WORKSHOP: DESIGN EXPERIMENTS AND DESIGN GAMES IN A REFLECTIVE PRACTICUM

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The Nordes Summer School 2008 was dedicated to exploring research and design experiments as vehicles for research, reflection and learning. From this experience grew the idea to more broadly share good examples of design experiments and design games suitable for learning experiences in a reflective practicum. What we have in mind is a sourcebook or rather resource book focusing on examples of design experiments and design games, but also including texts that put such experiments and games into a learning and epistemological perspective.

As a step towards the realization of such a resource book we invite design researchers and educators to a NORDES workshop. The idea of the workshop is to share examples and experiences of using design experiments and design games in an educational setting. A second aim is to discuss foundation, methodology and the theoretical framing of such activities in design education. Last, but not least the workshop invites participants to contribute to a resource book on design experiments and design games for design educators and their students.

Examples

Classical examples are "Silent Game" (Habraken) and "The Bridge Design" (Schön). Here are three examples from the NORDES Summer School 2008 of the kind of design experiments and design games that we have in mind.

"Knowledge of form – forms of knowledge
(Pelle Ehn, K3, Malmö University)
Can design be production of knowledge? How is knowledge then formed by the designer? In this workshop we explore such questions by experiments inspired by Johan Asplund's "meta theoretical" reflections in the book "What is the sound of thunder?". We produce recordings, sketches, metaphors, multimodal synaesthetic expressions and not least artefacts or machines. Reflections on production of this web of expressions are related to actor-network theory and the idea of "circulating references" and knowledge production as design of chains of material transformations of the object of knowledge, rather than as abstractions of something concrete.

Designing design research
(Thomas Binder & Eva Brandt, Danish Design School)
Design experiments are not only experiments of design they are also themselves designed to explore a particular program. In this workshop we

will discuss the relation between program and experiment in design research, and we invite participants to analyze their own on-going research as interplay between an evolving program and series of experimentation.

From designing to a research contribution
(Ben Matthews, MCI, University of Southern Denmark & Tuuli Mattelmäki, University of Art&Design, Helsinki)
This workshop/seminar will introduce, from precedents, several different models of the role that design projects (processes and artefacts) have played in making research contributions. From this initial discussion, participants will be organised into groups to engage in a practical design exercise, which will form the basis of and material for trying out the different models for turning design projects into design research. We will conclude with a discussion comparing the different approaches as archetypal models of research."

Framework

Our perspective on design experiments in a learning situation resembles design experiments in design research. Whenever design researchers are making design suggestions or interventions, as part of their research inquiry we may call such research experimental design research. Design experiments can for example be conducted in such traditions as co-design, critical design, concept design or radical design. Experimental design research as we define it here is in many ways similar to research-through-design or practice-based research. What makes design experiments part of design research and suitable for design education is that they are carried out in order to gain knowledge about what and how to design, and furthermore that they in themselves carries a statement about "what could be".

In a design educational setting such design experiments have successfully been carried out as design games, especially conceptual design games, as pioneered by Donald Schön and John Habraken,

and with a broad range of further developments not least in the Scandinavian countries.

The design experiments and design games are carried out as part of a "reflective practicum". In the words of Schön: "The practicum is a virtual world, relatively free of the pressures, distractions, and risks of the real one, to which, nevertheless, it refers. It stands in an intermediate space between the practice world, the 'lay' world of ordinary life, and the esoteric world of the academy."

Particularly design games resembling real-life design situations, but within an environment that is open for experimentation and learning seem fruitful in exploring rules, conventions, limits as well as constructive design 'moves' simultaneously configuring complex artefacts and negotiating arrangements among participants.

Organization of the workshop
Design researchers and design educators are invited to contribute with a) examples of design experiments and design games to be carried out in an educational setting, b) general contributions reflecting upon design experiments and design games as learning devices and the educational setting for such activities, or c) a general interest in contributing to a resource book as an instrument for design educators and their students.

This is a full day workshop accepting up to 30 participants.

Please send 1-2 pages indicating your interest to thomas.binder@dkds.dk no later than August 1. Submitted contributions will be circulated to participants prior to the workshop. Based on submitted contributions the workshop will be organized as an "editorial meeting" and a "walk through" of the outline of the resource book.