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# Talking about food: Reflecting on transitions of practice in people with lived experience of food poverty

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**Abstract**: In this paper, we deploy a practice theory lens to explore how co-design activities have enabled individuals to transition to new and different advocacy, inquiry and engagement practices. The co-design project we describe sought to bring about change in a national network of organisations addressing food poverty in the UK. The aim of the project was to collaborate with young people and adults from different communities of the North of England to co-design tools for gathering stories and enabling advocacy relating to food insecurity. We use a practice theory lens to describe the relationships between co-design activities and transitions in practices of a single participant. The findings show the value of exploring and sharing meanings, practical experimentation and facilitating transitions within participant's practice. We argue that practice theory provides an analytical framework to understand the impacts of co-design and social design by interpreting the transitioning practices in participants.

**Keywords**: practice theory, co-design, food poverty, people with lived experience

## 1. Introduction

When we asked one of our participants to give us a short sentence describing themselves, they said 'I want to speak for those who cannot'. In this paper, we describe the journey of this individual through a collaborative research project, aimed at enabling people with lived experience of food insecurity in the UK to advocate for systemic change. The project sought to equip members of the national network to engage in new forms of inquiry and advocacy. The ultimate success of the project turned on changing the practices of an extended, heterogeneous network of individuals and organisations in the UK (food alliances and charities), unified by the common goal of addressing the unfolding challenges of food poverty (see Coupe et al., 2020). In this paper we apply a practice research lens to the co-design process to explore what this perspective can reveal about how the project produced impact on the practices of participants. We build a case study of a single participant and use it to examine in detail what a practice perspective can tell us about the co-design process,

the role of materials, competencies and meanings in this process, the influence of their lived experience in the co-design process, and draw out possible implications for future co-design research initiatives.

## 1.1 Food insecurity in the UK

In the UK food insecurity is a critical social policy (Purdam et al., 2016). The term food insecurity encompasses the inability of people to have access to enough healthy food (Moraes et al., 2021).Food insecurity affects around 8-10% of the UK population with millions of families across the UK living below the breadline (Cooper & Dumpleton, 2013). The expansion and use of food banks in Britain started to grow after the global economic crisis of 2007-8 as economic conditions began to worsen for low-income families, along with a global increase in the price of food (Loopstra et al., 2015; Peck, 2019). In the aftermath of the global economic crisis a government austerity programme brought spending reductions of over £30 billion pounds made to welfare payments, housing subsidies and social services between 2010 and 2019. These cuts in public spending have been directly linked to a steep rise in poverty in the United Kingdom (Alston, 2018). Rises in food poverty, in particular its impact on children, hit national headlines during 2020 with the global COVID-19 pandemic having a profound impact on the economy, society, unemployment, and health. Food poverty, already an issue of significant public concern, became increasingly prominent in public discourse that brought together high-level issues of social justice with immediate, highly pragmatic issues of 'holiday hunger' for children not at school (Rashford, 2020; Varley, 2020). The increasing urgency of these issues to be addressed systematically, through national policy has become far more widely accepted, as has the role of prominent public figures advocating for such change, not least the England national team footballer Marcus Rashford.

## 1.2 Lived experience in food poverty alliances

The value of lived experience has become central to many initiatives seeking to make positive changes in people's lives. In this paper, we use the concept of lived experience as a first-hand or situated understanding and involvement with everyday situations rather than as something represented by other people (Chandler & Munday, 2020). In the research we describe, we worked with a network composed of people with a lived experience of food insecurity. The network comprised multiple UK-based food poverty alliances, from Cornwall in the South of England to Moray in the North of Scotland, supported by Sustain and Church Action on Poverty. The aim of these organisations is to campaign and work for sustainable and healthy food systems (Sustain, 2021a). As well as providing support to families experiencing hardship, they work with communities to tackle the root causes of food poverty and hunger through amplifying the voices of those with lived experience of food poverty, enabling decision makers to hear the consequences of food poverty, welfare reform and policy decisions. The work with food poverty alliances was resourced by Food Power, a

£4 million project seeking to tackle the root causes of food poverty to create long-term and sustainable lives free from hunger (Sustain, 2021b).

## 1.3 Food power and the leapfrog project

The research we describe in this paper is drawn from a 10-month collaboration between Food Power and Lancaster University researchers working within a co-design research project entitled 'Scaling Up Leapfrog: Improving a million creative conversations' (see Coupe et al., 2020). Within the Leapfrog project, the initiative entitled 'Tools for Food Stories', brought together multiple organisations within Food Power's national network of third-sector organisations tackling food poverty in the UK. The aim here was not to co-design 'solutions' to food poverty problems, but instead to co-design reusable, adaptable tools to equip people to better advocate for policy change, a co-design approach that had previously been applied in a range of public sector contexts (Cruickshank et al., 2017; Whitham et al., 2019). This project aimed to co-design tools which would help to structure and facilitate conversations about food and food poverty in a positive, non-confrontational way and enabling much-needed advocacy for policy change. The project outcomes (both planned and realised) centred on a 'toolkit' of paper-based tools, published via the Leapfrog project website, www.leapfrog.tools. Each tool was the product of multiple co-design iterations, and was accompanied by guidelines suggesting possible uses. All the tools were published with a Creative Common licence, explicitly permitting adaptation, and in formats (primarily PDF) with text and images inside the materials available for editing using free software. Versions of the tools (Figure 1) were printed and made available freely to co-design participants and members of the Food Power network, and the toolkit as a whole was promoted within the network through dissemination events (in-person and remote) and through the annual Food Power conference in 2019.



*Figure 1.  Summary of the co-designed tools*

## 2. Theoretical background

In this research we explore how co-design experiences enable the emergence of creative ways of engagement in people with lived experience of food poverty. The co-design approach draws on the epistemic abilities of participants to produce tools that can help others initiate conversations, identify situated resources, and develop new forms of articulating conversations with interest groups (from community members to policymakers). For this purpose, we focus our theoretical analysis on relevant perspectives of co-design and theories of practices, as a way to understand the interventional side of the project and the effects on participants' practices through a practice theory lens.

### 2.1 Perspectives on Co-Design

The research we draw on this paper was intended to generate a series of tools and resources to equip young people and adults to undertake conversations about food and food poverty. We utilised a co-design approach that aimed to enhance and utilise the collective creativity of participants (E. B.-N. Sanders & Stappers, 2008) with lived experience of food poverty in the design of these tools. The value in such collaborative design initiatives can be found in the relationships, contexts and outcomes of a continuous process of negotiation throughout the design project (Agid & Chin, 2019).The continuous negotiation process offers pathways to create meaningful and useful resources that respond to the actual needs and experiences of participants. Co-design processes typically involves experimentation with materials through the generation of non-deterministic prototypes (Groen et al., 2016; L. Sanders & Stappers, 2014), in this case, leading to the production of tools for use after the co-design process ended. The process of *making with materials* allowed participants to share their experiences and to negotiate meanings (Knutz et al., 2019). The dialogic negotiation of meanings through the process of making collectively diminishes resistance towards external design interventions, enhances collaboration and builds trust (Clarke et al., 2021; Pirinen, 2016) between participants and researchers.

Much research has been conducted relating the role of the designer as a facilitator (Light & Akama, 2012), staging collaborative and safe spaces for participants during a co-design process (Bustamante Duarte et al., 2019; Calvo & Sclater, 2021; Pedersen, 2020; Salmi & Mattelmäki, 2021). In comparison, far less research has investigated the connections beyond co-design project interventions into and the means and mechanisms through which they produce impact. This is important because what matters are the impacts of the outcomes, and long-term outcomes of collaborations beyond the use of the final designed product or system (Light & Akama, 2018). Within the Participatory Design (PD) research literature, a focus on infrastructure and processes of infrastructuring (Bødker et al., 2017; Ehn, 2008; Karasti, 2014; Star & Ruhleder, 1996) considers the relationship of an interventional design initiative with the embedded, hidden socio-technical structures that persist beyond projects. Co-design research can also focus on internal changes brought about in the attitudes and motivations of participants, such as concepts of empowerment (Zamenopoulos et al., 2021). Attending to PD projects, Smith and Iversen (2018) offer three dimensions of engagement

that avoid the monolithic nature of participatory design interventions. These three dimensions include *scoping, developing and scaling* (Smith & Iversen, 2018). In the latter stage they argue that design projects should consider, for example, the development of networks, frameworks and visions for stakeholders to develop their long-term strategies to sustain social change.

In this paper we explore a different perspective from which to understand the impact of co-design by interrogating practice during and beyond a co-design project. We investigate how co-design can play a transformative role in participants' practices. In this exploration, we can attend not only to materials, meanings and values, but to the interrelationships between these aspects of a collaborative situation across time.

## 2.2 Perspectives on practices

Practice theory offers a lens to analyse the changes in individuals' practices as a result of their participation in a research project. Although there is not a unified definition on what (theories of) practices are (Nicolini, 2012), practice theories offer a form of understanding action, particularly the recourse of the symbolic structures of meanings (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). The purpose for utilising practice theories is to understand how participants change in response to engagement with processes of co-design.

Reckwitz claims that practices are the interdependencies between 'forms of bodily activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge' (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). We refer as practices to the human activities composed by an arrangement of things or materials, skills or competencies and meanings that hang together in a distinctive human action (Kemmis et al., 2013; Shove et al., 2012). The concept of *meaning* refers to what Reckwitz frames as mental motivations, emotions and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002). This element is particularly important in social design and in co-design because it relates to the enactment and understanding of situated needs and individuals' motivations to participate in a research project. The analysis of *materials* is important to understand practices as intrinsically connected to and interwoven with objects (Schatzki, 2002, p. 106). The material element includes 'objects, physical infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body itself' (Shove et al., 2012). Materials also play the role of negotiating artefacts (Lee, 2007), a function particularly relevant when working with concrete prototypes, as ways of linking together practical action in a co-design activity and the negotiation of meaning (Knutz et al., 2019). The third element, *competences*, represents a set of technical (techne) skills, actions informed by experiences (praxis), and practical wisdom (phronesis) (Nicolini, 2012). Competences also refer to background knowledge, know-how and practical knowledge (Shove et al., 2012), forms of knowledge with great relevance when co-designing in collaboration with people with lived experience.
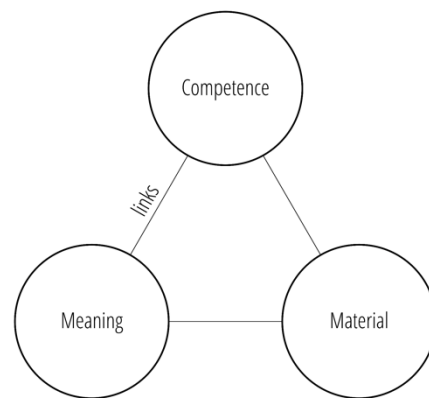
*Figure 2. Representations of practices (adapted from Shove et al., 2012)*

Following this model, practices occur when the links between these three elements are integrated. Unlinked elements could refer to proto-practices (links not yet made) or ex-practices (links no longer being made). From this perspective, it is possible to assume that practices are stable when these three elements persist over time. On the other hand, practices are unstable when elements of those practices are constantly changing, generating a transition in the practice itself. Practices transition when current links are broken or new connections are created. For example, introducing new things in a determined community of practice can generate new practices or change how current practices are performed. This example can be illustrated by how the introduction of piped water changed the practice of showering (Hand et al., 2005).

This framework offers an analytical approach to identify and characterise change in participants' practices throughout and after a co-design project, and to allow us to consider how practices transition and evolve over time (Shove et al., 2012; Shove & Walker, 2007). The distinctiveness of the elements of practice allows us to reflect on how new knowledge and meaning emerge in participants throughout a tool co-design process. In the following sections we will describe how a single participant shares meanings, generates new materials and adopts new ways of engagement throughout and after a particular co-design project.

## 3. Methodology

The co-design approach deployed for this project was intentionally directed away from the instrumental challenges of food access, where many Food Power network members had extensive experience. Instead, it sought to unlock new capabilities and practices in these organisations, allowing them to argue effectively for systemic long-term changes in national policy and public attitudes to food poverty. The research work followed a series of Participatory Action Research cycles (Swann, 2002) framed as a collaborative design project producing re-usable tools. The collaborative design approach of this project can be usefully framed as community organising (Costanza-Chock, 2020), seeking to amplify the power of

community-based organisations by making available design-research capabilities and resources to community members.

Beginning in November 2018, our partner organisation, Food Power, recruited participants from 6 pilot areas in which they were working. We planned and delivered a series of half-day co-design workshops in Darwen and Preston in Lancashire and the Byker Estate in Newcastle, UK. Each workshop was attended by 5-15 co-design participants, acting as co-design facilitators during the event and producing prototype tools between events. Tools were foregrounded as the planned outcome from the workshops in order to engage the participants with thinking about actions they and others might take, and the concrete, practical steps needed to accomplish these (Whitham et al., 2019). Without needing to speak directly about practices and the idea of developing new practice, the notion of a 'tool' functioned with the co-design process as a key mediating concept for participants to focus their ideas around, respond to and refine. This approach placed past experiences at the core of collaborative design activities, building ideas for new ways to start and develop conversations about food and experiences of accessing food. Key concepts helpful in the practical challenge of starting conversations emerged, such as nostalgia and regional food differences. Principles also emerged, such as 'we should not talk about food poverty, instead we should talk about food in general' and travelled between the co-design groups taking part of the project. These concepts and principles were embedded into paper-based prototypes of future engagement tools (Zamenopoulos & Alexiou, 2018).

We used a qualitative approach to collect and analyse data to characterise the co-design activities for research purposes. Observation of co-design activities was supported by photographic records of design materials, complemented by formal and semi-structured interviews (Oppenheim, 2000) with participants during and after the project. As the co-design process evolved, reflections from researchers, partners and participants shaped the process through discussions and reflections. For the purposes of this paper data relating to a single Co-design Participant, identified in this text as CP, was thematically analysed and consolidated in two themes presented in the following section.

## 4. Co-design participant case study

CP was selected as a focal case for this paper because of the extensive impact the project had on their everyday working methods and their use of co-designed tools after the project. The quantity of data available, and the extensive engagement of this participant in the co-design process made them suitable for in-depth analysis in this case study. We draw on interview data, gathered over a year after the end of the co-design project in 2019, and on observational data in field notes produced by researchers and collaborators facilitating the co-design process. The data focusses on experiences of the co-design process, use of tools and attitudes to advocacy and engagement work.

## 4.1 Reflecting on practical knowledge

CP participated actively in several of the co-design sessions undertaken during the project and made multiple contributions to the design of tools, frequently drawing on personal experience of challenging conversations around food and poverty. During interviews after the co-design project had ended, CP contrasted their prior expectations of the co-design workshops, *"I thought it was going to be a lot more academic based than it was. That was the hard thing, that I was expecting it to be a lot of talk and things that we didn't understand".* with an unexpectedly engaging and rewarding experience, *"[Researchers] were willing to listen to what we had to say, rather than them saying we're doing it this way."* that built trust, confidence and ownership of the tools produced. CP had a particular interest in the language used within the tools, and how this language approached (or led people to approach) sensitive territory, like the cost of food and difficulties feeding family members (Figure 3). For example, by drawing on personal experience of past conversations, CP was able to identify the need to address access to electricity as well as access to food, *"yes you might have the ready meal, but you might not have enough fuel on to actually cook the ready meal".* CP also worked extensively to amend language first proposed by young co-design participants in a prototype deck of cards for starting conversations (Figure 4). The co-design process enabled CP to identify relevant practical knowledge and translate it into the tools being developed.
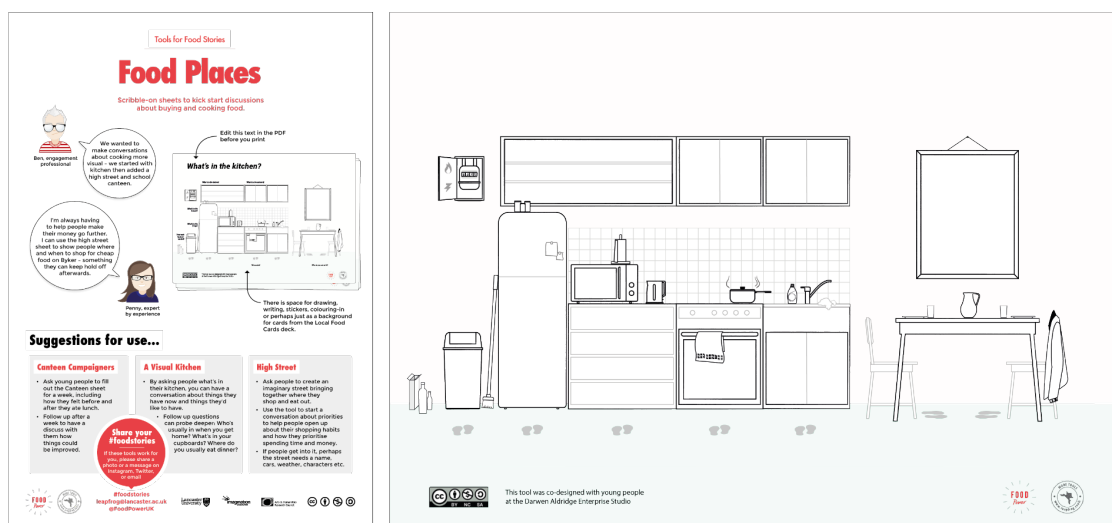


*Figure 3. The 'Food Places' showing a kitchen with an electricity meter.*

The reflections on practical knowledge enabled CP to exchange their experiences with other participants and researchers. The co-design process offered a safe space to CP, where they could talk openly with other participants about otherwise difficult conversations in a continuous and inclusive dialogue. This dialogue enabled the collective generation of new meanings (concepts, principles, approaches) across participants that related to their ideas about gathering stories and drawing on them in advocacy and campaigning.

*Figure 4. A co-design participant proposing an alternative wording within a prototype tool*

## 4.2 Reflecting on the co-design process

When reflecting on the co-design process, CP highlighted the importance of collaboration with participants from different backgrounds. The differing ages and geographical contexts of the participants led to opportunities for sharing and learning, *"So we teach the young people, but the young people teach us"*. Creative collaboration between participants within the co-design process helped CP to develop an understanding of differences in knowledge and in practical attitudes to conversations about food and food poverty. For CP, this led to important insights into not only their own expertise and practice, but also into the potential to test and adopt new practices.

The processes of ideation and making of tools at the centre of the co-design process exposed CP to a range of visualisation techniques and textual materials, and over time, led to new understanding of their potential relevance to new ways of working, *"how to word things, or draw things that have more of an impact, rather than just a spoken word"*. The potential to centre a conversation around a visual representation, as illustrated by the 'Food Places' tool (Figure 3), was a new concept for CP with direct relevance to the kind of conversations they wanted to have, *"Having the ability to sit down with people and say can we look at this, and can we look at what are in people's kitchens, and having a tool to take to somebody and say this is how much money it costs to boil a kettle, this is how much money it costs to put a microwave on for this amount of time"*.

The potential to use visual materials to structure conversations was particularly powerful for CP, and resulted in a request for an additional specialised tool beyond the original scope of the co-design project. CP had been invited to join a delegation to an international conference about food poverty, and in response proposed a one-off tool to support conversations at the conference. The resultant 'caterpillar' tool was a fold-out diagram (Figure 5), added to CP's personal notebook, which presented a series of high-level topics

that CP could refer to at the conference. The tool was a source of confidence for CP, *"For me, I can go off on a tangent so I forget what I'm talking about and I'm just rambling away. So having the caterpillar there helps, because it helps you with your thought process."*
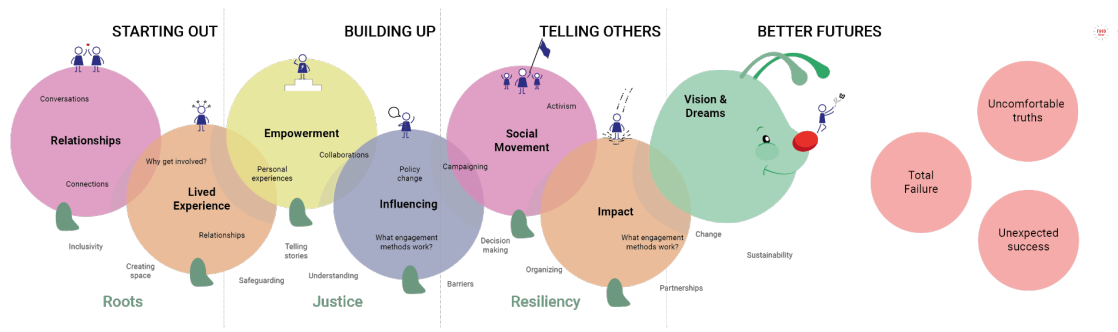


*Figure 5. The 'caterpillar' tool requested by and co-designed with CP*

As the formal co-design project ended, the changes in CP's approach to advocacy had shifted significantly. CP began participating in a number of advocacy initiatives, including giving people who have experienced food poverty a platform to give evidence at the House of Lords Select Committee, taking them to the Conservative Party Conference and appearing in national news coverage on Channel 4 and BBC Radio 4 (Knowles et al., 2021). CP adopted the co-designed tools in their own work, requesting hundreds of physical copies of the tools from the research team. CP also became an advocate for the use of the tools, joining the research and Food Power team at dissemination events to present the tools to others and advocate for their use, *"I can then put into practice with other people and help them to see that there are better ways of doing things".* CP identified a significant change in their confidence to speak, *"...it gives me more confidence to actually stand up there and say we need people to listen"*, and in the contexts they felt confident to speak in, *"I've never done speaking in public. I've never done this type of stuff with campaigning. So for me you've got that extra little bit of knowledge, and it's a little bit of a boost to think yes I can do this, and ooh I did that".*

## 5. Discussion

In this discussion we shift the narrative of the paper from an empirical perspective to an interpretative approach examining CP's interaction with the co-design project through a practice research lens. During the conception and execution of the co-design research project, we explicitly framed the activities in terms of co-designing tools. This framing provided reassurance to partners and funders about concrete, scalable outcomes. Here we apply the practice research lens to CP's interactions during the project, setting aside the co-design framing applied during the original project period. We re-examine the co-design process in terms of practices, and reflect on the value of a practice lens for co-design research oriented towards generating social impact.

## 5.1 Exploring and sharing meanings

For the majority of co-design participants within the project, co-designing tools for others to use was a new kind of activity. This new activity involved reflection on past experience, selecting and sharing experiences and offering opinions and ideas about actions they and others might take to better engage with communities. The project offered a safe space for co-design participants like CP to share their experiences and ideas, allowing the diverse meanings and motivations of participants to surface, and so enabling the development of meaningful material artefacts for use after the project. In the same vein, the attribution to meanings to co-designed materials made the aims of the project relative to and situated in (Shove et al., 2012) the particularities of participants' everyday lives.

Conceptualising, proposing and then encountering the co-designed tools necessarily intersected with participants' existing ideas about practice, routines and possible future practice. In proposing a tool and in evaluating it, participants were drawn into discourse about their own implicit practices. CP's many contributions to the process relied on practical, situated knowledge of conversations relating to acute experiences of food poverty - practices of advising, ways of starting discussions, choices of language and topics. The tools were iteratively developed across multiple groups of co-design groups and locations, and so acted as boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989) or negotiating artefacts (Lee, 2007) for exchanging ideas about how to start and develop storytelling about access to food. The end goal of each tool was to enable individuals to start conversations about lived experiences of food poverty, but during the co-design process, these same artefacts supported a different kind of dialogue between participants. These dialogues can be understood as exchanges about practice; concepts of how others could approach unique future situations, and be supported by material tools in their actions. During the co-design process and subsequently, the tools can be understood as epistemic objects, motivating and facilitating collaboration and providing practical infrastructure for it (Nicolini et al., 2012). A practice lens reveals this exchange of meanings between individuals, their past experience, negotiated future situations, and crucially the various roles that co-designed material artefacts played in this dialogue.

## 5.2 Experimenting with meanings and materials

As the co-design process unfolded, the work undertaken by participants expanded from imagining and proposing tools to include active experimentation with prototypes (Zamenopoulos et al., 2021). This was a crucial part of the development of the tools, as a link to the experiential implications of tools, and to the practical knowledge the participants held about practices that might involve the tools. By enacting practices implied by the tools, participants could develop further dialogue about their qualities, form and potential utility. The emergence of these early-stage, still-malleable prototypes invited participants to collaboratively produce a variety of interpretations for how the artefacts might be used, and actively adjust and iterate the tools in response. For example, CP considered and then amended the words in a prototype deck of cards. CP's active challenge to the tone of voice

in the cards, and the subsequent proposal CP made to adjust the language, surfaced in response partly to the text itself, but also from a dialogue with other co-design participants that imagined future uses of the tool.

CP's experimentation with tools helped to surface new roles for materials in their own work, expressed as ideas for further tools. The idea for a diagrammatic visual tool to support CP's work in the context of an international conference was a result of an insight generated through experimentation with a range of co-designed tools. Once proposed, (co)designed and created, this tool enabled CP to draw on existing experience and competencies with confidence, relying on the fixed structure of the tool to support complex dialogues in a novel setting.

## 5.3 Transitioning to new practices

As the facilitated co-design process came to an end, our research interest in the outcomes of the project intensified. The goal of the work overall was to equip members of a network with new tools, and so with the dissemination of the co-designed tools the potential to find impact increased. For CP, a participant throughout the co-design process, the conclusion of co-design activities and publication of tools accompanied continued change in practice. CP's stated motivation throughout the project was to 'speak for those who cannot'. This motivation transcended her participation in the project, relating to CP's role in their community and the world in general. The stability of this motivation is crucial to understanding not only the reasons for CP's participation in the research project, but also to understand the emergence of new capabilities and the role CP gave to co-designed tools after the co-design process ended.

CP made extensive use of the co-designed tools after the project concluded, and advocated for their utility and value to others in the food alliances network. As researchers, we saw this through the informal requests CP made for bulk supply of printed copies of tools, and also in the role CP reported giving to the tools in their independent engagement work. The visual elements incorporated in the tools enabled CP to use visual communication methods not present in their practice prior to the project. Thus, the tools acted as enablers for new competences that allowed CP to communicate in a different way, bridging between situated knowledge identified and materialised through the co-design process, and embodied practical knowledge used in forming dialogues and conversations. CP's use of the tools was not stable or prescribed by the material form of the tools. Reflecting on the tools produced, CP said, *"no set way in which you have to use them",* describing the tools as ideas, rather than objects, *"like a little toolkit to say this is how we think they could be used, but you could use them in any which way you can"*. The adaptable qualities of the tools generated new configurations of the elements of practices, allowing CP to transition their forms of advocacy and campaigning to new practices responding to situated circumstances. From a practice theory perspective, this reconfiguration relates to the idea of breaking links to certain

elements of practices (in this case material tools) and linking to new elements of practices (new co-designed tools).

## *5.4 Interpreting change in practices*

A practice perspective offers interpretive resources to understand the change, or rather the transition in CPs practice as a result of their involvement in the co-design project. This perspective allows us to discern the influence and interplay of competences, materials and meanings in this participant's practices. From a co-design perspective, a practice lens allows us to see the changing role of material resources throughout the process, and their effects on participants. In the early phases of the co-design, material tool concepts and prototypes helped to establish objects and mechanisms for dialogue and negotiation. The materials presented to participants in co-design activities helped to provide practical insight from their lived experiences, generating tool ideas and structures to better approach and communicate with diverse interest groups. As the tools developed, the materials became critical for supporting experimentation with new practices, not as ideas to be discussed, but as prototypes in direct use in the hands of participants. In experimentation activities, participants CP became familiar with the use of new visual materials and creative approaches. The exposure to the co-design approach that the researchers brought to the project, along with the creative situated practices of the larger group of participants, opened up space for new ways of communicating with others. The co-design process surfaced the situated meaning of food poverty for participants', allowing them to connect their lived experience with pragmatic ways to build meaningful conversations about these experiences in the future.

## *5.5 Implications for social design*

The use of practice theory contributes to the understanding of the impact of social design and co-design initiatives by enabling a shift to the situated perspectives of participants. This shift in the focus of analysing interventional co-design work allows researchers to see how transitions of practices occur and what enables them. For example, it is possible to understand:

- how new meanings emerge from exchanges of experiences across participants,

- how creative and collaborative competencies allow participants to rethink their forms of advocacy and engagement with communities,

- and how new materials emerge as a result of these transitions.

Practice theory as a process of inquiry is relevant to researchers of social and collaborative design because it allows them to attend to local practices and settings, and how elements of practices evolve during interventional research projects. In this way, it provides an analytical framework to support, for instance, acknowledging situated accountabilities, enabling co-creating, conscious future making and embracing pluralism (Kimbell, 2020).

# 6. Conclusions

In this paper we utilised a practice theory lens to critically analyse how previous and emergent elements of practices – meanings, competences and materials – lead to transitions in the engagement practices of a single individual, identified as CP. We describe how the engagement practices of CP transitioned throughout and after a co-design research project, building a discussion around the methodological challenges of how co-design is studied and the impacts that co-design projects produce in participants.

First, looking at the methodological challenges, we adopted a practice theory lens that focuses on participants' practices as a unit of analysis. This allowed us to understand how new knowledge was produced through the co-design activity by focusing on the links between distinct elements of existing practices. For example, we described how reflective and experimenting co-design activities allowed CP to change the way they engage within the food alliance network. This change was possible because of the persistent exchanges of experiences and knowledge (meanings) between co-design participants, and the experimentation with new meanings and materials in the formation of tool prototypes. The novelty of this approach is to shift the attention from the role of the facilitator or the project towards the effects of co-design on participants' practices. The benefit we see is that it will allow co-design researchers and practitioners to understand the creative and collaborative co-design processes from a participant perspective.

These insights lead to a second area of discussion about the impacts of co-design. By using a practice theory lens, we were equipped to reflect on how practices transition throughout the co-design project. From this perspective we consider that the main impact of this project is not the final co-designed tools but the changes of practices in participants (i.e. becoming newly creative or collaborative, or engaging with others differently). This insight relates to discussions about how to sustain co-design after projects end. We believe that the emphasis should not be put into how to extend the resources allocated to co-design projects, but instead how to support people in the generation of new practices that benefit their individual ways of working.

Practice theory allowed us to re-frame our epistemological perspective of the co-design research. When we started the project, our main objective was to co-design sharable and adaptable tools for creative engagement. From this perspective, our research aim was to understand how co-designed tools could be adopted by different groups to engage more creatively with different communities. However, after examining the effect of the project on participants, such as the one illustrated in this paper, we realised that the main impact of co-design does not rely on the outputs of the project but in the implicit changes of participants' practices.

Practice theory is underexplored in terms of the processes of change since it focuses on particular moments determined by time and space (here and now) rather than the different courses of actions that people undertake in their everyday life. Co-design, as an

interventional series of episodic events (workshops) and liminal activities (in between the workshops) offers a fertile ground to reflect on the transitioning of people's practices. In future research, we see great potential in exploring the implications of these findings for how co-design initiatives are proposed and configured. We want to explore how co-design projects can mediate between the need for explicit outputs and approaches that engage with existing meaning and competencies to build persistent infrastructures for social good.

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