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# EXPLORING PITFALLS OF PARTICIPATION – AND WAYS TOWARDS JUST PRACTICES THROUGH A PARTICIPATORY DESIGN PROCESS IN KISUMU, KENYA

EBA

# *Exploring pitfalls of participation – and ways towards just practices through a participatory design process in Kisumu, Kenya*

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## ABSTRACT

The dissertation builds on the belief that participatory development processes can lead to positive transformations for the people involved. However, it does at the same time recognize that participation is highly complex, and that this makes it vulnerable to unjust practices. The aim is to explore challenges that emerge in participatory processes, or as they are referred to in the thesis: pitfalls. The experience of being engaged as a Swedish researcher in a participatory design project in a Kenyan community, and critical reflections on this experience serve as the foundation for this exploration.

A number of pitfalls are highlighted as problematic. These are connected to either simplistic conceptualizations of participants and their participation, or to an unjust role distribution in projects. The terms community, empowerment and ownership exemplify how the use of vague and elusive words can hide participant diversity or lead to overstatements regarding project benefits. It is also discussed how an unjust access to knowledge resources between stakeholders hinder co-production of knowledge.

The thesis contributes with guidance regarding how researchers and practitioners can identify and work against the pitfalls that they come across in their practices, and towards achieving just participation.

# INTRODUCTION

## Background and rationale

The thesis explores the concept and practice of participatory development in which local residents and organizations are involved in the process. It is situated within the design disciplines, more particularly within participatory design and co-design, although it also connects to neighbouring areas such as development studies, participatory rural development, architecture and planning. The exploration reveals that the positive potentials of participation are framed in a similar manner across these areas, although it also reveals that the same types of challenges and problematic issues emerge in all of them. Thus, the critical discussion on pitfalls of participation and the suggestions on how to work towards just participation is applicable also to policy makers, practitioners and scholars within these neighbouring areas.

The project, acting as case study in the thesis, took place in a fishing village located just outside Kisumu city by the shores of Lake Victoria in the western parts of Kenya. It was initiated in September 2012 and the fieldwork was conducted up until early 2016, although parts of the project have continued to evolve since then. It deals with small-scale ecotourism development and was conducted in collaboration with a PhD student colleague from Sweden, two PhD student colleagues from Kenya, a local guide group, a non-governmental organization (NGO), the community Beach management unit (BMU)[1] and residents. Helena took active part, as a design researcher in the project, in accordance with an action research approach (Lewin, 1946). This is common within the design disciplines, particularly in participatory design, where scholars often explore participation in action.

[1] BMUs are community-based organizations in communities near lakes or the sea in Kenya. They organize the fishing business, although they often have a broader role of acting towards a general development of the community.

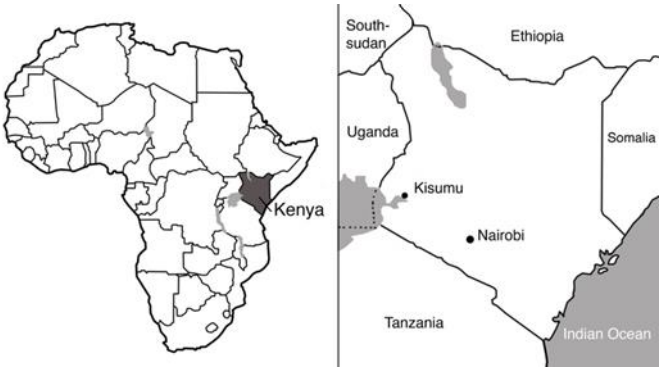


Image 1: Kenya is located in East Africa and borders to Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania and the Indian Ocean. Kisumu
is located in western Kenya, on the shores of Lake Victoria.

## Aim and research question

Accounts of participation, irrespective the field of application, generally keeps a positive tone, in which core principles such as democracy, emancipation, empowerment, mutual learning and partnership are affirmed without much further explanation. It is, for example, rarely described who it is that is empowered or in what ways people are empowered, as descriptions of how people are involved often go no further than statements that it was community participation (Chambers, 1997). Such descriptions, however, are bound to be perceived as unrealistic for those who engage in participatory projects, as participatory practice often is characterised by a high level of complexity. Furthermore, there are a number of contradictions between the high aiming principles of participation and what is actually feasible in projects. The aims for partnerships between local actors and

university stakeholders may, for example, be hindered by rigid funding schemes.

The purpose of the thesis is to identify and explore challenges, or as they are referred to in the thesis, pitfalls of participation, to explain when, how and why the set-up of a participatory project works against the principles of participation and the goal of reaching positive transformation for the people involved. The aim is to contribute with guidance regarding how practitioners and researchers can identify the pitfalls that they meet in their practice, and work towards just participation[2]. To achieve this aim, the participatory process in the Kisumu project is reflected upon through a critical lens, for which the following research questions are used as guidance:

1. What are pitfalls of participation, and how do they hinder just participation?

2. What characterizes just participation, and how can practitioners and researchers work towards achieving it?

The research questions are connected to the project context and the north-south collaborative set-up. Posing the first research question in a different setting or for a different type of project may lead to the identification of other types of pitfalls. Also, the focus on just participation derives from the pitfalls of unjust situations and unequal preconditions between actors, as identified in the Kisumu project. That being said, the Kenyan context, the north-south set-up and the specific findings of this study are likely to be of relevance to a broader community of development practitioners and researchers in Sweden as well as internationally.

[2] Just participation is not an established concept, but is defined in the thesis.

## The project set-up

The project in Kisumu was funded by the international research centre Mistra Urban Futures[3] , which focused on sustainable urban development and the creation of sustainable and fair living conditions in cities and rural areas. The approach to work towards this was transdisciplinary, which means that projects were set up as collaborations between actors from academia, industry, and the civil and public community. Mistra Urban Futures had local interaction platforms (LIPs) in five cities around the world, of which one was based in Kisumu (KLIP) . With KLIP as a base, senior researchers and PhD students from the Kenyan universities Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST) and Maseno University as well as the Swedish University of Gothenburg cooperated in building knowledge networks with local actors in Kisumu and its environs. The overarching aim of Mistra Urban Futures, to work for sustainable urban development, was approached at KLIP through two thematic areas, namely marketplaces and ecotourism, why the project that is explored in the thesis focused on one of these.

### *The focus area of ecotourism*

Ecotourism was a focus area at KLIP as it is seen to have the potential to play a key role in attaining the national vision of Kenya, namely that of becoming a "middle-income country providing high quality life to all its citizens" by 2030 (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2007, p. 1). It is considered to have the possibility to reduce poverty through the creation of local jobs that cannot be exported (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). The fishing village in which the PhD project was based had been identified by researchers at KLIP as having potential for small scale eco-tourism

[3] Mistra Urban Futures was in operation between 2010 and 2019. It was financed by the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research (Mistra), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and a consortium constituted by stakeholders in the western parts of Sweden. It is now reconstituted as Centre for Sustainable Urban Futures, which is placed under Gothenburg Centre for Sustainable Development.

development (Hayombe et al., 2012). The village, called Dunga, consists of about 3,000 inhabitants, of whom the majority belong to the Luo community. The main languages spoken are Dholuo, Kiswahili and English. Due to the proximity to Lake Victoria, 80% of residents rely on it for their income, working as fishermen, fishmongers, boat builders, and other related jobs. However, the poor state of the lake has been a cause for concern, as the fish stock is decreasing due to overfishing, pollution and the infestation of the water hyacinth. This made it crucial to find new sources of income, and ecotourism was seen as an opportunity to do so. A group of residents took hold of this opportunity in 2002 and started a local tour guide group, as they saw an opportunity for Dunga to develop, and for local youths to find a complementary source of income to fishing.

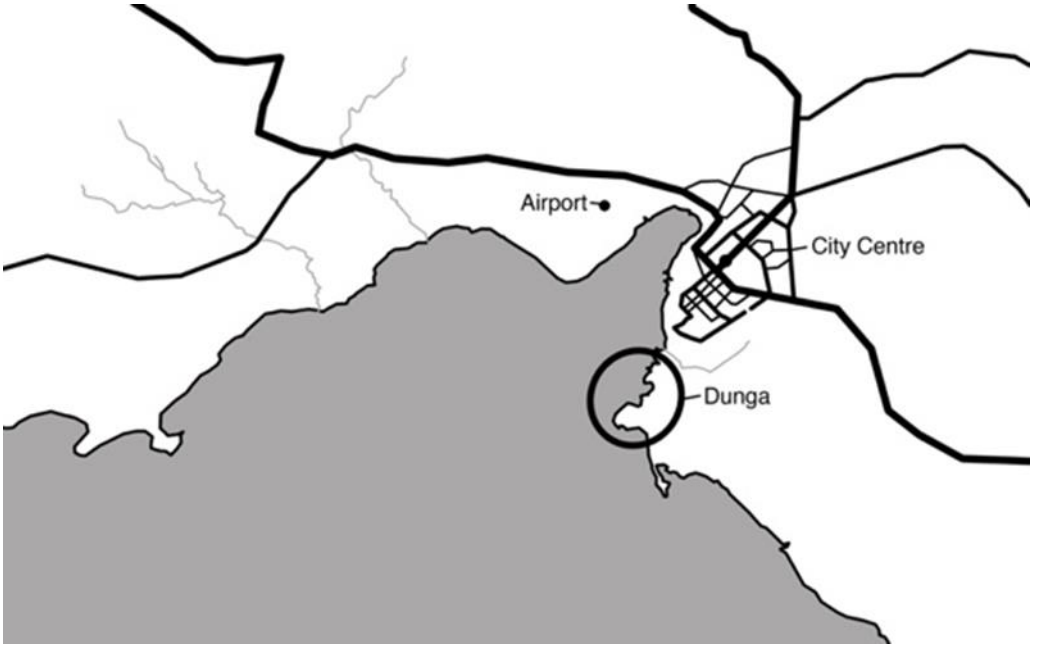


Image 2: The location of Dunga in Kisumu.

Image 3: The boat-landing site in Dunga.

*Collaborating with local stakeholders*

There was an already established connection between KLIP and local organizations in Dunga prior to the PhD student project, which meant that initial trust had been established. Also, the fact that there was a local tour guide group in place, whose members were engaged in ecological issues and community development, meant that the focus on ecotourism development was not imposed by the PhD students. The guide group was the closest collaboration partner throughout the project, although there was also regular contact with the BMU and the NGO. A group of female fishmongers in Dunga also got involved about two years in, as they formed their own community-based organization (CBO) for women wanting to

work with tourism.[4] Furthermore, a number of other local guide groups in Kisumu County became involved when the project turned to a focus on the establishment of a county-wide guide association. Community residents in Dunga participated in three workshops in the initial stages. These had about 75 participants in each, and men and women were close to equally represented. The aim was to bring forth ideas as well as concerns related to ecotourism development. With the purpose of keeping the project accessible for residents, these activities were complemented by an available project space, four public presentations and six (non-academic) reports that summarised the process. Project activities were to a large extent managed by Helena and her PhD student colleagues in the initial stages, although, the guides took on a more active role in managing workshops and other activities as the process progressed.

The collaboration with local stakeholders revolved around the field periods that Helena spent in Kisumu. These were spread over seven occasions, each lasting about three weeks. This was complemented by fieldwork in Sweden, when two guides spent ten days there. There have also been Skype meetings, e-mails and other online conversations, as well as 21 open-ended interviews with local organizations and residents in Dunga. The collaboration resulted in practical implementations in the village, including a signage system, waste-collection points, a graphic profile and a uniform for the guide group. It also resulted in organizational development and a general development of their service-offerings (e.g. their guided tours, in which local restaurant owners, craftsmen/women and fishmongers participated).

[4] The existing guide group consisted mainly of men. Guiding, and many other professions in the tourism industry in Kenya, are male dominated, why the project focused on gender inclusion.

Image 4: Residents presenting a stakeholder-map during the first workshop in Dunga.

Image 5: Members of the tour guide group in Dunga discussing the development of the guided tours.

Image 6: Involving visitors in craft activities was part of the developed tours.

## Methodology

The PhD project was approached as a transdisciplinary action research project (Lewin, 1946; Freire, 1970). It was tied to a specific context in which both scientific and societal perspectives were taken into account (Gibbons et al., 1994) and it aimed to achieve academic outputs as well as practical implementations of use for local stakeholders (Lang et al., 2012). Furthermore, it built on the collaboration between academic stakeholders from different disciplines and members of the society (Gibbons et al., 1994).

### *Critical theories as reflective lenses*

The aim to explore pitfalls of participation signal a need to critically reflect on participation and the Kisumu project. Feminist and post-colonial

theories were used as lenses to enable such reflection. These theories cast light on issues of power, politics and exclusion connected to for example gender and Eurocentrism (Harding, 1998; Mohanty's, 1988, 2003). They emphasize the importance of questioning dominant assumptions and epistemologies that affect the participatory process (Bardzell and Bardzell, 2011). They also highlight the need to expose aspects taken for granted due to your own background and cultural unawareness of the project context (Harding, 1998; Ali, 2007). Lastly, they reveal the need to identify your own influence on the process as well as to reflect upon your own writing and way of reporting about projects, and the risk of doing so in stereotypical, generalizing or reductionistic ways (Harding, 1998; Mohanty, 1988, 2003).

## Theoretical framing

The main theory is participatory design, as this is the disciplinary area in which the thesis is positioned. However, given the area of application and contextual setting, literature on participatory forms of tourism development, participatory rural appraisal, development studies and participatory planning and architecture are also included. The aim of the theoretical section is not to provide an account of the advantages of participation, as plenty examples already exist on how participation has the capacity to empower and promote deepened forms of democracy. Such accounts may be beneficial in the sense that they describe participation for those not yet aware of the approach. However, they may also contribute to romanticizing participation and to promoting it as the "saviour of all evil" (Miessen, 2010, p. 14), through which its complexity risks being overshadowed and aspects such as power relations are left unproblematized (Chambers, 1997; Southgate, 2006; Tahvilzadeh, 2013).

The theoretical chapter explores challenges of participation reported in the different literatures. This reveals that similar types of challenges have been recognized within them, that they highlight the same type of criticism, and that many challenges recognised already in the 1960´s re-emerge decade

after decade. Some studies, for example, discuss the risk of power imbalances between actors (Greenbaum 1993; Grønbæk et al., 1993), and instances where participants fear to voice concerns due to risks of reprimands or project exclusion (Wagner, 1992). People who are not positive about the idea of projects taking place in their community may be treated as though they are impeding development (Blackstock, 2005) and it is argued that the already powerful actors tend to set the agenda (Bødker et al., 1993; Kothari, 2001). Furthermore, there are plenty of examples of processes with non-genuine motives, in which participation is claimed even though most major decisions were taken beforehand (Arnstein, 1969; Chambers, 1997). This can be connected to claims of partnerships and the criticism that local communities seldom get a real chance to co-manage projects, but are only provided with an illusion of control (Blackstock, 2005). There is also criticism towards a lack of standards, which makes it hard to "distinguish between those genuinely committed" and "those who have simply joined the bandwagon to stay in business" (Sarin, 1998, p. 124). It is further claimed that there are few accounts of how people participate or what roles they play (Blomberg and Karasti 2013). Similarly, the role of project leaders and researchers are often unaccounted for, which means that their power to influence seldom is recognized (Light and Akama 2012).

## Pitfalls of participation

To answer the first research question – What are pitfalls of participation, and how do they hinder just participation from being realized? – a number of pitfalls experienced in the Kisumu project are explored, some of which tie to already acknowledged challenges of participation. The pitfalls are divided into two themes. The first relates to the words and type of language used for conceptualising participants and their participation in research writing, project reports and presentations, and how this language can produce abstracted, vague and simplistic representations. The second theme concerns the role distribution in projects and how this affects people's possibilities to participate under fair circumstances.

## Problematic use of words for conceptualizing participants

The need to problematize our use of words for conceptualizing participation is based on the idea that words are powerful (Ahmed, 2012) and influence our thoughts and actions and thereby the way in which we involve people in participatory processes. Ahmed's (2012, p. 50) approach to follow words and "explore what they do and do not do" is used in the thesis to critically investigate connections between the use of words and pitfalls of participation.

### *Hidden information in elusive words*

The term community is often used in project descriptions. However, it is a "difficult qualifier as it is simultaneously elusive and familiar" (Di Salvo et al., 2013, p. 183). Scholars state a "distinct reluctance" to define the meaning of community (Southgate, 2006, p. 82), a naïve and "stereotypical idealization" of the concept (Blackstock, 2002, p. 42) and a tendency to portray communities as homogenous units (Gujit and Kaul Shah, 1998). Thus, it is not enough to merely state that the project in Kisumu involved members of the community. Communities are complex structures, consisting of numerous types of groups, subgroups and individuals, all of which have different positions, interests, needs and preconditions for participating (Cousins, 1998; McGee, 2002). Also, no person is only a community member and people may not only be participating as residents, but may be doing so in a number of roles.

For example, two publications that report about the Kisumu project illustrate the tendency to make use of elusive concepts, and thus hide important information. It is, for instance, stated that "residents from the community participated in three workshops in the initial stages" and that "we interviewed the local organizations and members of the community" (Kraff and Jernsand, 2014, p. 1604). It is further mentioned that it was a participatory process including "members of the guide group and the

community" (Jernsand, Kraff and Mossberg 2015, p. 105). It is not that these statements are untrue, but the fact that they are not followed by further elaboration makes them problematic. For instance, it is impossible to determine the gender balance, or if the participants belonged to certain groups, with the exception of the guide group being mentioned. It is also impossible to gain an understanding of what proportion of the community participated since it is not stated in the publications how many people live there. This raises questions relating to when it is justified to state that you are working with 'the community', that you have 'community support', or that a project is 'community-based'. Are guidelines needed along the lines of requesting at least two thirds of the community to be informed about the project and being able to have their say about it, with at least one third being involved in project activities? What is the percentage minimum for when you can say that you are working with a community? The Kisumu project did take place in a community setting, and the fact that community members could be affected by the process and its results meant that it was important to make it possible for them to express possible concerns (e.g. through the workshops or public presentations). However, the main collaborators and beneficiaries were the participating guide groups, and a large part of the focus revolved around organizational development for these.

*Simplistic representation of people*

Another aspect is how the term community is used in accounts of projects taking place in African countries, and whether it contributes to simplistic representations. Africa, African countries and the people living there have been, and are still often, portrayed in "western" media, literature and research in simplified and negative ways (Adichie, 2009; Dowden, 2009). This highlights the importance of reflecting upon whether accounts of participatory projects taking place in African countries contribute to this negative portrayal. Scholars engaged in participatory design projects in South Africa and Namibia (Winshiers-Theophilus et al., 2010, p. 2) mention that there can be gaps between local participants and external and/or foreign

researchers in terms of "individuality and community, orality versus print-based literacy, and technological skills versus local situational knowledge". This acknowledgement offers a reminder to external project leaders to develop awareness of the fact that the approach they would use back home might be inappropriate in other contexts. Thus, they need to see beyond their own "readings of participation" and "draw upon local epistemologies" (ibid, p. 2). However, there is also a risk that such accounts contribute to an image of community members as people who are experts on everything connected to the traditional and local, but who know nothing about modern development or the professional world outside of their immediate community. This can be connected to Harding's (1998, p. 153, 106) claim that there is a "tendency of the Eurocentric, colonial or imperial mentality" to conceptualize residents' knowledge as "a kind of folk belief, merely local knowledge, or ethno-science". Representing people as only being community members hides important information, conceal diversity and agency, and reduces people to being less than they actually are.

*Problematizing ownership*

Project ownership by local actors is mentioned as important in the participatory design literature. For instance, Korpela and colleagues (1996, p. 27) state that community members need to be included throughout the entirety of a project, and that early involvement "gives the community a sense of ownership...". This statement may at first glance seem plausible, although it raises questions regarding the meaning of ownership, and what criteria need to be met for ownership to be established. Is it possible to claim that people have ownership just because they are engaged in a project from beginning to end? Does it not need to be accompanied by a discussion of how local actors are involved in decision-making and the establishment of the project framework? Isn't there a difference between giving someone a sense of ownership and actually having or claiming ownership? For the Kisumu project it is important to be clear that it did not lead to community ownership. Residents were involved in

collaborative workshops, which influenced the direction of the project, and there were opportunities for residents to follow project progress and provide input. However, they were not involved in project establishment or planning. Local project ownership was in this case limited to the guides in the later stages, as they engaged in project and budget planning and presented ideas for project direction.

Claiming that local actors have ownership is problematic if it is not defined who has ownership, what is needed for ownership to be attained or how ownership relates to project influence and decision-making. Keeping descriptions of ownership vague in publications makes overstatement possible, while it also makes it impossible for readers to create an understanding of whether the claims of ownerships are realized.

## Unjust distribution of roles

The second theme of pitfalls connects to roles and role distribution in projects and includes the following three issues; 1/ insufficient access to project information for residents; 2/ unjust access to knowledge resources between international (academic) actors and local community actors; and 3/ unjust preconditions between academic actors to conduct their research.

*Insufficient access to project information*

The aim to keep the process open and transparent, through workshops, presentations, written reports and an available project space, could be seen as an attempt to attain just participation. The founder of the NGO expressed appreciation of the fact that the PhD students did not "squeeze out information of community members and then turn away", but that information regarding project plans, progress and results was made available. However, what may seem as straightforward at first can turn out to be exclusionary if one reflects on it further through a critical lens. A conversation with a group of elders revealed that they viewed the location

for the available project space (a community centre) as a place for young people that was not available to the older generation. Also, the community centre doubles as a gift shop and visitor reception, which led some people to feel that it was not a space for the community. This raises questions of for whom the available project space was available and why it was based on the idea that people were expected to come to it as opposed to it coming to them. Furthermore, the facts that most of the natural meetings places in the village are located outside in a shaded area and that many people see it as customary to convey information to each other in person indicate that the choice to locate the project space, including posters and written reports, indoors was not the best option to create access.

Other aspects that can cause insufficient access is language. In Kisumu the open presentations followed a format where the PhD students presented in English, after which the guides translated into Dholuo. One of the guides mentioned that there is a directness that is lost when things are translated, that it is inevitable that some things will be left out or distorted, and that people who do not speak English may consider the activity not for them. It also means that those who do not speak English become dependent on others to access project information. Kenyan poet and post-colonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1985) and his view on language is interesting to explore in connection to this. He sees a close connection between language and culture and argues that those who only write in English are guilty of locking knowledge into a space that is inaccessible to a large number of people. Reflecting on the Kisumu project through this lens reveals a double exclusion. The fact that a large proportion of the project information was in English meant that people were excluded from discussions concerning their cultural environment and the development of their community as well as from taking part of the knowledge produced in the project.

*Limited access to critical information*

The aim with the above discussion is not to claim that all residents in a community necessarily feel that they want project access. However, for projects similar to the one in Kisumu, where the outcomes may have an effect on residents' lives, it is crucial that those who wish to have information do have easy access to it. Furthermore, it is important to be aware of what type of information is made available and if it is set in a positive tone, merely proclaiming benefits, or if it also includes information about possible risks. Also, has people's level of awareness about eco-tourism been taken into consideration, and has the information been adapted thereafter? In other words, does the information enable people to make informed and critically aware decisions regarding the suitability of the project for their community? For the Kisumu project, providing critical information would include information on the risks of economic leakages, which occur when tourism revenues go to external sources as opposed to to local organizations and the community, and that conflicts of interest may emerge, for example, if residents are pushed out of public spaces in order to make room for tourism businesses (Honey, 2008).

*Unjust access to knowledge resources*

The project in Kisumu was transdisciplinary in the sense that it built on collaboration between different academic disciplines, industry and members of society. One aspect that is emphasized in the literature on transdisciplinary projects, and which is seen as a precondition for increasing social relevance, is co-production of knowledge between these actors (Guggenheim, 2006; Robinson, 2008). However, the question arises as to what extent co-production of knowledge is possible, when the actors have an unjust access to knowledge resources.

For the Kisumu project, the Swedish PhD students had full access to the global knowledge arena and could easily move between the local and the

global, both physically and virtually. The guides, on the other hand, have minimal access to new knowledge on ecotourism and their opportunities to travel to conferences or other knowledge forums such as tourism fairs are highly limited even if these take place in Kenya. This created an unjust situation since the PhD students and guides were to collaborate closely together and co-produce new knowledge in the area of ecotourism. This is not to say that all guides had an interest in academic publications. However, research on ecotourism is often closely connected to industry and is often of interest to practitioners.

*Unjust preconditions between academic actors*

A group of four PhD students, two from Sweden and two from Kenya, were set to collaborate closely together with the project in Dunga. However, their differing preconditions for participating in the project and conducting their research created unjust situations. For example, the Kenyan PhD student did not have access to the same extensive university library system as their Swedish colleagues. Nor did they have the same amount of time to work on their theses as Kenyan PhD students often need to work full time as teachers, whilst in Sweden the teaching responsibilities during the PhD period typically are highly limited (e.g. up to 20% of your working hours). Furthermore, the Kenyan students did not have access to a fully organized compulsory PhD course programme nor did they have the same opportunities to travel to international conferences. There were instances when the Kenyan PhD students were able to attend a conference or a PhD course, however, these events were exceptions and often the result of individual efforts.

This example indicates that the "unequal relations of power and privilege" that have existed for a long time between African and European scholars (Jeyifo, 1999, p. 39) still prevail. These distorted power relations are noticeable also in publications since European researchers' publications dominate in international journals whereas African researchers'

contributions are often played down (Appiah, 1991; Eriksson Baaz, 2015). A contributing factor to the underrepresentation of African scholars could be connected to limited access to fully stocked library systems and the limited possibility to attend international conferences. Not being able to attend conferences is a hindrance to getting published during the PhD study period. Writing a conference paper is usually less time consuming than publishing a journal article due to the less extensive review process. Having the opportunity to attend conferences therefore makes it easier to publish within the time frame of a PhD. These issues are highly problematic and should be seen as signs of a continued under-promotion of African scholars in the academic world (Ali, 2007). They connect to the pitfall of unjust access to knowledge resources but also need to be stated as issues in their own right since they extend beyond the immediate project and concern academics' possibilities to develop.

## Towards just participation

The exploration of pitfalls is, in the thesis, followed by a discussion of the second research question: What characterizes just participation, and how can designers and design researchers work towards realizing it? The focus on just participation derives from the pitfalls identified, all of which contribute to producing an unjust situation. Acknowledging and articulating participant diversity, and revealing and addressing unjust situations, are explored as ways of working towards just participation. Furthermore, continual, critical reflection through different lenses are described as means for recognizing pitfalls in your participatory practice.

### Articulating participant diversity

Articulating participant diversity in project presentations, reports and publications is in this part presented as a mean to move away from abstracted conceptualizations. However, it is also important to articulate this diversity during the participatory process since this can make visible that people may need to be involved in different ways.

In the Kisumu project, an approach to make participant descriptions less generalized, whilst still keeping the project manageable, was to articulate the situations of different community groups. The reason for this was that most participants were members of one or more groups, and that many of them participated in the role as a group member. Also, the guides identified groups rather than individuals when inviting people to workshops and presentations. Reflecting on the characteristics and situations of the participating groups created an understanding of their different situations, needs and preconditions for participation. For example, looking at the situation of the male guide group in Dunga made visible their long history of working with tourism. Its members had a strong position in the village, and the group was stable and well formalized. Most members had gone through shorter trainings in guiding and they had some income security thanks to a system of collectively shared revenues. This meant that it was relatively easy for them to participate in the project since it focused directly on their area of business. Moreover, they had the possibility to participate in activities like workshops and still earn an income that day thanks to the system of collectively shared revenues. However, this was not the situation for all other local guide groups in the county who became involved when the county-wide guide association was initiated, and it proved difficult for some of them to participate in project activities. This was partly due to their level of formalization and the fact that they were not in the position to provide members with an income during days that they participated in project activities. Similarly, a female fishmonger group in Dunga expressed it as difficult to participate in project activities since it meant that they would need to pay someone else to take care of their fish sales whilst being away. This exemplifies that the approach for involvement needs to be adapted to different needs, and it highlights the importance of reflecting on the differences between groups, for example, regarding their level of formalization.

Another aspect important to reflect upon is how activities and decisions made in the project may affect people's situations and relationships to each other. An example of this is how the initiation of the female guide group in Dunga altered the relationship between the women of this group and the existing guide group (mainly consisting of men). Thus, there was potential for a redistribution of resources, and a risk of turning the tourism business into a site of tension (Harding, 1998). The initiation of the female guide group did lead to a change in power relations in the sense that women were included in discussions on tourism development and guiding, which they had not been before. The male guides supported the new group, for example with training sessions, although there were also instances when the women felt that the male guides did not include them in fair ways. A further discussion on this can be found in the article *A tool for reflection on participant diversity and changeability over time in participatory design* (Kraff, 2018).

## Revealing and addressing unjust situations

### *Providing spaces for expressing concern*

The provision of critical project information has been discussed as a way to offer residents a possibility to form critical awareness regarding project suitability. However, this needs to be accompanied by the creation of spaces where residents feel comfortable and safe to raise possible concerns, opinions or diverging views that may come up after having gained access to such information. Raising concerns publicly can feel difficult, uncomfortable and even unsafe, especially if the project can lead to the development of the community, is supported by a strong group (Cornwall, 2003), and the researchers/project leaders are present.

The challenge of providing spaces and support to make it safe for participants to express concern is further discussed in the article *A critical exploration of agonistic participatory design* (Kraff, 2020). It builds on the

project in Kisumu and makes visible how some groups found it easy to express concern or diverging views from the start, whilst others had to build a relationship and trust before doing so. It problematizes how one person can enable people to feel free to express concern in one situation, whilst hindering such expressions in another. It also exemplifies how participants can make use of external project workers, as mediators, to express concern, as that can be seen to legitimize the concern.

*Discussions on project set-up for North-South collaborations*

The unjust role distribution between actors from Kenya and Sweden in the project signals a need to discuss the ways in which projects that build on north-south collaboration are organized and to what extent project set-ups are controlled or influenced by Eurocentric values or have neo-colonial tendencies. This includes discussions within individual projects. However, such unjust situations also need to be made visible outside the immediate project in order to stimulate broader discussions between universities, funding agencies, knowledge centres, research institutes, researchers and participants. Such discussions need to start with the acknowledgement that the distribution of economic means and the political arrangements in projects have an effect on the production of knowledge (Harding, 1998). They need to include analyses of whether all actors have sufficient access to knowledge resources, and whether academics who are expected to collaborate have equal preconditions to conduct their research.

## Tools for identifying pitfalls

A final note on how to work towards just participation concerns how pitfalls can be identified. The identification of pitfalls in the Kisumu project occurred mainly by reflecting through what can be called critical lenses. These critical lenses consist partly of criticism aimed at the concept and practice of participation raised by scholars in political and development studies (e.g. Cleaver, 2001; Mosse, 2001). Reflecting on this criticism

revealed, amongst other things, how the use of terms such as community can hide important information, and how words like empowerment and ownership can produce overstatements. Furthermore, making use of feminist theories stimulated critical reflection on the involvement, or rather lack of involvement, of women in discussions of tourism development in the community as well as on the use of words in project reporting (Mohanty,1988, 2003; Harding 1998; Ahmed, 2012). It made visible the power of language and how words such as community and empowerment can become routine expressions that are easy to employ simply because they are already in use. Also, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'os (e.g. 1985) texts steered focus towards language, and how knowledge can be made unavailable through language. Lastly, Foucault's theories (e.g. 1980) were useful for reflecting on power relations in the project and how unjust situations between the actors are connected to, or the result of, systems of differentiation, regulations or hierarchical structures.

## Concluding discussion

Participation is in this thesis seen as having the potential to lead to positive transformations. As was the case for the guide group in the Kisumu project, participation can strengthen participants in a way that enables them to improve their professional level and work situation. However, it is at the same time recognized that participatory processes are inherently complex and full of pitfalls, which makes them vulnerable to unjust performances. Also, the literature on participation shows that those engaged in it have faced similar pitfalls as the ones described in this thesis since the late 1960s.

The discussion on how researchers can work towards just participation extends beyond the academic sphere, and the hope is that the proposed ways to achieve just participation is of relevance also for actors involved in development cooperation. These include;

- ensuring that participants are able to make critically aware decisions and that they are provided with opportunities to express concerns about the project under safe circumstances.
- articulating participant diversity when writing about or presenting projects, avoiding overstatements, and representing people in a fair and nuanced manner.
- reflecting on and exposing neo-colonial and Eurocentric tendencies within projects as well as in larger debates.

making use of critical theories as lenses for reflection to identify pitfalls. To this it could be added that engaging in a reflective writing process as well as engaging in critical reflection of your own previous writing can expose further pitfalls.

### Defining just participation for a particular project

The aim of the thesis is not to provide an answer to how just participation can be reached for participatory practices and research in general. The complex nature of participation implies that this is impossible. Just participation is highly dependent on context and situation, meaning that it needs to be defined within particular projects. Rather, the hope is that the discussion can contribute to a sensitization to the idea of just participation.

Drawing on the discussion of the thesis, just participation for the particular project in Kisumu, is defined as:

> A responsibility on behalf of researchers and/or practitioners to: provide with clear and just conceptualizations of participants and their participation; reflect upon possible differences between participating groups and how these may demand different forms of involvement; and ensure that residents have access to

> sufficient and critical information about the project, as well as the possibility to express concerns under safe conditions. Also, there is a necessity to ensure that the actors who are to collaborate closely and co-create knowledge together have sufficient access to knowledge resources, and that all researchers have the same preconditions to conduct their research.

It should be mentioned in relation to this that this formulation is constructed by Helena when reflecting on the project in hindsight, and just participation should in reality be defined by the actors engaged in the project when it is initiated and should be continually reassessed. Also, defining just participation does not necessarily mean that it will be attained as the act of formulating what it means needs to be followed by appropriate actions.

## Limitations of the suggestions for just participation

As a final point, some limitations of the suggestions for just participation are presented. For example, abstracted conceptualizations of participants and their participation is presented as problematic and it is argued that the aim should be to state clearly who has participated and how. However, this argument for clear articulations needs to be followed by the recognition that there is a limit to how clear such conceptualizations can be made before there is a risk of encroaching on people's integrity.

Another aspect regarding clear conceptualizations is that a monograph, which is the format of the thesis, may be one of few formats where you can provide clear articulations of participants and their participation without being constrained by word limits. How much you can elaborate is limited in articles, reports and other shorter texts, and it may also be the case that clear articulations make the text overly detailed and difficult to read. One way to tackle this is to demand that authors account for the project set-up, people's participation and the role distribution in projects, including the researcher's

roles, when submitting articles, but that this information does not need to be included in full length in the actual article. For project reports and similar, such information could be provided as appendixes. Provided that there is some sort of standard for what type of information needs to be included in such accounts, it is possible to consider that journals and other publishers demanding such precision and detail gain some sort of accreditation.

## Final remarks

As a final remark it is worth mentioning that pitfalls of participation deserve more attention. Participation is inherently ambiguous, and its complex nature demands open discussions and debates about the challenges that we as researchers and practitioners face when working in projects. Pitfalls can be tackled within individual projects, although it is through collective efforts that they can be hindered from reappearing.

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## Additional information

Written consent to use the photos in this document has been received from those appearing in them. The photos are taken by Helena Kraff and Eva Maria Jernsand.

Participatory processes are typically viewed as democratic and transparent. This DDB explores the pitfalls of participation. By addressing when, how and why participatory practices lead to unjust forms of participation, it offers guidance on how the pitfalls can be avoided in order to achieve just participation.

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Deltagandeprocesser ses ofta som demokratiska och transparenta. Denna DDB undersöker fallgropar i deltagandeprocesser. Genom att studera när, hur och varför deltagandeprocesser leder till orättvisa former för deltagande så erbjuds vägledning kring hur fallgroparna kan undvikas och rättvist deltagande kan åstadkommas.

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