



# A journey in the footprints of design

**THIS IS MY LAST EDITORIAL NOTE FOR THE RESEARCH PART** of the Swedish Design Research Journal, a journal published since 2009. This, as well as cooperation with Lotta Jonsson, responsible for the story part and who finished with the previous issue, has been very rewarding and inspiring. My journey as an editor really started back in 1994 when SVID, Swedish Industrial Design Foundation launched the "Designjournalen". Even then with the purpose to be a communication channel for researchers and design practitioners. Very tentative attempts! It was difficult to get articles from researchers. The situation is now much better and articles are coming from different parts of the world. These undergo an anonymous review process, and sometimes it will be just a few articles that are ready for publication. During these twenty years there has been a big change in design research, not least, the number of researchers in the field of design are today so many more, which should mean a continued good influx of articles. On the whole, the situation for the design has changed since I myself began research in design management in the late 1980s.

When design management became a research topic in the 1980s there was an assumption about the need to legitimize design, both as a research subject and as value-creating resource in business. Studies were made that "proved" the importance of design for companies' profitability. There were – and are – a perception that business is only interested in numbers! Sure, numbers are important for corporate decision-making, but rarely by showing a particular function's value. Decisions around investments and how businesses organize themselves is complicated. Decisions are often irrational and emotional (despite perceptions to the contrary), influenced by previous knowledge whether they are up to date or not. Management often lack knowledge of what design means and hence the knowledge of how design can be integrated into the organization. It takes a long time before knowledge of design becomes part of the management curriculum and the requirements of such necessary. In some industries it is today, however, obvious that the design is a strategic resource and companies have built up its design expertise. In other industries, companies are still unsure of how to approach design. In some sectors design is something completely new. This applies particularly to the public sector and service design that is new to both buyers and sellers of design. Design as a process and as a function is changing.

There is certainly a big difference in what and how design is perceived compared to when the first issue of "Designjournalen", in 1994 was launched. But also during the last five years, since the start of the Swedish Design Research Journal in 2009, there has been a strong development, especially in service design. If there was some scepticism from several actors, there is now a curiosity. There is still a knowledge gap that needs to be filled. Hence the need for journals, forums, activities, etc. that conveys this knowledge, which is growing as more researchers and designers get involved and conveys their knowledge and their research results. The more people contribute, the more interesting is the discussion about design. I look forward to reading and contributing to future issues and discussion, but then as a researcher. ■



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RESEARCH/

**Treehotel in Harads Sweden.**  
Photo: Helena Karlberg

**THE ARTICLE'S STARTING** point is a collaborative project between academia, industry and the community in northern Sweden. The project is developing knowledge and methods of place innovation based on a coherent perspective on the innovative design of places. Place innovation weaves together social, cultural, economic and technological aspects in order to increase the attractiveness of a place to existing and potential visitors, residents and investors. The term 'place' can refer to a destination, city, municipality or region – that is, some type of geographically defined area. The interest in place innovation among the participating researchers, businesses, organisations and authorities reflects the ongoing paradigm shift in the view of the role of innovations in social development. More and more importance is being placed on developing innovative solutions to social challenges by means of inclusive innovation processes in contrast to the previously dominant focus on the

## Social change through place innovation

This article explores how 'place innovation' can be used as a new scientific concept and practical tool to understand and shape the social design of the future.

expert-driven development of technological innovations. This article describes the key conceptual components of place innovation, starting from previous research into inclusive design/innovation combined with the joint problem formulation in the project that forms the basis of this study.

The article begins with a description of the study's methodology and materials.

It then describes the ongoing paradigm shift in society's view of innovation and design as drivers of economic and social development, as well as the existing research on place development and inclusive design/innovation. The next section identifies the key components of place innovation. Finally, conclusions are drawn about how place innovation can be used to understand and shape future social design.

## Methods and materials

The study employs a participatory research approach in which new knowledge is being developed jointly by innovation researchers at Luleå University of Technology and representatives of design companies, tourism companies, destination management companies and municipalities in Swedish Lapland (which includes all of the province of Norrbotten and parts of the province of Västerbotten) and the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID). This is occurring within the framework of the research project Place Innovation in Swedish Lapland, which is being funded by BFUF (the R&D Fund of the Swedish Tourism & Hospitality Industry) from 2015 to 2017. Participatory research is an established research approach that strives for a coequal exchange of experiences between researchers and practitioners based on both practical and theoretical knowledge. The resulting knowledge is thereby relevant and useful both to the research field's further development and to practical processes of change (cf. Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson, 2006; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014; Johannisson et al., 2008).

The participatory approach is being used in all stages of the project, from problem formulation, stakeholder mobilisation, data collection, analysis and tools development to results dissemination and utilisation by means of a continuous dialogue and mutual learning between the participants. This occurs primarily within the framework of 'dialogue seminars' and 'design seminars', which are proven methods in participatory research and participatory design, but also by means of continuous communication at smaller meetings and via digital channels (cf. Buur and Matthews, 2008; Ericson and Wenngren, 2012; Jégou and Manzini, 2008; Lindberg, 2014). Because the project has just begun, the material for this article is drawn from the two preliminary stages: problem formulation and stakeholder mobilisation. These consist of project descriptions for



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**” In the development of social innovations, these marginalised groups are involved in the development of innovative solutions (...)**”

research funding bodies and the final report from a pilot study. Planned future articles will involve in-depth empirical analyses of place innovation as a concept and tool.

### Paradigm shift in research and policy

Over the past decade, research into innovation – that is, how tomorrow's goods, services, methods etc. will be developed, disseminated and utilised – has grown explosively in both Sweden and other countries (Benner, 2005; Fagerberg et al., 2005). The main forms and fields of innovation that have been studied are technical product development led by technical experts within the basic, manufacturing and high-tech industries (such as IT), often based on knowledge drawn from technological and scientific research fields. The knowledge base of innovation policy work has thereby been limited in scope to a few industries, a few innovation developers and a few forms of innovation. For the hospitality industry, creative industries and other service sectors, and for the public and voluntary sectors, the result is that they have lagged

behind in the knowledge-based innovation development that is increasingly important for achieving competitiveness and attractive power (Lindberg, 2012; Pettersson, 2007).

Within the past few years, however, it has been possible to perceive a paradigm shift in that the launch of constantly new technological innovations is no longer considered to be the sole driver of the necessary renewal of the economy and society. Instead, there is a demand for innovation in the form of innovative solutions to such social challenges as unemployment, poverty, an ageing population etc. The view is that such complex challenges need to be solved by means of cross-sector collaboration that involves a variety of actors in many different industries and fields of operation and that interweaves social, cultural, economic and technological aspects. The latest growth and innovation policy strategies of both the EU and Sweden stress the importance of user and citizen involvement in the development of innovative solutions (European Union, 2010a; European Union, 2010b; Ministry of En-

terprise, Energy and Communications, Sweden, 2012). This is also reflected in the process People Powered Future, which is being managed by SVID with support from, among others, Sweden's national innovation agency VINNOVA. This process uses innovative inclusive design to increase Sweden's innovative power and competitiveness. ([www.svid.se/peoplepoweredfuture](http://www.svid.se/peoplepoweredfuture)).

Researchers have begun to study inclusive innovation processes that involve diverse groups of people to solve social challenges from various perspectives, including a service-based perspective, a social perspective, and a user-driven design/innovation perspective. This article combines these three research perspectives in an innovative way in order to understand how innovative place development is influenced by the multifaceted, interwoven aspects of attractiveness to different groups of people. Previous innovation research has certainly highlighted the importance of place to innovation and growth in terms of the geographic clustering of innovation-driving actors and activities (cf. Benner, 2005; Fagerberg et al., 2005). However, innovation has rarely been explored in terms of the innovative development and design of geographic places, especially not in a way that weaves together social, business and citizen perspectives as place innovation does. 'Place-based innovation' is a similar concept that studies innovation processes which originate in a specific place, but it does not pay attention to an innovative approach to the place itself (cf. Adams & Hess, 2010). 'Place management' is another related research concept due to its focus on place development but it does not focus on innovation per se (cf. Parker, 2008). Yet another relevant concept is 'place branding', which highlights the interweaving of places' economic, social, political and cultural development in brand strategies and other marketing methods, without necessarily analysing what is specifically innovative in this approach (cf. Anholt, 2005; Scaramanga,

2012). Nor does 'governance', which is deemed to have replaced 'government' as the main steering method of regional development, focus specifically on innovation (cf. Hedlund and Montin, 2009; Pierre and Peters, 2000).

By starting from the emerging research on inclusive design/innovation, it is possible to identify and further develop the specifically innovative factors in place development. Existing research into service-based design/innovation pinpoints the relationship between producers and users as one key element in the development, dissemination and utilisation of innovative services. Throughout the entire chain from design and development to delivery and consumption, an interaction occurs between producer and consumer regardless of whether the service is provided by the private or public sector. Service innovations are shaped by the fact that services are largely intangible, momentary, place dependent, interactive and can in their turn consist of various types of innovation, such as experience innovation, business model innovation, brand innovation or social innovation (Benner, 2005; Fagerberg et al., 2005; Kristensson, 2014; Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, Sweden, 2010). Social innovation in particular is a growing research field in Europe. Social innovation is defined as the development of new products, services, methods, organisational methods, and social structures that address the identified social challenges or social needs of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups and perspectives. In the development of social innovations, these marginalised groups/perspectives are involved in the development of innovative solutions designed to lead to social improvement for people, organisations and society (European Union, 2013; Hansson et al., 2014; Lindberg and Berglund, forthcoming). A closely related research field is social design, which involves design-based processes aimed at increasing people's control over their living conditions and environments

by involving them in the development of solutions to social and economic problems (Armstrong et al., 2014; Jégou and Manzini, 2008). Increased inclusion in innovation processes is also a focus of research into user-driven design/innovation. This type of innovation develops new products, services, methods etc. with the help of users, target groups, stakeholders and others. User-driven design originated in what is called 'participatory design', which previously focused mainly on the involvement of employees in the development of their workplaces. In recent years this type of design has increasingly been used as a method of including diverse groups of people in innovation development (Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Buur and Matthews, 2008; Ericson and Wenngren, 2012).

### Components of place innovation

As a coherent perspective on the innovative design of places, place innovation reflects the increasing scientific and social interest in a more multifaceted view of the role of innovations in social development. The coherent perspective of place innovation consists partly of an interweaving of various processes of place development that have previously often been kept separate. These processes include tourism design for the hospitality industry, regional growth development for the business community, and attractive regions for the population. The result is that place innovation connects various sectors of society – public, private, and non-profit – in new ways. Place innovation also interweaves the needs of three target groups/stakeholders that were previously often dealt with separately: existing and potential visitors, residents and investors. Place innovation also combines previously separated aspects of innovation development: social, cultural, economic and technological. Finally, place innovation highlights the interplay between three dimensions of the character of places: their physical manifestation (including their design and architecture), their content (including their public and commercial

services, business start-ups, activities and events), and their marketing (including their branding and marketing).

Place innovation supplies – in the form of theoretical and practical tools – the incentives and methods with which to link these various processes, sectors, needs, aspects and dimensions in the form of studies and programmes using a uniform approach to future social design. The hub of the link is the place's identity, which needs to be identified, formulated, packaged and communicated in order to increase the place's attractiveness to existing and potential residents, visitors and investors. The identity consists of the place's unique features, that is, the tangible and intangible characteristics that distinguish it from other places. By harnessing and clarifying this identity, place innovation can enhance the experience of a place for residents, visitors and investors (cf. Karlberg, 2015; Scaramanga, 2012).

In light of the existing research on inclusive innovation, the innovative aspect of place innovation is considered to lie precisely in this innovative linking of various processes, sectors, needs, aspects and dimensions. For example, combining the place's physical manifestation, content and marketing in relation to tourism design for the hospitality industry, regional growth programmes to foster business development, and attractive regions for the local population, represents a new approach to future social design. The socially innovative aspect of place innovation is apparent in the innovative method: first, of identifying and linking the social challenges within business and society in relation to the social needs of existing and potential residents, visitors and investors, and, second, of involving many different groups of people, organisations and sectors in distinguishing, harnessing and clarifying the place's identity in a way that increases the place's attractiveness. The user-driven innovativeness of place innovation is apparent in the involvement of many different target groups/stakeholders –

with a focus on existing and potential residents, visitors and investors – in the development of a place based on what these groups consider to be the place's unique identity. This is also consistent with social design in the sense that place innovation strives to increase people's influence over their living conditions and environments by involving them in the development of solutions to the place's social and economic problems. The service-based innovativeness of place innovation is apparent in the linking of the intangible, momentary, interactive and place-dependent aspects that comprise the foundation for the innovative design, content, and marketing of places. These components of processes, sectors, needs, aspects and dimensions can be regarded as central to enabling place innovation to be used to understand and shape future social design. It is precisely these innovative links within and between these components that make place innovation an innovative scientific concept and practical tool.

### Conclusions about place innovation for future social design

As mentioned above, place innovation reflects the paradigm shift that was initiated in the field of innovation, with growing scientific and social interest in a more multifaceted approach to the role of innovations in social development than the dominant technologically focused approach could offer. This attitudinal change follows the expansion of the service sector's share of GDP, export value and employment in Sweden, where innovation in the form of new services is seen to be necessary in order to meet future needs for growth, employment and welfare (Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, Sweden, 2010). Meanwhile, the private, public and voluntary services sector has a lot of catching up to do in terms of increasing its competitiveness and attractiveness by means of knowledge-based innovation development compared to the technological fields, whose innovative power has been supported and studied for far longer. The companies, destination

management companies and municipalities that are participating in the project Place Innovation in Swedish Lapland have expressed a clear need for knowledge- and tools development to enable them to renew their activities as the world around them changes.

Place innovation is thereby in line with the theme of this issue of Design Research Journal, which calls for greater awareness among decision makers and the general public about the need for creative, human-driven, multidisciplinary design- and innovation processes to solve global challenges. According to our analysis, by creating innovative links within and between the identified components of processes, sectors, needs, aspects and dimensions, place innovation has the potential to be used as a scientific concept and practical tool in order to understand and shape future social design in the desired manner. However, in order to really be able to contribute to the initiated paradigm shift in the awareness, understanding and use of design and innovation in various sectors of society, there must be continued empirical and conceptual studies of components and connections within place innovation. These studies must start both from the research fields discussed in this article and from other relevant research fields that have studied the attractive power of places, the marketing of places, the role of civil society in social development, the design of democratic innovation etc. We therefore intend to identify more relevant perspectives in the years ahead and to use them to further develop place innovation as a scientific concept and practical tool for understanding and shaping future social design in close collaboration between academia, industry and society. ■

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