

MANUAL FOR SETTING UP EFFECTIVE CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS

The only way a future vision for a transformation area can become reality is by creating it together with the different owners and other stakeholders. This of course has consequences for the design process: how do you organise a good co-design process that takes into account all different interests and also addresses the big overall issues and goals? Co-design goes way further than traditional participation. Of course, there are many different ways to organise a good co-design process. Co-design is becoming increasingly relevant and popular, so you can find a lot of inspiring examples for different types of projects. In this manual we do not so much tell you what to do, but share a few key considerations for you to keep in mind when setting up your own process.

Tap into the different local stakeholders' knowledge and experience

Your process needs to take the different stakeholders' involvement very seriously and the vision really needs to reflect their input in a substantial and real way. Make sure you tap into their everyday experience, expertise and creative potential. Like this, plans will get more rooted, interesting and specific and you have a large support base from the start - with people growing love for the area. Make sure you make a serious effort to reach the different big and small stakeholders in your area. Do you have a more or less organised community you can tap into or do you need to go out into the area more actively?

Create a trajectory

Co-design is a focused trajectory rather than a one-off workshop. This can be an atelier-like range of workshops where you invite all different types of stakeholders and experts to discuss the different prominent topics in the area. Or maybe you organise a more diverse palette of activities to reach and engage different types of stakeholders, varying from key decisionmakers to individual citizens. In-between these workshops the designers process and synthesise everything for the next workshop. The plan or design should progress both through high-level design expertise and through regular feedback sessions with stakeholders and experts. By working in loops like these, you make sure the design gets sharpened and enriched and the different stakeholders stay on board and grow ownership with every session you have together. Of course, this influences the form of the workshops throughout your trajectory. You may start with an open brainstorm but later you may need more focused discussions too.

Create a welcoming and equal atmosphere

Realise that these workshops are not only about you coordinating and collaborating with the different stakeholders, but also about the different stakeholders coordinating and collaborating with each other. In order to effectively bring different stakeholders together, you need to create an inviting and equal atmosphere where everybody feels welcome and safe to share their ideas. There is almost always a difference in information position, professional literacy and maturity level and as a consequence a difference in confidence and entitlement. Make an effort to create an equal atmosphere by choosing your location, setting and tone of voice wisely.

Present data and design input in a very accessible way

Prepare your input and brainstorm material in a very accessible and easy-to-use way. Not everybody can read an (abstract) map or data visualisation. We for example used maps, markers and candy to create new maps and models, but also a large set of reference cards showing inspiring projects in different categories. We spread them out over the table, so that stakeholders could pick the ones they liked best and discuss, combine, order and prioritise them together. Pay attention that everybody has a voice and feels encouraged to use it.

Allow for different types of input

Make sure you address both long, middle and short term issues in order to invite stakeholders with different perspective and time horizons to share ideas they feel close to. Some may focus on improvements on the short term which is also very valuable. After all, transformation is about gradually going from one state of being to another, it is not an instant result. All the different input can help you to create a very real transformation path

with very real support base for the coming years.

Focus on the content rather than the form of the output

The conversations around the table are as important as the cheerfully coloured maps and stickie papers you create. Don't be fooled by the importance of the latter only because they look good on the photos afterwards. Join the table as a moderator, ask questions and take detailed notes. In our experience, many stakeholders perceive a threshold to take up a marker and draw something on a map, but they do feel comfortable to explain what they mean. Make sure you don't miss their input.

Provide interpretation and signification to transcend individual interests

You want to bring in as much stakeholder input as possible, but at the same time an urban vision needs to transcend individual self-interests and give proper interpretation and meaning to the whole area, making sure the whole is more than the sum of its parts. More than a collage of loose ideas and projects. This also means the different input needs to be weighed and prioritised based on a clear set of parameters, including the big and long-term transitions you need to tackle. There is a crucial role for the designer here.

Always make sure there is time for informal networking during every workshop

Make sure you have enough drinks and bites, so people feel welcome to stick around and talk and network a bit more. This helps to create a sense of equality in very diverse groups of people, it simply makes it more personal and less formal. Don't hesitate to blend the formal and the informal part of your workshops a bit. In our experience there is as much interesting input generated during the drinks as during the formal parts, perhaps even more.

Share the results and organise the follow-up

Co-designing a vision should not be an isolated trajectory. After all, you need all the different stakeholders to join in, take action and invest to make it a reality. There may very well be projects and actions in the vision for them to take. The co-design trajectory therefore is a mere kick-starter for further - individual and collective - action. Make sure you organise a proper follow-up, presenting the results of the co-design, acknowledging the different stakeholders as co-authors and setting up a proper follow-up trajectory together.