

Making Futures – Challenging Innovation

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THEME AND CHALLENGE

Participatory design has always been about alternative futures: in the practice of (often marginalized) groups in society it has, through design practice, tried to support democratic changes. This started as actions research oriented collaboration with local trade unions at the workplace challenging the use of technology and the management prerogative to define what may count as innovation (Bjerknes et al. 1987).

Today participatory design is more and more taking place beyond the workplace: in public spaces, as engagement with NGOs, and other often marginalized groups. This is in line with its democratic tradition, but it also opens up new ways that we might re-conceptualise innovation as a form of invention (Barry 1999), and challenge the particular, often hegemonic, approaches to future-making in the corporate workplace.

Contemporary managerial ideology embraces ‘the crowd’ as a source of innovation. For example in the form of ‘user driven innovation’, ‘crowd-sourcing’, and focus group testing, with a strong rhetoric of accessible and participative design as a key to ‘democratizing innovation’. All this is often, however, within the perspective of the successful corporation and an unaltered market logic, which privileges particular crowds and particular places as centres of innovation (Suchman 2002): frequently the urban crowd or the perceived exotic. In the workshop we challenge this logic of innovation by exploring the potential of participatory design cases and fieldwork perspectives that demonstrate a repertoire of differently situated practices of ‘future-making’— futures made locally, in heterogeneous communities, and with marginalised publics. (Björvinsson et al. 2010).

The organizers of the workshop invite participants to share their stories of alternative future making. The first part of the workshop will create a relational map of such cases, and in the second we will explore common themes, relations, and resistances, as well as practical and theoretical challenges.

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FORMAT OF THE WORKSHOP

Early PD was strongly influenced by the Future Workshop as developed by Robert Junk, a way to collaboratively envision and plan for locally grounded particular futures (often in opposition to a hegemonic view and practice) (Junk and Müllert 1981, Greenbaum and Kyng 1991)). This workshop draws on that tradition, but with a shift of scope and form to also draw on current re-conceptualisations of innovation in anthropologies of design (Calvilo, Jiménez et al. 2010; Suchman 2011).

Whereas the Future Workshop provides a local ‘democratic’ alternative to centralized bureaucratic planning, this workshop gathers an assembly of local (often marginalized) participatory initiatives of future-making practices, and hopes to challenge generalized strategies for technology and market-driven innovation in multiple, diverse and creative ways.

The workshop uses a different format, focused on map-making and storytelling as a process for forming a *landscape of multiple futures*. During the workshop participants will create and map a landscape of futures - not a single utopian future but an ‘archipelago of futures’ constituted by all the participant’s cases. What they will construct is not an ideal, no-place, nowhere Utopia of Thomas More, but an assemblage of local, now, here futures. Once mapped they will then explore their encounters with these manifold cases and futures-in-the-making.

The expected outcome of the workshop will be a participatory crafted “guidebook” to these islands of the future and their connections (and distances) as sites of diverse forms of innovation.

MAPPING – ‘THE ARCHIPELAGO OF FUTURES’

Participants will bring cases, initiatives and fieldwork experiences of ‘futures being made’ to the workshop. This could be participatory cases of new collaborative public interventions, or sustainability projects, local social innovations, open and free production, maker spaces, do-it-yourself activities, etc.

These cases are initially seen as unique places or ‘islands’ (or another topological forms), and participants are asked to prepare invitations, a tour, of their respective case. These invitations should address the practices of future-making, and the hopes and challenges to the future of their island case. We suggest bringing pictures, samples and stories. (Instructions on format will be sent out on acceptance of workshop participation).

In the morning session of the workshop participants will give a guided tour of their island case, and collaboratively construct, and map as they go along, the archipelago of futures.

During the session we will shape an emerging landscape of futures, mapping an archipelago of futures, searching for connections, collaborations and controversies.

STORYTELLING – ‘TRAVEL GUIDE TO THE FUTURES’

During the afternoon session participants will collaboratively engage in documenting the archipelago of futures by producing a ‘Travel Guide to The Futures’.

This part of the workshop will explore the proximities of some futures, and distances of others; the shared challenges both within the cases themselves and of the experiences of the design practice. It will also consider the connections and resistances between these multiple forms of innovation practice. Through these discussions and sharing of stories, images, and texts from the cases, participants will generate a travel guide..

Drawing on *avant garde* mapping approaches such as psychogeography, and other situational interventions into mapping, the ‘Travel Guide to The Futures’ will include guides to participant’s cases (from the morning) and a series of cross-cutting themes that express the diversities and similarities of the cases (from the afternoon).

The travel guide will be produced as a bound book in a participatory low-tech DIY zine format, in a limited edition print run. There will also be an open and free version of the travel guide, free to download and open to redesign, and addition of new islands to the archipelago of the futures.

PARTICIPATION

Participants interested to contribute to the workshop should no later than June 1 announce their intent to the organizers, makingfutures@sand14.com, by sending a short description of your case (2-4 pages). The description should, as mentioned above, take the form of an invitation to “visit” your “island”/case including an outline of the specific (design and innovation) future-making practices in the case as well as hopes and challenges of those involved.

Although, as organizers we would like to assemble an archipelago of hundreds of futures, the active workshop format is a limit. So for making this zine of a ‘Travel

Guide to the Futures’ at the workshop a maximum of 15 cases can be accepted (though there can be more than one participant per case). If forced to limit participation in the workshop we will, besides quality of description, especially look for diverse and promising cases and initiatives that address the theme and challenge of the workshop and involve groups in the margin of (or marginalized) by contemporary mainstream innovation theory and practice. Accepted contributions will be announced no later than June 6 (to allow for early bird registration).

We are looking forward to collaborating with you in this challenge to innovation design practice by investigating, mapping and communicating promising local, diverse, and multiple alternative futures.

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