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Embodied Co-Design for Sharing Governance in Society

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Abstract: *This paper is the outline of a design-research project focused on the interface of system and life-world (Habermas, 1987). The three year design-research project is approached from the perspectives of politics and administration and design. These perspectives are represented by the two PhD students who collaborate on this project. The project was initiated only four months ago, by a joint effort from a design faculty of a University of Technology and a political-administrative consultancy. The aim of the design-research project is to use the multidisciplinary perspectives to co-design mechanisms for sharing governance in society.*

Keywords: *Co-Design, sharing governance, multi-stakeholder collaborations, System-Lifeworld*

1. Introduction

This research is a design-research project caused by contemporary societal transformation. The project's set up is designed accordingly.

1.1 Background

Our society is changing and faced with a number of major challenges, which trigger various stakeholders to rethink our current practice. The (Dutch) Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) and the Netherlands School of Public Administration (NSOB) observed that different actors organize themselves more easily and more horizontally, and that processes are significantly less predictable than before (WRR, 2012). This increased complexity (NSOB, 2010) is caused by the condensation of physical contacts and virtual information and in the acceleration of social processes, becoming the present-day challenge for governance. Brand and Rocchi (2011) illuminate the "(...) systemic shifts which are caused by the combined effect of changing socio-cultural, business, environmental and technological realities" (Brand and Rocchi, 2011, p. 5).

This project aims at contributing to re-examining the basic assumptions and core practices of the current government and business paradigms. With our research through design approach (Zimmerman et al, 2010) we aim at shifting multi-stakeholder interactions (including political ones) towards fitting the *contingency principle* which states that governance should meet the features of the societal issue at stake (NSOB, 2010) – and not the other way round. Through embodied co-design we wish to research and design for interactions between stakeholders in *life-world* and *system* (Habermas, 1987) that encourage them to make constructive use of each other's

qualities in responding to societal issues. Thus we strive at bringing the shift from government to governance (Rhodes, 1997 and 2007) a step further: towards *sharing governance*.

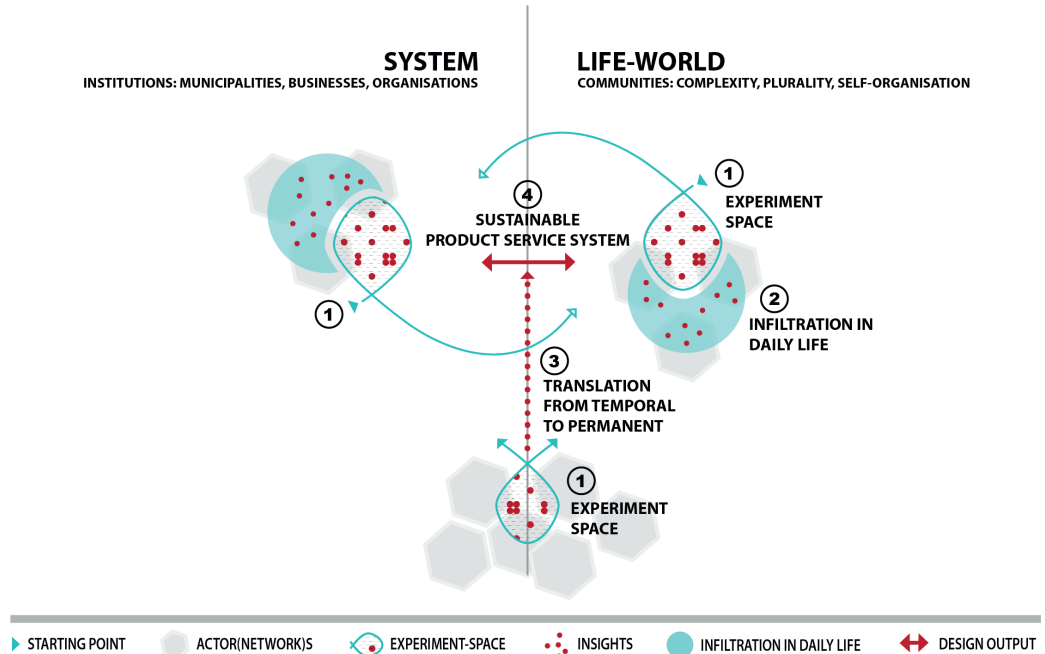


Figure 1: Preliminary visualisation of the project's focus and approach

1.2 Research Questions

The central design-research question of this project is: How can embodied co-design facilitate sharing governance?

By research through embodied co-design we wish to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What are the features, active principles and preconditions of sharing governance?
2. How to design product-service-systems that bring about and encourage sharing governance?

2. Theoretical Framework

As the design-research project is on the verge of socio-political- and design disciplines, underlying theories stem from both areas. The central question contains two principles that require elaboration: sharing governance and embodied co-design.

2.1 Sharing Governance

We define sharing governance as “interactions between stakeholders in *life-world* and *system* which encourage them to make constructive use of each other's qualities in responding to societal issues”. We refer to Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1987) and his distinction of

system and life-world. According to Habermas, in an increased complex society there is a transfer from “language” to “steering media” (such as money) as a way of co-ordinating action whereby economic and hierarchical mechanisms tend to take over autonomous action.

“In the end, systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration [...] where [...] the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas, the mediatization of the lifeworld assumes the form of colonisation” (Habermas, 1987, p. 196).

One might classify non-voters into three types: the dissatisfied, the interested, and the uninterested type (see Figure 1).

The shift from government to governance (Rhodes, 1997) depicts a solution of this colonisation of the lifeworld. In Dutch local administrative practice however, there is still a strong propensity to identify governance with municipality-centred strategies of responding to societal issues. Our definition of sharing governance takes a phenomenological perspective of radical interdependence of different stakeholders in their response to societal issues. Besides Habermas and Rhodes, our definition is founded on Arendt’s political phenomenology of collective action and the public sphere (i.a. Arendt, 1958). According to Arendt’s theory, making constructive use of each other’s qualities asks for (co-designed) “public spheres” as a common ground for real, *sharing governance*: the collective engagement in societal issues with preservation of the significant “*plurality of unique beings*” (Arendt 1958, p.176).

2.2 Embodied Co-Design

In order to honour Arendt’s principle of plurality, we adhere to an enhanced form of participatory design: *Co-Design*. In a co-design process different people with different backgrounds collaborate to design together. The concept of Co-Design is that all people are creative and that all who could be affected by the design are given an influential role in the development thereof (Sanders et al, 2008). In this research, we specify our approach to co-design based on embodied cognition: the embodied co-design process is situated in a context, which is part of- and sets the stage for the co-design. This means that the local landscape of e.g., stakeholders, resources and regulations provide the framework for the co-design process and the outcomes are therefore context-specific: situated action (Suchman, 1987).

3. PhD-Project Setup

This PhD-project is aimed to be finished in three years and is conducted by a duo of researchers from two different disciplines, also the authors of this paper. In this way, the project’s setup to some extent exemplifies the principles of sharing governance: The first author has a background in Industrial Design and the second author has a background in Political Theory. They bring together respectively the research group Designing Quality in Interaction of the Eindhoven University of Technology and the political-administrative consultancy Necker van Naem.

The work will be project-based and will revolve around generalising context-specific insights through working in different localities. The projects should generate funds for the continuation of the research itself, such as developing prototypes and sharing insights at conferences. The projects will be real-life cases, mostly based on challenges faced by Dutch municipalities, which means they take the role of clients. The researchers aim to take the different stakeholder’s perspectives by

actively approaching other stakeholders (informal care organisations, small-medium businesses) apart from municipalities.

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About the Authors

Philémonne Jaasma

Philémonne graduated from the Eindhoven University of Technology Master of Industrial Design in 2014 with a co-design project for community learning in Ghana. While obtaining her Master's degree she worked on neighbourhood development projects with emphasis on facilitating multi-stakeholder collaborations through design. As a freshly started PhD-candidate she, together with her colleague Evert Wolters from Necker van Naem, she concentrates on embodied co-design for sharing governance in society. She believes that many small people, who in many small places do many small things, can alter the face of the earth. As design-researcher, she is fascinated by how design can trigger people to do these "small things" and therewith contribute to a bigger purpose, together.

Evert Wolters

Evert graduated in political theory in Leiden on Hannah Arendt and her concept of the "public realm" (2008). Evert is a consultant at Necker van Naem in Utrecht. He helps municipalities and local politicians in achieving and evaluating policy. Evert is intrigued by the difference between the world outside and the world inside town hall. With this research he wishes to contribute to the change that local government undergoes, due to changes in society such as growing complexity and increasing responsibility of non-municipal stakeholders.