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Wafa Said Mosleh is a researcher in the field of participatory innovation, through which she brings together practices of design and anthropology to contribute with new understandings of organisational processes.

During her PhD research, she has been affiliated with the research group 'Entrepreneurship and Organisation' and has conducted her PhD studies as part of the ERASMUS+ Knowledge Alliance Project called TACIT (Teaching and Coaching Innovation and Entrepreneurship Innovatively). During the project, she has been in movement between academic immersion and ethnographic fieldwork in industrial organisations with a focus on contributing to theory as well as practice in her research endeavours.

Wafa has obtained a MSc in IT Product Design, with a specialisation in design anthropology. She also holds a B.Eng. in Interaction Design. Both degrees have been achieved at SDU in Sønderborg.

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PhD thesis
The Department of Entrepreneurship
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Emergence,
Tangibility and Power:
Participatory Innovation
as a Complex Process of
Social Relating

PhD

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Participatory Innovation as a Complex Process of Social Relating

Emergence, Tangibility and Power

Innovation has for several decades been recognised as a critical asset for organisational and economic growth; however, the processes through which novelty emerges are still discussed from a variety of different perspectives that do not necessarily align.

This PhD project has led to experiences of processes of innovation as organic, complex and context-sensitive which, as they emerge in situ cannot be captured by linear models that explain innovation as sequentially unfolding through a process of prediction ('design'), enforcement ('implementation') and control ('management'). Consequently, the outcome of this study does not lead to generic findings and guidelines for organisations to follow.

The central focus of my research study is an exploration of how a theory that focuses on the nature of human interaction; as complex responsive processes of relating, may support researchers in understanding participatory innovation through everyday local interactions as forming larger patterns within organisations. This entails that processes of innovation, although influenced by formal decision making, rational planning and control, also as a result of the social nature of human interaction, emerge in a reaction towards the planned activities.

This PhD dissertation is based on four scientific articles grounded in the main research question: *How does participatory innovation, perceived as complex responsive processes of human relating, emerge through everyday organisational life?*

Article 1 reflexively brings attention to the ways in which researchers become entangled in the organisational reality we seek to study. It draws on auto-ethnographic narratives to illustrate how awareness of sociology, focusing on the emerging figurations of interaction, can become a methodological lever to describe experiences of organisational fieldwork. This paper methodologically contributes to the main research question by confronting the particular interdependency between researchers and field actors as we engage with each other as a way to better understand the dynamics of innovation within organisations.

Article 2 contributes to the main research question by exploring power relations as they continuously emerge between managers and practitioners. It does so by involving a tangible artefact called 'the tangible brief', which turned out to support an open confrontation of political agendas and social tensions within the organisation. The paper highlights the non-linearity of innovation processes and argues that conflictual situations naturally emerge in the course of everyday organisational life, and that tangible artefacts can serve as invitations to actively deal with them.

Article 3, elaborates on how tangible artefacts can challenge the conception of collaboration through consensus, by becoming drivers in confronting conflicts that help multiple stakeholders to move beyond stuck positions. The paper contributes to the main research question by highlighting the challenges of multi-stakeholder collaboration and suggesting how tangible artefacts can be involved as a way to deal with that.

Article 4 is a theoretical paper that contributes to the main research question by rethinking the concept of participation through a temporal lens that emphasises the complex, political nature of human relating. It moves beyond understanding participation as a purely empowering concept, instead proposing it as simultaneously constraining and enabling the potential of innovation.

Through the four articles I explore the non-linearity of participatory innovation from different methodological and theoretical standpoints; together they nuance established innovation research by arguing that participatory innovation cannot be detached from everyday local interactions that form and are formed by the larger organisational ambitions.

I do not attribute overall generalizability to my findings, as they are connected to specific people, times and situations, but argue that they can offer views and ideas that may advance the participatory innovation community's understanding of the dynamic and non-linear nature of processes of innovation. Thus, my findings contribute to participatory innovation research by providing a window to the local experiences I stumbled upon in the organisation studied. The insights may offer inspiration for research conducted in other contexts as practical wisdom that evokes theoretical discussions and challenges existing assumptions.

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The Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management (DERM) is a business economics department under the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences. The department resides on campus in Kolding, Sønderborg and Slagelse and has approx. 85 employees.

DERM is characterized by a clear link and synergy between research, education programs, dissemination and societal relevance, as well as a close collaboration culture between subject areas and interaction with external partners from companies and public organizations, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. DERM is organized into 2 strong and focused research groups: Entrepreneurship and Organization, and B2B Marketing and Supply Chain. DERM's research is characterized by collaboration and interdisciplinary research groups. DERM carries particular weight within the spearhead areas: Entrepreneurship, Relationship Management, Design and Innovation.