Guiding through Co-Design Processes


http://idea-garden.org

RATIONALE

In co-design processes we guide through several phases to come up with concept sketches & general requirements. These phases are: exploring existing work practices, envisioning micro-utopias, and defining fields of action & objectives.

Here we briefly explain the rationale for choosing specific formats and methods within the EU funded ICT project IdeaGarden: Cultural Probes and a Future Workshop. What follows will be a rather sketchy account of the underlying ideas, providing an understanding of what the Cultural Probes are good for and on our intentions for Future Workshops.

UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY AS PRACTICE

One of the guiding ideas for the IdeaGarden project is the understanding of creativity as a practice rather than a set of clearly articulated methods or techniques. Adopting a practice-oriented perspective we have to face the fact that the way people work usually differs from official accounts of what they are doing. This is neither due to their unwillingness to follow explicit procedures nor a fault of the descriptions provided, but due to the fact that day-to-day activities make heavy use of practical and even embodied knowledge of the persons involved1. To put it simple, while all of us learned to ride the bicycle and can do so (fairly) well, it is quite difficult and often leads to quite misleading descriptions when we try to explain what we are doing. The same happens if we look at creativity as a practice. When being asked, all of us are able to explain what


they are doing, but this knowledge usually only reflects the tip of the iceberg. Hence we need some means to dig somewhat deeper. While observation is a useful tool towards this end, generative techniques such as Cultural Probes are means that might reach even deeper\(^2\). Yet, it is important to note, that we do not understand Cultural Probes as a kind of projective test that privileges the analyst to see something the actor does not see. Instead we understand the probes as a means to foster reflection among practitioners, emphasizing the relevance of their own interpretations. In this sense, we see the probes as a kind of contrast medium, aimed to highlight similarities and differences that would otherwise remain unnoticed.

**DESIGN AS ANTICIPATION**

While design has often been conceptualized as a problem-solving activity aimed to weed out shortcomings, we believe it is more productive to understand design as an open-ended inquiry into the future. According to Jungk, the originator of the concept of Future Workshops, we can either understand the future as a forward projection of the past, in which we encounter successively more and more constraints or we can see the future as possibility space, yet to be explored and shaped\(^3\). The Future Workshop adopts the second perspective. Starting form an analysis of the status quo, the creative practices currently enacted, we will explore desirable scenarios and envision micro-utopias of future practice. Finally, we will translate these micro-utopias into specific fields for action and outline respective concept sketches. Design from this perspective differs from other activities in that it entails a moment of anticipation. Or as Zamenopoulos and Alexiou\(^4\) have put it:

> “... design arises in response to a particular situation: when/where there is a desire, need or an idea that something should or could be different in a world W, but the means to achieve such a change are not immediately known [...] In particular, the situation can be described as an inconsistency that emerges between beliefs about the past, current, and future states of the world, and the expressed desires or needs regarding the states of the world.”

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DIFFERENT LAYERS OF (COMPUTER-SUPPORTED) COLLABORATION

Additionally, we think it is important to distinguish different layers of human (-computer) interaction\(^5\), all of them crucially important for the development of the IdeaGarden Environment. On the most encompassing layer, we can look at creative processes as complex activities enacted in particular socio-technical systems. On this layer, we see group processes, organizational or institutional regulations but also technical infrastructures that shape the creative process. Looking a little closer, there is a layer of individual actions that form streams of interactions. Here the focus is on particular tasks and the tools and artifacts the actors make use of. Finally, there is the level of direct interaction with the environment, including the interfaces provided by the technical systems used. Respective operations might include the rescaling of an object on a screen or calling for an undo. An important implication of this model is that the creative leeway is narrowed down from layer to layer\(^6\). Hence, the Future Workshop will be focused on activities and the underlying actions, while the interrelation of actions and operations will be the main topic of the subsequent design workshop.

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