

Mutual Leadership and Benefit in Encounters Between Human and More-Than-Humans: A leadership retreat in the Australian bush (Submission for Student's Forum Consideration)

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Abstract

My PhD (commencing mid 2023) explores the design of a leadership retreat for social innovators in a cabin in the forest in the Australian bush, utilising a participatory approach to Service Design. The purpose of the retreat is to provide opportunities for leaders who are women and/or people of colour to: broaden their communities of practice; intensely workshop ideas; rest and restore aided by the natural environment and interaction with the more-than-human residents.

The theme *Services and relationships: humans, beyond and below* is addressed by valuing the more-than-human residents of the property on which the retreat is located as key stakeholders, both as active collaborators in the design process and as essential service providers in the running of the retreat. The service ecosystem is synonymous with the biological ecosystem.

Borrowing from the disciplines of Ecology and Zoology this research asks what knowledge can be adopted from from the Biological Sciences to help designers to understand the world-view and agency of more-than-human stakeholders and include them as active collaborators in all phases of participatory service design projects? How can this knowledge help to shift the power relationship embedded in a design collaboration between human and non-human?

I conduct this research as a non-Indigenous settler of European descent on the lands of the Woiwurrung people of the Kulin Nations where the retreat is located. Collaborative relationships between humans and more-than-humans, that respect the agency of the more-than-human inhabitants have been practiced by Woiwurrung Peoples on this Country since time immemorial. I hope to respectfully learn from local Indigenous knowledge of and practices of relating to, non-humans. This raises the question how should I, a non-Indigenous designer and researcher in a Eurocentric discipline, relate to Indigenous knowledges.

