

CAN DESIGN GO BEYOND CRITIQUE? (TRYING TO COMPOSE TOGETHER IN OPENING PRODUCTION)

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at contributing to the emerging field of design for social innovation (D4SI) discussing the insights from the author's long-term involvement as a design researcher in a social innovation project. In order to discuss this experience a particular perspective is introduced, according to which D4SI can be considered an attempt of design to go beyond critique, and, specifically, of *composing together* (Latour 2010). In this understanding D4SI can be considered as a collective effort towards the construction and exploration of alternative ways of living and working.

In deepening how D4SI can be understood as *composing together*, some reflections are made on the author's involvement in the maker-space STPLN, a platform where production processes are opened and attempts of composing new ways of making things and delivering services are carried out.

By highlighting some of the challenges emerged from being a designer in STPLN, the paper develops two reflections. The first one is related to *togetherness* and it argues that, in dealing with collective compositionist processes, designers need

to acquire skills and look for a possible role that is different from the one of the enabler. The second reflection deals with how to assess *composing together*. From the experience with STPLN, it emerges how compositions need to be accountable in diverse discourses in order to travel further and, hopefully, generate future *prospects*.

INTRODUCTION

I belong to a generation of designers fully aware that "*There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a few of them.*" (Papenek 1971). Climate change and environmental problems may have lost their priority on the political agenda, but this does not mean that pollution levels have reduced or global temperature stopped to rise.

We are also aware that "*there is no alternative*" (Tatcher 1980) to neoliberalism, but we are increasingly realizing that in the irresistible march of progress, fewer and fewer are invited to participate.

As designers it seems that we have two possibilities: either hold it strong to progress (Latour 2010), embracing the conviction that "*We have designed systems, cities, and commodities. We have addressed the world's problems. Now design is not about solving problems, but about a rigorous beautification*" (Rashid 2012); or try to address the challenges that our times are posing to design.

Facing these challenges is not an easy task. If taken seriously, they are basically questioning the scope of design itself as the creative engine of mass-consumption and progress. Is it possible to be a designer and embrace environmental and social issues beyond developing environmentally efficient dishwashers?

A provisional possibility to respond to these dilemmas is coming from design for social innovation (D4SI) that is suggesting how design could contribute to the

development of environmentally and socially sustainable ways of living, working and producing things; giving the chance to stop designing for *progress* and rather cautiously experiment with *progression*, by engaging in the tentatively *composition* of possible future *prospects* (Latour 2010).

This paper aims at contributing to the understanding of the possibilities and limits of D4SI by reflecting on a three year involvement as a design researcher in a social innovation experiment, the setting up and running of the maker-space STPLN. The paper builds on an analogy between D4SI and the idea of Compositionism as presented by Latour (2010). By looking at D4SI as an attempt of *composing together*, two contributions are made: the first one is how D4SI can be considered as a way for design to move beyond critique; the second contribution highlights issues and criticalities that can emerge when trying to design as *composing together*.

The paper develops in three parts: first, D4SI is related to Compositionism and how it can be considered to be an attempt of going beyond critique. In the second part, the design experiment is presented: the ongoing participation in the setting up and running of STPLN, a maker-space in Malmö, Sweden. This experience has given the author the opportunity to work with D4SI focusing on production processes. Finally, by reflecting on the involvement in STPLN, the paper reflects on challenges in working with D4SI as *composing together*. The focus is on how to deal with togetherness and on how to assess compositions, that is trying to understand if alternative *prospects* are generated, or if the composition is rather *tinkering* with future-as-usual.

DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AS COMPOSING TOGETHER: IS IT POSSIBLE FOR DESIGN TO GO BEYOND CRITIQUE?

D4SI represents a growing and heterogeneous field with diverse approaches. This paper accounts for a specific development of D4SI that originated in Europe and that entails the possibility for design to play a central role in tackling both environmental and social issues, specifically, by engaging and fostering collaborative processes for the development of new practices and ways of living.

In 2003, Jegou et al. presented a collection of everyday sustainable scenarios, showing how design could help in the transition towards more sustainable lifestyles besides developing energy- and material efficient products. Few years later, the work with creative communities (Meroni 2007) and collaborative services (Jegou et al. 2008) contributed to further develop the idea of design as a key player for the development of a more sustainable society and as an enabler of grass-root initiatives.

In the same years (2004-2006), the work of the RED group in UK represented one of the first attempts of

using design to tackle complex social and economic issues (Design Council 2008, 2010). Focusing on diverse themes (health, ageing, democracy), the work of RED proved how design could be used for developing new services and solutions to respond to complex issues. From these experiences, the idea of *transformative design* (Burns et al. 2006) emerged, defining some key features of D4SI: the centrality of participatory processes involving stakeholders from diverse sectors, the importance of prototyping, and the need of transferring design skills to process participants. Counting on a strong political support, transformative design has been further developed with the DOTT programs (Design Council 2012), a project where entire communities are involved in prototyping solutions for sustainable local living, and Public Service by Design (Design Council 2010), a program where designers have been involved in redesigning services in the public sector.

The vision provided by Manzini and his group in Italy and the practical work promoted by Design Council in UK had a strong impact, fostering the idea that design can shape not only products but also lifestyles and systems for more sustainable societies. In this sense, D4SI differs from previous experiences of “social and politically engaged design” since it aims to *change* rather than *critique*. Moreover, it addresses and involves a wider public than the design community itself.

In his book on design activism, Fuad-Luke (2008) offers a compendium of diverse design experiences, which have aimed at “*generating (...) positive social, institutional, environmental and/or economic change*” (Fuad-Luke 2008:28). From Bauhaus to Critical Design, Fuad-Luke maps design practices involved in and with change. He also notices how “*the target audience for many of the design movements, groups and individuals were predominantly aimed at designers, with a view to change the way they think, approach their work and deliver their form-giving, rather than at specific targets external to the world of design.*” (Fuad-Luke 2008:48). D4SI distinguishes itself from these experiences in its ambitious goal of involving not only the design community, but also other stakeholders: from civil servants to NGOs, from citizens to companies.

This focus on collective processes has brought D4SI close to Participatory Design (PD) (Björgvinsson et al. 2010, 2012, Hillgren et al. 2011, Manzini et al. 2011) and its long-standing experience with collaborative processes (Simonsen et al. 2012). Starting from the belief that users should have a say in the development of technology (Kyng and Ehn 1987), PD strived (and strives) for establishing collaborative design processes involving diverse stakeholders, developing tools, techniques and theories to support users cooperation with professional designers (Kyng 1998). More recently, the PD community started to address social issues by getting involved in public arenas (Björgvinsson et al. 2010, Halse et al. 2010); and D4SI has recognized how PD knowledge about collaborative

processes could be valuable in fostering social innovation (Manzini et al. 2010).

Involving diverse stakeholders can play a role when it comes to the impact of the design process. As underlined by Fuad-Luke (2008), design activism has historically had a significant influence on the design world, but a negligible influence on a broader social level. In this sense, D4SI, similarly to PD, sees in participation in design processes the possibility of moving beyond traditional critique towards a notion of critique based on the construction of possible alternatives. Involving diverse stakeholders in collective design processes and empowering grass-root initiatives are looked upon as possibilities to scale and diffuse promising initiatives promoting change on a large scale (Jegou et al. 2008, Meroni 2007).

D4SI is also opening the possibility to redefine the role of design and to emancipate it from mass production and consumption. Historically, design activism practices (Fuad-Luke 2008) represented isolated and fortuitous occasions where individuals or small groups of practitioners had the chance of being a designer outside the mass-production realm, often, retiring themselves in academia or arts from where they have done a great job in revealing issues and controversies in the design field. The program of D4SI is more ambitious: it proposes to establish a new role for the designer as a catalyst of collective design actions aimed at exploring alternative futures, opening for a new way of practising and understanding the profession of being a designer.

In order to discuss what this practice could be about, the paper introduces an analogy between D4SI and Compositionism (Latour 2010), arguing that D4SI can be considered an attempt of *composing together*.

Latour's (2010) *An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto"* was written after the 2009 climate meeting in Copenhagen when, once again, the limits of traditional politics in facing climate change emerged. In suggesting how to deal with environmental issues, Latour (2010) proposes to move beyond traditional critique through Compositionism. Particularly, he is formulating an approach that is not too much concerned with revealing cracks and limits, but rather it focuses on the construction of alternative practices and discourses.

Latour recognizes how, historically, "*critique did a wonderful job of debunking prejudices, enlightening nations, and prodding minds, (...) generating an immense source of productive energy that in a few centuries reshaped the face of the Earth*" (Latour 2010: 474). However, eventually, *critique ran out of steam* (Latour 2004) because in distancing itself from the world to get an objective perspective on facts, it missed to notice that "*Reality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern*" (Latour 2004:232).

In the present situation, in the light of an environmental, economic and political crisis (Castells et al. 2012), to exert critique could sound as a call to nihilism (Latour 2010). In being at the end of history with no alternatives, the emerging malfunctions of neoliberalism are dramatically revealing that we might have no future. In this scenario, critique is unable to generate the necessary energy to provoke change, and it ends up *poking holes in delusion* (Latour 2010).

The *An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto"* refers explicitly to Marx' work. Particularly, it seems to build on the conviction that "*the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.*" (Marx 1848). Latour's argument is that reaching change implies involvement in the construction of alternatives. Compositionism is a way of tentatively explore and prototype diverse activities, practices and discourses and understand how they could become *prospects*, challenging future-as-usual and open for new possibilities.

What Latour proposes is to shift from *progress* to *progression*: from an inexorable unidirectional march towards future-as-usual to an exploratory and suggestive progression where different future *prospects* are tried out: "*While critics still believe that there is too much belief and too many things standing in the way of reality, compositionists believe that there are enough ruins and that everything has to be reassembled piece by piece*" (Latour 2010: 475).

Instead of explaining away the world, Latour calls for engagement with humans, objects and technologies (actants) to compose, construct, compromise and even compost future *prospects*. An engagement that acknowledges how each actant, being human or non-human, carries its own agendas and has an active role in shaping the present situation but also possible future *prospects*. *Composing together* aims at generating *things* (Latour 2004), socio-materials gatherings where human and non-human actors are brought together. "*A thing is, in one sense, an object out there and, in another sense, an issue very much in there, at any rate, a gathering. To use the term I introduced earlier now more precisely, the same word thing designates matters of fact and matters of concern*" (Latour 2004:233).

Compositionism should not be mistaken for being acritical, but is an attempt of moving beyond critique that still requires the ability of having a critical mind and carefully understand how *things* are composed and how they flick between being facts and being issues. Working with *things* requires you to recognize and be aware of the connections and tensions that hold reality together, trying to understand how they could be effected. In composing, the focus is not on the construction per se, but on how the process does or does not affect actants' relationships and agendas. On the contrary, if the focus is more on having a functional composition, the risk is to end up in *tinkering*;

assembling not towards alternative *prospects* but rather towards future-as-usual.

What Compositionism is proposing for critique resembles what D4SI is trying to do with socially and politically engaged design: an attempt of moving beyond exert critique to rather work collectively towards the experimentation of alternative practices of living and working. As mentioned above, D4SI is exploring how design approaches could support collective efforts to compose future *prospects* for sustainable living, involving diverse stakeholders in the society. It is moving from raising awareness about specific issues to rather support collective prototypes about possible sustainable futures.

Latour underlines how composing is a matter of togetherness “*it is time to compose—in all the meanings of the word, including to compose with, that is to compromise, to care, to move slowly, with caution and precaution*” (Latour 2010:478). Togetherness plays a central role in D4SI: it often requires the creation of new alliances and relationships between stakeholders from diverse sectors (Jegou et al 2008), but it is also a matter of empowering bottom-up initiatives, developing ways to support other stakeholders’ design activities (Björgvinsson et al. 2012, Jegou et al. 2008, Meroni 2007).

Considering D4SI as a way of *composing together* sheds new light on this emerging field. It values prototyping as a key approach to explore alternative possibilities; it underlines how making things (together) – being artefacts, services, scenarios – allows to experiment with new alliances that can move us away from future-as-usual. However, some shades are also emerging from being practically engaged in *composing together*, such as designers’ inability of dealing with togetherness, as well as their lack of implementation and management skills. Another issue is related to the role of designer in *composing together*. Finally, the dilemma of understanding if we are *composing* or *tinkering*: are we really building *things*, or are we just playing safe with future-as-usual? These issues are further discussed using some insights from the author’s involvement as a design researcher in the setting up and running of STPLN, a maker-space for opening production.

STPLN, A SPACE FOR OPENING PRODUCTION

It is a usual Thursday evening in the STPLN basement: the laser-cutter is running at full speed, cutting out a wood shell for the arcade game that Marcus and Niklas are building. Sitting at the table, Davey is building a wood wristwatch and discussing with a guy who needs help to develop a software. On the sofa, some guys are coding, or maybe they are drawing something to cut out with the laser-cutter? In the Textile Department, two women are knitting, having biscuits and tea. A lot of bicycles are stacked in one corner of the room: they are projects from the Bicycle Kitchen, an open workshop

where people can fix their bikes with the help of volunteers. In the room beside, Carin is fixing the last things before tomorrow’s workshop with a primary school: she is the founder of Återskapa, an atelier where cast-over materials from industrial production are used to explore with children their creativity and teach them about sustainability. In the opposite corner of the same room, behind a curtain, some guys are setting up the textile printing workshop, bringing in materials and paints, checking out the frames for screen printing. Upstairs everything is quiet now, but few hours ago the co-working facility was busy as usual and in the kitchen a catering company was cleaning after the conference in the concert room.

STPLN is a 2000 sqm venue owned by the city of Malmö. It was opened in April 2011, becoming an arena where people can experiment with diverse kinds of production: from repairing bikes to staging new formats for music concerts, from building robots to trying out new educational formats.

The space is managed by the NGO STPLN that has a long experience in working with culture production in a broad sense. The role of the research centre I belong to was to set up and manage the workshop in the basement in collaboration with the NGO. When it comes to my role, I have been involved in diverse activities: from setting up events and workshops about making to experimenting with urban gardening, from using prototyping as a tool for coaching to being actively involved in the development of the cast-over materials bank. These activities have been often carried out as a collaborative effort between several stakeholders and with a long-term perspective.

STPLN is a maker-space, a platform where people and individuals can access tools and share resources to engage in production processes, trying out how to move from being a consumer to becoming a producer. In STPLN, diverse practices and activities are interweaving: from amateur do-it-yourself, to professional educational services; from small-scale production with commercial aims, to artistic explorations of materials and technologies.

Maker-spaces, together with other physical infrastructures such as FabLabs and Hacker-spaces, represent a growing phenomenon that is offering to small companies, freelancers, students, artists and amateurs the possibility of opening physical production processes.

The expression “opening production” accounts for all emerging practices that are experimenting with the way in which production is understood and organized, blurring the distinction between producers and consumers, focusing on social values rather than economical ones, reconstructing local supply chains. These practices are cutting across diverse realms: from software and ICT sector, with open-source and commons-based P2P production (Benkler 2006, Bauwens 2009), to the food sector, with civic

agriculture (Lyson 2004), from manufacturing, with the rise of crafts and do-it-yourself practices (Anderson 2012), to the media field, with platforms supporting collaborative production between users (Löwgren et al. forthcoming).

The opening of production is not a coherent movement. Nevertheless, there are shared traits that characterize these *opening production* practices, e.g., the challenging of the distinction between producer and consumer in creating new models in which the two roles overlap and sometimes merge. Moreover, if compared with capitalist and mass-production processes, these practices are often aiming at the generation of multiple values: use value, but also social and human capital. When it comes to social innovation, these practices are looked upon as promising attempts for the establishment of a local-based and on-demand production systems that, by valuing small-scale and artisan production, could become a more social and environmentally sustainable way of generating goods and services (Anderson 2012). Opening production gathers diverse practices that are experimenting with the possibility to compose processes outside (or on the side of) the capitalist and mass-production model.

STPLN represents a space to explore how production could be opened in the specific context of the city of Malmö. What practices can emerge? Which needs are fulfilled? Who is participating? Above all, how is it possible to *compose together prospects* about production, and how can design contribute?



Figure 1: Activities in STPLN basement workshop

REFLECTING ON COMPOSING TOGETHER STPLN

THE CHALLENGE OF TOGETHERNESS: FROM COMPOSITION TO COMPOSING

The expression *composing together* stresses the role of collective actions in generating *prospects*. Togetherness is considered a central element in social innovation, which often emerges from encounters between established organizations and grass-root initiatives (Murray et al. 2010) and entails the creation of new alliances and relationships between diverse sectors (Phills et al. 2008). D4SI has developed the idea of

designing networks, collectives where diverse stakeholders are brought together and entangled in co-design activities (Manzini et al. 2008). Similarly, *transformation design* underlines the importance of participatory approaches for developing social innovation (Burns et al. 2006). Togetherness also implies a shift in the role of the designer: from being the driver of the design action to becoming the enabler and supporter of others' composing activities (Burns et al. 2006, Manzini et al. 2008, Meroni 2007).

However, D4SI lacks hands-on insights discussing the difficulties and challenges of togetherness. What does it take to bring actors together? How is it possible to *compose together*? The work with STPLN has been rewarding, providing insights about how complex (but also surprising) togetherness can be (Seravalli 2012b, 2013). The experience with STPLN has generated two outcomes in terms of togetherness: the first one related to a particular understanding of the collective action in D4SI; the second one regarding the role of the designer in *composing together*.

In framing togetherness (and its difficulties), a great contribution comes from PD, which offers a wide range of approaches and frameworks to understand and deal with collective processes (Simonsen et al. 2012). This knowledge has been extremely helpful in making sense of and navigating what happened at STPLN (Seravalli 2012b, 2013). One of the main learnings that D4SI could embrace from PD is the one of design as a situated practice (Suchman 1987), where human specificities play a central role in shaping practices and results. In dealing with togetherness, it is important to remember that to support the collective design action, the focus should be neither "*the method (n) or the designer but the designer using the method(...)*" (Light, Akama 2012: 61). In this perspective the outcome of a design action depends on the interaction between the designer, the method and the specific actans involved (being both human or non-human). In *composing together*, a particular emphasis should be put in understanding the specificities of the collective that is brought together. Designers willing to work with social innovation should be able to embrace the specificities of the collective they are involved in (e.g. agendas, possible conflicts, personalities) and develop a particular sensibility in deciding which approaches can be used to foster and navigate togetherness. For example, in the initial phases of STPLN, traditional design strategies for togetherness (such as workshops) have been unable to foster a collective design action, while working on a tactical mode with prototyping, small-scale interventions, and long-term engagement encouraged the emergence of a specific form of togetherness based on making (Seravalli 2012a, 2012b, 2013).

When it comes to the designer's role in making together, D4SI proposes the idea of the designer as a facilitator or enabler of social innovation initiatives. The involvement in STPLN opens for a different

understanding, where the designer brings its competences in the composing but does not necessary lead it.

As a designer, embracing the idea that STPLN was collectively built has meant to leave the ownership of the design agenda, moving from a strategic to a tactical design mode. Rather than starting from specific ideas about which activities should happen in the space, I tried to be more open to support what was emerging: navigating the diverse initiatives and hooking up with the ones close to my agenda. This has been difficult but it has also revealed how *composing together* is often about compromising (Latour 2010) and how, as a designer, you have to stop designing and understand how to support others' design activities.

This requires gaining a different role. PD has developed knowledge about how to support others' design processes, but there is little discussion about what it takes to gain that role. In STPLN, it has been a matter of building trust and understanding what exactly I could offer to the other participants. In establishing a long-term collaboration with the cast-off material bank, it has been important to use my industrial design skills and knowledge about sustainability to make evident how I could contribute to the project. Time passing, mutual trust has grown, creating the possibility to extend the collaboration to other aspects of the project (such as possible business strategies, formats and content for the workshops).

However, trust is not enough, as it emerges from the collaboration with the NGO running STPLN. I always wanted to work with service design aspects of the maker-space, such as how to organize access to the space and how to engage users in its everyday management. I had the chance to give suggestions about possible strategies and solutions regarding these topics; however, it has not been possible to get the same space for experimentation that I gained in Återskapa, the cast-off material bank. A possible reason is, that, while with Återskapa the collaboration is built on offering competences that are missing (e.g. industrial design), with the NGO what I would like to offer overlaps with competences that are already in place. Moreover, my involvement in the management of the space could lead to issues when it comes to defining ownership and roles.



Figure 2: Workshops with Återskapa

These experiences have also highlighted how being a facilitator could not be the most appropriate role for a designer involved in social innovation. In these three years, I had to face the frustration of lacking skills and competences for having that role: one thing is to facilitate a design workshop about visions and scenarios, a totally different one is to cope with issues related to implementation and everyday management of a maker-space. On the other hand, I could see how my skills related to making and "*not being afraid to try out things*" (as Carin from Återskapa framed once prototyping) are considered much more valuable. It is difficult to define exactly which role I have in the *composing together* at STPLN. It is not the one of the facilitator or enabler, but rather it seems to be more related to the ability of navigating the diverse agendas looking for possible connections and having the skills (and some material resources) for trying out activities together with others.

The experience of STPLN shows the need in D4SI to move the discourse from *compositions* to *composing*, from visions and hopes to actual insights from being involved in social innovation activities, to understand how composing is performed and what kind of competencies are needed to work with it. Similar issues have already been brought up in the field of D4SI. The former director of Young Foundation (a leading organization for social innovation) highlighted how designers are often lacking skills in the implementation phase, when it comes to organizing resources and people (Mulgan 2009). A similar critique has been raised by the design studio *Inwithfor* that has worked with D4SI for a long time. They underline the need to move from concepts and prototypes to developing and spreading robust theories of change (Schulman 2009).

COMPOSING OR TINKERING?

In understanding D4SI as *composing together*, a fundamental question relates to how to assess what we are doing, this to understand if we are *composing* or just *tinkering*, i.e., if we are creating *prospects* or just playing safe towards future-as-usual. This is a central issue in both conceptual and practical terms.

In conceptual terms, it is important to embrace how, going beyond critique does not imply to suspend critical mind, quite the contrary. D4SI has been criticised for not considering the political aspects of its actions (Tonkinwise 2010). This risk has emerged in a quite evident way in the discussion about designers' engagement in the implementation of Big Society policy in England, where the development of community-based public services seems to be not an attempt of composing but rather a progressive withdrawal of the State from delivering public services (Tonkinwise 2010). Similar discussions can also be found in the opening of production, for example, in open software and hardware fields, where it is discussed if open-source approaches represent a possible seed for alternative

production, or if they have already been totally co-opted by market forces (Bauwens 2009).

When it comes to practical terms, the line between *composing* and *tinkering* may be blurred. A possible way to navigate this is to consider how *things* travel, i.e., who and what is involved in the composition, as suggested by Latour (2010). *Composing together* aims at generating *things*, which are both matters of facts and matters of concern. In trying to understand if we are generating alternative *prospects*, or if we are just *tinkering* with future-as-usual, it is important to consider how *things* may or may not travel. This idea can be explained by looking at how STPLN worked both as matter of fact and a matter of concern in relation to economic growth.

My participation in STPLN was made possible through a research project financed by EU structural funds aimed at fostering economic growth and innovation. The project involved a consortium of diverse actors: a research centre (to which I belong to), a media cluster, and regional departments. In this constellation, the role of my organization was to set up three Living Labs that were supposed to work as pre-incubators from which new entrepreneurial activities, products and services should emerge (more information on format and aims of the Malmö Living Labs can be found in Björgvinsson et al. 2010).

One of these labs was the workshop in STPLN basement. Since its opening, the lab has been criticized from other project partners due to the fact that it was not delivering enough companies and jobs, which were two of the project evaluation parameters. This led to the decision, a few months after its opening, to re-allocate the remaining resources for the creation of a new prototyping lab that could contribute more directly to economic growth and innovation by engaging big players in the region.

This unfolding can be used to argue why it is difficult to judge if we are *composing* or *tinkering*, since *things* flick between *facts* and *concerns*.



Figure 3: Fixing bikes at STPLN

One of the reasons why the STPLN lab is considered a failure resides in its inability of delivering companies and jobs. At the same time, it is possible to see how the space is contributing to economic growth. Beside the fact that some companies have been actually developing in the space, other interesting “*facts*” emerged. Such as the participant that by starting tinkering around with electronics decided to take courses at university to improve his education; or the number of long-term unemployed people that is regularly coming to the space and eventually being enrolled for internships there. Other facts are related to the practices of repairing and reusing, which, besides reducing costs and saving materials (like the ones going on in the Bicycle Kitchen), sometimes are even leading to new entrepreneurial activities (like it happened with the material bank). It is also a matter of socializing and getting to know new people that, for example, are attracting in the space a number of creative workers looking for possibilities to enlarge their professional networks. These facts may lie at the margins of the economic growth discourse but it is easy to argue how they contribute to it. At the same time they are issues questioning and enlarging the understanding of production: is it necessary just carried out only by companies? What if it allows unemployed people to “get back on tracks”? What if it becomes a way to create social bonds and improve people skills? What if it results in recycling and repairing rather than consumption?

These questions are showing how STPLN is generating *things* that are opening for a wider understanding of what production is good for and that could lead to *prospects*. However, at the same time, STPLN is failing

in terms of composing, since “*the facts*” emerging in the space have not been recognized as such by the local actors working within the economic growth discourse. The decision to invest in the new prototyping lab is not bad per se, but it partially shuts down the possibility for STPLN of being a composition, since, the withdraw of the media cluster and the economic development agency from the composition, might relegate the space in a position (being a facility for leisure activities and cultural artistic explorations) which puts it back in the prospective of future-as-usual.

This story exemplifies how difficult it is to keep compositions ongoing and make *things* travel. If the *things* emerging from STPLN are not accountable in an economic growth discourse, they cannot involve actors related with that issues and this limits their possibility of becoming *prospects*.



Figure 4: One of STPLN companies

However this is a complex point, since even too much travelling can lead to *tinkering*. A meaningful example can be found in the opening of production, where free-software was renamed as open-source software, in order to make this model acceptable by the business community (Benkler 2006). This shift implied that some of the political agendas were left behind, but on the other side it opened the possibility for the open-source models to travel further. Peer-to-peer and sharing-based models are spreading in diverse realms, inspiring new ways of organizing production. Of course, it can be argued how giving up “free” for “open-source” was a way to make these models appealing to the market, but it has also created the opportunity for them to travel and inspire, for example, new models for delivering public services (Botero et al 2012). Making STPLN accountable in an economic growth prospective would allow the maker-space to travel further and create the possibility of opening for *prospects* in the future-as-usual of production. This certainly would imply that some ideas and ways of working in STPLN could be used to keep progress ongoing, but at the same time they would hopefully spread and support the generation of new *prospects*.

Trying to understand if we are *composing* or *tinkering* implies to be aware of how *prospects* can become futures. What emerges from the STPLN experience is that, for travelling further, compositions need to become

accountable in diverse discourses and this requires to care about who and what is involved in the composition.



Figure 5: Making curtains at STPLN

CONCLUSIONS

The paper tries to contribute to D4SI by introducing the idea of *composing together* to reflect on the long-term involvement in a social innovation experiment.

D4SI can be understood as a way of *composing together*, as an attempt of moving beyond being critical and rather engaging directly in the collective creation of possible alternative future *prospects*. *Composing together* aims at generating *things*, gatherings of human and non-human actors where practices and relationships can be explored.

This perspective reinforces a possible role for design in the generation of alternative practices for sustainable living and working, however, it also highlights criticalities as it emerges from the author’s involvement with STPLN, a maker-space in the city of Malmö. Particularly from this experience two issues are brought up.

The first one relates to the need of moving the attention from compositions to composing, from visions and hopes to a better understanding of the practice of D4SI. From STPLN it emerges how *composing together* is a situated practice that depends on the context specific situation. As a consequence, designers need to develop not only approaches to deal with togetherness, but also the ability to understand the specific setting they are involved in. Moreover, some reflections on the role of the designer in *composing together* are made, discussing how the task of enabler may not be the most appropriate one.

The second issue is related to the difference between *composing* and *tinkering*, or how to assess D4SI work. Particularly, from the STPLN experience, it emerges how, in *composing together*, it is important to reflect about how *things* travel further, that entails to consider how *things* flicks between *facts* and *concerns* and who and what is involved in the composing.

Considering D4SI as a way of moving beyond critique towards *composing together* represents a bold statement that is far from being proved. However, introducing this perspective gives the opportunity to discuss more in detail the actual practice and challenges of D4SI.

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