

M Khamala and Donna Pido \* (2017) *The Past, Present and Future of Social Design in Kenya*. Nairobi International Design Education Conference NIDEC. The University of Nairobi, Nairobi, 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2017 \**Department of Design and Creative Media*

### **Abstract**

Social Design has a dark history in East Africa because of its unnamed use in subjugating, and manipulating unsuspecting peoples for over a century. Terms like 'civilization' and 'modernization' were often used to mask intensive 'social control' and 'social engineering.' The study of Design as an academic discipline began at the end of the 1960s, on the misunderstanding that Design is part of Art, which may explain why many subfields of Design have gone unrecognized. To many design educators the notion that their work should be influenced, if not driven by social research and insights gained from the target populations remains strange. The authors now shed light on Social Design, a subfield of Design that has tentacles in many other fields including Social Marketing, Advertising, Public Health, Urban and Rural Planning, Architecture, Green Design and Social Innovation Design. The unclear, diverse and contradictory views of Design sometimes muddle understanding of Social Design and complicate its integration into tertiary Design Education. An online survey of African and other Universities reveals great variation in definitions of design and very little attention to Social Design as a subfield. The authors bring together experience, literature, observation and experimentation in elucidating the status and trajectory of Social Design in Kenya as we integrate it into our curricula. As the use of computers spreads in Kenya, Virtual Reality and Digital Design promise to redesign us if we do not take them under our insightful and vigilant control.