

Importance of Creativity and Playfulness in Co-design Facilitation

M. Örnekoğlu Selçuk[†]

Department of Industrial Systems Engineering and Product Design, Ghent University, Campus Kortrijk, Belgium melis.ornekogluselcuk@ugent.be

MY MOTIVATION

I am interested in creating generative tools and techniques for facilitating the meaningful and fruitful participation of people in co-design processes. I believe that it is necessary to find a common language among people from different disciplines and in this case, the role of the facilitators is quite essential [1]. In my opinion, in its essence, co-designing is also based on the fact that designers should not have the expert mindset because in fact, people with lived experience are the ones who are experts in their own needs. Thus, it is of paramount importance to look for creative ways to facilitate their participation in co-design activities, and help them express themselves, even when they are not aware of their needs and wishes [2].

My PhD thesis is also in line with my interests in co-design and I have been working on developing a phygital card game that can inform, motivate and guide design students about co-designing. Marina Emmanouil (UGent, Belgium), Marianthi Grizioti (NKUA, Greece) and Lieva Van Langenhove (UGent, Belgium) are my supervisors and Deniz Hasirci (IUE, Turkey) is my doctoral advisory committee member. Another aspect that makes this workshop very interesting for me is its relation to games. According to researchers, designing games might positively affect the learning process, as a constructionist way of learning [3, 4]. In my PhD, I would also like to focus on the impact of co-designing games on students' learning process (especially about co-design).

For this reason, I am happy to attend the workshop 'Creative Entrances to Co-Design: Exploring Collaboration through Fiction, Fairy Tales, and Games'. I am also delighted to join the network of researchers, practitioners, and designers engaging with creative approaches in co-design activities. I do believe that we have a lot to learn from each other.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH CO-DESIGN

My Master's thesis was about co-designing furniture with children with cancer for the play area at the Hematology & Oncology Service of a children's hospital. In order to understand their needs regarding the play area at the hospital, I conducted co-design sessions with children with cancer. According to Spiel et al. [5] especially when conducting co-design sessions with marginalized children, it is important to pay attention to their skills to express themselves. For this reason, a Make toolkit would be beneficial to enable especially younger children who cannot express themselves verbally to use their making skills for communication through the design language. With this regard, following a research-through-design process, I generated a Make toolkit to use during the co-design sessions. It consists of modules made of

felt, wooden sticks at varying lengths, 1/8 scale model of the play area made of corrugated cardboard and wooden mannequins. The initial idea was to use plexiglass but after producing the pieces, I saw that they had sharp edges and corners and might have hurt children. Thus, I chose felt to produce the modules because of the softness and flexibility of the material. This game-like toolkit helped me to facilitate the participation of children with cancer in the co-design sessions.

MY RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED BY WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

Collection 1 // Methodological challenges:

- What are general struggles you encounter in PD processes?

In my opinion, it is challenging to create activities in co-design sessions that are not too guiding but not too open at the same time. The amount of boundaries might also depend on the personality or background of the participants of co-design sessions. Thus, there cannot be a certain recipe to follow precisely.

It is also hard to create an atmosphere in which all stakeholders equally participate. Again, this might be linked to the participants' personality and preferences. For instance, when introverts and extroverts come together, it might not be that easy for introverts to jump into the conversations as much as extroverts do. This might lead to issues and the participants might even feel upset, which is not intended during co-design processes. For this reason, it is crucial to design activities in which all participants can equally take part in regardless of their profession, background, gender, ethnicity and personality. *Perhaps, games can contribute to that?*

- What is 'success' or 'effectiveness' in PD design for the different people involved (designers, researchers, participants, users)?

To the best of my knowledge, to determine the aspects that make a co-design process successful or effective is not an easy task. Of course, it is essential to adhere to the principles of participatory design and the misalignments with these principles may address ineffective or unsuccessful parts in the process. However, there is not a clear and precise way to measure the effectiveness of co-design sessions. For instance, personally, I would call a co-design process 'successful' or 'effective' when all participants easily, freely and equally express their needs, wants, dreams and opinions regarding the topic. Nevertheless, there is still room for 'subjectivity' and what a designer finds important or valuable might not necessarily be perceived so by users or other stakeholders.

Collection 2 // Creative approaches:

- What potential does fiction, fairy tales and games carry regarding creative and low-threshold entrances to co design?

In my opinion, using fiction, fairy tales and games in co-design sessions is quite beneficial for several reasons. First, these techniques might serve as a way to help participants express themselves in an easier way. This is also explained by Sanders & Stappers [6, p.29] as follows:

“Skeptics of co-design still cite the famous Henry Ford quote—if you asked users what they wanted, it would not have been a car but ‘a faster horse’—as evidence that participation in design should be limited to a narrow set of professionals. But more are now realizing that facilitating the participation of users and other stakeholders involves far more effort than merely asking them ‘what they want.’”

Second, fiction, fairy tales and games might be also seen as ‘icebreaking’ activities that can make participants feel more comfortable during co-design sessions due to the joyfulness inherent in these techniques and their connotations with leisure activities. Moreover, as stated by Mattelmäki [7] generating these creative activities might be another way designers can apply their skills and competences. Lastly, since these creative ways might be seen familiar by participants, they might also have an important role in changing the role of the participants towards design partners, which is essential in participatory processes [8] rather than testers or informants.

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