Guest Editor:

Dr. Brigitte Wolf

Brigitte Wolf is Professor Emerita of Design Theory at the University of Wuppertal and was also Professor of Design Management at the Köln International School of Design (KISD), TH Cologne. She served as Head of Design Theory at the German University in Cairo and as Lector of the Brand, Identity, and Design Management research unit at Inholland University in Rotterdam.

Her background is in Industrial Design and Psychology. She received her doctoral degree in Psychology. Her professional background includes working in a design studio as well as acting as Vice Director of the German Design Council and serving as UNIDO consultant at the Oficina Nacional de Diseño in Havana, Cuba, where she also lectured at the Instituto de Diseño Industrial.

Her teaching experience spans master's programs at the Lucerne School of Design and Art, ecosign Academy in Cologne, the doctoral program at the University of Teheran and workshops for students and professionals in Brazil, Cuba and Argentina.

She was honored with the title Assistant Professor at ISDI (Havana) and Adjunct Professor at the University of Teheran. She curated the traveling exhibition Designing the Environment for the Goethe Institute and initiated the international Sustainable Summer School.

Editorial

Design Research as Applied Science

Dr. Brigitte Wolf

I feel very privileged to be invited as a guest editor of the June/July 2025 edition of the acknowledged Design for All journal. I thank Mr. Sunil Bhatia (who is successfully publishing this magazine since 20 years) for giving me the chance to share my thoughts about design research and research methodologies. In this magazine I present a small variety of examples of design research. I appreciate the dedication of this year's magazines to woman in design research, because experience tells us that many design researchers are female. This might be related to the fact that design research needs social competence – which is a female strength.

I am grateful to all design researchers who accepted my invitation and submitted a paper for this issue of the designforall magazine. The articles published in this edition present design research projects and theoretical reflections about design and designers. The invited authors are women from different countries and cultures. Finally, nine design researchers gave some of their valuable time and managed to write a paper, although they are all very busy researchers and have a variety of projects on their agenda. All of them have been working with me on various projects.

As editor of this issue, I take this opportunity to briefly share my approach to design research: Design research is an academic discipline which has developed and gained more visibility and acknowledgement during the last years. It is a growing discipline and

makes more and more designers to understand human behavior and human experience within their material and immaterial environment. Cultural changes, new technologies, and social values determine living experiences. It is obvious that the complexity of our everyday life is increasing, and new challenges occur in all parts of society.

Design research is not a science and will not be a science in the future. It differs from scientific academic research, which is focusing on the generation of new scientific findings through the verification of hypothesis and theories using quantitative methods. On the contrary design research is applied research focusing on the understanding of problematic situations with the intention to improve peoples' lifes. In many cases 'wicked problems' appear which cannot be solved easily. Design research is a discipline focusing on understanding the interplay/relation between society, environment and technical innovation aiming for improvements.

Research problems are encountered in everyday life and therefore create research processes addressing the experiences of all different stakeholders. Understanding different points of view is crucial for the research process to come up with concepts acceptable to all involved. The aim is to achieve insights and understanding of peoples' everyday life and the challenges they are facing. For this kind of research empathy and collaboration with the targeted group of people is a prerequisite. Consequently, qualitative research methods adopted from different social sciences, like psychology, sociology, ethnology, anthropology are borrowed and modified. Especially participative research methods play an important role and offer the chance for all people involved to have a say. None of these methods was developed for design research, therefore methods need to be modified and

tailored especially for design research purposes and new methods need to be developed.

At the starting point the definition of the research subject is usually very open and research questions are not yet clearly defined. During the research process which consists of secondary (literature) research and primary field research the knowledge base increases and the subject of research will be more clearly defined during the research process. The emphasis of design research is directed to what is called 'social design' - in private or professional life. Other than in classical design disciplines, like industrial design or communication design there is no final solution on the spot, instead it is often an ongoing process of implementation and improvement.

In the design research literature different approaches towards design research are mentioned. The articles in this magazine's issue emphasize on research 'for' design and research 'about' design. The intention of research 'for' design is to deliver insights and knowledge to improve people's lifes including human interaction with their environment, the social interaction with each other and the role of artifacts. The intention of research 'about' design is to reflect in a critical and philosophical way about what designers do, how they do it and what has been achieved already. As a discipline, design research cannot rely on measurable theories. Instead, design creates theoretical assumptions through the analysis of insights and observations. In this way of proceeding critical reflection is a must in every step of the research process.

May the published articles in this issue provide inspiration to the readers and stimulate further design research activities.