

# Opening Our Minds For Open Design

At the HKDI DESIS Lab 'open design' is a way to approach a complex design context such as design for healthcare, residential communities, politics, work, homelessness etc. wherein both humans as well as artefacts are involved (Latour, 2005; Akrich, 1992; Ehn, 2008). The lab's approach is closely related to how openness is approached in Participatory Design (PD). PD was introduced in the 1970s. Users and designers would collaboratively work together to create better products. PD thus searches ways to enhance and share power in decision-making in the design process with those who are affected by the design, thus opening the design process for their input (Ehn 2008). Likewise, the lab has strong relations to the approaches of Social Design and Design for Social Innovation, wherein

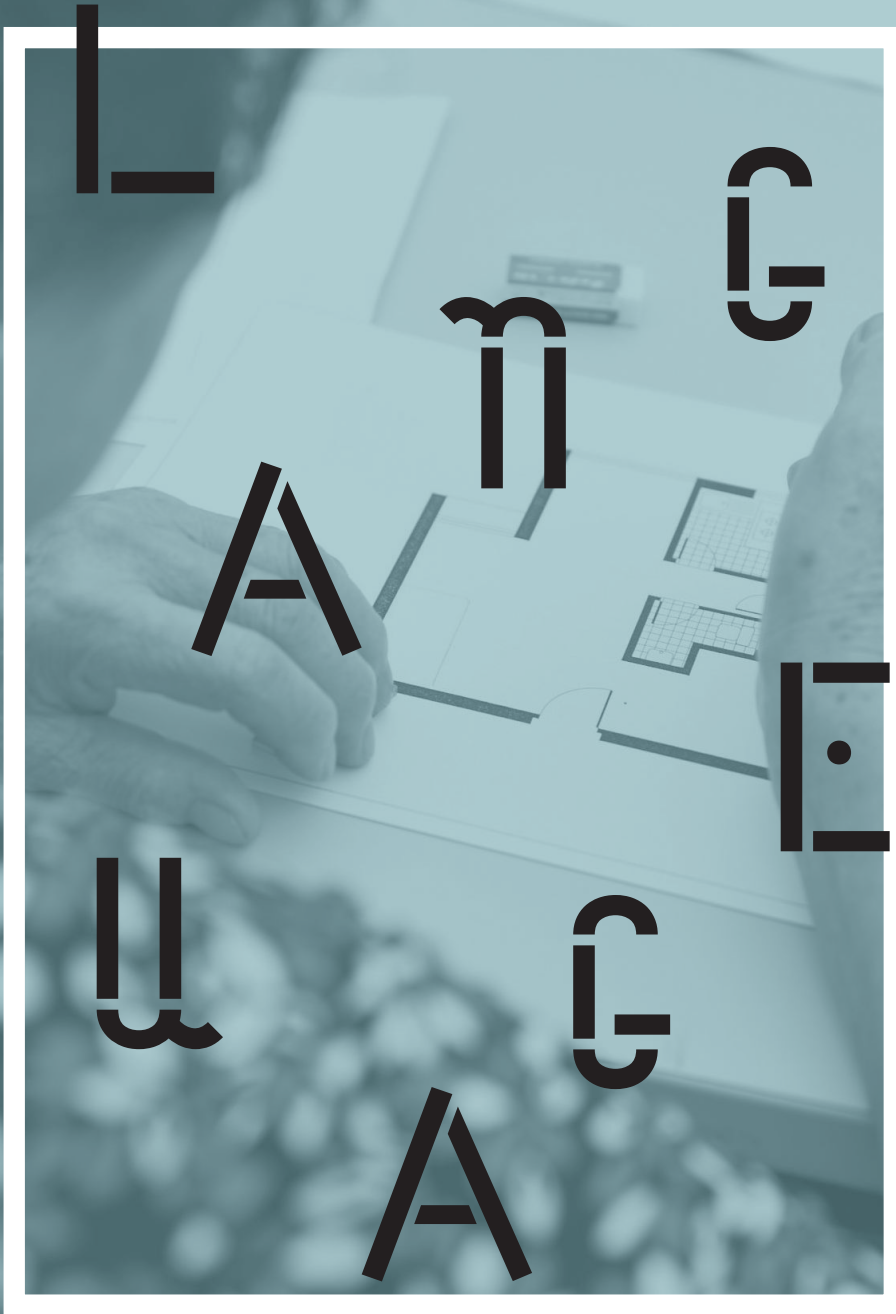
design is used to achieve societal goals. This involves sharing and thus opens up social resources (e.g. competences) that may or may not already exist in a certain community among citizens and designers, to reach a certain goal. An example of this, is the lab's research into how people without homes in Hong Kong and designers learn from each other's experiences and competences in building temporary street homes and - by extension - an alternative future for their city.

This book is divided into three parts, describing three ways how the Lab defines open design. In these three definitions, one aspect of the open design process is stressed: open language, open hearts and open minds.

# Open Language

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With the term Open Language HKDI DESIS Lab refers to opening up the language of design for the broader society, to use it and appropriate it for achieving their own goals. There is a long tradition of opening language in the design world, although most often in the more technical milieus. This tradition is related to open source software where developers share the source codes of their software to allow collaboration, reuse and/or improvement by others (see e.g. Stallman, 2010). More recently the design world became interested in open hardware or open design, a way of working wherein designers and hobbyists share their design to allow others to produce these designs by themselves (see e.g. Van Abel e.a., 2011).



Although open design - defined as open access and contribution to the design artefact - is not limited to the digital world, the terminology used is still related (open source code, hardware and software). Open design artefacts thus will range from the design of office software (like LibreOffice), an encyclopedia (Wikipedia), furniture (see for example <http://www.openstructures.net>), to toys (making your lego connect to k'nex or duplo), mobile phones, a stethoscope ... or an open designed book on ... Open Design (Waag Society).

In order to make the language of design open for the production and use by a group of expert or amateur users and makers, The Open Design Working Group states that the openness in open design refers to open access to the sources of design and open contribution to the collaborative design process. Waag Society, the Open Design Working Group or OpenDesign.org indeed pay great attention to reflection on the ways of documenting, protecting and sharing process and outcome. It is no surprise that one of the supporters of the open source community, Lawrence Lessig, was one of the co-founders of the alternative copyright licenses Creative Commons supporting the legal protection of open and shared artefacts.

When HKDI DESIS Lab talks about open language, they open up the language - the sources and processes - of design in participatory ways. It is clear that what the Lab considers as sources does not only refer to technical aspects of the artefacts, but also less

tangible aspects of the design, such as values or living patterns. In their project 'Open Homes', they answered the question "how do citizens in one of 'the most liveable cities in the world' actually live?" by opening up their living spaces for debate and redesign by the community. The lab discloses the diverse patterns of living through a series of drawings (such as floor plans), images and toolkits of typical interiors in diverse districts of Hong Kong and by engaging people in several design activities (e.g. measuring their homes). This allows people to gain insight into the language of these homes and redesign them. Similarly, in the project 'Open Health' they opened the language of medical equipment and discourses on health 'What the Health' in playful ways through design jams.

## Project 01/ Open Homes I Pattern of Living with Hilary French

**Person in charge/**

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Hilary French

**Outcome/**

The book of  
"Pattern of Living:  
Hong Kong's High  
Rise Community"  
(July 2013)

**Duration/**

July 2012 - July  
2013

**Format/**

Design research  
project

**Discipline/**

Interior Design  
and Architecture



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This project was in collaboration with architectural historian Hilary French from the Royal College of Art (RCA), London, and Interior Design Year 1 students in HKDI. The book is a result of a 1-year study based on the research question - "how do citizens in one of 'the most liveable cities in the world' actually live?"

Almost 50% of Hong Kong's population, some 3.5 million people, live in public housing. They occupy the high density, high-rise tower blocks, in small apartments that have been standardised, serialised, repeated and refined for efficiency in construction.

This project looks inside people's homes capturing a glimpse of their patterns of living through a series of drawings and snapshots of typical interiors in diverse districts of Hong Kong. Although living in the same shape of space inside these high-rise communities, all the dwellers show different patterns of laying out their lives through different settings of their domestic environment.