

EDITORIAL

MOVEMENTS IN HUMAN-CENTREDNESS

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A year ago in June 2014 the first joint summer school of the doctoral schools of the Estonian Academy of Arts (EAA) and Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture was held in Esna, Estonia. The focus of the discussions and presentations was on the issue of human-centredness within art, design and architecture, which has been an increasingly important topic in all these disciplines. On the one hand, this has meant a notable change in the field of design, where the development process has moved from the production-centred to the human-centred approach. On the other hand, it is connected with wider philosophical processes in several disciplines, including hermeneutics, phenomenology and social constructionism, moving from objective descriptions of the world towards the concept of the active experiencing subject instead of the passive object. Legitimising the uniqueness and singularity of the human experience has also validated the author's unique viewpoint in research.

The shift to human-centredness has initiated significant processes that affect the way we think about design, art and architecture, and their role in shaping the human experience. In the context of practice-based research, it is especially important to ask what kind of changes are happening within the already established human-centred paradigm and how these changes are applied in art, design and architecture.

The participants from both Aalto and EAA, as well as from Australia and the UK, approached the topic in their presentations from several different angles and the following discussions raised a variety of questions. The rich and pluralistic discussion on site and afterwards showed the topicality of and wide interest in these issues and that's why we are now sharing some of this with the wider public by publishing five papers written on the topic from the artistic and design research viewpoints.

It is interesting to observe the differences and similarities between the definitions of human-centredness in design and art. In art, researchers take their own bodies and experiences as the focus of their artistic practices and researches. Contemporary design research looks within the human-centred methodology at other people, trying to understand the behaviours and experiences of users and customers and, through that process, find insights for the design process. There are some similarities, as one of the

keynote lecturers at the summer school, Prof. Stuart MacDonald, pointed out in his conclusions, for example the subjectivity of the artist's research approach through his/her own practice has an echo in the single-minded focus of human-centred design.

The two disciplines have researched these issues separately, and therefore there are not only the differences in methods, but contradictory results. For example Nevanperä claims that experience can be met only by the person herself and there is no access to another person's experience. The acceptance the singularity of one's subjective experience is one of the potential explanations for why artistic researchers start their research from themselves. In design, both MacDonald and Melioranski see co-creation and co-design as the cornerstones for improving human-centred design (HCD) methodologies. In the collaborative design process, design practitioners should be open to others' experiences and in this way the needs of others can be understood by all participants and by wider communities.

Design research is concerned with overall societal well-being and questions the existing HCD methods, which are still, to a great extent, targeted at the ego-centricity of the user. But the rise of wicked problems and unpredictable challenges, in parallel with a growing demand to improve public services, especially in a time of economic and ecological constraint, has thrown HCD's limits into sharp focus in MacDonald's article. Melioranski stresses the need to make the individual less central in contemporary social design and to focus on the needs of communities and those of the whole society instead.

In artistic research, the articles explore the connection between subjective experience and the outer world, the environment and society. Nevanperä defines experience as "*a layout of differences and possibilities oriented by the sensibility of an animated human body in relation to its environment*" and suggests that, in the making of art, the irreconcilability of the experiences of oneself and the work, both as subject and object, articulate a difference that can be overcome with creativity. This, in turn, places prime importance on the use of practice-based research in studying experience. Orenius looks at the processual nature of experience, more precisely in making and responding to art, and argues that the moment of sensing creates a gap in the process. The gap can be understood as a state of possibility, but in terms of artistic practice also as an in-between space of contemplation or destruction. Brandenburg's article explores the limits of artistic research in studying the validity of unique subjective experiences as real or unreal.

In compiling this special journal edition, we should also ask what is interesting for designers in artistic research and what is interesting for artists-researchers in design research. Could the richness and depth of the introspections and retrospections of artistic researchers provide some fresh methods for designers for their research on wider user groups or understanding stakeholders? Should art researchers start questioning the appropriateness of human-centredness as design researchers do?

Hopefully the following articles will provide some new perspectives and material for future discussions.

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