



**HDK-VALAND – HÖGSKOLAN FÖR KONST OCH DESIGN**

# **Designing Together: A Frugal Design Approach**

## **Exploring Participatory Design in a Global North-South Cooperation Context (Sweden–Kenya)**

**Helena Hansson**

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i design vid HDK-Valand – Högskolan för konst och design, Göteborgs universitet, som med tillstånd av Konstnärliga fakultetens dekan offentligt kommer att försvaras fredagen den 8 oktober 2021 kl 10:00 vid HDK-Valand, Kristinelundsgatan 6-8, Göteborg, samt via Zoom

Fakultetsopponent:

Dr. Yongqi Lou, Professor, Tongji University, Shanghai

# Abstract

Title: Designing Together: A Frugal Design Approach. Exploring Participatory Design in a Global North-South Cooperation Context (Sweden–Kenya)

Author: Helena Hansson

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Since the turn of the millennium, participatory designers have increasingly begun to engage in collaborative research processes in the so-called Global South, targeting sustainable development. The quest is to take on the larger challenges through cooperative work, and such a research context is here referred to as Global North–South cooperation. This research explores how participatory design and designers can contribute to sustainable development targeting the UN’s SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

The transdisciplinary research process has involved multiple and diverse actors, both researchers and practitioners, from Sweden and Kenya. It is significant for this research that a participant belonging to the user group in focus, the Jua Kali, a local community of practice in Kenya, has been involved in the whole design process, including the reflection phase. Several frugal constraints challenge the Jua Kali and their practice. The research, which takes an agency-oriented view, aims to make a transformative change for this user group by creating agency in terms of capabilities. A central aspect is that the designer acts to support others to act, serving as a catalyst who supports the Jua Kali practitioners.

The discussion pivots around four design issues—diversity, context, reflexivity, and time—that I have identified as key issues to consider when designing together in such a design context. To grasp and deal with them, I have explored a methodology that contains a set of conflicting elements: actor-network theory (ANT), the capability approach (CA), co-craft (CoC), and co-writing (CoW). While ANT provides an analytical tool for investigating how agency is created, CA acts as a moral compass and framework for discussing what agency should be created in terms of capabilities. While CoC helps contextualize design, creating a linkage to the local design practice, CoW provides a space for shared reflection, giving the Jua Kali a formal voice.

The joint explorations in the frugal context, combined with joint reflection and support from conflicting theories, have helped create a more nuanced understanding of how design contributes to sustainable development. In this way, the research brings new perspectives and vocabularies to participatory design research.