

COCREATION AND TRANSFORMATION: THE POWER OF BRINGING THE NEW INTO THE WORLD - TOGETHER

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INTRODUCTION

At the Institute for Participatory Design we are interested in co-creating a positive sustainable and just future with groups who face certain problems or challenges or who want to develop new places, products, services and concepts for their work or life environments. During our participatory design processes, groups don't just collectively innovate by merely gathering new creative ideas. In the course of these processes they often see themselves facing their past and present states in regards to their social, emotional, psychic, historical or spiritual internal system. Only by overcoming and thus transforming these past and present states do they gain inner freedom to explore and co-create new possible futures.

While the original and primary goal of our institute's work is not to heal trauma or to mediate conflict, but to design for a given tangible output, both can and does happen if groups work on their collective future by using a certain methodology

we derive from the fields of design and planning. Working on a possible future can often be a cathartic and liberating group experience. Looking at the future holds possibilities and hope, which will not be triggered by only looking at the past.

In this paper I will explore what a good co-creative design process looks like, how it brings the New into the world and how it can help to support both behavioural changes and changes to our concrete environments. I will discuss emergence, creativity and design and present two cases of our practical work. At the end I will draw some insights and conclusions about co-creative design processes.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

Let me start with some normative claims about change in general and the necessary change we have to face collectively.

I think or hope that we can all agree on the notion that we live in times where fundamental changes have to happen and where we need solutions for the severe challenges facing us all over the world, be it war, hunger, migration or environmental threats. These problems and challenges have something in common: they are complex and complicated, they are systemic and dynamic. They can't be solved by a single mind or by a small exclusive group of experts alone.

Secondly, I hope we can agree on the notion that technological and social innovations alone will not lead to the solution of these problems, as long as they are not accompanied by behavioural change in individuals and groups.

Neither will behavioural change alone bring us salvation. If the systems in which we try to act anew will not change alongside with our realisation and conclusions as to what actions it would be best to take, there will be no success.

Taking these claims together I draw a simple conclusion: Social and technological transformation has to go hand in hand with personal and group transformation in behaviour. Let me first discuss what I mean when I talk about bringing the New into the world:

EMERGENCE: THE NEW COMES INTO THE WORLD

Emergence is a scientific concept which originally describes the phenomenon that higher level systems or assemblies of parts have properties which their original parts do not have. Emergence comes from Greek and can be translated as 'to turn up', 'to rise up' or 'to appear'. Historically emergence was focused on the idea of levels of hierarchy in the order of things and their respective properties, where the higher level of organisation was said to have emergent properties compared to lower levels of organisation. E.g. a society has properties which its individuals do not have, e.g. institutions.

From the viewpoint of design, innovation and development we use the term emergence today in a slightly different way. Emergent design is used in contrast with the term incremental design. A design can either be incremental, meaning that it builds upon already existing solutions, but enhancing and improving them,

or, as in emergent design it can create a completely new solution to a given problem. It shifts perception and attitudes and opens up possibilities to re-evaluate problems and their context. While incremental design improves the status quo, emergent design tries to transform the status quo in order to bring something new into the world.

For example: Nokia did improve its phones incrementally, by advancing the existing technology. In contrast, Apple did something new. By disposing of the little keys on the first iPhone and using a big touchscreen instead, Apple made it possible for the user interface to change in keeping with the needs of the application.

If we work with groups to design their future, be it in planning places and spaces to live and work in, or products and services, it is the emergent quality we strive for. Because only by attaining emergent solutions can we be sure that deep and

necessary transformation has taken place: the change of our viewpoints, our attitudes and our actions.

What is the role of creativity and design in this?

CREATIVITY AND DESIGN IN GROUPS

Creativity was long studied as a phenomenon connected with individuals only. The interest lay either in the moment of insight, the “heureka” - moment and/or in the character of the genius, artist, inventor or entrepreneur, who, as a lonely wolf, is subject or has access to these insights.

But since the 1980s, researchers have begun to also look at groups. Keith Sawyer states: „Several prominent creativity researchers, influenced by the onset of sociocultural and distributed approaches to cognition in the 1980s, have begun to analyze the role of collaboration and context in creativity. This second wave of creativity research focuses on how novelty emerges from unstructured and improvised group collaborations. This collaborative turn in creativity research has provided us with a deeper understanding of how new things are created – not only by solitary individuals, but also by collaborative teams and social

networks." (2009, p. 91) In his book *Group Genius* he even claims: "Forget the myth about historical inventors; the truth is always a story of group genius. And today's innovations emerge from ever more complex organizations and interacting teams." (2007, p. xiii) But he also notes: "However, even though we now realize the importance of group collaboration, we still have very little understanding of the exact mechanisms whereby creative products emerge from groups." (2009, p. 82)

At our institute, we think there are three answers to this. One is about methods, the second is about attitudes and context, and the third is about fields and processes:

Many design and planning professions have an understanding of what creativity is about: A procedure of steps and methods usually following a scheme consisting of something like observation and analysis, idea generation, doing the actual design or plan, making a technical plan and implementing this plan. Each step has its own

set of creativity methods and professional tools like layering, clustering, brainstorming, prototyping, modelling, sketching, lateral thinking, interviewing, story telling, moodboarding etc. Some creativity and design approaches like Design Thinking, Human Centred Design or Agile Methods in Programming have their own clearly defined set of these creativity techniques and the procedure in which to use them. Since we think these tools are important and effective we believe they are not the whole secret to creativity. They don't explain the moment of the design itself and they are not sufficient to guarantee a valuable and emergent solution.

The second answer is about attitudes and context: Creative professional spaces help fostering creativity. A well known example are the Google offices - they are more akin to playgrounds with all the resources you need to be creative than the grey cubicles found in most offices. In terms of attitudes, it helps to cultivate a

creative culture where failure is a step towards development, ideas are open to be used by everyone, hierarchies are flat and communication is transparent. All these are supportive to the creative process but again not sufficient for a creative breakthrough.

The third answer is focused on explaining creativity and emergent design solutions through working in the field of the project with a generative process. We coined the term Field-Process-Design for this approach. To explain this, I will first present two cases from our practical work.

CASES

CASE 1: DESIGNING FOR A NEW INTEGRAL HOSPITAL

The first example I want to bring to your attention is our work with a small group of around 40 participants at an integral hospital in Germany. They prepared for a major building refit alongside with new extension buildings to the hospital campus. The hospital had to meet rising standards and modern requirements while also having to increase its number of beds in order to remain economically competitive.

Since this hospital is reputed for its special integral approach to health and its strong community, the management wanted to conduct a participatory planning workshop, consisting of employees, management staff, doctors and supporters.

The aim of the workshop was to develop guidelines as a basis for a subsequent architectural competition.

We only had one full day for a workshop, which is not enough for this kind of endeavour. Nonetheless we managed in this workshop to develop sound and tangible guidelines for the competition. Without explaining the whole process I would like to single out a small but important incident during the workshop.

At one point, after thoroughly understanding and discussing the project's context and framework conditions, as well as having a few creative warm-up exercises, we split the group into small working groups with a maximum of 8 participants. The task was to come up with a vision of the future hospital either drawn with colour pens or modelled with modelling clay or by building paper models. While all groups directly plunged into a creative process giving form to all the utopian and real visions and ideas they had about the future hospital, I noticed that one group

really struggled and got into an argument with each other. After observing this for some time, our team decided to intervene. More than half the time for this session was up and the group had not produced a single sketch, drawing or model. I sat down with the group and listened to their arguing. I understood that half of the group's members were surgeons asking for modern high technology as well as for clean, bright and functional rooms with easy access. The other half comprised psychotherapists. They called for bubbly, round and cosy spaces, almost like hobbit holes or wombs, preferably with doors directly opening into wild nature. While the latter tried to convince the former that healing requires an holistic approach and spaces where the soul can heal, the surgeons argued that without a modern emergency room there wouldn't be any soul left to heal.

I suggested that perhaps this group was really onto something important to the whole project, and probably closer than the all other groups to the real challenge

of the future building. At first they didn't understand my comment and thought I was making fun of them. So I explained that the hospital was renowned for its integral approach offering both surgery and psychotherapy among many other approaches to health and healing and that surely the new building should represent this even more strongly than the existing one. Then I left the group back to its task.

When the groups finally presented their results, they all made wonderful and important contributions, with many ideas we could build on. The group in which I had to intervene presented only one thing: A modelled cube and a sphere morphing into each other. From this presentation they derived one of the most important guidelines for the architectural competition. The future hospital should offer a diverse range of room qualities differentiated by function and atmosphere, from rectangular to round, from white and bright to colourful and warmly

dimmed, from spaces with high technology to spaces close to organic in form and character. And they made it clear that it was important to them for these different qualities not only to be options to choose from for the patient, but rather they should offer the possibility of moving through them, morphing with them while being on a personal healing journey.

No doubt this is a very difficult prerequisite for the architects but it is nonetheless a consequent design guideline for this hospital. The small presentation also triggered a renewed and perhaps even deeper understanding of the integral approach and what it would mean for this hospital to collaborate in a multimethodological approach to help their clients in their personal health process.

CASE 2: DEVELOPING THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE OF FRANKFURT

The city of Frankfurt has a major problem with demographic change. Frankfurt is growing at such a rate, that the administration will have to build a whole new elementary school every year with 4 classes to be able to accommodate all pupils. The planning process for an elementary school in Frankfurt normally takes approximately 10 years. As if this weren't difficult enough, everything concerning schools and education is a highly conflicted political field. We were informed that there was little constructive communication between major stakeholders, such as proponents from politics, city administration, federal state administration, teachers' associations, parents' associations, the Education and Science Workers Union (GEW) and several interest group organisations such as those advocating inclusive schooling in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Head of Frankfurt's Education Authority was under high media pressure. Mistrust was great, pressure to act was high.

The Head of the Education Authority thus made a very bold move when she declared that she was going to invite all stakeholders into a participatory process of more than one year duration to work out Frankfurt's new school development plan. The school development plan is the political and administrative basis for all major measures concerning school development over a seven-year period.

We were invited to conceptualise and facilitate the design process for the preparation of the school development plan with over 450 people representing all the stakeholder groups mentioned above.

From our own preparation we found that it would be important to introduce complete transparency and that we would have to address the trust issue. We achieved transparency via an online platform where everyone could view all the minutes, and every flipchart, sketch or result produced as part of the process. In

this way the entire city was invited to inform themselves about the ongoing process and to discuss it privately, publicly and in the media.

We addressed the trust issue methodologically by seating people from different backgrounds together at one table, right from the first event onwards. We termed these the “multiperspective tables”. A table consisted of a maximum of 8 persons and consisted of people from politics and administration, teachers, pupils, parents, interested citizens and representatives from other associations. First we were faced with complaints about the undemocratic rule we had established which forced people to sit at certain tables. But already after the first event, people were touched and almost enthusiastic about these tables. They experienced that actually everyone attending the process was interested in one way or another in serving pupils by giving them the best possible education. They were also intrigued to hear about the struggles everyone had to fight in their own

professional backgrounds to bring this intention to life. Of course, mistrust does not vanish that easily, but a first step had been taken.

But something else happened at the first event: As an aside, someone mentioned the idea of building educational villages. Even though this wasn't a thought-through concept, the term somehow stuck with everyone as a small inspirational spark which was repeatedly taken up.

During the course of the process we got into details and tackled different parts of the overall problem in a range of workshops. We hoped that by splitting the over-complex challenges of the school development plan into thematic subgroups we might somehow get some detailed insights and ideas.

But at the end of these thematic workshops, which ran from Tuesday through to Friday, the confusion peaked. We had so many ideas and solutions for almost every

detailed problem, but a common thread was difficult to see and the complexity of the task at hand overwhelmed all of us. At this point the whole group was generally empathetic to each other, and knew the whole picture of all problems and all positions towards solving these problems. But the task of bringing all of this into one consistent concept, seemed impossible. We had scheduled a big workshop at which all the results of the thematic workshops were to be brought together for the following day, Saturday. Our client was confused, too and asked us to provide a framework for a controlled outcome, but we had only planned for an open process.

We had done everything we could to foster understanding of all the positions and the entire scope with all the challenges of the school development plan, and we had a good plan for an open creative process for the following day. But there was no way we could control or guide the outcome in any way anymore. Our team

tried to match all needs and anxieties and worked all night on the methodological set-up for the next day's workshop but we could not find a better solution to guarantee a safe process and perfect result for the next evening. We didn't go to sleep until 4 o' clock at night, with the workshop starting early the next day. We decided to just go ahead with our open process as planned and trust in the group's creativity and intelligence and the intense professional immersion in the field achieved already. We also decided to give the flickering idea of the educational village a try.

The other day we set the task to again sit at multiperspective tables - this time we didn't need to force anyone, everyone knew the value of it – and to bring all they had worked on together under the umbrella of the idea of educational villages or city quarters and to visualize it. Our team and our client cautioned me against offering modelling clay as to pedagogically but the groups grabbed the big sheets

of paper, colours and the modelling clay and started co-creating before I had finished explaining what to do. There was an amazing energy and buzz in the room when almost 250 people started on the task. While during all the workshops they had been focussed on solving problems, now for the first time they had a real opportunity to unleash their collective creativity. I have rarely experienced such a high creative power in a room. And something else almost magical happened: when we started walking around we noticed that all groups had broadly come up with very similar solutions in visualisation and content.

The educational city quarter became the main organising principle for the new school development plan. At the regional level of a city quarter, with the multiprofessional perspective we all had trained ourselves to use during the process, many problems such as the allocation and sharing of spatial and material resources, the coordination of schedules for afternoon schooling with sport and

music associations, libraries or youth welfare became manageable and added to a diversified and integrative, local educational programme, easing communication and organisation on a direct basis and decreasing administrative overhead.

Moreover, the educational city quarters would contribute to identification with a local system rather than with single schools, making changing schools and programmes easier since the pupils would still be part of their local educational system.

The plan is not the territory. The new school development plan has now passed political and administrative consultation and has been approved as the concept for developing the educational landscape of Frankfurt for the next 6 to 7 years.

With the plan's successful implementation, Frankfurt will become the most innovative and future-oriented city with respect to education.

FIELD-PROCESS-DESIGN

I still owe the third answer of what the mechanisms whereby creative products emerge from groups, are. For that, let me single out three insights from the cases I presented.

First: In order to get into a transformative creative process with a group, it is important to dive deep into the field of the respective context and establish connections between all forces in this field.

Working with place, material, form and (hi)stories, we experience that participants of a group have to immerge (as in contrast to emerge) into an existing field first. They have to become part of the field in order to establish what we call field-intuition, an intuition based on sensing the field of which the participant becomes

a part. Once this immersive connection has been established, personal transformation becomes a transformation of the field and vice versa.

This happened with the conflicted group at the hospital as well as with the entire group working on the school development plan. They mirrored in their personal behaviour strong forces and themes in the field of the project. The hospital group acted upon an unresolved issue concerning integrative health at the hospital. The participants of the school development process started finding solutions when they practically applied their own positive and new experience of forming small local multiprofessional units to the complexity of school development.

Secondly: the moment the individual, the group and the field become a single collective processing body, everyone is empowered to speak and act for himself, the group and the field alike. Now the group is ready to confront the challenges, flaws and conflicts of the field from within, rather than fixing a problem of an

external object. We usually feel that the pressure of unresolved issues is rising during the process towards a point of crises or transformation. This can happen to the whole group, to parts of the group, or to the facilitating team as it happened in both cases I presented.

Thirdly: Co-creation in a deep sense means that creativity and creation are not the act of an individual or a group of individuals but that they emerge from the field under transformation. A field which moves through the threshold of crisis or transformation, reconfigures itself to the point that internal conditions and basic laws of the field itself are transformed. This enables emergence: The status quo changes and new ideas come into life rather than producing incremental solutions within the framework of the previous status quo. The self, the group and the field co-evolve. This happened to the hospital group when the principle of integrative medicine became not only an intention but a principle for the organisational and

build design of the hospital. It also happened when all detailed problems of the school development plan rearranged themselves in accordance with the idea of multiprofessional city quarters.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of this paper let me draw some conclusions:

True emergence in contrast to incremental design only comes from the co-creational processes we label as field-process-design, where the whole field shifts through a threshold, a point of crisis and transformation.

If our goal is personal and group behavioural transformation alongside with technological, environmental and social innovation as I stated in the introduction, we have to learn to bring therapeutic and design approaches together. In this way, we can both heal trauma and conflict of the past, and design and build for a positive future.

While design has to learn to face psychic, emotional and spiritual dimensions of the realities it wants to transform and to create, therapy can learn a lot from

creative design, planning and innovation approaches and methodologies in order to draw the healing path of individuals and groups into the future.

In his work "The World as Design" Otl Aicher points out that "the work of the designer, is to bring order to a field of conflicting heterogenic factors". "The world", he claims, "can be understood as design, as a product of a civilisation, as a world made and organised by man. (...) While in science truth is truth to the point where it is falsified, a design is always true, as long as someone takes responsibility for it."

So let us not only take responsibility for our past but also for our future. As we learn how to heal our collective traumas, transform our current situations and co-create our future, we might start using different group-centred approaches to face problems as complex as climate change, poverty or migration.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST!

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