



Faculty of Design

2022

Systemic-self and Pluriverse: A design research framework for pluriverse

Gautam, Mamta

Suggested citation:

Gautam, Mamta (2022) Systemic-self and Pluriverse: A design research framework for pluriverse. In: Proceedings of Relating Systems Thinking and Design, RSD11, 3-16 Oct 2022, Brighton, United Kingdom. Available at <https://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/4251/>

Open Research is a publicly accessible, curated repository for the preservation and dissemination of scholarly and creative output of the OCAD University community. Material in Open Research is open access and made available via the consent of the author and/or rights holder on a non-exclusive basis.

The OCAD University Library is committed to accessibility as outlined in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) and is working to improve accessibility of the Open Research Repository collection. If you require an accessible version of a repository item contact us at repository@ocadu.ca.



Relating Systems Thinking and Design
2022 Symposium
University of Brighton, Brighton, UK,
October 13-16, 2022

Systemic-self and Pluriverse: A design research framework for pluriverse

Mamta Gautam

[National Institute of Design Haryana](#)

Systemic-self and Pluriverse is situated at the intersection of design research and systemic design framework. As a part of evolving research methods in my practice, the question of personal motivation and aspirations has been central to the decision-making. In my practice, as a design entrepreneur and researcher, my quest for meaningful intervention, outsider (etic) being an intruder while conducting research has made me question design research methods and approach to contextual inquiry. The role of design and the approach to framing the 'problem' and whose problem is one solving has been a dilemma across the problem framing stage of the project.

This activity provokes the need to equip designer and design students to become aware of their position as a researcher and designers before intervening in a social system.

KEYWORDS: systemic-self, pluriverse, design research, autoethnography, systemic design

RSD TOPIC(S): Methods and the worlds they make, Confronting legacies of oppression in systemic design

Introduction

With a given framework for systemic design, while there is enough emphasis on the actant, the designer as one of the key actants is often under-estimated. This activity provokes the need to equip designer and design students to become aware of their position as a researcher and designers before intervening in a social system. Based on the premise that knowing the systemic self can be an empowering tool for the design to not only situate themselves but also relate to the social system with a more informed position.

The proposed activity, 'systemic self and pluriverse', will lie at the intersection of design research and systemic design framework. Taking the pluriverse as an ontological starting point implies not simply tolerating difference but understanding that reality is constituted not only by many worlds but by many kinds of worlds (Querejazu, ISSN 19833121).

As a part of my evolving practice, the question of personal motivation and aspirations has been central to my decision-making. In my practice, as a design entrepreneur and researcher, my quest for meaningful intervention, and outsider being an intruder while conducting research has made me question the design research methods and approach to contextual inquiry. The role of design and the approach to framing the 'problem' and whose problem is one solving has been an ongoing inquiry! Often, the intrinsic motivation though central to me as a design researcher has remained outside the purview of the research pedagogy approach and method. Through this inquiry, I seek to delve deeper into the positioning of the designer as a systemic self (Josina Vink, 2021).

Framework and perspectives

The proposed activity is geared and framed to inquire following key aspects and questions: -

1) Systemic self and pluriverse: With formal acknowledgment of the designer's socio-cultural background, could this reveal a newer understanding of systems for which one is to design? How could the knowledge of self as a system referred to as systemic self-challenge or deepen the understanding of the perceived problem? I propose to develop a framework for researchers, designers, thinkers, educators, and entrepreneurs to

RSD11 ACTIVITY

situate themselves as a subsystem in the larger socio-cultural system in which one is to intervene and see oneself as part of the system (Josina Vink, 2021). Further do individuals based on their socio-cultural background view systems differently? how can this be considered while representing (Manuela Aguirre Ulloa, 2014) plural cultures and codesigning with this relationship in mind? For some, the research would incorporate the Autoethnography (Carolyn Ellis) approach to equip self-awareness for the designer. Based on the codification of a self-theory (H.ALTMANN, 2021), the framework would be applicable for systems thinking mapping and modelling.

2) Cultural diversity and systems thinking: Systems Thinking and complexity theory shares common roots. Both questioned the assumptions of Newton that are based on linearity, determinism, and the connectedness between cause and consequences (Satu Teerikangas, 2002). Culture is taken as a given, as a “set of behaviours”. This view deprives us of the multifaceted nature of culture. Adopting a systemic view of culture enables us to see, appreciate and study the more dynamic aspects of culture (Satu Teerikangas, 2002). Restricting oneself to the mono-cultural viewpoint with strict rationality will not help to understand the diversity in the human experience in a complex world. (Satu Teerikangas, 2002) We need to improve our means to appreciate the holistic, interrelated, multi-levelled, subjective, complex, and dynamic character of culture. (Satu Teerikangas, 2002) .

As observed during fieldwork, the existing frameworks on complex social systems are inadequate for contexts like those of the global south. While the complex social systems have been defined as ‘wicked’ the same is found to be inadequate to incorporate cultural diversity and plural systems. The characteristics of multicausal, evolving, and ill-formed problems should be held to the standard of wickedness. (Jones, 2014) Wicked problems observed by Rittel are a very real symptom of the culture composed of sets of interwoven, dynamic, and self-organizing human choices within their worlds but false in others: which is to say Complex adaptive systems (CAS) showing emergent behaviour. By testing the proposed framework with activity participants, the intention is to adopt for sensitive socio-cultural context for systems mapping and modelling. The eastern worldview was close to systems thinking, they thought it natural to regard matters in a

RSD11 ACTIVITY

holistic perspective, embedded in their environment with which they should seek harmony (Satu Teerikangas, 2002).

3) Design Research methods for Pluriverse: designers' ability to conduct research in culturally diverse contexts has not been addressed much in the design research frameworks. That is to say the truth of the user: the culturally mediated truth of those whose worlds we are engaging (Downs, 2016). Ethnography frameworks have been helpful for contextual inquiry however, with complex systems, the multiple dimensions to be understood pose a challenge of when to stop conducting research and at compromised project implications. Do complex systems also require a nonlinear, approach to conducting research and allow mixed methods? The design of the research is a challenge. This project proposal aspires to draw broad aspects that the design of research must carry for conducting design research (MARGOLIN) in pluriverse systems. Design with the awareness that complex social systems cannot be defined, mapped, or transformed without the participation of those who will be impacted by the process and result. (Juan de la Rosa) What impact would cultural plurality have on research findings and project strategy would be insightful. While autoethnography has been critiqued for its limitations as a research tool, this activity aims to bring out the advantages of relying on this framework for situating the systemic self in plural contexts. Further, what impact would cultural plurality have on research findings and project strategy?

Conclusion

Towards intentional generative emergence: Emergence appears to be universal, as phenomena can be observed at virtually every level of scale from the cellular to the galactic (Jones, 2014) In the context of India in the 21st century, the changing meaning of identity, identity as a complex troupe in the post-colonial context like that of India (CHATTERJEE, 1998) poses newer challenges for the researchers. In the larger context, it is imperative for the designer, as a professional, to situate oneself and their users. The critical question to confront towards emergence is to ask ourselves - what is the imagination of our future self? Is there one answer to this? Can this inward-looking help us to confront value conflicts and hence find preferable multiple futures?

Activity Outline

ONLINE , 10/15 participants

As a part of the online activity, participants would be requested to map themselves vis a vis the following two aspects:

- 1) Systemic self: Mapping three generations using any one of the autoethnography tools. Activity Duration 30 mins.
- 2) Stakeholder belief gaps: self-versus the key stakeholder or actant of the systemic design. Activity Duration 30 mins.

Concluding session on belief gaps identified and their relevance for the designer in both aspects.

References

Carolyn Ellis, T. E. (n.d.). Autoethnography: An Overview¹.

Chatterjee, A. (1998). Design in India is a Challenge to Identity. *Design And Development in South And South East Asia*, (Pp. 6,10). Hong Kong.

Downs, S. (2016). I know this one, but the answer is complex. *DRS2016* , 321,322.

H.Altmann, M.-H. A. (2021). The Construction of a Systemic Self Model. *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 208.

Jones, P. H. (2014). systemic design principles for complex social systems. *ResearchGate*, 14, 20.

Vink, K. W.-E.-H. (2021). Designerly approaches to catalyzing change in social systems a social structures approach. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics and Innovation*, 246, 256.

Juan de la Rosa, S. R. (n.d.). Systemic mapping and design research: Towards participatory democratic engagement. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics and Innovation*, 288.

Manuela Aguirre Ulloa, A. P. (2014). Co-designing with relationships in mind. *formakadermisk*, 7.

RSD11 ACTIVITY

Margolin, V. (N.D.). Design Research What is It? What is It For? *50th Anniversary Conference* (Pp. 1,13,14,). Brighton UK: Design Research Society.

Querejazu, A. (ISSN 19833121). Encountering the Pluriverse : Looking for Alternatives in Other Worlds . *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* , 3.

Satu Teerikangas, D. H. (2002). approaching cultural diversity through the lenses of systems thinking and complexity theory.

Ryan Murphy, RSD 7 2018, Finding the *emic* in systemic design: Towards a systemic ethnography.