

# MORE-THAN-HUMAN PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

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## ***ABSTRACT ORIGINAL***

The ecological crises we face are fed by a disconnect from interspecies interdependencies and misguided human-exceptionalism (the belief we are somehow distinct from nature). Given that design may contribute to our worsening socio-ecological conditions, this is seen as a pivotal moment to question and expand Participatory Design's traditional tenets, such as those grounded in democracy, rights, fairness, inclusion and empowerment, to consider what a different philosophical starting point and commitment to more-than-human Participatory Design might bring. This chapter explores the different traditions underpinning existing Participatory Design work oriented towards sustainability. We show the beginnings of a Participatory Design drawn from an appreciation of the innately interdependent and entangled nature of the world, called here the more-than-human. Two lineages of Participatory Design scholarship are traced: Sustainability (with branches in Modernist and rights-based thinking) and Entanglement (with branches in care-based and co-ontological being). The chapter presents three cases to ground our explorations and bring to light how human-nature separations in systems, structures, values and mindsets inadvertently condition our practice. Our cases ground the theories and paradigms identified in the four branches and show how commitments play out and evolve through practice. This allows us to critically examine existing tenets of Participatory Design and reinterpret the visions that these hold to explore what more-than-human relationality might entail. Our discussion reveals the tensions, politics, paradoxes and difficulties in turning towards more-than-human relationalities and in working across and between worldviews. The chapter closes with the questions that the ambitions of more-than-human Participatory Design pose for our practice. At best, we hope they present a means to tread more gently and responsibly on the earth we share. © 2025 selection and editorial matter, Rachel Charlotte Smith, Daria Loi, Heike Winschiers-Theophihis, Liesbeth Huybrechts and Jesper Simonsen.