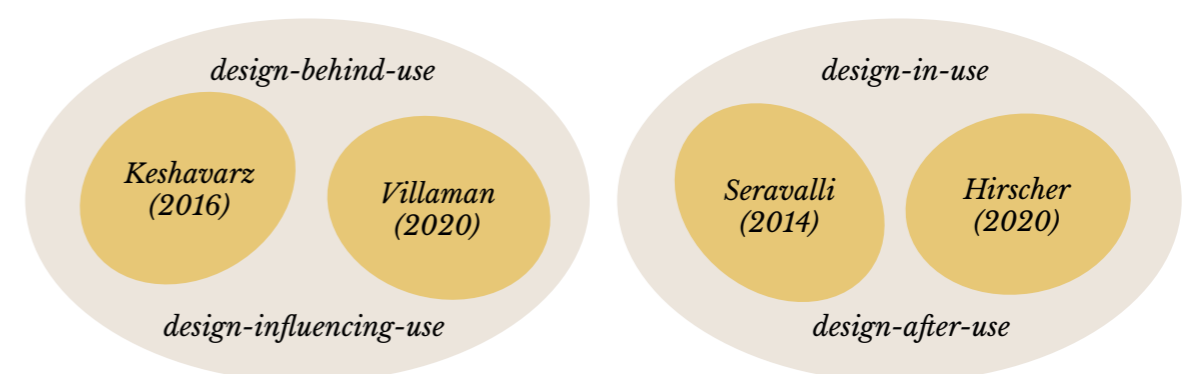


Figure 17. Comparison based on research focus

As visible in Hirscher (2020), her research touches upon and elaborates on different gaps present in Seravalli (2014). Both of their works are mainly concerned with present and practical applications of practice, their dynamics, the involvement of participants and the role of design in enabling and regulating spaces for interaction and creation. Their focus is mainly on design-in-use and design-after-use as they proactively experiment and engage in reshaping participatory practices. On the other hand, the focus in Keshavarz (2016) and this thesis is that of exploring the underpinning structures that uphold design regimes and current ways of doing things. With a strong focus on power and politics, these two pieces of research also look into how design influences interactions, and the implications of doing so.

6.3 Learnings from the established lenses —

In chapter two (see section 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6) different lenses have been established in order to analyze design facilitation in a more precise and evaluative manner. One of the main objectives for doing so was to foster a deeper and better understanding of the underlying factors, structures and relationships underpinning the field. The following sections will draw the attention back on these lenses to reflect on the lessons learned throughout the thesis. By doing so, it aims to spark further discussions and reflections, as well as addressing the research questions posed in section 1.4.1.

6.3.1 Critique —

The first lens through which I will comment on is critique. One of the main takeaways from this point of view is, as already briefly touched upon in

chapter four, the issue of consensus (see section 4.6). The existence of a culture of harmony has been individuated, and its consequential implication in practice, not leaving enough room for dissensus. Practices of framing, orchestrating and staging play a big role in determining how much room - if any - there is for dissenting with what is being proposed, the way in which it is presented or to question who is leading that, for example. Allowing dissensus in participatory practices does not mean setting projects up for failure, or chaos; what it actually means is fostering a space of critical discussion in which concerns, doubts and different opinions freely meet. A space that challenges pre-established frames.

Design research would greatly benefit from further research on how to transition to a practice that embraces dissensus and learns how to transform conflict and controversy into catalytic action. An interesting angle to this could be to find ways to ingrain dissensus into existing approaches. Hirscher (2020) already brings up this possibility by stating that infrastructuring strategies, for example, should pay attention to and “deliberately design indeterminacy and incompleteness into the infrastructure with unoccupied slots and space left free for unanticipated events and performances” (Hirscher, 2020, p. 88). Embracing dissensus also calls for a reconceptualization of the role of creativity, already pointed out in 4.2.1, when it comes to setting the stage for participation. In the thesis, reflections on how creative activities can also prevent dissensus by fostering behaviours considered admissible in such engagements have been made.

A systemic view on facilitation has thus been enabled here by adopting a critical stance, which has granted me with a better understanding of the foundational

aspects underpinning facilitation. I have come to consider consensus, for example, as one of the strongest ways to control power dynamics and therefore, requiring extensive future research.

6.3.2 Language use —

As stated in chapter two, critique is to be seen as the all-embracing lens through which to look into design facilitation. Deriving from it, the thesis establishes two additional lenses, the first one being language use. Recapitulating, I will highlight three aspects³⁰ when it comes to language use in PD and facilitation: connotations in terminology, accountability and transparency.

In participatory design, these aspects become visible when attempting to define what type of practice designers engage with. The unremitting extension of design to other spheres has led to rethinking the way things are done, from designing objects to designing action platforms (see section 1.1 on Manzini, 2011), from hierarchical design to diffuse design (see sections 5.3.9 and 5.5.8). There is a noticeable shift from designing-for-people, in which designers alone produce solutions and objects that will be imposed in our every day as consumers and users, to the alternative approach of designing-with-people. In the latter, collaboration and participation are highly sought for, as well as other representative values of PD and co-design (see sections 1.4 and 2.1). However, for the thesis, I would like to acknowledge two different levels to designing-with-people:

The first case is what could be considered to be still the mainstream choice and that I will refer to as “distant-participation”. Participatory spaces are created, yet still present a strong hierarchical influence that predisposes engagements to be

strictly framed, agency to be unevenly distributed and dissensus to be prevented. On the other hand, genuine participation (Hirscher, 2020) could be a pathway to proposing alternatives when it comes to designing-with-people. These different scenarios will be explored in-depth in chapter seven.

Regarding facilitation, I can conclude that the use of the term is context-sensitive and the purpose behind its deployment ought to be explicit. If intended as empowerment (see section 4.3), facilitation tends to eschew its political implications and come across as a benevolent area of practice. On the contrary, if understood as an enabling/disabling practice, further and deeper discussions can be started, such as in the thesis, where I reflected on role gaps, expert dominance, control and power relationships. Future research could focus on even attempting to find a more appropriate alternative term for this practice, or for the role the designer takes in participatory processes. This type of research entails an extensive understanding of the implications of language use and facilitation, and their interconnectedness.

6.3.3 Unpacking —

Finally, the last lens is unpacking. Further delving into other disciplines, such as philosophy, has enabled me to understand what underpins design facilitation and to learn what to pay attention to, what to highlight when it comes to writing about it. Power exertion has been extensively touched upon as one of the key components in participatory practices, learning that power imbalances are ubiquitous. Furthermore, power exertion is a two-way relationship, therefore being necessary to find the right balance to avoid irreversibility.

³⁰ This delineation has been made for the purpose of the thesis and should not be considered final as it is based on a specific analysis of relevant literature and discourses pertinent to this context.

Achieving more balanced ways of doing practice, however, requires genuine efforts to do so. [Section 4.3.2](#) on empowerment has shown that power imbalances can take the form of illusory-empowerment in which the hierarchical model is still very present while proclaiming active efforts in empowering participants. In other words, this becomes just a mere example of masked power over in the form of illusory power to. Chapter seven will touch on alternative power balances in facilitation.

Unpacking has also allowed me to develop a multilayered vision of design facilitation (see figure 18). Oftentimes, what is acknowledged in papers, discussed, and put into practice are the superficial aspects of facilitation: skills and methods. This is not to discredit the attention given to these two particular aspects of practice. On the contrary, it is

a way to highlight that underneath this superficial level, there is so much more. Developing skills and methods for design facilitation becomes possible due to the strengthening and mutual interaction between different factors such as values, accountability, ownership, causality, language, assumptions, underlying structures, and so on. These are all aspects that ought to be taken into consideration, that need further unpacking as to understand further implications on practice, to find other research approaches to them, and to rethink which are being given more importance over others. It is safe to say, however, that this is not a final list, but the result of the unpacking conducted during these six months of research. Further studies will provide a more extensive and perhaps a final list of aspects underpinning facilitation.

7.1 *Balancing power* —104

7.2 *Facilitation as a form of prefigurative politics* —107

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

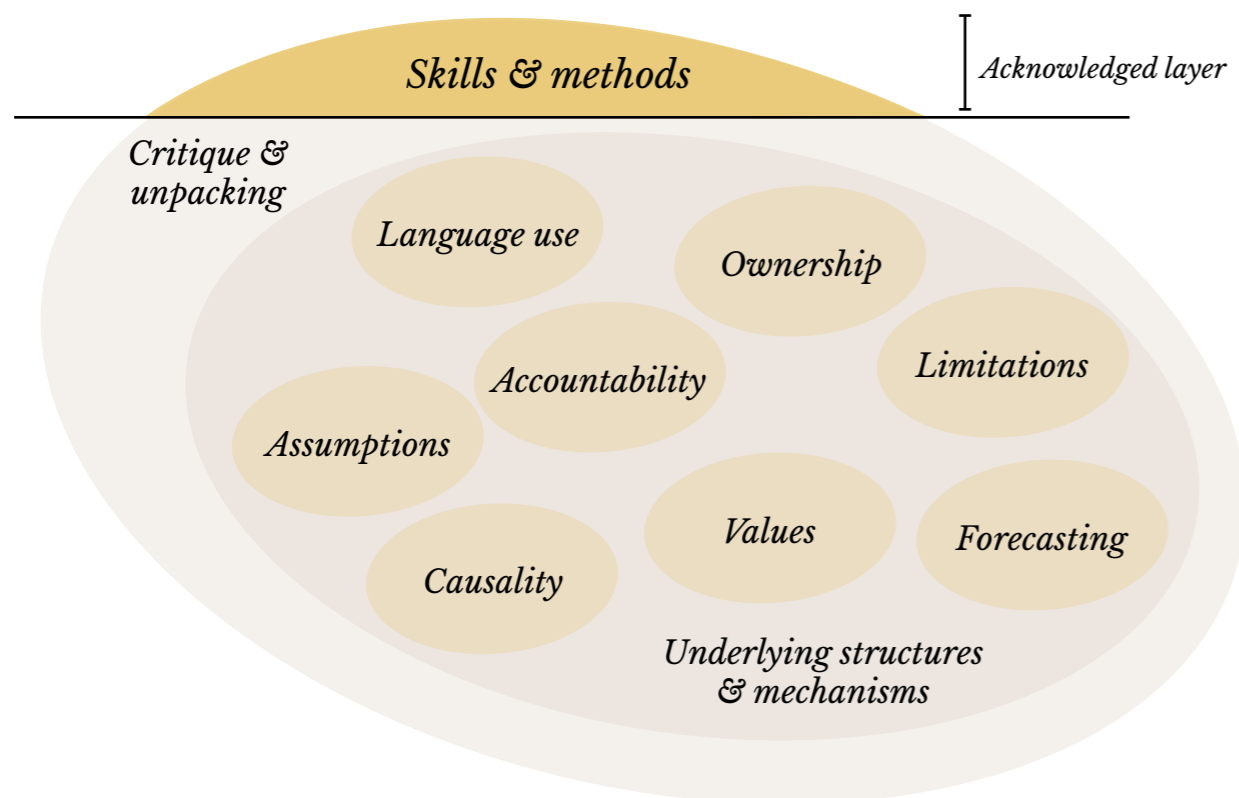


Figure 18. Unpacking facilitation

This final theoretical chapter intends to provide concluding remarks on the topics dealt with in the thesis. The sections will help paint a picture of what could be a possible approach to design facilitation, based on the claims made throughout the previous chapters. These are, of course, preliminary thoughts as they are based on the research I carried out during these allocated six months. I will not refer to the following claims as possible visions of the future as I am fully aware that these topics require a much longer examination in order to be able to craft possible and feasible visions of the future. Furthermore, the models proposed below are not meant to be an exercise of framing. On the contrary, this is meant to be an exploration of the implications that nurturing pluralities would have on design facilitation and PD (see section 4.6).

7.1 Balancing power —

A recurring claim that appeared in the reviewed literature, in the dissertations and the elaborated theory, is the need for rethinking ways to tackle power imbalances in participatory practices such as facilitation. This is a field that requires skills and practice (Unger, Willis & Nunally, 2013), and so do its unpacking and reconceptualization. However, understanding that systemic changes in the socio-political dimension of design are a long-term endeavour (Akama & Light, 2018) is key. Engaging in this process would entail a lengthy effort, requiring extensive research and resources, iterative experimenting and inevitable failing, learning and adjusting until an adequate balance is achieved. Furthermore, designers ought to adjust to the ubiquitous presence of framing practices within PD, as “[t]here is no way around this nexus. Rather designers must enter into and understand some necessary

complicities and complexities” (Dovey, 1999, p. 208). In other words, what Dovey attempts to say here is that we must come to an understanding that frames are an immovable and certain aspect of design. However, their (omni)presence can be used as a launchpad to ideating out-of-the-frame alternatives that aim to balance disequilibria.

In section 6.3.2, it was pointed out that in seeking to balance power within PD and design facilitation, designing-with-people seems to be the better alternative, as opposed to designing-for-people (figure 19).

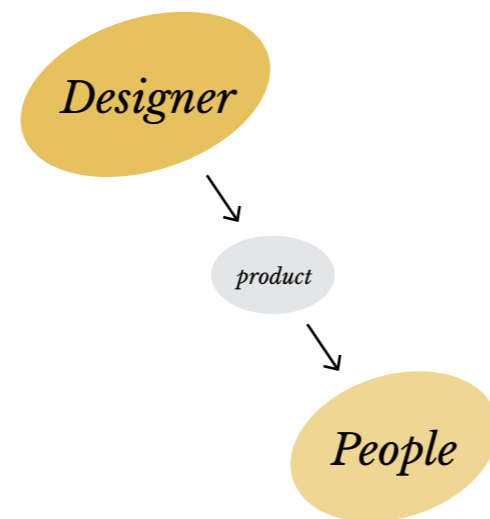


Figure 19. Designing-for-people

At the same time, the presence of two levels when it comes to designing-with-people has been pointed out, these being: distant-participation and genuine participation (Hirscher, 2020). Distant-participation refers to the mainstream way of doing facilitation. In this scenario, as visible in figure 20, participation is prompted within a

prefigured - framed - environment; at the same time, the relationship between the facilitator and participants is hierarchical, therefore distant, aspect that widens the role gap. Power dynamics are therefore imbalanced, leaving little to no room for dissensus and resistance from the subordinate group, the participants, as their agency is partially withheld. Distant-participation is the type of practice which has been the main focus of the thesis, and on which chapters two and four have mainly focused on. Further details and discussions about its characteristics and implications can be found in the corresponding sections.

The issues of uneven distribution of agency and power in distant-participation, despite not being fully acknowledged yet, have been explored by a still selected group of researchers and practitioners, which prompted discussions around alternative ways of enabling a more effective facilitation³¹. A mode of participation which is increasingly being

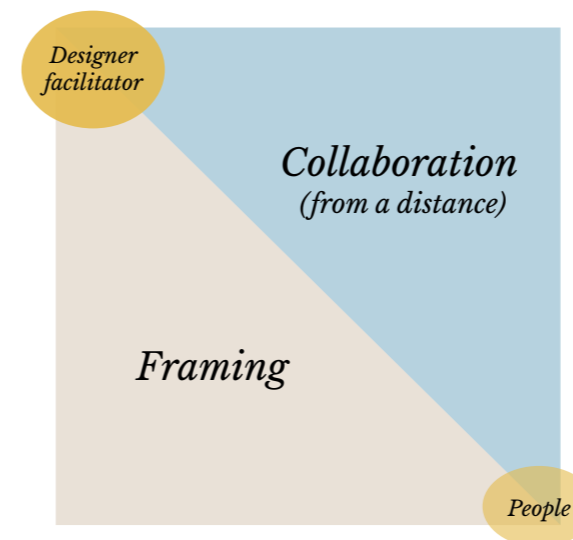


Figure 20. Distant-participation

deployed to counter distant-participation is persuasive “empowered” participation (figure 21). The goal in this setting is to “empower”³² participants by raising them to the same level of power as the designer. In other words, this alternative seeks to balance power dynamics by providing the same amount of power to both parties. This way, participants are empowered to be facilitators and to make use of their skills, for example. However, the reason why this type of facilitation here is referred to as persuasive is that it takes place within the designed prefigured frames set by the facilitator, and within which the issue of distant-participation was originated in the first place. Therefore, as mentioned in chapter four: “If intended as an act of giving someone the freedom to do something, empowerment becomes a top-down act. [...] Said empowerment can be a partial one, in which granted freedom is limited, or it is conceded as long as it responds to a bigger scheme” (see section 4.3.2).

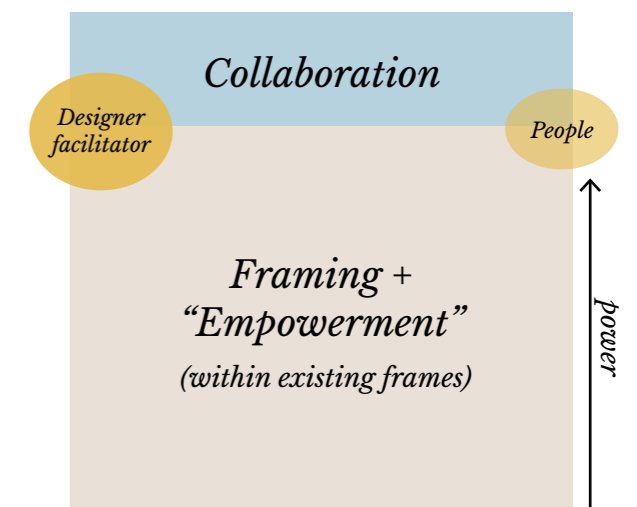


Figure 21. Persuasive “empowered” participation

³¹ Deliberate use of an “economic” language of “more” (see section 2.6.2) to strengthen the discourse underpinning the sought alternatives.
³² Refer to section 4.3.2 to understand the use of empowerment between quotation marks in this scenario.

Persuasive empowered participation, then, reduces the chances of achieving genuine collaboration. An alternative scenario derived from the insights acquired and reflections made throughout the thesis is what I will coin as “deliberate resistance”. During the six months allocated for this research, extensive thought has been put into understanding the relation and intersection between power, the political nature of design and facilitation. Literature belonging to the field of philosophy has greatly helped to build a more critical point of view and to get rid of assumptions present in the field of design that might become hard to expose as sometimes authors build on each other’s claims. Pondering about the very nature of power relations and exertion, and juxtaposing those reflections to design facilitation, it seems coherent to claim that in order to shift towards genuine participation, the attention should be past these frames. The first step towards this objective is to acknowledge the structures on which these frames have been built on. As mentioned in [sections 2.6.2](#) and [4.6](#), a culture of “more” and of harmony tend to prevail in design, which leads to alternatives to be sought for within these trains of thought. Despite the good intentions behind wanting to empower participants, that is just a partial view of the whole issue. In that scenario, what is not being taken into consideration is the fact that the agency of the designer remains, to some extent, untouched. In contemplating the situation from a systemic point of view, power dynamics can be balanced through a deliberate resignation of power from the designers. Despite how threatening this might sound, there is a reasoning to it.

As visible in figure 22, meeting in the middle becomes a two-way commitment. On one side, the agency

of participants is increased not through “empowerment”, but through a process of skill enhancement. On the other hand, designers willingly decrease their agency - whether suddenly or gradually - in order to enable genuine participation and design-in-use (Hirscher, 2020). Deliberate resistance, then, refers to the voluntary engagement in an exercise of “power to” (empowerment) through a deliberate resignation of it, despite possessing the agency to do so. The aforementioned scenario could potentially open up ways to collaborate less dominantly, as well as leaving room for uncertainty and its components such as contemplating non-linearity, dissensus, imperceptible factors and changing states ([see section 2.4](#)). Finally, as elaborated in [section 3.2.2](#), deliberate resistance would aim at limiting the “effects of power and in doing so materially influenc[ing] the conditions of reproduction of those social systems in which those resisting power have subordinate positions” (Barbalet, 1985, p. 542).

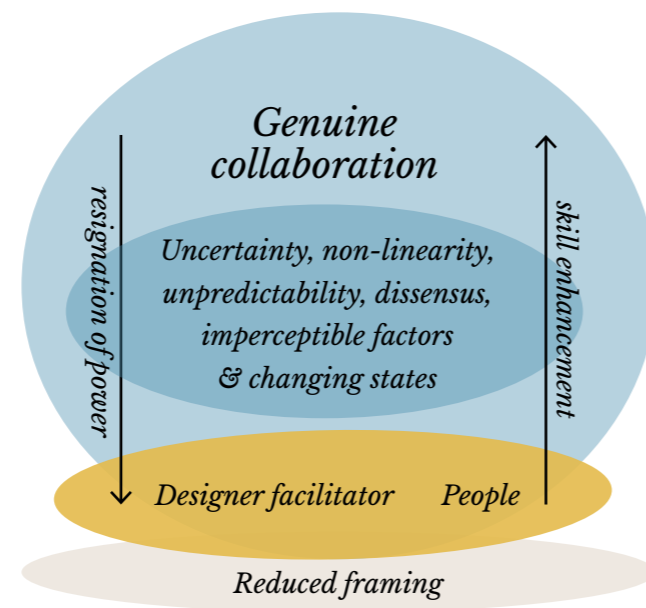


Figure 22. Deliberate resistance

7.2 Facilitation as a form of prefigurative politics —

A final reflection takes the form of a slightly more ideologically-grounded vision for the future. Throughout the thesis, it has been possible to denote different and highly political aspects of design facilitation that are oftentimes avoided as a taboo (Kirk & Broussine, 2000) due to their threatening nature to the status quo. In *The Politics of Facilitation* (2000), Phil Kirk and Mike Broussine claim that such approach can be either dangerous or naive, predisposing facilitation to “become part of a system of oppression and perpetuation of dependent relations, with facilitators becoming the unwitting agents of manipulation and managerialism” (Kirk & Broussine, 2000, p. 14).

In agreement with the latter claims of the authors, the research carried out in my thesis has focused, on the contrary, to make visible those often unaddressed dangerous and naive aspects of practice that are deemed to be apolitical. As an alternative, design facilitation could benefit from adopting a more explicit approach when it comes to embracing its belonging within socio-political systems and rethinking its role within them. Thus, it is proposed that further research and practice actively explore the intersection between prefigurative politics and facilitation in order to inquire into alternative ways to bring about socio-political aware participation.

The term prefigurative politics was originally coined by political scientist Carl Boggs in 1977 to define a movement, or mode of practice that would embody “those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are [its] ultimate goal” (Boggs, 1977, as cited in Raekstad, 2017, p. 362). Subsequently, the term has been studied

and redefined by different authors from different lenses. Paul Raekstad proposes different theorizations grounded in religious, strategic and social ideas. Looking at his analysis through the lenses of the thesis, the focus is placed on his definitions of prefigurative politics as the ways of doing which aspire to set in motion practices derived from an ideal vision of the future. In this description, Raekstad clarifies the importance of understanding that such a vision of the future has to be intended as a goal that will be used as a reference to structure contemporary ways of organizing (Raekstad, 2017). Simultaneously, in an alternative - yet complementary vision in the case of facilitation - definition of prefigurative politics, the author underlines its intrinsic “hypothetical formulation of alternatives and their continuous reformulation through trial and error”, making these practices “inherently experimental and experiential” (Sande, 2015 as cited in Raekstad, 2017, p. 362; Yates, 2015).

Therefore, a socio-politically aware form of design facilitation becomes an excellent match with prefigurative politics as they would both ideally engage in a critique of the status quo through a proactive iterative experimentation of alternatives with the end goal of implementing balanced and democratic practices (Cornish, Haaken, Moskovitz & Jackson, 2016).

Designer and researcher Carl DiSalvo has looked at the topic to elucidate its potential when connected to the sphere of design. In *Design and Prefigurative Politics* (2016), the author refers to these tactics as a way to prove that alternatives are possible by enacting the conditions we wish for. Moreover, he contextualizes

prefigurative politics to often take place in situations where the existing conditions might suggest a lack of multiple options (DiSalvo, 2016).

Building on these claims, prefigurative politics could be understood to be a form of possible resistance within the sphere of design, and design facilitation, to be mainly “guided by the idea that radical social change requires creating and experimenting with the kinds of egalitarian practices, democratic spaces, and alternative modes of relating that anticipate a future society that cannot yet be fully realized” (Breines et al., 1980;1982, as cited in Cornish et al., 2016, p. 115).

Prefigurative politics could become a means to react to existing situations while envisioning desirable futures in participatory practices, aspects that can be addressed both through research and practice, each with their specific roles. Firstly, design research plays an important part in discovering what are the desirable prefigurative politics that ought to be aimed for (DiSalvo, 2016). In this regard, I would like to highlight the importance of transdisciplinarity to foster a plurality of visions, to challenge assumptions within design and to further unpack when necessary. Moreover, both research and practice can engage in making visible the inescapable nature of frames ([see section 7.1](#)) by acknowledging what are the current structures and actions that influence our visions of the future and the processes that could be set in motion having those visions as a reference.

In conclusion, design facilitation is inherently political and considering this a fact and not an opinion is a political act, too. If successful, the thesis showcased supportive arguments for this claim.

Finally, it strives for sparking further discussion around topics such as participatory design, power and politics, being fully aware that joining academic debates is a two-sided coin.

After all, “[t]here will always be tensions between those who wish to preserve the system and those who wish to change it” (Kirk & Broussine, 2000, p. 21-22).

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