

DESIGNING FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

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Background

This dissertation presents the investigations I have made in the last three years on how to design for social interaction in interactive environments. This research has been conducted within the Center for Interactive Spaces, ISIS Katrinebjerg and practical research projects have been engaged in collaboration with colleagues from the different disciplines working in the center, with external partners from industry and a range of users.

The starting point for this investigation has been a conviction that too much technology is designed for single users, since that is how we designers too of ten think of the world of use and applicability - technology as empowerment of the single person. This conviction extends to a hypothesis of humans not only being single individual users, standing alone, confronted with context. Humans also exists as parts of larger entities in collectives and social gatherings, who's interaction bears as much meaning and importance as individual interaction with digital technologies. This opens for the possibility that the most interesting point of reference for design in some cases might be this social entity rather than the individual. Design basically deals with creating meaningful artifacts and "meaning arises out of, or is derived from, social interaction with ones fellows" as Hallnas and Redstrom (2006) write.

Purpose

Designing for social interaction is a relevant issue to address from an interaction design research standpoint as computational technologies

permeate increasing aspects of our everyday lives, and as such are part of creating the social spaces within which we live. As designers are confronted by the challenge of designing and facilitating relevant forms of social interaction, the complexity of this design space can be overwhelming. The reflections and experiments presented in the dissertation are aimed at exploring this design space and build a conceptual understanding for future reference. The social design space has been approached from a range of angles through mainly three different projects; the *iHome* project, the *Future Hybrid Library* project and the *Nomadic Play* project. This has led to the three perspectives that the main contributions are developed within; how do we describe this design space and what we want to design? Who are we designing the social space for? What and how are we able to affect through design?

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The goal of this dissertation is to increase awareness about the potential we have as designers for creating social spaces with and around these technologies. This awareness is established by developing and relating words in conceptual frameworks, aimed at enabling the designer with ways to describe and conceptualize future design proposals. I seek to achieve scientific validity of my work by expanding "the repertoire of possible action" (Latour 2004) for designers through introducing these words into the design community, both in relation to practice and research.

Results

This challenge is addressed by summarizing and presenting the central publications I have been part of publishing during the project. These are submitted as Part IV of the dissertation, and, all but one, these are written in collaboration with colleagues from the projects.

Before this the first part of this dissertation is introducing the research context, describing the applied research methods and presenting the experimental design cases. In Part II the design experiments and the experiences from these are reflected upon and summarized in order to present the experiences at the edge of what I know now about designing for social interaction, in the form of unfolded concepts and *design sensibilities*. The concepts presented are concerned with:

- Developing a framework for addressing the *level of social interaction* designed for.
- Refocus design attention from the individual users to the gathering at large - *the collective user*

- Discussing *facilitation as a designer's stance* when confronted with designing for social interaction and developing innovative platforms for collective action

Part III concludes on the presented reflections and discusses the methods applied in this research project. This means that the PhD project presents at least three types of contribution: Firstly, the projects and prototypes developed, demonstrated and presented both in their relevant use-contexts and at research conferences and seminars; secondly, the peer-reviewed papers that have been accepted and presented to conferences around the world describing the projects and reflecting on the designs; and finally the extended and collecting reflections presented in this dissertation tying the project work together around the subject of *designing for social interaction*.

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Method

The fourth possible contribution that has developed in the course of writing the dissertation itself is the discussion on the nature and idea of design research -based on experiences from this project and the applied research approach; research-through-design. This discussion links design research to a wider philosophy of science, discussing the impenetrables behind conducting research from an experimental design research perspective.

Research-through-design means to investigate a subject by applying creative design methodology and experimentation to the context and subject matter of study in order to gain knowledge - and, as importantly, to investigate possible futures and potentials of this subject. Design research in this form does not only report on how the world is or have been, but inquires into how the world can become.