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Design for and with values in designing for social change (Design Ethics SIG)

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Editorial: Design for and with values in designing for social change (Design Ethics SIG)

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Abstract: This editorial introduces the theme track 'Design for and with values in designing for social change'. Building on prior work that frame ethics as an *invitation to care*, the track focuses on values as a central construct in socially engaged design. It responds to a growing need to move beyond abstract value frameworks toward understanding how values are elicited, surfaced, negotiated, and enacted in practice. Drawing on 24 selected papers, we reveal a strongly interdisciplinary collection where participatory design emerges as a dominant method. The contributions are organized into four overlapping themes revolving around the concepts of power, methods, dignity and care. The track highlights both instrumental and critical approaches as well as top-down and bottom-up value articulations. With this, it emphasizes the importance of context, relationality, and reflexivity in socially engaged design.

Keywords: design ethics; design for values; situated practice, dignity, participatory design

1. Introduction

This editorial introduces the theme track on Design for and with values in designing for social change, organized in collaboration with the Special Interest Group (SIG) in Design Ethics, TUDelft SIG in Design for Dignity and Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning. Since its initiation in 2022, DRS Design Ethics SIG has framed ethics as an *invitation to care*, focusing on situated theories and practices and arguing against reducing ethics to universal frameworks or fixed templates (Ozkaramanli et al, 2022). In DRS 2024, the paper track on design ethics aimed to stimulate a nuanced and reflexive discussion on the ethics of design, where most of the submissions addressed theories, methods and practices to nurture ethical awareness and accountability in design practices (Ozkaramanli, Ferrarello, & Laursen, 2024). These theories and methodological re-orientations engaged with interdisciplinary research with questions that originate from within design research and practices. In DRS2026, we zoomed into values as a central construct in design ethics and



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aimed to better understand how values are elicited and handled in socially engaged design practices where the goal is to stimulate or facilitate social change (c.f. Gulbransen-Diaz & Hepburn, 2024).

Design is an inherently value-laden practice, and this is emphasized in socially engaged design where multiple value perspectives emerge simultaneously. However, values that drive design processes often remain implicit, predefined, or oversimplified in lists, offering little inspiration for real-world design practices. As socially-engaged design fields (such as systemic design, social design, and transition design) mature, there is a growing need to interrogate how values are surfaced, interpreted, negotiated and enacted, not just as 'desirable ends' to design for, but also as generative drivers in framing, idea generation, and critical reflection during design processes. Our preliminary questions included:

- How can design research reconcile top-down normative value frameworks with bottom-up, stakeholder-driven value articulation?
- Which underexplored values, such as dignity or reciprocity, offer new potential for social and systemic design?
- How might we move beyond technology-centered frameworks and methods to support value discovery, interpretation, negotiation and enactment in social and systemic design?

This track received 113 abstracts and 80 full paper submissions, 52 of which were processed within the track, resulting in 24 submissions that are published. Our primary observation is that the track is truly interdisciplinary drawing on philosophy, environmental psychology, cultural heritage, and community-driven design. Participatory design, in all its forms and visions, emerged as the main method of inquiry when handling values. We are also happy to host review papers that offer an in-depth analysis of nearly 50 methods in Design for Values as well as theoretical papers that explore new constructs (e.g. value co-displacement) and underexplored values (e.g. dignity).

2. Insights from the 2026 papers

We clustered the final 24 papers around four main themes, which are:

- Power plays: Values, place, and community
- Methods that matter: Surfacing and operationalizing values
- Dignity by Design: Ethics, values and justice
- Design as care: Values and accountability in practice

These themes are overlapping and tightly intertwined, which means that it is possible to fit many papers under more than one theme. The categorization was done not only based on similarities but also the potential for conversation and learning across papers during the conference. This editorial is organized around these themes and is intended as a practical tool for navigating the track, helping find key concepts and insights during and after the conference. In what follows, we will refer to the paper numbers listed below in alphabetical order per session.

Session: “Power plays: values, place and community”

- 938 - Dideriksen, S. T., Snijder, S., & Cila, N. (2026). Understanding power at the doorstep: examining interpersonal power of smart doorbells through speculative design. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.938>
- 354 - Gómez, J., González, M., & Ramírez, M. (2026). Empowerment for aging design: a framework to reframe the design of solutions for older adults in the Global South. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.354>
- 1184 - Jiang, Y., Zhang, H., Zhang, K, Liu, S, & Siu, K. W. M. (2026). Designing for themselves: the Gearbox model of value-reclaiming design within grassroots sports communities. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1184>
- 2132 - Mahecha, D. M., de la Rosa, J. A., & Velasquez, J., P. (2026). Figurations as a situated counter-device for participatory design: exploring time and presence in design practice. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.2132>
- 1932 - Pan, A. H., McHugn, J., & Bian, J. (2026). From Edgeland to Gentrified-land: graphic communication as intermediary for negotiating place identity in Hackney Wick, London. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1932>
- 2229 - Wu, H., Nissen, B., & Lechelt, S. (2026). Co-speculating future design research opportunities in community sharing with local sharing communities. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.2229>

Session: “Methods that matter: surfacing and operationalizing values”

- 831 - An, Y., Bos-de Vos, M., & Wang, Y. (2026). Reconciling values in multidisciplinary design teams through structured dialogue. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.831>
- 737 - Duan, Y., & Hu, F. (2026). Towards an operational framework for Design for Values: An exploration through systematic literature review. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.737>

- 1422 - Lee, B., Tallyn, E., Thangaraj, R., Elsdon, C., & Speed, C (2026). Value co-creation, co-displacement, and co-destruction in design: bridging value and values in human-data interaction. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1422>
- 429 - Lee, S., & Lee, K. (2026). Democratizing the newsroom: A participatory design approach to empower citizen-participatory journalism and civic knowledge. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.429>
- 1287 - Shercliff, E., & Ward, A. (2026). QUILT: Designing a values-driven toolkit for surfacing participant-led impact assessment of participatory design and making experiences. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1287>
- 1145 - Song, Z., Chen, S., Sato, C., & Wagner, C. (2026). Negotiating authenticity, vividness, and engagement: a design framework for GenAI in heritage co-creation. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1145>

Session: “Dignity by design: ethics, values, and justice”

- 400 - Abou Eddahab-Burke, F., & Bauer, K. (2026). Exploring designing for dignity in the context of digital community platforms. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.400>
- 1031 - Cummings, M., & Teal, G. (2026). “I didn’t choose to write my life”: Trauma-informed values in the design of social care records. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1031>
- 1463 - Heuvelmans, C., Günay, A., Ludden, G, & Sturge, J. (2026). Designing for dignity: A method to explore emotional lived experiences of stigma and dignity in perinatal mental health environments. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1463>
- 2248 - Ng, N., & Lutta, A. (2026). Design as a mediator: Bridging traditional cosmologies and scientific knowledge for climate change adaptation through value-led design. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.2248>
- 365 - Sturge, J., Persijn, C., Wens, L., Fleerackers, N., van den Elshout, D., Kohnle, S. C. J., & de Groot, T. J. H. (2026). Cultivating careful design responses to homelessness through practice, theory and education. Proceedings of the DRS

2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026.

<https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.365>

- 664 - Zhang, L., & Yujia, L. (2026). Visualising values in women's digital labour: design ethics for assembling social justice. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.664>

Session: "Design as care: values and accountability in practice"

- 944 - Dunbar, M., Fennessy, L., & Speed, C. (2026). What can't be confessed: the structural absence of value accountability in design culture. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.944>
- 1983 - Jacobs, N., Birch, E., Craigon, P., Drury, K., Gutierrez Mendoza, A., Manning, L., & Perez, D. (2026). Speculative Woolgathering: using design approaches to explore values in the UK wool supply chain to enable digital good. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1983>
- 665 - Knight, L. (2026). Darker affordances: designing with values as vulnerabilities in an age of disinformation. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.665>
- 695 - Lydén, H., Juujärvi, S., & Miettinen, S. (2026). Designing with care: proposing an ethical canvas for co-design with marginalised groups. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.695>
- 2127 - Prado, G. C. (2026). Design activism pedagogy: learning and negotiating values in practice. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.2127>
- 1546 - Wilkinson, L., Reid, C., Raberm C, & Hannan, J. (2026). The who cares? approach: materializing values in community-based participatory research. Proceedings of the DRS 2026: Design Research Society Conference, Edinburgh, June 8-12, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1546>

2.1 *Power plays: values, place, and community*

Papers in this session explore how design research can critically engage with power, using methods such as research-through-design, visual ethnography, and co-speculation. For instance, (354) challenges ageist paradigms by shifting towards a capability-based framework that foregrounds agency through value elicitation. In this capability-based paradigm, the values of an individual are entry points to the resources and energies that people are prepared to mobilize to reach a certain outcome. Similarly, (938) draws on feminist theories of power to create speculative 'smart doorbells', revealing themes such as

awareness, contestation, and care in living with surveillance technologies. Other contributions focus on grassroots agency and situated practices. For instance, (1184) examines how communities “design for themselves,” (1932) uses visual ethnography to explore gentrification and place identity through graffiti, (2132) critiques representational logics in participatory design, and (2229) investigates DIY sharing communities through co-speculative tools using the Mandala as input.

While united by a critical stance, the papers diverge in how they define and operationalize participation and power. Some emphasize bottom-up, community-driven processes, such as (1184) and (2229), where design emerges from within communities as a form of empowerment and social innovation. Others, like (2132), take a more meta-critical approach, questioning the underlying assumptions of participatory design itself, particularly its reliance on representation rather than relational “figurations.”

By combining these papers in the same session, we aim to stimulate discussion on how design research is becoming increasingly reflexive and socially and politically engaged, taking up topics ranging from ageism to surveillance technologies to urban transformation. These papers reveal a more confident move towards having an informed debate about the concept of power and positioning design as a critical practice. Moreover, the emphasis on participation is not uncritically celebratory. It is scrutinized for who is represented, who has agency, and how power circulates within design processes or through design outcomes.

2.2 Methods that matter: surfacing and operationalizing values

The second group of papers focuses on frameworks, methods, and tools that aim to make values in design more explicit, actionable, and negotiable. (737) proposes an operational framework that categorizes 47 Design for Values methods, while (831) introduces a structured dialogue method to surface implicit values and navigate value tensions through collaborative reflection. Others develop context-specific frameworks, such as (1145), which outlines authenticity, vividness, and engagement as key values in human-AI co-creation for cultural heritage storytelling. In addition, (429) explores participatory journalism through citizen-AI collaboration to strengthen information integrity in local news, (1287) presents QUILT, a toolkit of question cards that redefines impact as something emergent and processual rather than purely measurable, and (1422) advances the concept of co-displacement in data-intensive design settings, moving beyond simple value creation/destruction binaries.

Despite a shared concern with explicating values, these papers differ in how critically they engage with the conditions under which values are articulated and negotiated. For instance, (737) and (1145) lean towards structured and accessible frameworks that help designers use values in practice, while (831) and (1287) take a more reflective stance by emphasizing the importance of dialogue, empathy, and ongoing interpretation. Notably, (831) highlights how value tensions can be productive rather than something to resolve, aligning with critiques of consensus-driven participatory design, though it still calls for deeper engagement with power and positionality. (429) and (1422) raise more critical questions about technological and systemic implications: (429) begs the question whether AI is the appropriate solution in participatory journalism, while (1422) complicates binary value articulations by introducing the notion of co-displacement to understand how values are redistributed.

In sum, these papers suggest that the design discipline is increasingly concerned with not only identifying values, but also with understanding how they emerge, evolve, and are negotiated within design processes. There is a clear movement towards equipping designers with tools and frameworks and a growing recognition that values cannot be neatly codified or resolved through methods alone. Instead, they require ongoing negotiation, sensitivity to context, and attention to relational dynamics.

2.3 Dignity by design: ethics, values, and justice

The session “Dignity by design: Ethics, values and justice” brings together contributions that approach dignity both explicitly and implicitly through closely related concepts such as trauma, stigma or recognition. These contributions examine how design engages with situations where people’s experiences are shaped by vulnerability, marginalization or unequal power relations affecting their sense of dignity. Beyond framing dignity as a fixed ethical principle, the papers collectively investigate how it is experienced, challenged and/or operationalized in specific contexts. For instance (400) employ a qualitative interview study within a community in the Netherlands to examine how dignity is understood and perceived in digital services, revealing its multiplicity, and the frequent gap between institutional intentions and user experience. Similarly, (1463) develop and apply the UDDE (Uncovering and Designing for Dignity through Emotions) method, a participatory and practice-based approach that uses emotional experiences to surface how dignity and stigma are lived within perinatal psychiatric care environments. These studies explicitly position dignity as a situated value that must be uncovered through engagement with context.

Other contributions expand the scope of the session by addressing dignity through adjacent value frameworks and methodological approaches. (365) present a combination of educational intervention and reflective case studies, introducing trauma-informed design principles into architecture and design curricula to address homelessness. (1031) similarly adapt a participatory design methodology grounded in trauma-informed values to rethink social care records with care-experienced young people, highlighting tensions between stakeholders and institutional constraints. In a different domain, (664) examine women’s digital labour, focusing on often unrecognized work such as emotional and coordination tasks. They propose ethical narration, prototyping and interaction as a three-phase approach to make labour visible and question how value is assigned in digital platforms. This links dignity to issues of recognition and the visibility of work. Finally, (2248) explores value-based design in the context of climate adaptation, using participatory methods to bridge scientific knowledge and local cosmologies. While dignity is not explicitly named, their work centres on how community voices are included in decision-making and how different knowledge systems are negotiated, pointing to dignity as connected to agency.

Across these contributions, we see a shared thread that dignity becomes visible through situated design practices that engage directly with lived experiences, particularly in contexts of vulnerability and inequality. Using methods such as interviews, participatory design, trauma-informed approaches, and value visualization, the papers show how dignity is not a predefined goal but emerges through interactions with systems and is often revealed in moments of breakdown, such as exclusion, stigma, unequal treatment or lack of recognition. This implies that designing for dignity requires creating processes that remain responsive to

context, treating dignity as something that is continuously negotiated within design rather than simply delivered by it.

2.4 *Design as care: values and accountability in practice*

The papers in this session reframe 'design as care' not as a moral aspiration, but as a demanding practice. Care here involves recognizing the dual nature of values, engaging with ethical ambiguity and taking responsibility for the consequences of design decisions. It requires not only tools and frameworks, but also infrastructures for accountability, and spaces where values can be surfaced, challenged, and collectively negotiated.

A recurring thread in this theme is the recognition that values are not inherently good or stable. The concept of 'darker affordances' in (665) challenges the assumption that values function solely as ethical anchors. Through a pedagogical experiment in climate communication, the work demonstrates how the same values that enable trust and resonance can be mobilized for manipulation. This introduces an important asymmetry: unethical design is often easier to produce than ethical alternatives. In doing so, the paper destabilizes binary distinctions between ethical and unethical practice, instead positioning designers within ongoing conditions of moral ambiguity.

If (665) exposes the fragility of values, (695) focuses on the difficulty of working with them responsibly. Their ethical canvas offers a practical response to the often implicit nature of values in co-design, particularly when engaging with marginalized groups. Rather than prescribing correct decisions, the canvas makes ethical deliberation visible, supporting designers in navigating tensions between institutional demands and participants' lived realities. Here, care is framed as an ongoing, situated negotiation, one that requires attentiveness, reflexivity and the willingness to remain with unresolved tensions.

Questions of responsibility and accountability are taken further in (944)'s critical intervention into design culture. Their 'confessional booth' surfaces a striking gap between the field's aspirational value statements and its lack of mechanisms for accountability. The absence of admissions related to harm, exploitation or systemic complicity reveals how values often remain rhetorical, rather than collectively examined or enforced. The paper calls for new forms of 'value infrastructure' that move beyond individual reflection toward shared accountability, suggesting that without such structures, care risks becoming symbolic rather than actionable.

While these contributions foreground tension and critique, other papers explore how values can be actively cultivated and materialized in practice. (1546) proposes the Who Cares? Approach that demonstrates how values such as trust, relationality and presence can emerge through long-term participatory engagement. By translating values into visual artefacts, installations and events, the project shows how design can make values tangible and negotiable, enabling collective reflection within community-based research. Similarly, (1983) uses speculative design to surface hidden and conflicting values within the wool supply chain. Their iterative process of valuation and revaluation highlights how values are continuously shaped through interaction, rather than imposed from above.

The focus on design activism in education in (2127) illustrates how values such as dignity, reciprocity and solidarity emerge through situated, embodied engagement with real-world issues. Moving beyond classroom-based reflection, this approach positions learning as a

process of ethical becoming, where students encounter the complexities of acting responsibly within social and political contexts.

3. Conclusion

This track engages with the important yet often underexplored or contested concept of values in design, particularly in relation to ethics and responsibility. The sessions highlight the ongoing work required to move values from abstract commitments to situated practices.

The richness of the papers is evident not only in their individual insights but also in the connections that emerge between them. Taken together, we sense that there is a tension between instrumentalizing values and critically interrogating the socio-political contexts in which they operate. In the future, we hope for an increased engagement with non-traditional and non-Western values and works that examine the concept of values as neutral vs. political sites for reflection, discussion, and negotiation.

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