

22nd SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE ACTIVITY AND SOCIETY (E5)
Habitation Throughout the Solar System (1)

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SOCIAL TOPOLOGIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF FLOURISHING IN SPACE

Abstract

”Cooperative design,” ”collaborative design,” ”participatory design” are important initiatives that employ a methodological shift to radically alter how the design process, the stakeholders involved, and the desired results are linked. Historically the shift can be traced to the trade-unions in Scandinavia and a desire to empower a larger segment of a community in a decision making process. The involvement of social media in the design process seems a natural outgrowth of this trend, but we have yet to fully understand and harness the implications from our own evolutionary standpoint. Given the very conditions of our humanity, the most radical potential for both understanding and implementing an expanded field of design lies in the realm of space—the very situations which bracket our human condition and give cause for its re-evaluation.

The greatest hurdle to realizing the full potential of participatory design lies in a basic characteristic of the human condition, namely our inability to imagine conditions truly “other” than those which include us in principle. This just means that we cannot conceive of that which we cannot recognize. This is a serious handicap to how we adapt and thrive in space. Ironically a virtual community is perhaps the most profoundly recognizable manifestation of a non-terrestrially-given subjectivity.

This paper uses advances in psychoanalysis and cognitive science to identify and make sense of conditions which precede and/or endure, but which fall outside of, the calculus of life-preservation presently guiding space research and development. Furthermore, it speculates on both the potential these observations have for the design process but conversely how this process may widen the ambitions and resonance of space initiatives.