Decolonising Participatory Design Practices: Towards Participations Otherwise

Rachel Charlotte Smith
Department of Digital Design and
Information Studies, Aarhus
University, Aarhus, Denmark
rsmith@cc.au.dk

Heike Winschiers-Theophilus
Department of Computer Science,
Namibia University of Science and
Technology, Windhoek, Namibia
hwinschiers@nust.na

Daria Loi
Experiences and Design, Emerging
Technologies, Mozilla Corp. Portland,
US
dloi@mozilla.com

Asnath Paula Kambunga
Department of Digital Design and
Information Studies, Aarhus
University, Aarhus, Denmark
akambunga@cc.au.dk

Marly Muudeni Samuel
ICT Innovation Hub, Namibia
University of Science and Technology,
Windhoek, Namibia
marly18samuel@gmail.com

Rogerio de Paula
IBM Brazil, São Paulo, Brazil
ropaula@br.ibm.com

ABSTRACT

Participatory Design (PD) approaches are particularly well-suited to contribute to contemporary debates of decolonisation in design due to PD's long-standing political traditions and values of democracy and empowerment. Decolonising discourses teach us that we need to move away from the universalising 'grand narratives' of knowledge production and focus on contextualising diverse and situated experiences, epistemologies and narratives. Yet, few contributions actively demonstrate what a shift to decolonising PD means in practice. This interactive workshop will invigorate the gap in PD debates of decolonisation by bringing together and demonstrating how participatory designers in diverse global contexts are working with and adapting modes, concepts, methodologies and sensibilities of PD into decolonising practices. These practices not only create new shifts and worldviews, but have potential for developing truly transcultural and transdisciplinary PD approaches

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → Interaction design; Human computer interaction (HCI).

KEYWORDS

Decolonisation, epistemology, Methodology, Transdisciplinary, Transcultural

1 INTRODUCTION

The workshop will engage participants in interactive activities with a focus to generate plural understandings and epistemological views through the use of PD methods. Further, it will create insights into the different ways choices are made based on diverse epistemologies, methodologies and continental demarcations. Grounded by the PDC 2020 theme of Participation(s) Otherwise, the workshop looks beyond traditional PD narratives towards adoptable PD approaches and methods within a transcultural and transdisciplinary mode. A central aim of the workshop is to gather a diversity of decolonising practices; methods, concepts and approaches applied in diverse contexts, that demonstrate research and knowledge practices for plural epistemologies, marginalised voices, situated socio-political and historical contexts, through participatory processes.

2 DECOLONISING PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

PD has a long history of addressing power relations and issues of democracy and empowerment with special attention to engaging local and marginalised groups, citizens and organisations in processes of mutual learning and bottom-up development [4]. Equally, the ongoing appropriation of PD outside of Scandinavia in particular to the global south, has focused on the inclusion and 'empowerment' of local communities and citizens, but also prompted critical concerns of the original Westernised model's applicability to the rest of the world [3, 22]. The cultural lenses chosen determine our approaches to participant engagement as well as the research outcomes. A postcolonial perspective points to the fact that design practices are far from universal, and are still based on Western epistemologies and applied in developing countries without much consideration of the local knowledge systems [5, 11, 12, 20]. Thus, one could argue that well intended PD practices intrinsically still promote neocolonial

design. Thus, the decolonising design discourse is of an ontological nature and requires a transdisciplinary and transcultural dialogue to radically transform design [12, 18].

Yet, there seem to be theoretical and methodological gaps in PD in relation to contemporary discourses of decolonising design [17, 18, 20]. Such gaps are visible also in practice in different domains, from the widespread generalisation of design methods and approaches, to non-profit organisations' commodification of aid in the underdeveloped world [11], and industry development and distribution of one-size-fits-all tech applications to the global market.

3 DECOLONISATION PRACTICES

The workshop examines how participatory designers are responding to the critical calls for humanistic, contextualised and dewesternising approaches to design and development across local and regional research contexts. Based on promising examples of decolonising directions on different continents, described in the following, we aim to create a basis for evolving decolonising PD practices connected to such domains as:

Transcultural technology design: Community engagement through a transcultural approach, looks beyond traditional individual cultures and focuses on transcultural technology design methods that adopt, support and continuously create new meanings from diverse settings. A transcultural approach focuses on being culturally aware when designing with culturally diverse communities and groups, embracing pluralistic social practices and increased awareness [23].

Localisation of knowledge: Through promotion of local conferences such as AfriCHI and other initiatives to support strong local research communities. ICT4D though engaged in local initiatives to support development is often still based on Western ideals and evaluation parameters of the developing world [10]. Incorporating local practices and values, such as the suggested afrocentric approach to HCI [21] promotes alternative knowledge creations.

Humanising emerging technology: An increasing number of debates around inherent biases in AI, cultural variations in the ethical debates of autonomous vehicles and social robots suggest the realisation for action [8, 13]. Like design, algorithms and intelligent systems are important sites of cultural transformation, and participatory designers and researchers are working against the colonial impulse in ubiquitous computing [9], to develop human, ethical and responsible approaches, principles and guidelines for decolonising emerging technologies in corporate contexts [2, 16, 17].

Participatory action research: Historical traditions such as participatory action research in Latin America echo strong decolonising practices that focus on the social realities, political struggles and empowerment of marginalised communities [6, 12, 14]. Where some contributions suggest the systematisation of experience to validate alternative southern epistemologies, Escobar argues for notions of 'pluriversal design' [11]; creating a world in which 'many worlds fit' and that allow the emergence of pluriversal ways of worldmaking. Notions of autonomous design are integral and should support the self-realisation of communities based on southern approaches [7].

Design anthropology futures: Contributions from design anthropology offer decolonising approaches to the situated ethics, values and politics of future making [15, 19, 22]. Researchers use anthropological approaches and cultural sensibilities to create 'correspondence' through a continued engagement and commitment to particular people and lifeworlds [15]. Through collaborative explorations of emergent cultural practices, possible futures are cocreated that are deeply aligned with local epistemologies. Such sensitivity relates also to Akama's [1] use of the Japanese concept of *Ma*, 'between-ness', to explore how designers can work through processes of becoming together.

The transdisciplinary and culturally situated approaches to knowledge production have potential for generating new understandings and practices in the decolonisation of PD. To identify and map possible decolonising practices in transcultural and transdisciplinary settings, four questions are addressed:

- What are state-of-the-art examples of decolonising practices and epistemologies in/for contemporary PD research and practice?
- What can we learn from PD experiences of decolonising practices applied in diverse contexts; geographical, academic, corporate, not for profit?
- How are theoretical discourses of decolonisation integrated into concrete practices, methodologies, or modes of knowledge production in the research?
- What are the future trajectories of decolonising PD practices for pluriversal approaches to design and technology?

3.1 Workshop format

Building on the above arguments and directions for decolonisation, this full day workshop has different phases.

Phase 1: PD of a social robot [[2] hours]: Participants are grouped in smaller groups and immediately engaged in the codesign of a social robot for defined diverse contexts (be it organisational, community, private or public spaces). The design techniques will be "borrowed" from the suggested methods in the position papers and/or prescribed by the organisers such as using "consensus method" in one group, but also allowing the participants to negotiate design methods [[1] hour]. Only once the groups share their design outputs with the rest of the group do they reveal who they are and position their research in relation to their created robots, their personal values and views [[1]hour].

Phase 2: Embracing epistemologies dialogue [1.5 hours]: The plurality of epistemologies in the room are now made explicit triggered by the created artefacts and attached values. Each participant will position themselves, map out their methods or concepts, and express how they create knowledge looking at phase 1, a research through design approach. Possible decolonisation of PD practices are presented in form of an engaged Bohm dialogue.

Phase 3: Prototype decolonising toolkit [1.5 hours]: In groups the participants will prototype a toolkit of methods, techniques, concepts and principles of a decolonised PD. The toolkit will be showcased to a wider PDC audience in an exchange event with other workshop participants.

4 PARTICIPANTS RECRUITMENT

The minimum number of participants is 5 and the maximum number of participants 25. Participants will be asked to provide 1-2-page

Table 1: Workshop schedule

Workshop Activity	Time
Introduction of workshop format and content by organisers	15 min
PD of a social robot in smaller groups	60 min
Sharing of products and introduction of participants and organisers	60 min
Dialogue embracing epistemologies	90 min
Prototype toolkit of methods	90 min
Summary conclusion and way forward	30 min

position papers describing examples of rich on-the-ground research cases that demonstrate or conceptualise decolonising approaches and practices to design and technology. The participants are requested to elaborate on their own practical experience as well as provide suggestions for possible methods, techniques and concepts aiming at embracing multiple epistemologies in design and knowledge production. The aim is to attract diverse participants from different continents, that represent a global community of PD researchers working in different contexts and domains.

5   OUTCOME OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop will produce a collection of decolonising approaches and methods from a diverse PD global community. Multiple joint article(s) or a journal SI, will be generated after the workshop that discuss and reflect upon this collection and collaborative decolonising toolkit.

6   ORGANISERS

The authors represent diverse disciplines and approaches across design, anthropology, technology and innovation, from Africa, Latin America, Europe and the US.

Rachel Charlotte Smith is Associate Professor at the Dept. of Digital Design and Information Studies at Aarhus University. Her research focuses on participatory and design anthropological modes of research, social transformation and future making. *Heike Winschiers-Theophilus* is a Professor in Computer Science at the Namibia University of Science and Technology. Her work revolves around community-based co-design with indigenous and marginalised people. She promotes a transcultural approach to technology design. *Daria Loi* is Senior Director at Mozilla, where she heads the Experiences & Design organisation. Her work revolves around mixing design strategy with user experience research to enrich people's everyday life, with an emphasis on Emerging Technologies. *Asnath Paula Kambunga* is a Marie Curie PhD fellow at the Dept. of Digital Design and Information Studies at Aarhus University. Her research interest lies in working with youth communities and collaborative explorations of future memories making. *Marly Muudeni Samuel* is a Tech Innovation Coordinator at the Inclusive & Collaborative Tech Hub in Windhoek, Namibia. She is passionate about information access, and how innovation and co-design can empower youth and advance education. *Dr. Rogerio de Paula* is a senior research scientist at IBM Research Brazil, and manager of

the Visual Analytics & Insights Research Group. His main research interest is in the intersection of AI and human machine interaction, and design for social good.

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