### Introduction

Our world is in a severe state. Climate change, growing inequality, financial crises, unemployment, destruction of biodiversity and habitats, and depletion of natural resources are examples of the greatest challenges we are facing, and there are practically no commonly shared visions that could guide our societies towards global, sustainable long term solutions.

We believe that design, as an inherently transdisciplinary and integrative practice and activity, could make significant contributions to this (Kommonen 2001). However, this requires that the design field and those involved must develop new competences and understandings of fields that they may not have thought about as relevant for design, and that we can find and develop relevant communities of both experts and citizens that welcome the contributions from our direction.

The aim of this workshop is to take steps in that direction. The workshop invites a group of participants who are interested in exploring a design-oriented way to create ideas of serious utopias – i.e. what kind of a society we would like to have in the future.

### Theme of workshop

The theme of the workshop is “Utopia and design of society”, and it is divided into two stages.

### Morning: Discussing and analyzing societal designs

We propose that useful design discussions can be initiated if we are able to broaden the understanding and discussion of what designs are, and what are designs.

Several key authors in the field of design have highlighted how design is a universal human activity and how everyday life and society are permeated with design (e.g. Cross 2006; Krippendorff 2006; Nelson & Stolterman 2012; Papanek 1971). However, most of these tend to discuss the topic from the point of view of the designer or the design activity, which leaves the point of view of society and of citizens, as well as the kinds of design processes that are not designer-led but perhaps more of emergent nature, less elaborated.

With **societal designs** we refer to designs and design features such as institutions, laws, customs, practices, social systems, concepts, ideologies, beliefs, structures, functions, and so on (Kommonen 2013; Schneider & Ingram 1997; Ostrom 2005; Benkler 2006; Wright 2010; Unger 1996; Lessig 2006).

### How to participate?

#### Registration

For registering to the workshop, there is a Doodle address where you can sign up which will be provided to you by the conference organizers when you have successfully registered for the conference. Please note that there is a limit of 20 participants, and participants will be accepted in the order they register up until 20 registrations have been received. If this Doodle is already full, you are welcome to send us an email (see address below) if you are interested in a place in the case of a cancellation.

#### Position paper

We ask all participants to prepare a position paper with input for the workshop with

1. a short **introduction** of themselves,
2. an **example of a change** that is or should be taking place in society, and
3. a **design fiction story** about society in the year 2040.

These are explained more in detail below. As these will be used as materials in the workshop, we hope that you would send them to mia.muurimaki@aalto.fi as soon as possible after your registration, to help us to prepare for the workshop activities well in advance!

We will have an internal website that is open only for the participants, and parts 1-2 of your input will be posted there and made available for other participants a few days before the workshop. Part 3 will be shared during the workshop. As these materials are targeted mainly for facilitating the groupwork, we will not share these materials publicly. As this is a highly experimental workshop, we do not plan publishable results. However, we expect that the workshop may lead to some future publishable collaborations.

The workshop will rely a lot on the material you contribute beforehand, but at the same time we suggest that interested participants would not be overly ambitious or self-critical in preparing their contribution: we don’t want you to drop participation because you think preparing the input is too hard. Hence we welcome as input any contributions that attempt to respond to our questions!

### Questions, inquiries?

Please send any questions for more information to mia.muurimaki@aalto.fi.

### Designs in society

Here is a non-exhaustive list of things that we believe can be usefully thought about as **having a design**:

- institutions, organizations, bureaucracies,
- rules, laws, regulations, agreements,
- practices, routines, habits, customers, rituals, cultural institutions,
- beliefs, belief systems, ideologies,
- systems, platforms, processes,
- language, discourses, expert vocabularies, concepts,
- plans, policies, strategies, campaigns, principles,
- artifacts, music, artworks, narratives, brands,
- organisms, organs, biological systems,
- businesses, value chains, markets,...

### Examples of concerns

If you have trouble finding a topic to consider changes in society, we have collected a page of **Concerns and challenges for society** for your inspiration!

### Sources for inspiration

Please find below a selection of links to materials that may be of inspiration.

**UPDATE**: We have some quotes for you on this page that may provide some inspiration.

### Design

- Kommonen, K.-H., 2013. *Design Ecosystems as the Landscapes for Co-Creation*. In *Proceedings of the...*
We invite the participants to explore ways how the design of society can be discussed in a useful way, through the examples they bring to the workshop. In the morning session we will discuss the designs brought to the workshop and try to analyze them, and conclude by reflecting on what we can learn about society through this kind of an analytical lens.

Afternoon: Utopia 2040

In the afternoon session, we will move on to develop together ideas of a desirable future society in the year 2040, based on ideas of participants, and try to employ design language in our work, maybe also potentially mobilizing some of the designs we have discussed earlier as building blocks for the utopias.

The term utopia comes from Thomas More’s book of the same name (More 1516), and has turned into a generic label for depictions of alternative societal models. Ruth Levitas proposes that utopia can be used as a method, as it:

“facilitates genuinely holistic thinking about possible futures, combined with reflexivity, provisionality and democratic engagement with the principles and practices of those futures. And it requires us to think about our conceptions of human needs and human flourishing in those possible futures. The core of utopia is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively. Its expressions explore and bring to debate the potential contents and contexts of human flourishing. It is thus better understood as a method than a goal.” (Levitas 2013)

Conclusions

In the concluding stage, we will discuss the key findings of the exercise, eg. 1) the difficulties and benefits of the utopian thinking and our ability to approach and envision a description of a desirable society; 2) the feasibility and usefulness of design analysis and utopia as methods in such a limited exercise and 3) how these experiences can help us to foresee their value in some larger context? Will some of the work done in this workshop form interesting building blocks for future utopia and design fiction work? And, finally, what did we learn about design in society and societal design?

References


Design fiction

• Arki research group / Aalto ARTS Media Lab
  • Future Media Home / Design Fiction project (1998)
  • Asumisen arki ja unelmat (At home today, tomorrow) (2000)

Utopia

• Ruth Levitas - http://dsm.ucl.ac.uk/spais/people/person/ruth-a-levitas/
  • Levitas, R. (2006). The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society: or why sociologists and others should take Utopia more seriously. (pdf)
  • Erik Olin Wright - http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/
  • Envisioning Real Utopias (2010)
  • Marxist.org Utopian Socialism pages - discussion of many facets of utopia with full texts from e.g. Plato, Thomas More, Samuel Butler, Edward Bellamy, H.G. Wells etc
  • Roberto Mangabeira Unger

3. Story from Utopia 2040

In the afternoon, we will explore how we can use Design Fiction and Utopia as methods to develop interesting ideas about the future for society, combined with the design language we have been exercising in the morning. To feed the work, we ask all participants to write a design fiction story to feed the afternoon work.

In your contribution, please

• write a short news story for a newspaper that will appear on June 9th, 2040
• tell about something that let’s us imagine how society and everyday life has changed in 25 years
• your story can be either utopian or dystopian – i.e. something you consider desirable or undesirable: the point is to inspire you and other participants to think fruitfully about a future that is different from today
• we will compile the stories into a newspaper that will be distributed in the workshop, to feed the utopia session

References


• any notes about why you are interested in the topics of the workshop

This introduction will be shared with all participants on the website and in the workshop.

2. Change in society

In the workshop, we want to discuss the design of society and how the design is or should be changing. As material for our discussions, we hope that participants bring examples of changes in society that they think are happening, have happened or should be happening, and try to identify designs, design actors and design processes that are relevant to the example.

In your contribution, please present

• an example of a need for change in society, small or large (hint for inspiration: newspapers! or materials on this page in the left hand column…)
• supported by notes about what kinds of societal designs are involved, e.g. (you can also take a different approach in your notes)
  • which designs are changing and which ones play some role and should be understood and taken into account
  • who are the designers that a) can or should make the new design and b) decide whether it will happen or not
  • what are the various forces driving or opposing the change

This description will be shared with all participants on the website and in the workshop.
This story will not be shared before the workshop, but it will be shared in the workshop before lunch break. Please note that in order to prepare the newspaper, we need to receive your story well in advance of the workshop!

Please write these 3 parts clearly separated from each other, into a text document or a plain email message and send them to mia.muurimaki@aalto.fi.