

Exploring the “human norm” in design: a workshop at Nordes conference

Authors

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Abstract

As designers, we design from a human perspective—a position we cannot change but must critically reflect upon. This is why we (Katerina Katka Cerna, Britta Teleman and Yi Luo) organized a conference workshop, which addresses this fundamental challenge: the invisible "human norm" in design. The conference we chose for our workshop is called Nordes and it brings together researchers and practitioners interested in design, especially in the Nordic countries. The title of the workshop was *Exploring the “human norm” in design: integrating more-than-human and norm-critical design approaches*. The reason for the workshop was the following. While norm-critical approaches have explored norms, the most profound invisible norm is simply our existence as humans. This is particularly significant as we confront environmental crises demanding design beyond human needs. We integrate two complementary approaches: more-than-human design, which challenges the assumption that "human-centeredness" represents a neutral viewpoint, and norm-critical design, which makes invisible norms visible. Our 3-hour workshop engaged participants in interactive activities analyzing human norms, shifting perspectives, creating norm-critical prototypes, and sharing reflections. In our workshop, the issue of diversity was crucial; however not in the traditional sense. Instead of focusing on specific norms (such as gender or age), we focused on the normative aspects of our work which connect to us being humans; in contrast and comparison to other species. This provided a unique point of view on our own design practices as well as enabled creative exploration of norms together with the workshop participants.

Expected results and/or impact of the workshop

We contributed to design research by offering a novel methodological framework combining these previously separate approaches and providing the crucial first step toward addressing needs beyond humans: making human norms in design visible and subject to critical examination. This workshop was the first step in this integration. The results of the workshop included enabling deep reflection on the participants' own design practice from an untraditional point of view. This further helped participants to gain new insights and develop their own design practice. In addition, we plan to continue with developing the human norm workshop. We have already organized a short version of the workshop during a lunch seminar as part of the REBEL research program at Halmstad University. Next, we are preparing a 3 hour version of the workshop as part of the FUSE network, which focuses on bringing together different stakeholders interested in living and other types of labs. Below, you can see images from the workshop at the Nordes conference.

¹ Katerina Cerna's attendance at the Nordes conference was financed by ELIIT.

A group of participants working through identification of the human norm and speculation on what to design.



Participant putting down finishing touches on their provotype.



Participant presenting their provotype; here, an aggressive chair, which repulses humans but is suitable for other smaller species.

