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Metadesigning Design Research – How can designers collaboratively grow a research platform?

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Abstract: 'How can we design a meaningful and relevant research platform that will support futures of sustainability?' was the question guiding the two-and-a-half-year-long, co-creative and emergent metadesign process of establishing a new research platform at the Department of Design, Linnaeus University, Sweden. The meta focus on developing a whole research environment, as a design practice and design research endeavour, should be valuable for the design research community. Findings concern the viability of co-creative approaches in such a remit, negotiations of artistic/scientific research conventions, and the design institution's position in the multi-disciplined university. The research has identified tensions and conflicts between the academic institution and construct, and the application of ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies deemed auspicious for sustainability endeavours. The paper itself is a collaborative effort between eleven of the researchers involved in developing the research platform.

Keywords: sustainability; metadesign; research environment; co-creative processes

1. Introduction

"The day of the death of a spruce and the beginning of its future life as a vessel for explorative research projects at the Department of Design. We started early in the morning, the smell of fall was strong as the forest was changing or should I say; preparing for a long winter. Leaves already in a decomposing phase. A bit misty, light rain from the previous night, a sun rises and the forest inhabitants are in full operatic mood. (Birds, birds and an occasional howling from dogs.) Light, camera and action." (Co-author Mikael Blomqvist)

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This paper describes the development of a new design research platform at the Department of Design, Linnaeus University, Sweden. The work was set up as an inquiry in itself, guided by the overarching question 'How can we design a meaningful and relevant research platform that will support futures of sustainability?'. The process has been co-creative and emergent, informed by a metadesign framework. The work described here took place between March 2013 and October 2015. The contribution of this paper lies in:

- The meta focus – a synthesis of creative-critical perspectives into the practical application of building a new research platform;
- The identification of pragmatics and paradigmatics of co-creative design research processes in this remit;
- The articulation of paradigmatic challenges to the academic institution and construct, in terms of its fit to promote futures of sustainability.

All members of staff at the Department of Design were invited to contribute to this paper. They were offered the choice to reflect on the process using an evaluation template or to contribute in any form they felt interesting, useful and possible, and to comment on work in progress. The views expressed in the piece are not necessarily shared by all co-authors. The theoretical/methodological underpinnings of the research are manifold, for reasons of scope and clarity mainly addressed through the lens of metadesign. After a brief practical and theoretical contextualisation, the paper is organised in: A) descriptions of milestones in the process of growing the research platform; B) reflections on the process's viability in delivering a research platform, its viability as a metadesign process, and how it sits in the wider academic context. The conclusion summarises key points and questions for a wider research community, and outlines steps ahead for the particular research platform.

2. Contexts

2.1 Practical context

The Department of Design, Linnaeus University, is distributed across three locations in Småland, a Swedish county of forests, lakes, potatoes, entrepreneurship and craftsmanship. When this story began, in spring 2013, it is fair to say that the department was an underdog on the Swedish design map. Whilst populated by knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff, it was falling behind design institutions of longer standing, situated in bigger cities. Design research was taking place, but without a coherent narrative and without formal or informal research environment. Overall, the confidence in the staff body in this remit was low; no permanent member of staff possessed a doctorate. The development of the research platform formed part of a larger agenda to consolidate the design department's offer, give it a clearer identity – internally and externally, raise its reputation, and to live up to the university's overarching strategy of complete academic environments. The initiative to dedicate efforts to building a research platform came from the head of department, but was cautiously welcomed by staff, weary from major transitions, not least the 2010 merge of two

universities into one, with practical and cultural implications. A more general historical context is the transition of design education from a focus on vocational training and design industries' needs, to becoming situated in the academic institution, with required adaptation to new formal frameworks, more paper work, new language, new culture. The Department of Design, Linnaeus University has twenty-nine members of staff, spanning textiles, industrial design, graphic design, furniture design, architecture, ceramics, glass, moving imagery, fine arts and cultural studies. The institution sits within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, in a university of five other faculties spanning a wide range of academic subjects.

2.2 Theoretical/methodological context

I arrived at the department of design, from Goldsmiths, University of London with boundless enthusiasm, some real and some cultivated naivety, and an explicit suitcase of ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. My design research and teaching practice is situated in the understanding that:

- Creating futures of sustainability must be the ultimate framework for all human endeavours (see e.g. Rockström et al., 2008; IPCC, 2013);
- Sustainability is a creative opportunity for enhancing quality of life, including enhancing the quality of design and design research;
- The realisation of futures of sustainability depends on the mobilisation of a diverse range of knowledge holders, and the challenging of Western hegemonies and other power structures (see e.g. Sardar, 1999);
- This includes the challenging of power hierarchies in the understanding of valid routes to knowledge through the employment of "an extended epistemology", synergising, at least, knowing through theory, practice, experience and articulation (Heron and Reason, 2006);
- Participatory and transdisciplinary research processes are best suited to responding to this brief;
- Because of the urgency of the sustainability imperative, research should be transformative as well as informative (see Action Research, e.g. Heron and Reason, 2006);
- The experience of *agency* is pivotal for acquiring knowledge, locating ourselves as problem causers and solutions holders, taking concrete steps, and well as spreading information and agency (Tham, 2008).

The translation of these understandings into a coherent research framework took place during my doctoral research (Tham, 2008). The understandings have been enriched and found further form and agency through the metadesign research at Goldsmiths, University of London. Metadesign can be described as an overarching design, design of seeds for change; it involves interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary co-creative and emergent processes. (See e.g. Giaccardi, 2005; Wood, 2007)

The metadesign principles presented in Figure 1 are key reference points for the paper and the journey it draws upon. So is the notion that iterative cycles "from me to we and back again" create auspicious conditions for processes of change (e.g. Jones and Lundebye, 2012), and that setting up a 'safe space' supports participants to cope with the uncertainty and complexity of co–creative, emergent processes (e.g. Tham, 2008; Jones and Lundebye, 2012.)

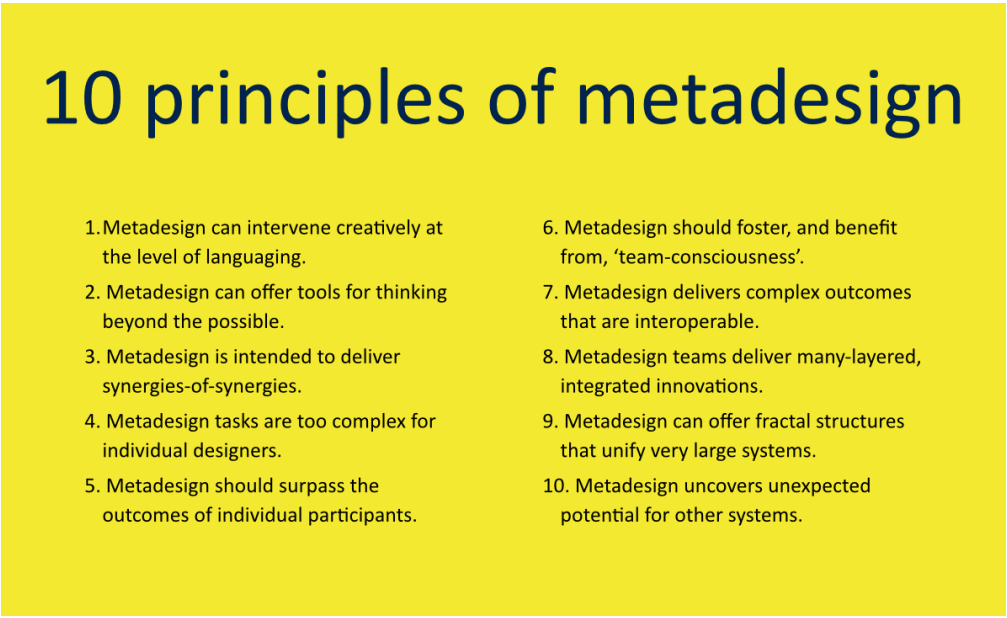

Figure 1 10 Principles of metadesign. (Wood, n.d.)

The positions, packaged as a vision statement, were the bridge to my new academic home, where I was appointed to lead the development of the research platform. I had experience of leading collaborative processes of change, participating in collaborative research processes, and evaluating collaborative research efforts – prospectively and retrospectively (as member of the board of a research council). I had no experience of developing a research platform.

3. The process

This section of the paper presents key milestones in the process of growing the research platform. All the events did not take place as a sequence. Some unfolded over the whole time period, whereas others took place in one day.

3.1 Milestone 1: Futures worlds and design research manifesto

The process kicked off with a one-day workshop with twelve members of staff at the Barbican, London, in March 2013. Gradually moving from the individual to the whole group, we sketched a map of a futures worlds context of design research. Scenarios similar to that which we made are of course readily available through a range of reports. The purpose here

was to, from the very start, ascertain that a global futures perspective was part of our design research platform, to position all our co-researchers as valuable knowledge holders and designers of futures worlds, to root our shared notions of the world in personal values, interests and experiences. The exercise served to create initial scaffolding for more personal and therefore 'scary' explorations into design research, and to start getting to know each other as a research group. The day ended with an early manifesto for design research.

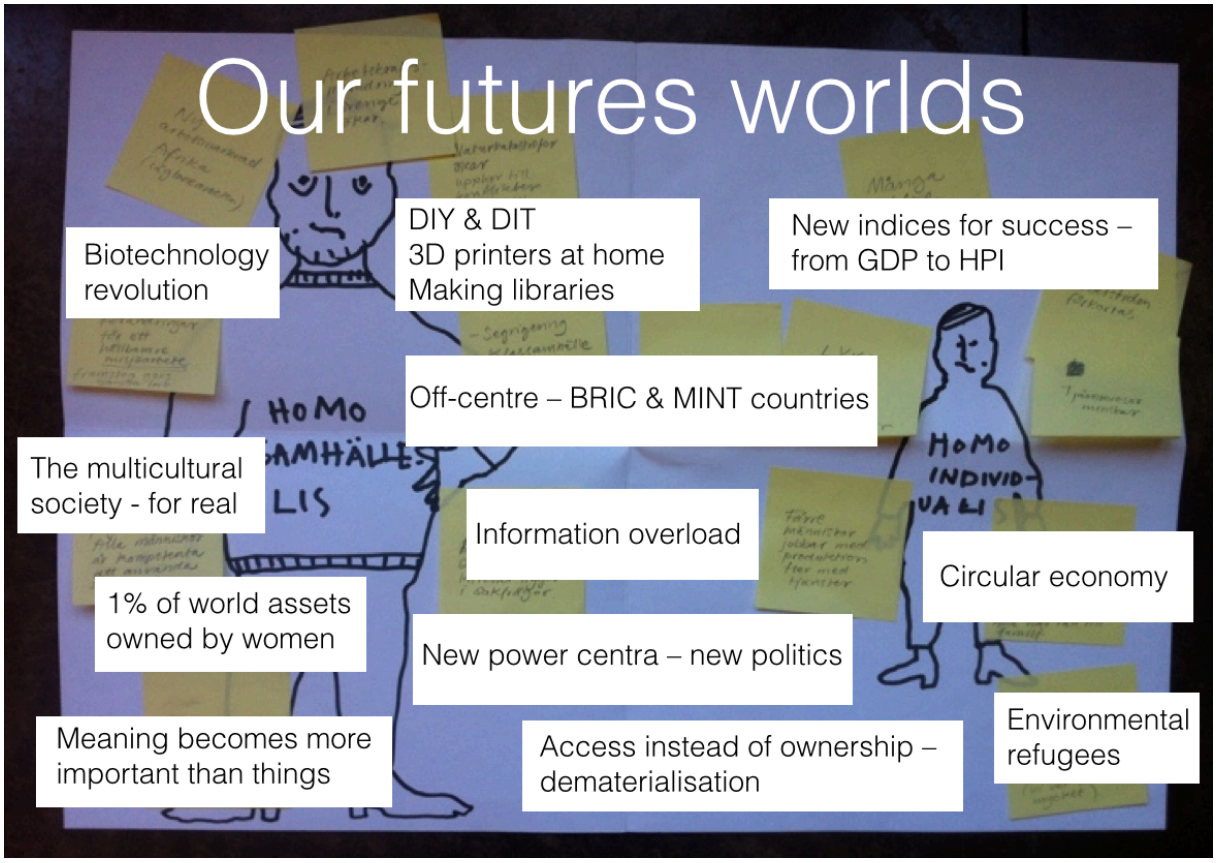

Figure 2 Homo Socialis and Homo Individualis. Our futures worlds – a context for design research.

Figure 3 Early manifesto for design research.

3.2 Milestone 2: Internal survey & clustering of design research interests

After this workshop, during April to June 2013, I conducted conversations in groups and individually with members of staff focused on their research interests. All members of staff were also invited to provide an image-led brief overview of past, present and future research (or artistic development work) interests. This material was used to create an initial map of research expertise and interests within the department, which was fed back to all members of staff in a meeting.

Figure 4 Early clustering of design research interests and expertise. The four key areas at this point were: Design for sustainability, Good lives/good homes, Design and education, Artistic expression.

3.3 Milestone 3: Design research in practice course

Since 2011, approximately half of the members of staff had been enrolled in research training focused on scientific frameworks and academic writing, within a framework of competence development. It was clear from the dialogue I had with members of staff that while this had been enlightening, they still struggled to see the link to their own design/arts or education practice and had, generally, not found agency to *do* design research. We therefore put in place a continuation of this training, the course *Design Research in Practice.* The course, now in its second iteration and running at two levels, was designed specifically to offer orientation in practical manifestations of design research, to build knowledge and confidence, and to support the leap into active research. The purpose was also to establish a continuous space for research, a communal research environment, as well as an individual research space.[1]

3.4 Milestone 4: Sharpening the narrative in dialogue with an external community

The growing of the research platform continuously took place in dialogue with an external world; generating feedback of increasing usefulness as our narrative achieved more texture and clarity. Simultaneous to the internal survey, a topic review/inventory of design research at the intersection of sustainability took place. Many conversations with the surrounding design and design research community nationally and internationally, as well as exposure to

[1] The course at each level constitutes ten half-day seminars and supervision in smaller groups. In the first level of the course, each individual conducts a small design research project and presents it in a small symposium. In the second iteration, the project is refined, further contextualised, and a particular aim of formal validation (such as external funding or publication) is pursued.

a general research community, in the faculty and wider university helped sharpen the narrative further. The faculty dean and the research funding office challenged us to think about identity and narrative in more strategic terms. After many iterations this resulted in the research platform *Curious Design Change*, with four key research areas: *Metadesign*, *Home on Earth*, *Learning for Change*, and *Creative-Critical Expressions*. The identity and language of the institution, the new programmes, and the research platform have been reciprocally informing. Exactly how we arrived at (the grammatically curious) *Curious Design Change* is not clear, but in hindsight I see that it answers to a tacit brief of: demystifying, de-professionalising or claiming research by talking about 'curiosity', and re-energising sustainability by talking about 'change', as well as offering a name with a direction.

3.5 Milestone 5: The physical turn

In spring 2014, we initiated a collaboration with London based design company Åbäke. We approached Åbäke[2] for its visionary approaches and Sweden and Småland connections, to energise the work on the research platform with external perspectives and to give members of staff a confidence boost – validation by interest from someone we value outside us, whilst realising the practical goal of a website. All through the process, there had been a certain confusion and unease around the term 'research platform'. In a meeting with members of Åbäke we started unpicking it. As I recall it, the conversation went:

"What is a research platform?"

"I think it's a platform for generating and sharing knowledge and stimulating and spreading curiosity."

"Isn't that a bit like a bookshelf?"

"Yes, let's make a shelf."

[2] We collaborated with Kajsa Ståhl and Patrick Lacey, Åbäke, and Thomas Bush.

Figure 5 Screenshots from the film about the felling and planking of the spruce. (Co-author Mikael Blomqvist, 2014)

Kalle Nuszkowski, Laboratory Technician, took charge of procuring a tree. He found a spruce, auspiciously born after a storm in 1968, on the grounds of Holger Karlsson's farm in Eskås. Mikael Blomqvist documented the felling of the spruce and the process of planking it in a film. We used green wood processing, which means that the wood has not dried before use, resulting in it continuing to twist and turn. In October 2014, Åbäke and Thomas Bush facilitated a two-day workshop in the large wood workshop at the university, campus Växjö. All staff and students were invited. Åbäke gave an inspirational lecture on shelves and their use. All participants had been asked to bring in a series of objects that, in more or less direct ways, related to design research, curiosity and change. During the workshop, which took place literally on top of the planks from the tree, we explored the concepts of research, design, curiosity and change, and collaboratively designed and built the shelf.

Figure 6 Workshop with Åbäke and Thomas Bush. Collaborative exploration of 'Curious design change', designing and building the shelf.

The physical turn, the shelf, was important in so many ways. The designing and making of the shelf prompted a re-negotiation of power, the most obvious example being that I, the leader of the development of the research platform, was the distinctly least knowledgeable when it came to building the shelf. Instead, expertise and interest from many other individuals came into play and forefront. The space of the workshop, the large laboratory hall, the designing and making allowed for so many other forms of knowledge and engagement to find their way into the research platform than the formal and academically prioritised. Craftsmanship, obviously: "How about a cabinet with a heart on the door to hold our manifesto?"; Care: "How about a pillow that someone tired can rest their head on while reading?"; Humour: "Let's start a shelfie of the week, a new instagram effort!"; Design creativity: Let's make some hanging shelves for such issues that hang; Vernacular practices/ingenuity: "If we rub the cut surfaces with boiled potatoes there will be fewer cracks."; Fondness: "It's true that the shelf is far from perfect but it has personality". These are all examples of personal concerns, knowledge and skills finding a way into the research platform through the shelf. Those considerations are still embodied in the shelf and in the research platform. Through those days, and that shelf, the research platform acquired an identity. The shelf is situated at the heart of the Department of Design, campus Växjö, with representations planned for the other two locations. It is being curated to reflect the research efforts in the department, and our collaborations internally and externally. The shelf making and the shelf itself generated excitement in the faculty – staff from other departments dropped by and told colleagues to have a look.

Figure 7 Confidence and pride embedded in the shelf through a flag.

3.6 Milestone 6 Branching out – growing into the world

With the shelf, the research platform *Curious Design Change* existed. The shelf gave shape to thoughts, actions and articulations and confidence to stand in front of different audiences, other departments within the university, external partners, research councils and say: this is us, this is what we want to do, do you want to work with us? We are growing the website – its architecture based on the shelf. Visibility on the website is open to all staff and students, and led by projects. 'News' includes a variety of manifestations of curiosity that members of the department are actively involved in or curious about.

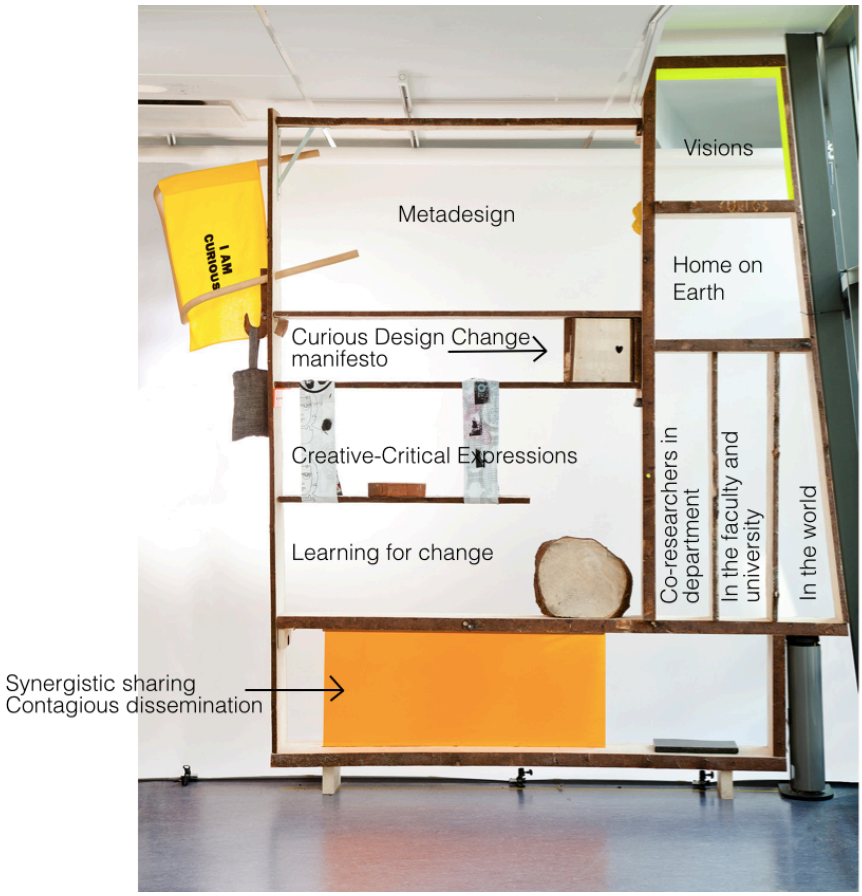

Figure 8 Early sketch web front page.

3.7 Milestone 7: Curious Design Change launch

Throughout the process we have viewed all our activities towards building the research environment as research in their own right. This was also true of the launch event of *Curious Design Change*, which took place on 16 October, 2015. The location was the large laboratory hall. We gathered thirty participants: researchers from the department of design, researchers from other departments (literature, music, history, archaeology, economy and organisation, wood technology, informatics, gender studies), the faculty dean, representatives from communications, external relations and funding, as well as key local stakeholders (energy, entrepreneurship, culture). The question 'What is the potential of our collaborations?' guided the inquiry. The process took the transdisciplinary teams through three short workshops (with facilitators Anette Lundebye, the lead author, and chef Maja Söderberg). A *Curiosity* and a *Change* workshop took place in sequence. The first started from individual interests, moving to designing a common futures research field. In the second workshop, participants designed and made research tools to experience the *now and here* of the local context of Småland through the lens of the new research field. The potentials identified by the use of the new research tools were then packaged into new research project proposals. A *Food for Thought* workshop constituted of collaboratively making the lunch with organic produce from a local farm with a local chef.

Figure 9 Curious Design Change launch.

The purpose of the launch workshop was to give *Curious Design Change* visibility in the university and to establish us as a desirable research partner, by giving a sample of how we work, and setting up a process that would, in itself, generate seeds for research collaborations. The launch was also a time to celebrate all staff's efforts to date, to close one stage and open a new one, and to build internal confidence by the validation of an external audience. The *Curiosity* and the *Change* workshops were designed to facilitate hands-on transdisciplinary research collaborations. The food workshop brought conviviality, connection with essential resources and seasons, as well as bridging the personal/domestic and the professional. Yellow aprons legitimised by the cooking helped participants to step into a shared space of inquiry, on equal terms, and to give the event an identity. The space, the laboratory hall, positioned the research at the heart of design, with the embedded epistemologies that the space affords, and that we had constructed in the previous shelf workshop. Concretely, the launch led to three promising embryos for transdisciplinary research, which are being developed with the interested partners[3]. It also generated energy in the department, and in participants generally:

"My most fun and interesting day at work since I started two years ago."

[3] One of these has subsequently led to the establishment of Småland Living Lab, that has been granted funding, and mobilised a transdisciplinary regional working group.

"I'm not sure what happened, but it was fun, inspiring and it tasted good!"

"*Now* I understand what design can be about. You have explained before, but now I get it."

> "The process has been a journey for the Department of Design and not least for me. To participate in the whole process has made me understand both that I have lots of knowledge and that it has to be outspoken. In design, as in many other professions, lots of the knowledge is tacit, taken for granted and not very valued, not at least by us who have reached it by working as designers, not by researching. By participating in the process I have found tools and methods to use when teaching 'practical knowledge', both to pass the knowledge on and to inspire students to try and experiment in the practical field of design." (Co-author Lena Håkansson)

4. Reflections on the process of growing Curious Design Change

It is clear, we hope, that this process has been fun and meaningful to us. However, has it been ultimately useful in achieving its aim of growing a research platform? It is it a valid example of metadesign?

> "Design as a topic being young and fresh compared to other university disciplines and the fact that we are on artistic as opposed to scientific basis set traces in the work process. It has sometimes been somewhat confused and methods have been experimental and sometimes inefficient in a traditional sense. As a whole, though, it has been reflecting design thinking and design methodology. It is unclear, so far, if it has lead to a well-defined result constituting a work path or a design research platform, but there is definitely hope!" (Co-author Ole Victor)

4.1 Reflections on the process's validity in terms of growing a research platform

> "I've learned so many things. Before, I didn't see myself as a design researcher, but now I've taken my first baby steps towards a design space that I want to explore." (Co-author Tobias Svensén)

The goals of developing a 'research platform' was interpreted as an interplay of growing: A) knowledge and expertise; B) culture, confidence, pride and commitment; C) a coherent and clear narrative, identity and vision; D) collaboration internally, and networks and collaboration with other research communities and stakeholders outside academia. I believed that growing these entangled remits should set up conditions to reach formal targets, such as: E) publications/bibliometrical success; F) external funding of research projects; G) securing doctoral students; and H) attracting strong researchers to the environment. **Most importantly,** I believed such growing would lead to meaningful research of high value and relevance to the surrounding society, contributing through the culture of collaboration as well as the explicit focus on sustainability.

At the time of writing, two and a half years since we started this work, *Curious Design Change* is a holder of promise, rather than a fully-fledged research environment. There are, however, some distinctly positive developments. Since the start of the *Design Research in Practice* course in autumn 2013, twelve small research projects have been initiated. So far

these have resulted in four publications, other submissions awaiting review, and plans for exhibitions and funding applications. We have managed to establish a regional transdisciplinary research consortium, and as host institution submitted two proposals for external funding from national research councils, participated in an additional two, and submitted one application for a centre between ourselves and another department. On the strength of our narrative and strategy, we have secured two doctoral positions within The Bridge, a collaboration between IKEA and Linnaeus University, and one postdoctoral position. We have submitted a proposal for a faculty transcending doctoral programme. I think it is fair to say that our department, because of qualities in our effort of growing the research platform and our new visibility, has also become a more desirable employer - we have secured two new members of staff with doctorates. The clarity we now have in terms of our profile has allowed us to start a process to secure external funding to recruit additional expertise. In more informal terms, we have started to grow a research culture. The research course meant that at least a portion of the staff started meeting regularly as a research group. This has spilt into other conversations and research is now an integrated topic. Staff are now confidently attending research activities organised by the faculty. The course's focus on taking the leap to *doing* research has meant that many members of staff today identify themselves as researchers, alongside being educators and practitioners, and that they see the roles as mutually reinforcing.

4.2 Reflections on the process's success and validity as an example of metadesign

> "Building a research platform literally and theoretically together with your department is blood, sweat and tears. The work was quite easy and happy in the beginning, but as the framework became clearer so did the differences. The goal to keep everyone included is not always easy as we put different values in the word. As an architect you are used to teamwork, but as an artist you are more used to working on your own. To keep everyone involved it is absolutely crucial to create forms for a little bit of both." (Co-author Sara Hyltén-Cavallius)

The process of developing the research platform has been *inclusive*, in the sense that all staff, and in some stages all students, have been actively invited to participate. All meetings have been scheduled far in advance and under the framework of competence development, making it (at least in theory) possible for staff to contribute within their salaried working hours. However, in practice it has not always been possible or a priority to dedicate time to a collaborative process. Overall, contributions from staff members have not been consistent over time, jeopardising the consistency of the collaboration. Some members of staff have been very generous in giving to the whole, but not developed any research 'points', some have been inactive for long periods of time and then made significant contributions. It is clear, though, that contribution generates a sense of ownership, which spurs more contribution. In open space technology, a rule of engagement is that 'Whoever comes are the right people'. (See e.g. Owen, 2008) This has been an important motto for me in this process, to avoid feelings of sorrow or irritation about individuals who are not present, to

keep the focus on the valuable contributions of those that are present, to keep in mind that the 'right' people at different points of time will be different (including the potential future absence of myself). It has taught me to strive to keep a continuous and genuine invitation open, and to have empathy for, and try to learn from silence and non-participation - although sometimes painful.

> "My input to this is that I was trying to make a film that perhaps would show others a way of telling a story with small means. In hindsight I don't see it as my research - I see it as a group effort. The collaboration part was that I was trusted to do this visualisation. I did a part in a larger context." (Co-author Mikael Blomqvist)

The process has been democratic in parts, such as at the design and making of the shelf workshop. Yet, on this occasion, and in terms of the setting of initial and overarching frameworks, the agenda was set by the lead author. While all members of staff were invited to respond to the evolving ideas at various points in time, it is clear that the territory of responses was therefore also set, and the inquiry not genuinely open.

> "The process to involve and include all members of our design institution and to allow them to participate in the work has been very inspiring to us. It has been, and I hope it will continue to be, a uniting force in a situation where there are many other forces risking to split the faculty, the department of design and the design topic." (Co-author Ole Victor)

The process has certainly been multi-layered, joining up many understandings and traditions of design, approaches from artistic and scientific research, as well as an extended epistemology – and staff from three geographical locations. It is important to note that we have not ironed out all misunderstandings, or even conflicts. *Curious Design Change* as an emergent and co-creative space has been sufficiently safe and open to harbour, and thrive upon agonism (Mouffe, 2007). The co-creative and emergent process is by nature not neat and tidy. I think on the whole, we have managed to set up and maintain a safe space for exploration, but sometimes there have been gaps in the communication.

> "The creative process of the shelf was not functional in a conventional sense but exploratory and expressive in essence, and before I understood this, I felt uncomfortable. I negotiated with myself, and managed to contribute and not disturb the process." (Co-author Miguel Salinas)

In shorthand, *languaging* refers to the reciprocal causality of wording, consciousness, perceptions, actions. (Maturana, 1975) Languaging has played an important part in this inquiry. I have sought to use language that should be *accessible* to a community sometimes new to (and sometimes frightened of) research, that transcends conventional hierarchies in knowledge production and knowledge holding, and that invites language about research that is rooted in the individual's personal experiences.

> "[design research is about] wandering between being curious, exploratory, testing different questions and different answers. The goal is to chisel out a result that weaves together experiences and to create an expression for this. Most important of all is that there are some remaining unanswered questions, so that the excitement and curiosity

> doesn't stop – there is no 'the end', but to keep the nerve and maybe some underlying secret." (Co-author Susanne Bonja)

The name of the research platform, *Curious Design Change*, but also the languaging that has taken place through selection of workshop space (the big wood workshop), and of course the activity of designing the shelf, and the shelf itself[4], have all served to challenge conventional hierarchies in research and academia, and to set up a generous and allowing, open, safe and creative space for inquiry.

> "I have become more aware of the importance of naming things and events – what name you decide on focuses the contribution to the outcome. *Curious Design Change* means to me that if we insist on being curious about design we can make a difference with our increasing knowledge and our actions."(Co-author Marie Sterte)

4.3 Reflections on how Curious Design Change sits in a wider academic framework

With the process of growing the research platform, we have challenged the academic institution and construct. The vision of a research endeavour that in culture, process and outcomes supports futures of sustainability has sometimes come into conflict with the formal framework it sits within – although sustainability is also part of the university's agenda. Existing within a multidisciplinary academic environment has provided benchmarks, inspiration and opportunities for networks and learning, but also pressures on academic success in more conventional terms.

> "Of all the possibilities offered in the staging of the new research platform, the Design Research in Practice courses have been the most valuable to me. They have given me the confidence to trust that my own instinct, rooted in my own researcher situation, is 'right'. At the same time I have felt frustration with the lack of time, sustained concentration to fully submerge myself in the new discoveries." (Co-author Anna-Karin Arvidsson)

The inclusivity we have sought to foster is in conflict with, for example, only senior lecturers and 'above' having research time built into their contracts, and access for funding to go to conferences. Similarly, employees eager to pursue external research funding find out that most grants are only open to the PhDed. Yet currently, in Sweden, a lectureship awarded on artistic merits is supposed to be equal to that granted on scientific grounds and the requisite of a doctoral degree. One year we had to spend considerable time proving that the course *Design Research in Practice* was indeed practice led and practice creating, the next year the issue was the use of the word 'research' which, we learnt, in such documents amounts to a protected term – again reserved for the activities of the PhDed or those on a doctoral programme. In Sweden, there is strong polarisation between scientific and artistic research, perhaps especially awkward for the design field. In a university wide strategy discussion, I was once asked to give a prognosis of the percentage of artistic/scientific research in the research platform. This is, obviously, not about 'difficult' administrators, but about language

[4] See also e.g. Goodwin (1994) and Suchman (2002) for the integral role of artefacts in research.

use, policies, hierarchies deeply engrained in the academic system and society, and enforced by, for example, the Swedish Higher Education Authority. However, are the procedures, benchmarks, rules and purpose of this long-legacied system genuinely supportive of futures of sustainability? I think not, and that we therefore need to extend our efforts to intervene paradigmatically and challenge the overarching conditions in which our institutions sit, simultaneously as we grow examples of new ways of thinking and doing research.

> "Another way of looking at these [metadesign] methods in relation to change would be through the figure of transversality in Félix Guattari's (1972) work. Guattari first uses the term to describe a therapeutical model by which to avoid purely vertical as well as purely horizontal forms of group organisation. What is significant, to Guattari, is rather multi-directional flows of communication between different levels of a group, institution or other organisation. Can we envisage forms of participatory research that operate precisely through such transversal flows of communication and information? Can we conceive of participatory pedagogical structures that do not reduce difference horizontally or turn difference into a vertical hierarchy but instead thrive from difference?" (Co-author Ola Ståhl)

We have invited Swedish design schools to join us in a discussion and practice to make explicit both informal and formal benchmarks of design (as practice, education and research), to chart their planned and emergent pathways across histories, cultures and structures. This is towards more holistic and systemic understandings and narratives (but by no means a mono-logic) *within* our design community and clarity as we continue discussions with, for example, the larger institution and education authorities. We see these discussions, ideally emergent practices, as natural extensions of the metadesign work of growing the research platform. Our extended community can facilitate processes that mobilise a diverse range of knowledge holders, such as policy-makers and industry representatives, towards seeding genuinely meaningful learning organisations.

5. Conclusions

> **"**When thinking of our research platform, I think the image of a new planted tree is what we have now. It needs support and help, there are some few tiny branches and the leaves show it thrives. Probably in some years ahead it might even have flowers and fruits, but it is important that we do not miss the whole and see how it grows and how the trunk will support the many branches growing in the future." (Co-author Miguel Salinas)

We have enjoyed much freedom, due to management's confidence in us, and the flexibility and speed that can come with being small. Being underdogs on the university and Swedish design community/research map has meant a lack of visibility and low risk – you can only improve. Yet, this can also mean that expectations are not always positive. When we now enter the next stage of growing the research platform, we will need to guard the integrity of the process and the platform as increased visibility also results in more external pressures, and increased size adds complexity, and more administration.

The next steps for *Curious Design Change* constitute a further integration within our student body, and establishing and formalizing networks with our surrounding society. To this end we have scheduled a research day with all students and staff in April 2016. We will be in the large laboratory hall, and conduct short vertical research projects starting from potatoes – a local and humble resource, that helped the region out of starvation. In October 2016, we will host an event of regional scope, with stakeholders from private, public and not for profit sectors, as well a researchers, educators and students from a range of academic disciplines. The question guiding this will be: 'What is the potential of our collaborations for futures of sustainability?'. In the next phase, we are intensifying the support for our researchers to publish and secure external funding, and for some of them to achieve doctorates. We will set up a *Curious Design Change* researcher in residency. We are in the process of building a larger international transdisciplinary consortium towards applying for EU funding.

While design research is now a mature (if rapidly changing) field, the emphasis to date has been on discourses, methodologies, results – instead of the collective *how* and ultimate *why* of the academic research environment. The meta focus on developing a *whole* research environment, as a design practice and design research endeavour, should therefore be of value for the design research community, with findings concerning the viability of co-creative approaches in such a remit, negotiations of artistic/scientific research conventions, and the design institution's position in the multi-disciplined university. In particular, the paper hopes to invite discussion on how the academic institution can be designed to best mobilise a range of knowing and knowledge holders within and outside the academy to meet the demands of the sustainability imperative.

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