SHIFTING ROLES IN PUBLIC ISSUES: EXPLORING A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY DESIGN APPROACH TO MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

RELATIONS, DYNAMICS, ENGAGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Local governance transformed from a municipality-centred to a collaborative process between multi-stakeholders, of which the municipality is one of many stakeholders who all have different interests, expertise and resources. Such multi-stakeholder collaboration networks change stakeholders' roles and responsibilities and require new forms of participation in governance processes.

In this work, we explore how a cross-disciplinary design approach can facilitate multi-stakeholders to 'practise' their shifting roles in local governance. We found that this context requires not only shifting roles of multi-stakeholders, but also a transformation of the roles of designers.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, a trend of decentralization arose in Western Europe. Reducing fiscal income led to budget cuts (e.g., in the social domain) and increasing unemployment led to a higher demand of public services and hence to pressure on local governments. Local governance transforms from a municipality-centred to a participative process between multi-stakeholders, of which the municipality is one of the stakeholders, just as citizens, or housing corporations, wellbeing organisations or property developers. Such multi-stakeholder participation requires a shift of roles in the local force field with regard to decision-making power, (shared) responsibilities and accountability.

Designers are increasingly working on societal challenges that comprise 'complex systems of stakeholders and issues' (Norman et al. 2016). The tradition of participatory design focused on workplace democratisation but now shows a discourse of designing participation processes for 'more pragmatic ends' (Brereton et al. 2008) and design thinking methods are widely implemented, as comprehensively expounded by Hillen (2017), to overcome challenges of multi-disciplinarity in multi-stakeholder collaborations. Public issues are complex- perhaps not so much with regard to technology, but rather with regard to disciplinary, cultural, economic and socio-political factors that shape the behaviour of the users (stakeholders) of designed interventions (technologies) (Tacchi et al., 2007). To introduce these factors into design processes, designers require different skills and toolsets (Norman et al. 2016).

In this work, we explore how a cross-disciplinary design approach can enable multi-stakeholders to 'practise' their shifting roles in participation around public issues. We found that this context requires not only shifting roles of multi-stakeholders, but also a transformation of the roles of designers.

We describe three case studies in different municipalities. We conclude by sharing our reflections on the shifting roles of design itself, stakeholders and design-teams in participation in public issues.

POSITIONING

As this paper focuses on process and not on specific design characteristics, we briefly outline the theoretical principles underlying our approach.

SYSTEM AND LIFEWORLD

Habermas (1984) distinguishes two parallel communicative realities: System and Lifeworld. System describes hierarchical structures, rules procedures or steering media that impose structure on life or *colonise* Lifeworld (1984): the messiness of human behaviour, relations and plurality.

In governance, the terms System and Lifeworld are often used to describe tension in participation processes between relatively the municipal organisation and the citizens' lives. Habermas explains that these two realities meet in the 'public sphere', where they can reach common understanding through deliberation.

In participation processes around public issues, a popular way to ignite discussions is through Deliberative Democracy (Hendriks 2006). Based on reasonably valid arguments, stripped off from emotion and personal history, people discuss to reach consensus about a public issue.

We are inspired by the tension that Habermas pinpoints, but we take a different approach to reaching understanding.

MIND AND BODY

Whereas Deliberative Democracy suggests to take out all situational characteristics from the discussion, we believe that knowledge is inherently situated and embodied (Suchman 1987): we do *not* have rational minds that can be, as in a Cartesian split, separated from our bodies.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains that our body and our mind are interconnected. Through (inter-) acting physically in (with) the world, we perceive and generate meaning of it. This view shows limitations for participation through the public sphere or through rational discussions proposed by Deliberative Democracy: the body is neglected. This opens up an opportunity for designing participation processes for public issues: to actively engage the whole, situated, body in the exchange of perspectives on the world beyond the limits of a rational discussion. We therefore design interventions that trigger bodily engagement, physical interactions in space and social interactions between people (Hummels et al. 2015).

PARTICIPATION IN DESIGN AND SOCIETY

From the field of design, various participatory approaches have been applied to open up societal issues such as architecture (Awan et al. 2013) or policymaking (Bason 2016) and tools have been developed for urban planning (e.g. MAP-IT by Schepers et al. 2003). These new applications of Participatory Design change the roles of the participating 'users' or

stakeholders in the public domain. In this context, it is our aim to engage stakeholders in practising the shifting roles in public issues, through design interventions based on embodiment.

APPROACH

The work described in this paper was undertaken by a cross-disciplinary design-research team: A design-researcher (first author), trained as an interaction designer and a political-administrative consultant (second author), trained as a political theorist and working in a consultancy for local governance. In close collaboration, we decided on which strategic steps to take in the design process, and what kind of interventions to design.

The three case studies served as contexts in which we could explore our cross-disciplinary approach. In each case, our aim was to provide practical insights to address the struggles of stakeholders and to investigate the role of design interventions in multi-stakeholder participation.

Figure 1: Excerpt of the photo-realistic scenario presented to communicate the final concept.

CASE 1: COMMUNITY PLATFORM

The context was a municipality, made up of three villages in the North-East of the Netherlands, who were looking for a 'digital platform' to enable their inhabitants to self-organise informal care, and to connect with formal care.

The municipality asked us to design such a platform in participation with inhabitants, civil servants and local care organisations.

APPROACH TO CASE

We planned out a co-design process and presented it to several stakeholders within the municipality. The Co-Design process consisted of 10 weeks including three workshops and two concept evaluations.

We selected diverse participants from the network provided by the municipality. For the workshops, we used a mix of participatory design methods based on embodiment, see figure 2. We sent sensitising packages (Visser et al. 2005) to participants, used scrap materials to tinker ideas (Stappers et al. 2003), used acting out to reflect on roles and prejudice (Buur et al. 2010; Tomico et al. 2011) or to enact the platform's desired functionalities.

The first two workshops had the same format but were organised separately with municipal stakeholders and with societal stakeholders. The third workshop brought

all stakeholders together. The aim of this process was to first gain insight into the relevant perspectives and to finally confront those perspectives: to open up reflection amongst the stakeholders and to crystallise the essential characteristics for a community platform in the third workshop. We presented a concept and suggested pilot test plans for them to evaluate the ideas that were developed.

DESIGN INTERVENTION

The design intervention consisted of (1) the *process* that we developed and (2) the *final concept* that we presented based on the insights from the co-design process. During the process we made use of several designed materials (e.g., sketched scenarios, postcards in sensitising packages, paper prototypes) to trigger ideas and perspectives, see figure 3. Lastly, we presented the final concept through storytelling and a photo-realistic scenario, see figure 1. The concept was a combination of an action-based community website with physical interactive boards at the locations of local initiatives.

Figure 2: Inhabitants, showing a sensitising exercise (left) and acting out desired functions of the platform

Figure 3: Paper prototypes of ideas for a platform in the shape of a website, card-set and pass-on message system.

REFLECTIONS

The initial separation of stakeholders in the first two workshops allowed us to gain insight into the complex force field of stakes and prejudices surrounding the 'common goal' (a digital platform). Moreover, it allowed participants to feel heard, taken seriously and develop trust in us as independent party (even though the municipality asked us to facilitate).

The participants were positively surprised by our translation of their input (e.g., tinkering, or acting out) into specifications for the community platform: "that you were able to crystallise *that* from our piece of crafting work, I find impressive".

The initial process of ten weeks extended into sporadic involvement over ten months. After the presentation, we urged the participants to decide how they would like to continue (e.g., pilot test). Initially, the municipality attempted to put 'project management' in our hands, but through several meetings in which we re-affirmed our

role, we were able to gradually retract from the project and shift ownership into the stakeholders' hands. This was important to us as in this way, the insights from the participation process could be used by the stakeholders themselves: to collaborate locally towards results, rather than to assign the project to us or another external design-team. Finally, participants formed a core group who took it upon themselves to realise the concept together.

IMPACT

One year after the first workshop and five months after our closing presentation, we were asked to join one of the team's meetings to share our advice. The team had formed in the month after the presentation and consisted of the most enthusiastic participants from the workshops from all stakeholder groups. The team indicated to have continued with our proposed concept, although *we* saw a *new* concept, inspired by our proposal, moulded by their own priorities and beliefs. For example, many of the interactive or location-based technologies were taken out of the concept. On the other hand, the team were still interested in the interactive location-boards and asked us whether we could implement that part of the concept. In this phase we had to (again) define the limits of our role: not production, but design-research. Hence instead, we facilitated an in-depth discussion on why they wanted the interactive boards. Eventually we found that visual markers on location, with a link or QR code were fitting to their concept and expectations.

15 months after the start of this project, the team had launched a website (see figure 4): they developed their online community platform and generated the first content. They were proud of their accomplishment and regarded the platform as a result that grew out of the co-design process.

Figure 4: Impression of the concept platform (left) and developed platform (right).

CASE 2: CARAVAN CONVERSATION PROBES

The context was a municipality, made up of three villages in the Mid-South of the Netherlands, who were looking for ways to involve their inhabitants' perspectives in their upcoming municipal amalgamation. Already for a year, this had been a 'hot topic' amongst inhabitants and local politics.

The municipality wanted to get to know the current and future needs of inhabitants of their villages, in order to take those into account in negotiating with partners for amalgamation.

The municipality asked our partner consultancy and a communication agency to work out a strategy and deliver insights in the inhabitants' perspectives. The consultancy then asked us as design-researchers to develop materials to engage inhabitants in a meaningful conversation.

The consultancy's strategy was to approach the citizens actively, in their own environment. The communication agency transformed an old caravan into a mobile living room that we drove through the villages. We sent out a schedule of our visits and a fill-out sticker sheet in the local weekly newspaper.

Figure 5: Caravan in context, the probes in action (FLTR: body, agenda, stickers)

We designed four conversation probes in the caravan to facilitate deep and spontaneous conversations and allow inhabitants to express themselves.

For 10 days, the consultants and we drove the caravan through the three villages. In order to meet a representative group of inhabitants, we visited locations where diverse daily life activities took place: e.g., church on Sunday, soccer field on Saturday or the supermarket. At each location, one employee of the municipality was present and the mayor made five brief visits, to talk to inhabitants in person.

DESIGN INTERVENTION
We designed four conversation starters, see figure 5, aimed to trigger participation at the caravan and tap into people's experience. We hoped to attract different types of participants by offering different types of conversation starters, some based on writing, some based on talking and some based on movement.

Based on body mapping (Solomon 2002) we created five life-size body silhouettes in different postures. Participants were asked to relate the postures to their municipality, and use post-its to fill out what is for example, in 'the heart' of the municipality. Other participation invitations were an agenda for the municipality (what would you want to put on the agenda of governors?), a mailbox for ideas, a fill-out sticker sheet (sent to all inhabitants with the local newspaper) of which the stickers could be stuck onto a category map on the side of the caravan, with themes based on capability approach (Mink et al.,2015).

REFLECTIONS
The combination of embodied probes and daily-life interactions around the caravan provided rich insights in the lived experience and future outlook of inhabitants.

However, during the ten days of driving the caravan, the project was harshly critiqued by some of the local media. The graphic style, energising tone and active approach towards inhabitants was, by some groups, experiences as a campaign to lure in inhabitants for any decision that the municipality would make. An important addition is that local media found out that the municipality had paid a substantial sum to realise the caravan project. The influence of the caravan on the amalgamation was not apparent to the critics. They regarded the 'infantile' forms of expressing perceptions, opinions and wishes as a smoke screen to 'keep the inhabitants busy, make them feel engaged while the municipality are busy making their own plans'.

On the other hand, there were many positive reactions from inhabitants who felt welcome and were happy that the municipality 'had made an effort' to reach out to them in an 'informal, humane way'; the caravan allowed them to express themselves personally and meet with 'actual people of the municipality'.

IMPACT
We analysed the qualitative data collected in the caravan (written stickers, ideas, agenda points and our notes of conversations and visitors' quotes). The rich impression of the 'experiential worlds' of visitors provided input for the consultancy's workshops. Finally, the impressions from the caravan were included (e.g., in quotes) in the final report for the municipality.

The municipality published their proposal shortly after the report was published, making it implausible that the insights were carefully taken into consideration and affirming the expectations of the critical media.

What was remarkable was that the municipality did ask the communication agency to stylise the publication of their proposal in the same graphic style as the caravan

project, but did not use the content (e.g., lines of reasoning, motivations of inhabitants) of the project to motivate their proposal.

Six months after we drove the caravan through the villages, a critical columnist and member of the city council, published a new column in which he apologised for his column at the time. He took the effort to broadly elaborate on the whole process enclosing the caravan project, stating that the outcomes were 'startling' and that he was 'completely wrong' before, saying: it 'was well worth the money' [reference omitted for anonymity of municipality].

One and half year after this project started (Dec, 2014), the amalgamation was delayed until the municipal elections in 2018, more than 1,5 year away.

CASE 3: BUURTBAKFIETS

The context was a small neighbourhood made up of about 1000 households in a city of 225K inhabitants in the Mid-South of the Netherlands.

The neighbourhood received (and still receives) extra funds and attention from professionals to increase the liveability. Especially the level of 'engagement and activities' by local residents should be improved, according to the municipality's statistical report. This follows the trend of 'participation society' (Hendriks 2006) that requires citizens to take more responsibility of their own physical and social wellbeing.

The area-coordinator of the municipality asked us to help her to stimulate inhabitants to become more active in the area.

APPROACH TO CASE
As in case 1, we designed a process approach (see figure 6) for this project. We included three parallel lines to indicate the different interests, roles and activities of professionals, inhabitants and ourselves as researchers.
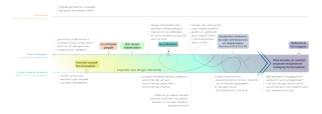

Figure 6: Process visualisation with parallel lines.

We used Engagement Catalysers (Trotto et al. 2013) to explore the neighbourhood and its inhabitants from a first person perspective (Hummels et al. 2015). Based on the first insights, we designed probes for the public space, to stir up a discussion about what the inhabitants themselves perceived as positive and negative elements in their neighbourhood. Moreover, we encouraged the professionals to go out with our probes, so that they

could (1) acquire a first person perspective on the neighbourhood, (2) confront their perceived problems with the issues that came up in spontaneous interaction with inhabitants and (3) explore their potential role in the issues that might pop up.

As in case 2, we approached the inhabitants actively, in their own neighbourhood- however, without campaign-like outings.

DESIGN INTERVENTION
We designed an Engagement Catalyser that was based on the 'felt' facts and figures of the neighbourhood. It was a pie-chart puzzle that inhabitants could engage with together: it could trigger exchanges of perceptions, anecdotes and stories of life in the neighbourhood.

Figure 7: Engagement Catalyser (left) and discussion tool (right)

We designed a discussion tool (Jaasma et al. 2017) for the professionals to discuss the perceived problems in the area, their goals for it and their roles in it.

Finally we designed the BuurtBakfiets ("Neighbourhood-Cargo bike") as a probe in the public space, to invite spontaneous interactions between inhabitants or inhabitants and professionals, see figure 8. It functioned as a pop-up café and was designed as an 'open platform' to allow for new ways of use initiated by the inhabitants or professionals.

Figure 8: BuurtBakfiets

REFLECTIONS
While riding the BuurtBakfiets, the professionals and we received many enthusiastic responses from inhabitants. The BuurtBakfiets attracted attention and the presence of professionals positively surprised people. The professionals themselves had to overcome a threshold before cycling, as they were unsure 'how to act'.

Reflecting on their experiences, each professional indicated that they were surprised by the positive attitude of the inhabitants: through the BuurBakfiets they got a different impression of the neighbourhood than from the data reports.

The chairman of the local committee developed a certain ownership over the BuurtBakfiets. He offered safe parking it in the yard of the neighbourhood-house,

and proudly walked along when one of the professionals came to take out the BuurtBakfiets- also when his presence was not desired. When inhabitants asked whether the BuurtBakfiets belonged to the neighbourhood committee he would proudly answer "Yes!", while they were not part of the initiation and that was not yet discussed.

After a few times of cycling, local active residents started to borrow the BuurtBakfiets for activities e.g.: a street barbeque or to invite and gather volunteers for neighbourhood soup-diners.

IMPACT
In the year after we designed it, the BuurtBakfiets was used in various yearly neighbourhood activities such as Sinterklaas (Dutch children's festivity), cleaning the neighbourhood and replanting in the neighbourhood. In these cases the BuurtBakfiets was mainly used as a fun attraction and carrier for cargo (in the examples above: for gifts, rubbish or plants).

However, the BuurtBakfiets was also used for more informative goals, such as the sharing of next year's goals for the action-area. All inhabitants received an information flyer in their mailbox, but when the professionals rode around with the BuurtBakfiets they learned that the majority of inhabitants did not look at the flyer or did not understand what it was about. The BuurtBakfiets provided a way to unofficially inform on and gain feedback about goals. For this event, the professionals did ride the bike, but mainly parked it at busy locations so that it functioned as a notice board. It continued to provide a spontaneous and personal medium to stir conversation with local residents in the streets.

A year after this project, the neighbourhood-house was closed, as it did not fulfil a meaningful role for the neighbourhood anymore. The BuurtBakfiets was moved to another nearby neighbourhood-house. Wellbeing organisations of nearing neighbourhoods have requested to use the BuurtBakfiets to introduce themselves to the residents, to get to know them, and to recruit volunteers. The professionals currently receive and decide upon these requests.

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude by sharing our reflections on three themes that emerged from the cases: (1) the shifting roles of design (1), stakeholders (2) and design-teams (3) in multi-stakeholder participation around public issues.

THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN PUBLIC ISSUES
We highlight two insights on the role of design, focusing on the place of the intervention and the sharing of insights from the intervention.

Design interventions in workshops or in context

In our cases, we used design interventions in workshop-settings and in the public space. Both types of interventions led to insights for all stakeholders, including insights for our research.

However, approaching people in their own locality, makes insights more situated and directed towards practical implementation by the stakeholders themselves.

Considering the challenge of shifting roles in multi-stakeholder collaboration in the context of public issues, design interventions in context allowed stakeholders to practice with new roles. They allowed stakeholders to experience new ways of interacting (e.g. chatting with the mayor over a cup of coffee at the caravan) and to experiment with sharing responsibilities (e.g. borrowing the BuurtBakfiets).

Reflecting on our cases we suggest designers to design for contextualised interventions (not in workshop settings) to enable stakeholders to practise with different types of interactions and shifting roles close to their daily reality.

Sharing insights of design interventions

The cases demonstrate the tension between the meaning generated through the use of what participants often called 'creative' methods, inspired by embodiment, and the Cartesian, rational reality of decision-making systems.

Often heard critiques were that the methods were 'infantile' and 'irrelevant to the issue'. Both perceptions are understandable and important to note. It is explicable that tinkering, acting out or filling out and pasting stickers may remind of children's activities, as we might have unlearned them in our (especially Western/Cartesian) culture. It is also evident that these activities do not directly lead to different policies or decisions, much like a referendum, a public poll would *seem* to do.

We experienced implicit- and explicit resistance towards our methods in Case 1 (e.g., remarks during the workshops) and Case 2 (e.g., through local media) from some groups but in both cases those critics publically announced their positive surprise when we presented our insights- retrieved/extracted from the use of those methods.

Reflecting on this observation we believe that, in the context of designing for participatory decision-making in local governance, designers should be highly aware of these potential interpretations and we suggest them to make two efforts. The first effort is to provide early insights during the participation process, so that stakeholders can recognise the efforts in on-going insights and may stay engaged.

The second effort is to provide an outlook on the next steps that the 'creative methods' could lead to- already at the moment when the creative methods are used. The latter is complex in this context, as partners, stakeholders and clients might not want to share their strategy publicly or as local politics might overrule any planned procedures and uncertainty of follow-up will always remain.

THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PUBLIC ISSUES

As explained, stakeholders' roles are shifting in multi-stakeholder collaborations around public issues. We highlight two insights on interacting outside of 'boxes' and on process ownership.

Stakeholders as full persons: outside of their 'compartments'

Our use of physical tools, acting out and interventions that elicit physical interactions shook up common ways of behaving between stakeholders. For example, the municipal Coordinator could not ride the BuurtBakfiets as a coordinator, she rode it as herself, a person who also works for the municipality. Most of the professionals felt unease, or were even scared, in the beginning. They often asked us for instructions on what exactly they should do. Other stakeholders slid into their new position with optimism and ease. The non-professional stakeholders (e.g., citizens), appreciated that organisations 'had gotten a face' and felt comfortable interacting with professionals informally than e.g. when they would be interviewed for the same topic. It seems that embodied design can help to create Habermas' 'public sphere' (1984) by inviting engaging interactions between stakeholders, pulling them out of their 'compartments'.

Process ownership

In all cases, stakeholders struggled with their roles and responsibilities: oftentimes stakeholders would take a passive position when they thought the others were to step forward; or look at us, as we had designed the process, to tell them what to do next. We noticed that, especially, the stakeholders who represented the municipalities often tried to retract from their roles and either function as client, attempting to steer the process into a desired direction, or as objective entities without any interests.

We learned that it is extremely difficult to guide the process, on the one hand, but leave management and ownership at the stakeholders on the other hand. For example, in case 1 our 'exit' took a long time with repeated clashes with the limitations of our role, but it seemed that time and conflict were needed to grow confidence at the side of the stakeholders to continue on their own; and in the end they succeeded to develop a platform that suits their wishes, crystallised from the process.

It seems that adding a project manager, in the form of a person who is not related to the stakes at hand, could contribute to a smooth and meaningful transition from a design-led process towards the continuation within the stakeholder network.

THE ROLE OF THE DESIGN –RESEARCH TEAM IN PUBLIC ISSUES

In this work we collaborated from the perspectives of political-administrative consultancy and design research. This cross-disciplinary collaboration enabled us to gain deep insights into the context based on which we could design fitting interventions that respected or played into the local dynamics. We highlight two of our insights related to our own role in public issues.

Designing tools and strategies: sharing actionable insights and handles for continuation

In Case 2 we saw that local politics overtook the participation process outside of our influence, making the design interventions less trustworthy and relevant.

We realised that our report and advice might have missed specific handles for action for the municipality to continue engagement with the other stakeholders during the rest of their decision-making trajectory-rather than fall back into old patterns.

We suggest designers to provide actionable advice and tools for stakeholders to continue their own process, building on the methods and insights from the designed participation process. For designers, this requires deep understanding of local politics, the stakeholder landscape and the topic at hand (e.g., rules and regulations).

Cross-disciplinary approach

In all cases, we supported our design interventions with a designed participation process (see figure X6). That process included the communication with stakeholders and the sharing of insights upon which they could base their next steps.

In this work, we venture into delicate contexts of conflicting (political) stakes. Reflecting on our own roles, we were able to design fitting participation processes because of our expertise in both design processes and political processes. We see the necessity for cross-disciplinary design teams in the context of public issues.

Through our experience, we suggest that design-teams with cross-disciplinary backgrounds are able to sensitise each other for subtleties of the context (concerning e.g., political strategies or design implementation) that can be missed by an untrained eye.

Furthermore, we suggest that the two perspectives represented in our work could be complimented by, for example, communication or marketing consultants, jurists, social workers, psychologists, historians or local stakeholders- depending, of course, on the topic at hand.

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