WHEN CO-DESIGN WORKS: Real Change Through Creative Collaboration
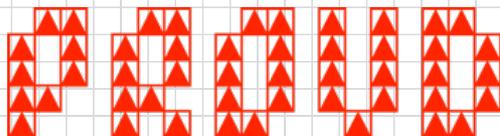
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PROUD

**People Researchers
Organisations Using Design**

When Co-design Works: Real Change Through Creative Collaboration

Co-design is not a new 'thing' and the challenges that are addressed are not new either. In 1966 Robert F Kennedy quoted the Chinese curse: 'May he live in interesting times'. He said: 'Like it or not, we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also the most creative of any time in the history of mankind'.
Our times are just as interesting, facing other challenges, or 'wicked problems' as we call them.
Co-design is about empowering people to be more creative, active and involved. It is about creating collectively better solutions by connecting the knowledge of more or many. It is about the value of participating, being respected and trusted. It is about good enterprises that are society-serving. It is about public services that serve real needs and adapt to new needs.

Building on this, the recommendations of the PROUD partnership underline the importance of co-design, and the take up of co-design processes as a natural approach of multi-sector collaboration with citizens, communities and organisations. This means investing in trust and giving people more room to create their own lives and work, and make them feel involved with collective issues. These processes in itself are training people in all levels to be active and creative while contributing to change that affects us all positively.

Let's make these interesting times collaborative, co-creative and positive. Let's contribute to a transition towards a more sustainable economy and a better-balanced society.

THE PROJECT, THE PARTNERS AND AIMS

The PROUD project under INTERREG IVB NWE has been developed and implemented by a group of partners representing different design and innovation institutions in North Western Europe. The PROUD project started October 2011 and will run until end April 2015.

PROUD stands for **P**eople, **R**esearchers and **O**rganisations **U**sing **D**esign for innovation and co-creation. First and foremost PROUD is about People.

The overall aim of PROUD is to employ design as driver for innovation, economic transformation and sustainable development. PROUD partners create cross-sectorial partnerships between public authorities, industries & businesses and designers to work together with user communities. The focus is to gather representatives, to involve them in various activities that lead to the development of new and relevant products, services and spaces. Partners want to achieve that design is taken up broadly by public authorities and businesses/SMEs to enhance NWE'S capacity for solving today's real world problems in a valuable and sustainable way.

To achieve this partners:
1. Executed pioneering work to develop models for large-scale deployment of co-design in NWE.
2. Provided hands-on demonstrations of the added value of co-design for public and private sector.
3. Provided well-equipped and newly developed design innovation hubs with viable business concepts extending after the project's lifetime.
4. Provided open source innovative knowledge on (new) materials.
5. Engaged with public sector workers, business and industries, intermediaries, knowledge workers and designers around themes of common interest to create

improved concepts for services, products and public spaces.
6. Created a transnational network of knowledge exchange, going beyond the immediate collaborations of the partners.

When developing PROUD, there was clearly chosen to concentrate on addressing complex, intractable problems that require for bringing together the knowledge, skills and experiences of larger groups of people including the users/citizens. By working on smaller, local challenges PROUD aimed to pilot solutions applicable to the big, global challenges and create greater good and contribute to social and economic transformation.

As Hummels and Trotto state in their publication Civic Forges (2014)[1] :

'True sustainability and wellbeing cannot be created on an individual level. The collective is more important than the individual. If we want different people to work together on local solutions for local issues that stem from greater global issues, we believe it is necessary to involve citizens, and trust and empower them through their skills in shaping the future of their own city'.

DEFINING CO-DESIGN

Co-design as a term is at least 40 years old. What the terms stands for and the popularity of the term drastically changed the last 10 years. During the course of PROUD the partners worked with the following definition of co-design distilled from the Report and Recommendations of the European Design Leadership Board Design for (smart, sustainable + inclusive) Growth & Prosperity[2] :

'Co-Design is a community centred methodology that designers use to enable people,

1 Hummels, C. and Trotto, A. (2014), Civic Forges – Weaving Neighbourhoods (Eindhoven University of Technology)

2 European Design Leadership Board (2012) Report & Recommendations: Design for growth and prosperity

who will be served by a designed outcome, to participate in designing solutions to their problems'.

This is a rather simple definition for a complex way of working that also needs to be seen from another perspective. Co-design takes designers out of the spotlight and really demonstrates the wide-ranging and strategic importance of the idea of co-design that stretches far beyond the design and creative sectors. In fact we could all co-design, when we collaborate. Often collaboration on projects is bad or ineffective or time consuming, alternatively it's good but we don't really know why it's good.

Why are certain projects enjoyable and also make a really useful contribution with ideas flowing between people in an energetic, exciting manner resulting in fantastic outcomes? Why are some projects like this and are others less fulfilling? When looking from this perspective at co-design we are trying to understand why some projects have this creative flow and then designing ways of doing projects that increase the chances of positive, active, creative participation leading to excellent outcomes that fulfil real needs and wishes.

Good co-designers look to facilitate projects or processes where all participants feel challenged to contribute and do so in an optimal way. The problem has been that designers educated in the traditional manner find it difficult to focus on helping other people be creative. However, there are a new breed of designers emerging that have been taught to realise that collective work, using carefully crafted activities, can bring fresh and contrasting insights on complex issues and are aware that while they have been trained to be creative in a particular manner, there are many others who are just as creative.
The interesting thing is that creative people can be anywhere in organisations from the highest paid to the lowest. Co-design seeks to give everyone the possibility to contributing with the aim of helping the participants - who often don't think they are creative at all - to express themselves creatively and have a voice in a project.

To use a musical metaphor, in co-design everyone has a voice and while not every voice warrants a solo, overall the massed choir is just as moving as the inspired individual and combined effects can be spine tingling and have a totally unexpected impact.

The notion that any participant could make a critically important contribution runs counter to the strong hierarchies often in business as well as the public sector. The power of co-design comes from crossing between participant 'tribes' – breaking down walls between different sectors or knowledge fields - exploring the effect of combining contrasting perspectives and understanding. The fact that these new unexpected connections are very likely to result in genuinely new innovations is very well proven in the literature stretching way back to the 1970's[3]. The challenge of the co-designer is to develop approaches that help citizens and stakeholders – representatives of business, public authorities and others - to step out of these embedded, hierarchical positions. Then, through this opening up help them maximise their contributions, often surprising themselves and colleagues as well.

In PROUD we have explored, developed and shared some approaches that enable this new type of creative knowledge exchange, the challenge remains significant but the outcomes of the project here show some key indicators of how we can work creatively and transnationally together to the benefit of regions, nations and wider Europe.

The context of co-design in NWE region
There still remain huge differences between the implementation of co-design approaches in the different regions, depending on the sectors. But as is to be learned from the different context developments in PROUD, co-design has had a certain impact on the way the business sector and public sector is operating right now in the different PROUD regions.

3 [1] Granovetter, M. The Strength of Weak Ties. The American Journal of Sociology, 78(6), 1973, 1360–1380.

Eindhoven has a true co-design policy, and also in Lancaster public authorities embraced co-design as they experienced how positively citizens responded to taking part into co-design processes. In Luxemburg a co-design workshop last May with public sector workers, in collaboration with Imagination Lancaster, enthuses the Luxembourg-city management to further invest in co-design workshops. The Luxembourg Ministry of Culture has asked Luxinnovation to accompany a co-design project about an underdeveloped industrial site and railway park with a cultural and industrial heritage (Fond de Gras) in the south of Luxembourg. The success of co-design implementation in the public sector also starts spreading amongst other institutions and organisations that were not initially involved in the PROUD project. In the Netherlands also other levels of government are adopting a design thinking strategy now, and the Scottish government asked for support by Imagination Lancaster to implement a design innovation strategy for their innovation department.
In Essen the city government is further developing a design strategy that hopefully will bring them the recognition of becoming a UNESCO City of Design. Public bodies in other French regions like e.g. the regional administration of Nantes has approached APCI France in the set-up of a co-design process for more user-centred EU funding services. For the business sector design seems to be more and more valued. Dissemination activities as well as the work on the challenges opened the eyes of business representatives and entrepreneurs that co-design can unfold new collaboration strategies and create inspiring knowledge exchange that may lead to new opportunities.

Co-design in practice through Challenges
One of the objectives of PROUD was to gain insights in whether co-design works, or not, depending on different contexts, goals and actors. To achieve this the PROUD partners took up regional challenges to collaborate on transnationally.
All of these projects have unique elements that have enriched the partners as a whole and offered models for future co-design

projects across Europe, for example DZNRW's focus on working with children to instil co-design thinking at an early age can be applied elsewhere, like on a special challenge for school kids on co-designing a healthy lifestyle in Eindhoven: Design for the Fittest (2014) by Capital D. APCIs focus on commercial contexts and small or micro companies brings insights for co-design with businesses and DesignRegio Kortrijk elaborated different interventions by a multinational team of co-design professionals. Imagination Lancaster created a massive co-design process – Beyond the Castle - on a public space challenge, involving about 2,000 people ranging in age from three to 92 in a series of specially designed interventions in which 700 actively contributed with as highlight the co-design of the final exhibition. Also festivals like Dutch Design Week can be a great stage for co-design as proven in interventions for an improvement project for the small railway station – NS Beukenlaan.

Design centres turning into an environment of co-design and making
PROUD partners took the challenge to work on the concept of Design Innovation Hubs. These hubs would establish communities that would go 'beyond networking', designing knowledge exchange and create and facilitate engagement of multiple stakeholders in open development processes. Also these places would be open to the more critical consumer/citizen of today. During the PROUD project period developments that already were manifest in the field of rapid manufacturing further democratized. Meaning that the making of customized, personally designed objects or the availability for downloadable open source designs, is becoming more and more common. Designers need to experiment with this to stay on top of new developments and may be find new business opportunities.
The different design innovation hubs in PROUD all take up a role that is proper to their organisation and the context they are working in.

Netherlands, Eindhoven The Design Innovation Space of Capital D offers a multifunctional and

flexible space where co-designers of all kind can meet and find different facilities for the set-up of an entire co-design process. Also the local residents or Dutch Design Week visitors appreciate the inspiring environment where they quickly feel at ease and stimulated to further explore e.g. the temporary exhibitions or get acquainted with different sorts of co-design tools.

Germany, Essen The Design Experience Laboratory that was used for the implementation of the co-design process with school kids and young students has been further enhanced and turned into a permanent Design Experience Exhibition that allows visitors to touch and experience the quality of materials and design.

Belgium, Kortrijk At the BudaFabric in the creative heart of Kortrijk the so-called BudaLab was established, to make designers acquainted with the latest rapid manufacturing methods to experiment with different, innovative materials. Also local companies frequent the lab and local residents easily walk in to do their own experiments in collaboration with design professionals.

United Kingdom, Lancaster Imagination Lancaster established a flexible creative facilitation space for use with internal and external stakeholders. Besides of modular meeting places, there are also rapid manufacturing facilities like a laser cutter, that produced an immense lot of useful, customized co-design tools, like the during PROUD developed hexagons that gained international popularity.

Luxemburg Technoport in Luxemburg established a FabLab at the heart of the innovation zone in Esch-sur-Alzette, where participants from different knowledge fields meet for workshops to experiment with new methodologies such as 3D-printing and laser cutting, sometimes in direct on line connection with others e.g. the BudaLab in Kortrijk

WHAT PROUD BROUGHT

PROUD achieved in three years many results that had impact on many people. There have taken place more than 60 PROUD events as conferences, forums, co-design café's, master classes, exhibitions. There has been worked transnationally on setting-up co-design processes for 5 PROUD challenges, but next to that at least 10 other challenges were launched supported by PROUD. About 80,000 people (till July 2014) have been reached by PROUD activities like promotion actions, master-classes, workshops, visits to design innovation hubs, and exhibitions. More than 1,000 of these people, amongst whom designers, public workers and business people, were involved in activities that bring improved innovation capacity. Altogether PROUD delivered a kind of 'scaffolding': a flexible and open system of models, frameworks and supporting activities to contribute to inclusive innovation, development and transformation of NWE's society and economy.

To summarize what PROUD brought to the different target groups:

People – citizens, users, teachers, care-givers, patients
Feedback from PROUD activities clearly shows that the people who participated in them as co-designers felt valued and inspired. The working in co-design workshops was fun but also engendered the sense of being taken seriously by the owners of the challenges (businesses and/or public bodies) in which they participated. The role of co-designer brought them the affirmation that they are capable of delivering a creative and valuable contribution to what is going on in the world around them. As a good co-design process respects and activates everybody. Sometimes it is about lots of people, sometimes about a smaller group of people depending of the topic.

Business sector
PROUD focussed on the collaboration with a variety of businesses in different sectors. Within our challenges and dissemination activities the aim was to have business representatives experience and understand the value that designers can bring within innovation processes and to correct their sometimes biased view of design as something not relevant for business, especially for SMEs. The co-design approach supported the establishment of a more open relationship with their clients and/or possible business partners. However, businesses can fear uncertain outcomes and the openness of the process that might bring unfair competition. The experience PROUD partners gained while working with businesses in the agricultural, service sector or elsewhere was limited by the focus on public sector innovation. Therefore it was not possible to derive general business guidelines for the application of co-design. However we see a great deal of potential for more activity in this area in the future. We did however derive some guidelines specifically for the Design business sector (see below).

Designers
PROUD has worked on supporting the design sector by creating awareness of including design in innovation processes amongst industry and public sector. This included developing Master classes and creating Design Innovation hubs as places to be while working on challenges, while collaborating and sharing knowledge e.g. on innovative processes and materials like with PROUD Moving Materials exhibitions and workshops. Designers that participated in the dissemination activities and/or worked on the challenges highly appreciated the rich experience of working transnationally, meeting international experts in the field of co-design and gaining new perspectives for their (potential) field of work. Many participating designers also work in the field of social design or service design and missed the recognition of the importance of this design field till the PROUD project. They also praised the (transnational) peer-to-peer reviews they are now able to make with newly met colleagues. As a practical tool Imagination

Lancaster distilled a set of guidelines as a kind of touchstones when building a co-design process:

The PROUD principles to set up a co-design process for designers:

1. Agree how the success of the project will be recognised
2. Move in and beyond your normal design practice
3. Involve and respect lots of people in the ideas generating parts of the process
4. Use the expertise of all participants in the process
5. Let everyone be creative in their own way
6. Explore and challenge assumptions
7. Expect to go beyond the average
8. Bring the process to the best possible conclusion with the best possible design outcome

Public sector
Our general conclusion is that the take-up of co-design projects has been very rewarding for the public sector workers involved in the challenges. They underlined that it inspired them to seeking new and better solutions, which led to spending public money on serving the true needs of the citizens. The transnational exchange program within PROUD in which several public workers participated - with as special highlight the visit to World Design Capital Helsinki, when Culminatum arranged visits to the various Living Labs - broadened their view and network. Stepping out of the office and having meaningful conversations and collaborations with end-users has now been adopted as a key component in Eindhoven's city policy confirmed officially in the coalition agreement (after the elections) this spring.

After working on PROUD challenges, public sector workers in collaboration with Imagination Lancaster developed a set of guidelines for co-design in the public sector. These focus on how a co-design process can be maximized to produce good design outcomes for councils and private institutions

and optimize the benefits of using a co-design approach. These principles are as follows:

PROUD Co-design principles for public sector, including local and national government, charities and NGO's

1. Expect to be often outside your comfort zone (as with everyone in the project) throughout the whole co-design process
2. Accept co-design is a journey, not a set process or outcome. The journey can be the outcome.
3. Co-design is about real change owned by the community. It takes time and effort.
4. Be open-minded, allow new ideas to emerge by temporarily ignoring constraints.
5. Expect change to individual's perceptions and service delivery, including you.
6. Co-design requires trust building at all levels to ensure success.
7. Employ an independent co-designer to facilitate the process.
8. Not all designers can co-design.
9. Diverse opinions and people are essential for successful co-design.
10. Co-design processes are on-going, living things. Officers need to maintain the approach over the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On basis of the PROUD actions and results, the PROUD partnership is proposing a number of recommendations for the different target groups that are involved in embedding and using design for the social and economical innovation of Europe. It's important to recognise here that there is no single or correct co-design methodology. Co-design is a living concept that evolves and adapts to the context of the challenge. Whatever form it takes, co-design is characterised as being inclusive and non-hierarchical. This resonates strongly with the humanist tradition of Europe, wherein active citizenship has always been highly appreciated. Co-design is about empowering people to be more creative, active and involved

in collective issues affecting their lives or work. It is about creating collectively better solutions by connecting the knowledge of more or many. It is about the fun of participating, being respected and trusted. It is about good enterprises that are society-serving. It is about public services that serve real needs.

Policy makers at European, national, regional

There lies an important task for Policy makers at European, national and regional level to further invest in the take up of design to create better services and augment the inclusion of citizens in the development of their living and working environment. In particular the PROUD partnership calls for potential advantages of co-design to be recognised, exploited and promoted through policy (also building on the EU European Design Innovation Initiative (EDII)) as a mechanism for the collaboration of citizens in projects.

1. Co-design is an excellent approach for policy-makers to design better policy, innovative services, valuable projects, and effective networks as it breaks down walls and brings knowledge exchange.
2. Co-design builds an excellent bridge between policy makers and citizens creating understanding for each other's ambitions, interests and constraints.
3. Co-design is strategically important to maximize the human resources within regions and nations, and across Europe by increasing the creative potential of everyone
4. It is important to invest in a robust infrastructure for (co-)design meaning the creation of places and programs where people can experience how to start up and how to work upon processes for change in their own environments in the form of grass root initiatives.

Public Organisations, NGO's (schools, charities, care institutes, etc.)

Across Europe we see a shift of responsibility from big institutes to people and communities. Workers in the public sector need to reorganize themselves while working on tasks that ask

for collaboration both internally within their organisation as much as externally in order to effectively integrate the knowledge and experiences of colleagues as well as those of citizens, knowledge institutes and businesses in the elaboration of new developments. Co-design offers significant opportunities in this move to a more decentralised, collaborative, inclusive mode of operation. For example:

5. Co-design is an excellent approach to improve the services of public organisations: making them more open, transparent and addressed to true needs of a wide range of stakeholders.
6. Co-design supports the creation a positive relationship with stakeholders and 'clients', which offers wide ranging, long-term benefits in addition to making work more effective, more fun and more challenging in the short term.

Business Sector

Successful and sustainable businesses operate in a socially responsible manner - meaning taking into account what people in and outside the organisation need, what impact there is on the environment, whilst also having a viable business model. This shift connects to the huge change in the economy of goods and services. Businesses are increasingly seeking collaboration with other organisations within the so-called Golden Triangle of public, business and knowledge sector. Research by some institutions (e.g. Accenture Research - the Unusual Suspects Festival) point out that cross-sectorial collaborations might become the norm:

'Businesses are seeking new growth. Collaborative exploration rather than outright ownership appears to be the favoured approach.'[4]

It is no surprise that to acquire trust and openness for these new partnerships, new working and meeting modes – digital or live

4 Robins, Maitland and Robinson http://
www.theunusualsuspectsfestival.
uk/#post=2511

– are needed. And it is here where co-design can play an important role in the set-up and implementation of open and effective development processes. In the follow-up of PROUD, partners hope to be able to elaborate on principles for co-design for businesses to develop new co-design approaches, project proposals and interventions. The aim of this endeavour would be to help businesses:

7. Create better results then with pure consultation of clients.
8. Obtain new business successes in cross-sectorial collaborations with open development guided by designers as facilitators or inspired by designers as participants.
9. Increase involvement of employees while using co-design in internal innovation processes.
10. Accept certain risks when using co-design, give people involved a certain freedom, let them try out and fail fast and in the end reach better and more rewarding results. Costs and energy will be saved by not launching unwanted, unneeded, dysfunctional products into the market. Benefits will be gained by building up meaningful relationships with clients.

Business Sector Supporting Bodies

PROUD advises business associations and other supporting institutions to collaborate with co-design expert institutions (research institutes, design centres) for further dissemination and exploration of a set of principles that support businesses in the collaboration with designers and stimulate the take-up of innovative cross-sectorial and open innovation projects.

Creative Industry (specifically the design sector)

There is a new role for designers and other creative professionals in contemporary innovation processes. In our society and economy it is clear that design skills, experiences and expertise are needed in the cross-sectorial partnerships of today. The user-centered approaches designers are trained in

serve as great example for everyone working with and for people. Their skills for visualizing ideas can be of great support in multi-stakeholder working processes. Co-design (and the advantages this brings) needs designers to facilitate the involvement of everyone and stimulate the creativity of everybody in a process that is not dominated by professional designers. They can either facilitate the process by creating a scaffolding of tools and formats that help participants in democratic, ground-breaking development processes. Or be a participant contributing to the process with their visualisation skills and unconventional way of thinking. When facilitating co-design processes designers need to:

11. Be aware of the PROUD co-design principles in the set up a co-design process.
12. Ask themselves whether they are a true co-designer – by considering where they bring best value in design processes.
13. Realise the value of the designer is not about their ideas as everyone brings in ideas when working in a co-design process – but is about facilitating the process of connecting different ideas and knowledge. It is also the competence of a designer to go from ideas into prototypes that convince the stakeholders to invest in the further elaboration and implementation.
14. Let other people do the making and see how they can contribute to it, refine it, improve it.
15. Realize that the outcomes of a co-design process should always be better than the outcomes of processes that involved only designers.
16. Keep themselves trained by peer-to-peer review meetings, like in Eindhoven PROUD Co-design Café's, Kortrijk BudaFabric meetings or Lancaster FaceMoocs. As co-design is not easy.

Creative sector supporters (specifically design research institutes, schools and professional associations)
Co-design has not been taken up everywhere yet in curricula of design schools, with some notable exceptions (like the University of Southern Denmark). To support the uptake of successful co-design strategies design education needs to:

17. Further promote and disseminate co-design as a working method amongst design schools is needed. In this respect also more research is recommended when looking at the different collaborative creativity processes and tools that are being developed and used e.g. how to enhance or create 'new engagement catalysers' (Hummels and Trotto, 2014) .
18. Undertake further and continuous investigation in terms of co-design, what works best where, when, with whom.

Communities of People
Last but most importantly, change starts with people, groups and individuals. Innovation and transformation is about collaborative work. Grass root initiatives can lead to powerful movements. Communities play a key role here, especially if these initiatives are nourished by organisations, business and policy. Therefore it is important that citizens and communities become more aware of how they can better organize and perform. As community work is very often about volunteering, unpaid work it is important to make the work as challenging and rewarding as possible. Co-design tools can contribute to more effective and more fun group working, taking away fear of self-expressing and hierarchy.

19. Consider co-design as a better way of group working as there are a lot of resources available to stimulate meaningful conversations, to empower people to express themselves and address their own skills, experiences and knowledge.
20. Continuously develop and adopt new community tools for and by communities on basis of the sets of PROUD co-design principles with designers.
21. Create or find a space for community work that facilitates co-creation.

Collaborative communities and the territorial development

The PROUD project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and specifically by the Interreg IVB NWE Programme. The project is aligned with the priorities of the NWE Operational Programme, promoting an integrated approach in a vertical (between different levels of government), horizontal (between policy sectors) and geographical manner (across administrative bodies), stimulating the interdisciplinary ways to boost innovativeness of NWE.

The project has allowed the PROUD regions to establish the infrastructure, expert network, trainings for the designers (and communities involved with them) as well as the connection to the innovation receivers (public and private sectors), not only effectively embedding the co-design in social economy but also making the co-design economically viable and socially acceptable. It also helped the partner regions introduce the innovation management system that meets the regional specificities and needs of the NWE regions. Last but not least, the project led to local synergies that reinforced the regional economies due to its innovative logic, privilege given to collective intelligence and trans-disciplinary approach.

From the perspective of the Programme, PROUD contributed to improved innovation governance on the NWE territory and therefore strengthened the knowledge-based economy in NWE. The interconnection of public and private sectors with creative industries is one of the main aims of the Priority 1 of the NWE Operational Programme ("Fostering and strengthening the knowledge-based economy"). Here, PROUD and the transnational cooperation facilitated the translation of innovation on the territory via the strengthened institutional and territorial framework for innovation, direct SME involvement (designer network) and joint actions assisting the public services in the implementation of innovative products, processes and services.

INTERREG IVB North West Europe, Joint Technical Secretariat – Lille

PROUD PARTNERS: