Section 4.c
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Introduction: At the Intersection Social Innovation and Philosophy

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Increasingly, designers are asked to play a role in innovation processes taking place in society, either by initiating new approaches to weave social tissue, by amplifying or scaling up existing initiatives or by creating the preconditions for these initiatives to prosper (Manzini 2014). In doing so, they touch upon new meanings and values that are about to emerge in society, often increasing their visibility and moving them towards the centre of our everyday lives. For instance, a new sense of community and citizenship emerges where designers attempt to increase citizen participation in co-designing new services for their cities. As time progresses, the meaning of notions such as politics, aesthetics and citizenship shift and designers need to adapt to these changes and help to initiate or steer the adaptation process. Thus, they no longer just work to create new services: they are engaging in a cultural operation (Margolin and Margolin’s 2002 and Manzini 2016). This raises important questions such as: Are we designers always aware of the cultural implications of our work? How to take these implications into account? Are we always aware of the shift of meanings and values to which we contribute when working on social innovation? Do we deal with it critically?

Philosophy has traditionally dealt with the interpretation of meanings and values produced throughout history. As a discipline, it can help us to better frame the new meanings and values that we designers are uncovering, (re)shaping or amplifying in society. Which meanings and values are we talking about? Can philosophy help us to critically assess these new meanings and values, framing them culturally and increase our awareness of their implications on our culture? Can philosophy help to bring more critical awareness and continuous reflection in processes of social innovation? Which philosophical traditions are better suited to look into in this sense? How can these reflections help us in our design practice aimed at social innovation? This track puts into dialogue meanings and values emerging from practices of social innovation with diverse philosophical traditions.
All the contributions presented in this track register a shared need to further develop a critical reflection on design for social innovation, and to an integrative approach, involving other disciplines. They touch upon a variety of philosophical perspectives and approaches in order to contribute to the growth of a kind of design wisdom, e.g. activity theory, constructivism, pragmatic aesthetics, science and technology studies. In this context, this session tries to create a dialogue between different attempts to research the potential role of a philosophical reflection for design research, in which design philosophy becomes a real “philosophy-in-action”.

There are many red threads connecting the papers to be presented in this track. For instance, there is a shared attention towards the political implications of design experimentations in social innovation (Koskinen 2016 and Tonkinwise 2016) and an acknowledgment of the need for further reflection on this issue in design research (Keshavarz & Maze, 2013 and Dilnot, C. 2005), particularly when it comes to the topic of power relationships between the different actors involved (Keshavarz 2015 and Sangiorgi 2011). Besides the need to better address political issues, there is also a shared attention towards the aesthetic dimension of such projects, particularly in relation to their political dimension. We need to create arenas for discussions where different issues arising from the phenomenological observations of cases of design for social innovation are put into dialogue with different philosophical traditions, and to explore new ways for having these disciplines interact more with one another. In this section, particularly, there is a focus on the issues of aesthetics and politics raised by these practices. What also equally emerges from these papers, is the need to look at experimentation in marginalised communities while avoiding the risk of a stereotyped western-centric perspective fuelled by the dominance of European examples in literature.

The first paper (Social Design for Services Framework: Capturing Service Design for Development Framework), draws on eight doctoral theses produced by the World Design research group, to present a framework for social and service design in marginalised communities, applying constructive design research (Koskinen et. al., 2011) and thereby focussing on the development of design solutions through iterative processes and reflective design. Drawing on case studies in Namibia and South Africa entitled ‘My Dream World’, which took place between 2013 and 2015, this paper stresses the importance of storytelling in social design. It describes in concrete terms how storytelling proved to be a structural element underpinning and supporting the functioning of the other elements of the framework for this project (NEPIDE: Social Design for Services Framework) i.e. ethnography, participation, identities, development and economic opportunity. It is asserted, that the latter elements of the framework can eventually serve scalability in developmental contexts.

The second paper presented (Objects of Design: Activity Theory as an analytical framework for Design and Social Innovation), discusses how within an ongoing project in Bangkok Activity Theory proved helpful in order to take multiple perspectives into account within the design process, taking the local and cultural context into consideration, while focussing on the stakeholders motivations and their own power relationships.
The third paper of this session (Thoughts and reflections on design wisdom: a cross-disciplinary path towards social innovation) addresses the importance of aesthetics when it comes to tackling societal challenges, reducing inequality and inequity, promoting inclusive growth, particularly referring to the idea of pragmatic aesthetics in the philosophy of Shusterman (Shusterman, 2000).

Finally, the last paper of this session (Designing Good(s)? Exploring the Politics of Social Design Processes) addresses the need to be more critical towards the “good” that social design projects aim to achieve, questioning the idea of “good” as such. Moreover, it addresses the need to be more critical towards the instruments used to achieve this “good” - for instance design methods. It questions the latter’s nature of being a construction of reality while being a representation of reality, and thus being a tool for power. Drawing on Science and Technology Studies - particularly Haraway (1988), Mol (2002), and Law (2004) - the authors underpin the multiplicity and complexity of reality that design for social innovation needs to deal with, and point to the need for a more critical reflection on the political implications of such experimentations.

All works presented in this session share the need for further experimentation - showing not only the achievements but also the limits of ongoing experimentations - where also a deeper understanding of how the reflections on issues such as aesthetics and politics addressed from a philosophical perspective can empower new approaches to design experimentations in societal contexts. Far from willing to conclude the discussion, this session raises a wide range of new questions - particularly concerning political issues emerging from practices of design for social innovation - thereby opening up new or at least enlarging existing areas of discussion around topics which merit further study.

With similar research interests, Satu Miettinen and Melanie Sarantou, in their article Social Design for Services Framework: Capturing Service Design for Development Framework, examine a service design project carried out in Namibia and South Africa. The main intention of the article is to propose a social design for services framework that can be applied in development contexts, and illustrate and discuss this framework through the description of the project.

In Together We do not Forget: Co-designing with People Living with Dementia towards a Design for Social Inclusion, Marjolein Wintermans, Rens Brankaert and Yuan Lu present a design process in which cognitively impaired participants are involved in the design of products and services for themselves. Demonstrating each phase of the co-design process in detail along with their personal reflections, the authors share their observations regarding the role of designer in co-design activities as well as the methods and tools used within the process.

Another article that is empirically based on a collaborative activity is Using Collaborative Reflection in Service Design Research. In this article Merlijn Kouprie and Soumava Mandal aim to show how applying a methodology based on collaborative reflection in the research phase of a service design project enables employees of an organisation to reflect together and build a common understanding. In a similar way to the previous article, the
authors discuss and evaluate the research tools they have designed for the workshop, and place much emphasis on their observations as design researchers.

In *The Role of Inner Values to Teamwork during Design for Social Innovation*, Pratik Vyas and Robert Young's goal is to identify and verify the inner values that are considered to play an important role in teamwork during design for social innovation. The paper draws on a survey (that generates both qualitative and quantitative) with design professionals. In the conclusions the authors highlight the context-dependency of inner values, arguing that the trade-off between inner values is essential, yet requires wisdom and balance by the designer.

Locating itself at the intersection of the fields of aesthetic experience, design management and social innovation, the article titled *Thoughts and Reflections on Design Wisdom: A Cross-Disciplinary Path towards Social Innovation* by Eduardo Tapia Olmos argues how these fields construct themselves with emergent paradoxes from drifting points, and how such paradoxes and the insights driven from them constitute a directional bridge for a philosophy-in-action.

*Objects of Design: Activity Theory as an Analytical Framework for Design and Social Innovation* by Cyril Tjahja is an article that addresses the lack of the critical analysis of the initiatives within the area of design and social innovation. The author examines three social initiatives in Bangkok utilising activity theory as an analytical framework in order to understand he motivations as well as the limitations of the stakeholders, and the impact of the local social and cultural context on the role of design in the social innovation practices.

Another article that adopts a critical stance towards social design processes is *Designing Good(s)? Exploring the Politics of Social Design Processes* by Josina Vink, Katarina Wetter-Edana and Vanessa Rodrigues. Inspired from the field of STS, the authors investigate two co-design projects considering three issues: the recognition of situated knowledge, the multiplicity of reality, and the performative nature of methods. They conclude by underlining the significance of self-reflection in social design processes and acknowledging the politics of design embedded within these processes.

**References**


**About the Track Facilitator**

**Virginia Tassinari** is researcher & educator in design and philosophy at LUCA School of Arts (Belgium), where she also founded the DESIS Lab. She is a member of the International Coordination Committee of DESIS Network and co-initiator of the DESIS Philosophy Talks, a series of discussions in which design for social innovation and philosophy are brought into dialogue.
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