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Relating Systems Thinking and Design
2022 Symposium
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Confronting Legacies of Oppression in Systemic Design

A dialogue series

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Taking a systemic view of systemic design itself, we understand that systemic design is not separate from, but rather a part of, the fabric of oppression in society. If we fail to acknowledge this, the systemic design community will continue to unwittingly reproduce oppressive dynamics. This two-part dialogue series brings diverse perspectives together for a reflective exploration into systemic design's role in perpetuating oppression. The first session will be an online panel with invited international guests to critically reflect on the ways in which systemic design is complicit in reproducing oppression. The second session will be an in-person fishbowl dialogue with leaders and contributors to Relating Systems Thinking and Design 11 grappling with if and how the systemic design community can confront legacies of oppression and work toward liberatory aims.

KEYWORDS: systemic oppression; dialogue

RSD TOPIC(S): Cases & Practice, Methods & Methodology, Society & Culture

Background

Opening up one of the RSD11 conference themes, this dialogue series explores the legacies of systemic oppression in systemic design. Systemic oppression is defined as “the permanent subordination, humiliation, and domination of certain social groups due

to their socially constructed lower position in society on account of the socially constructed higher position of the oppressing groups.” (Liedauer, 2021; 1). Due both to the perpetuation of oppression in historic and present day social systems and the systemic nature of oppression (Hill Collins, 2000/2009), oppression is pertinent to the ongoing evolution of systemic design. Calls to address legacies of oppression in both design (Ansari, 2021) and systems thinking (Goodchild, 2021) must be taken up in systemic design.

Purpose

The aim of this dialogue series is to build a collective awareness of divergent realities related to issues of oppression in, with and through systemic design. Through dialogue, we aim to build a shared, but not unified understanding, of the ways that systemic design is implicated in structural discrimination and support early exploration into how the systemic design community can responsibly resist and dismantle oppression.

Format & participants

Part 1: Online Panel

The first part of the dialogue series will be an online panel over zoom with four invited international panellists. The panel will be made up of leaders and practitioners working in different ways to confront legacies of oppression in design, systems thinking, systemic design and beyond. The hope would be to host this first panel discussion as part of RSD11 but available to all for free registration.

Part 2: In-Person Fishbowl Dialogue

The second part of the dialogue series will be an in-person fishbowl format with leaders and contributors within the Relating Systems Thinking and Design community. Seven leaders and contributors will be recruited in advance of the workshop and invited to listen in on the online panel session. They will then start the dialogue in the inner circle reflecting on the implications of oppression for the systemic design community.

Additional participants that register will join the outer circle and listen to the people in the inner circle start the dialogue and then the dialogue will move to the outer circle and they will be invited to contribute their perspectives. Finally, the dialogue will be opened up for all to discuss their reflections and thoughts regarding if and how the systemic design community can work towards liberation.

Key questions

The following key questions will be explored in the international online panel:

- What is the systemic nature of oppression and how does it manifest?
- In what ways is oppression reproduced in systemic design?

The questions below will be reflected on in the in-person fishbowl dialogue?

- What are the implications and experiences of oppression in systemic design locally?
- What does understanding the legacies of oppression demand of the systemic design community?
- Can the systemic design community work towards liberation? If so, how?

Schedule

Part 1: 1-hour online dialogue

- 5-minute land acknowledgement & introduction
- 20-minute panel statements (5 minutes each)
- 15-minute Q&A of panellists by facilitators
- 15-minute Q&A with audience
- 5-minute closing

Part 2: 1.5-hour in-person fish bowl

- 10-minute land acknowledgement & introduction
- 30-minute dialogue with inner fishbowl
- 30-minute dialogue with outer fishbowl

- 15-minute reflections by all on discussion
- 5-minute closing

References

Ansari, A., (2021). Design's Missing Others and Their Incommensurate Worlds. *Design in Crisis: New Worlds, Philosophies & Practices*. New York: Routledge.

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