Altering participation through interactions and reflections in design

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we illustrate through a set of examples how our own conceptualisation of participatory design (PD) and associated tools and techniques transforms within the design process itself. Co-designing with African rural communities has brought to light our many assumptions and intentions underlying commonly used methods and principles of PD. While genuinely striving for user involvement these same methods can hinder a truly participatory approach to design. We have learned much through our encounters and continuous reflections in various projects with southern African rural communities and seek to share our experiences in one particular, current project which led us to interrogate and revise our existing conceptions of PD. We also aim to infuse the evolution of PD with insights from Africa and cross-cultural design so that PD can better serve diversity globally.