Mobilization of vulnerable actors through interventions; full-scale mock-ups as mediators

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An analyse of different interventions in two bachelor design projects

• Conclusion: Interventions with full-scale material objects are a successfully way to interest, enrol and mobilize social vulnerable groups in design processes.
Research Question:

- How is it possible to enrol social vulnerable groups in design processes - through interventions?
- **How** do a design team stage the enrolment and **mobilize** knowledge sharing processes?

Methodology

- **Anthropological practices to get knowledge:**
  - Observations, Data collection, Ethnographic Interviews, focus groups, Seminars

- **Design thinking:**
  - Creative methods & tools:
    - Cultural probes
    - Design games
    - Mock-ups
  - (Brandt 2007), (Björgvinsson et al 2010), etc
Theoretical inspiration

Methods:
Field studies, theoretical and co-design activities –

Theory:
Inspiration from Actor-network theory:

• **Problematization** *(insight from the field: why?)*
• **Interessement** *(who?: different actors)*
• **Enrolment** *(where?, how?)*
• **Mobilization** *(how?, activities?)*
• -> translations
  * (Callon 1991)
• Mediation (Latour 2005, 2006)

In the paper we present, analyze and discuss two design experiments engaging and facilitating dialog processes with vulnerable actors:

• Drug users

• Children with disabilities.
**Mobilizing enjoyable therapy**

- The design team wanted to ‘enrol’ children with disabilities who ride ponies as a therapy activity.
- The aim of the therapy was to improve balance, co-ordination and reducing spasms.

**”Problematization”**

- The field studies (observations and interviews) showed that neither the helpers nor the children were motivated by the therapy. (- no joy)
- The sole focus on ‘therapy’ didn’t motivate the disabled children.
• A mother: "She lacks the motivation to participate in riding. It should rather replace a sport or a hobby..." (like her friends participating in football, dance, etc.)

• The design team asked the parents to act as mediators in terms of the children, to invite the kids to make drawings illustrating their ‘hobbies’, activities done for pleasure, etc. (cultural probes)

• But the cultural probes-activity did not turn out successfully because the parents had to motivate the children at home

• Instead the design team asked the therapist if they could set up a workshop
The team did a mock-up sessions in which the participants (helpers, children, therapist) were asked to respond to mock-ups.

One of the mock-ups was inspired by the game ‘Twister’.

The full-scale Twister mock-up was a ‘horsecloth’ and the design team put it on chairs so the children could try out.

The mock-up served as an intermediary object and mediated dialog.
• The full-scale mock-up supported by the enthusiasm of the children showed and convinced the therapist that it was possible to motivate the children in new ways.

• The therapist was able to see how the children were moving their body trying to reach the colours.

• The mock-up both visualized and mediated the idea of an ‘activity’ and a ‘game’, and translated the view of riding from a sole focus on the ‘therapy’ to include motivation and fun.

‘Enrolment of vulnerable actors’

• In the project a local civil society organization and social workers wanted to help drug addicts who were injecting drugs on the street.

• The research showed a ‘problematization’ for a ‘safer injecting place’ for drug users and a safe environment for the citizens living in the area.
Interventions - 1: 10 mock-ups/models

• The design team tried to involve the drug addicts in the design phase using drawings and 1:10 Scale models ‘on location’ next to a café where they could get a free meal

• This intervention failed

• It was not easy for the actors to relate to the drawings or models — it seems to be too ‘abstract’ and it did not mobilize the users.

The full-scale mock-up:

• An Injection cabin inspired by a Phone Cabin
• With help from the full-scale mock-up, the design team gave voices and engagement to the vulnerable actors.
The full-scale mock-up got a lot of attention from the media (TV and newspapers).

The locals were on the street to observe how/ if the drug addicts were responding to the mock-up.

The different actors were interested in finding sustainable solutions for not only the drug addicts but for the whole local area.

Epilog

In the autumn 2012 the municipality of Copenhagen invested in ‘injecting rooms’ (not ‘injecting cabins’) where the drug addicts in a safe place are able to take the drugs.

Most of the local citizens seems to accept the solution.
Conclusions

• The full-scale mock-up (as a social-material artefact) are able to mediate dialogue with a heterogeneous part of actors (Children, parents, drug addicts, social workers, the press, politicians etc.)

• Staging and facilitating interventions are not a simple task. Getting the central actors interested was difficult and enrolling and mobilizing them was a process where different ‘design thinking’ methods and tools were in play.

• Facilitating the translation process where in these two cases mobilizes via full-scale mock-ups that interests/enrolled and mobilized the different actors and mediated translations

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