

Guest Editor:



Dr. Farnaz Nickpour is an inclusive and human-centred design scholar, researcher and educator with more than 15 years of experience in leading inclusive design research across healthcare and mobility sectors in the UK, and Director of The [Inclusionaries Lab](#) for advanced design research at The University of Liverpool, UK.

Farnaz's research focuses on critical and contemporary dimensions of design for inclusion, aimed at advancing four strategic research themes i.e., Inclusive mobility; Psychosocial inclusion; Inclusive health innovation; and Design for palliative and end-of-life care. Farnaz has an established track record of award-winning design research, education and knowledge transfer, with 50+ peer-reviewed design publications, External Examiner appointments at the Royal College of Art and University of Brighton UK, and various advisory, review and scientific committee positions in international design journals, conferences and organisations.

As the Guest Editor of the inaugural edition of Design for All India, Farnaz will be introducing and outlining the theme of 'Critical Inclusive Design', building the case for critically

engaging with inclusion. With diverse contributions from The Inclusionaries Lab researchers, this edition will provide multiple perspectives, contexts and examples of dilemmas and existential crises inclusive design is facing and sets the scene for a new theoretically and empirically informed field of 'Critical Inclusive Design' - which Farnaz argues is urgently needed.

Editorial:

The Case for 'Critical Inclusive Design'

Inclusive design status quo needs to be challenged and inclusive design state-of-the-art needs to be reimagined and redefined. There is urgency and significance to this statement.

Inclusive design is both a philosophy and a practice. We need to progress both fronts, if we are to remain relevant and impactful as a field. Critical reflections and progressive perspectives on philosophy and positionality of inclusive design are much needed, as well as granular know-how and nuanced guidance on advanced application of inclusive design.

What are the existential crises of inclusive design today? This question, and perhaps more importantly, this critical approach, has significance to our field. As a community of research and practice, we are well aware of many of our dilemmas, while for some others, we need to adopt a transdisciplinary lens - to excavate and define them together with other fields. Going forward, what do we do about these dilemmas and crises, and how do we best capture and communicate them to inform and advance the field? Does this require a more critical, reflexive and collective approach? And as a progressive field, how do we define our position in relation to the more contemporary and critical issues of our time? A quick review might help illustrate an overall picture:

- On a societal level - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is already at the top of the societal, organisational and educational agenda. This is a major step forward, and prone to tick-boxing and tokenism. This is also a timely opportunity for inclusive design to step in and offer valuable**

conceptual/methodological/empirical expertise. How should inclusive design dialogue with and inform EDI and are opportunities for such conversations and contributions being realised? Moreover, what is the juxtaposition of inclusive design and equity? Does inclusive design strive for tackling inequality, or do we strive for designing with equity at the outset? And are we equipped with the principles, methodologies and tools for this?

- **On an inter-disciplinary level - is inclusive design actively engaged with important voices and relevant disciplinary epistemologies outside the design field - such as critical disability studies, philosophy of technology, and medical humanities? And as such, how does inclusive design relate and respond to increasingly relevant perspectives such as ethics, rights and narratives of inclusion, exclusion and oppression, intersectionality, and techno-ableism?**

- **On an intra-disciplinary level - how do we position ourselves in relation to relevant emerging approaches within the design field, such as pluriversal design, system-shifting design, and design justice? How could inclusive design be applied on a transformative system-shifting level, acknowledging relationality and multiple centres, and actively contribute to design justice - moving beyond the equality and equity mandate?**

Do we think our inclusive design research and practice agenda and priorities are in keeping with key challenges and priorities of our times, or are we possibly falling behind? Where do we stand now and what is the next stage? What is our long-term vision and what are our key strategy and priorities? What are we doing well,

and what capabilities, connections and commitments do we need to establish? There seems to be a critical, strategic, and progressive void and a state of stagnancy in the inclusive design field - leaving many such questions unaddressed. A more reflexive, positional and transformative approach is needed.

This special edition by the Inclusionaries Lab is a first step towards conceptualising and contextualising 'Critical Inclusive Design', laying the foundations for it as a new field of enquiry, research and practice, addressing some of the above questions and beyond.

The edition presents a selection of articles by The Inclusionaries members Cara Shaw, Luka Kille-Speckter, Andrew Tibbles and Isobel Leason, as well as a joint piece introducing The Inclusionaries as a design research collective. Together, the four articles by each lab member offer a quadruple critical review of the current state of inclusive design as a field through four distinct concept-specific, context-specific, method-specific and tool-specific critical lenses and help outline first insights and initial constructs for a 'Critical Inclusive Design' approach.

A concept-specific critical lens

In "*Identifying 'Extremes' in Complex Systems; Critical and Systemic Perspectives on the Concept of Extreme Users from a Study in Oral Health*", Isobel Leason offers concept-specific critical perspectives on inclusive design by interrogating the concept of 'extreme user' through the lenses of systems, complexity and intersectionality, bias, and categorical and normative thinking. Leason argues, while extreme users notion is foundational to inclusive design, its conventional conceptualisation and application, particularly within the fourth order design domain, fails to acknowledge complexities,

intersecting dimensions, and dynamic boundaries between extremes and mainstreams within a system. Leason suggests advanced perspectives to account for the above and contextualises them within the field of inclusive oral health systems, drawing on her findings from a research study in this area. The article concludes by proposing System's Context; Individual-System Navigation; and Individual's Context as three levels to consider when gauging extremes on a systemic level.

A context-specific critical lens

In "*Advancing Inclusive Design in the Context of Paediatric Mobility; Six Key Research Studies and a Critical Implementation Strategy*", Cara Shaw offers context-specific critical lenses on inclusive design by focusing on the field of inclusive paediatric mobility design. Shaw revisits her six comprehensive research studies in this area and offers distinctive dimensions and perspectives through which to advance inclusive paediatric mobility design. These include Narratives, Children's rights, and Child-centred framing. Shaw starts with a reflexive approach interrogating 50 years of inclusive paediatric mobility design through a mapping review. She then develops theoretical frameworks and models to transition designerly ways, elevate children's voice through analysing their designs, and build theories around design as an agent of narratives to advance the field. Shaw finally proposes a critical implementation strategy offering five practical considerations which shift the focus from knowledge building and design research to knowledge implementation and design practice to ultimately deliver tangible impact in the field of inclusive paediatric mobility design.

A Method-specific critical lens

In “*Influences in Eliciting Authentic Answers in Design Inquiry and Imagination: through the lens of participatory design workshops*”, Andrew Tibbles offers a method-specific critical lens, reflecting on the methods of participatory design, particularly participatory design workshops. Tibbles shares scepticisms around authenticity of outcomes of design inquiry and imagination through this method, recounting his multiple experiences over the years as a designer, researcher, facilitator, and participant experimenting with diverse settings and scenarios in participatory design workshops. Tibbles discusses social desirability bias, group and individual dynamics and settings, participant hierarchies, and temporal aspects and how they impact and shape reflective practice. The article poses questions around the rigour of design knowledge building in participatory design, and the role of such methods in relation to supporting versus challenging dominant narratives.

A Tool-specific critical lens

In “*The Illusion of Inclusion: Exploring the Paradox of Simulations and Simulation Toolkits in [Inclusive] Design*”, Luka Kille-Speckter adopts a tool-specific critical lens, interrogating use of the widely recognised simulation toolkits in inclusive design. Kille-Speckter examines the potential pitfalls and paradoxes in relying on such simulations to offer insight into and empathy for diverse lived experiences, and questions whether they inadvertently perpetuate the ‘illusion of inclusion’, ableist and deficit-based views, and unintended exclusion. Kille-Speckter explores simulation versus immersion, focuses on the interrelation of narratives and psychosocial, and offers valuable lessons from three non-design disciplines. The author adds an extra valuable dimension to the investigation by sharing first-hand personal

accounts of her experiences with simulation toolkits as an individual with a visual impairment, through an auto-ethnographic lived experience expertise lens, alongside her disciplinary expertise lens. Kille-Speckter concludes with a set of suggestions to guide designers in adopting a critical and nuanced approach to simulation tools, or as she notes: 'A Call to Do Better'.

Beyond their critical and reflexive content, these four articles exhibit diverse and distinctive approaches to writing, and authorship styles - reflecting the individuality and positionality of their authors in both the choice of topics and the formats of narration. As *The Inclusionaries*, we believe this is important and something we should strive for.

Collectively, the articles in this edition exemplify a critical and reflexive approach to inclusive design, through interrogating specific and key inclusive design concepts, contexts, methods and tools. Our goal is to build on this first attempt, towards conceptualising and contextualising critical inclusive design as a field.

We hope there is value to the reader and that this edition of *Design for All India* would stimulate further thinking and conversation within the wider inclusive design community. You can find us at: www.inclusionaries.com - we hope to hear from you to collectively build on critical inclusive design.

Acknowledgement

This edition has been a major team effort and I would like to thank all *The Inclusionaries* Lab members; Cara Shaw, Luka Kille-Speckter, Andrew Tibbles and Isobel Leason for their enthusiasm, commitment, and excellence as always, also thanks to Andrew Tibbles for leading graphic design work for this special edition.

This has also been a precious opportunity and exercise for us as a team, to reflect, critique and create together as a collective and I would like to thank Dr Sunil Bhatia for this invitation to contribute as a Guest Editor for this Design for All edition.