# Visions that change

*Articulating the politics of participatory design*

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# Visions that change. Articulating the Politics of Participatory Design

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# Visions that change. Articulating the Politics of Participatory Design

*In this paper we draw upon the articles included in this special issue to question how to re-politicise co-design and participatory design (PD). Many authors in these fields have recently made a plea to re-engage with 'big issues' as a way to address this concern. At the same time, there is an increased attention into the micro-politics of the relations that are built-in co-design and PD. These two approaches are sometimes presented as working against each other with a de-politicising dynamic as a result. The editorial hypothesis of this issue is that designing visions can turn the tension between addressing the big issues and close attention to the particularity of relations into a motor for re-politicising design. Through engaging with literature, the articles presented in this issue, and two fieldwork cases that explore this dynamic, we discovered that paying careful attention to the activity of designing visions can support re-politicisation. While visions enable us to develop relations with close attention to their politics, building relations supports a more political approach to designing visions on issues. We argue that vision-making can particularly support re-politicisation when it enables the articulation of the political by relating its situated reality to how it unfolds in space and time.*

Keywords: Participatory Design, Politics, Relational Design, Visions

## 1. Two short Stories

In 2017, two of us (Huybrechts and Zuljevic) started working on a long-term project in the city of Genk (BE) titled *WegenWerken* (*RoadWorks*). The project was a case of co-design in the public realm, as we collaborated with different actors in exploring, identifying and activating a neglected infrastructure of slow connections while searching for more sustainable futures for this post-industrial city. In fact, Genk has no historical centre as it developed around several garden cities (termed cités) attached to former mining sites – these cités are somewhat disconnected today due to a large road

infrastructure which is an obstacle to pedestrian, cycling and other types of slow mobility. The issue we were dealing with was the transformation of a car-focused city into a city that prioritises sustainable mobility. We wondered whether slow paths could work as connectors between different parts of the city, while imagining a network of slow mobility that could activate the public space in the city through relations of different inhabitants and sites in Genk.

The project gathered a number of researchers in the fields of participatory design (PD), interaction design, spatial planning and architecture, each collaborating with local actors on a specific slow path in the city, using mapping and PD interventions as their main tools to engage with the micro-context of the respective paths, bottom-up initiatives gathered around them, as well as their history. In addition to this focus on specific sites, we mapped the slow network and explored the roles and relations of specific paths within the large scale of city-making. This was happening as we were simultaneously taking part in international frameworks of design and research projects, such as the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, which gave us an opportunity to continually bring *WegenWerken* into a discussion with other international projects working on sustainable transitions over the course of two years. In all cases, we were displaying one of the results of the codesign activities, a map (figure 1) conveying the vision of a 'slow city' to counterpoint the historical 'car city' that became dominant through the development programs of the 1960s. [Figure 1 near here]

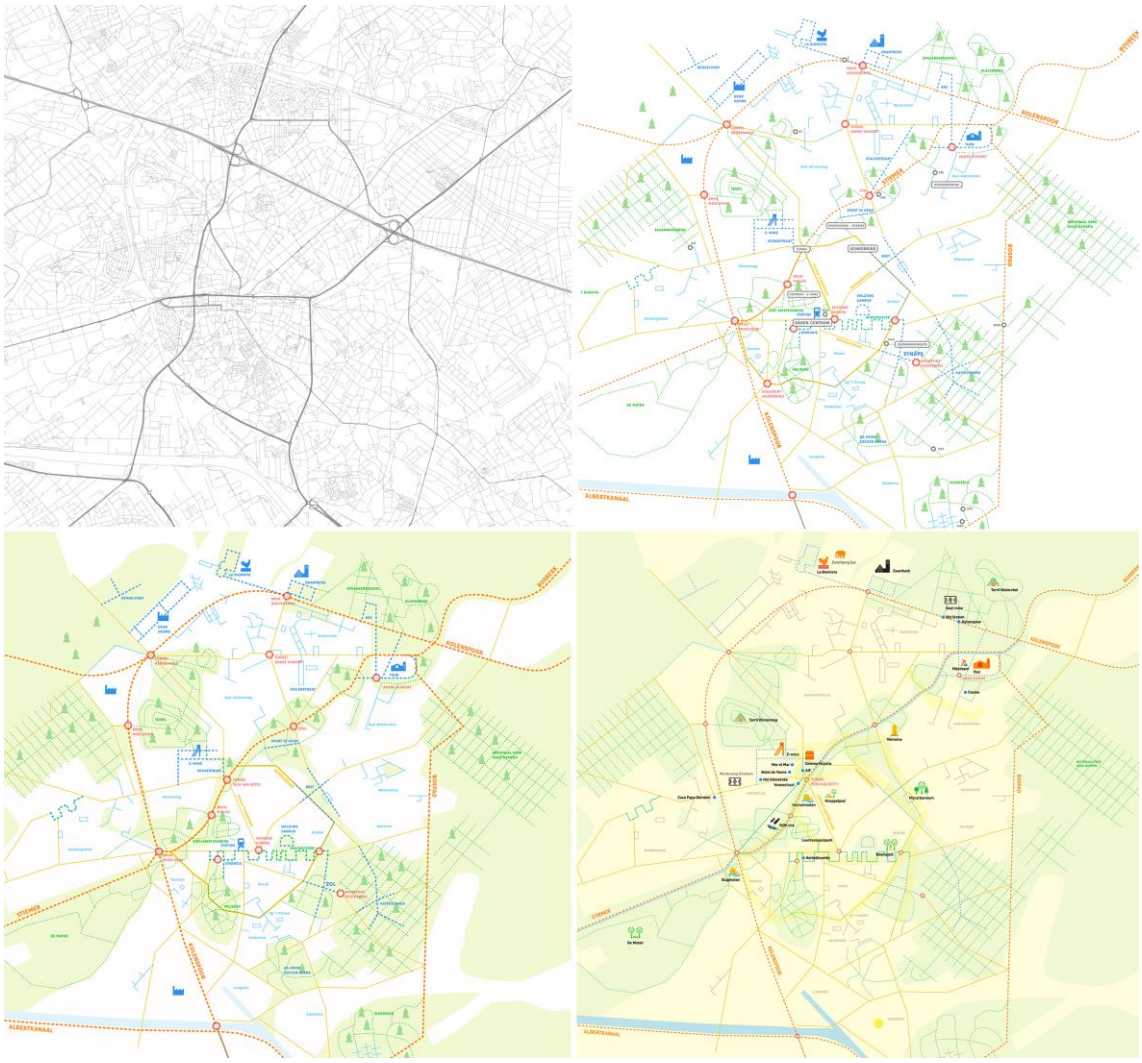

Figure 1. Evolution of the ‘slow city’ in relation to the ‘car city’ image (top left) across project duration.

Later on, the researchers involved in the project relied on the map and the general vision of the ‘slow city’ to develop a proposal of a strategic project that would stimulate the activation of the network of slow paths in Genk. Under the title *GenkerRing*, it focused on activating several existing paths by connecting them to assemble a type of a slow ring road. This ring proposed bridging between different parts of the city by making the central area stronger and claiming more space for a public program. Our proposal was not selected for funding. One of the underlying reasons is that it didn’t articulate its relation towards a previous spatial image for the city of Genk well enough. This was the ‘*raster*

*stad*' or the grid-city image that was already integrated in the planning discourse through a spatial vision previously commissioned by the city of Genk.

*Madeira as a Commons* is part of the PhD research of another author (Bettega) and is currently under way in Madeira, a 250k inhabitants Portuguese island located 800 km west of the Moroccan coast. Its core idea is supporting a group of local people to take advantage of the relatively recent but steadily increasing digital environment. To do that, a PD process has been set up to promote the appropriation of off-the-shelf technologies supporting commoning practices. This goal can be framed in the broader critique of the assumption that the adoption of digital technologies automatically benefits their users (one of the main themes of the so-called 'third-level digital divide'). The big issue the project deals with is that the adoption of digital technologies related to 'platform capitalism' implies several downsides for their users, as well as for the communities they belong to. Supporting the reflection of a scarcely digitised population about what kind of digital tools they can appropriate and accommodate in their life is a contribution to contrast extractive technologies and promote commons-like practices. Reflecting on the results of this kind of process, trying to understand what worked and what did not, constitutes a situated piece in the puzzle of supporting commoning practices.

This process has been designed building on a one-year community study, and one additional year of participatory observation in a local cultural association. The engagement approach to the project was to discover the experiences that are hidden inside people's smartphones, through workshops and digitally-mediated conversations (e.g. Whatsapp groups). The first workshop has already taken place and has been centred on presenting the whole participatory process, as well as introducing the first commoning practice: collaborative mapping. Most of the participants are not very conversant with

digital tools, so the mapping was approached in a tangible way, using printed maps, transparent sheets simulating layers, colours, and stickers (figure 2). [Figure 2 near here]


Figure 2: From collecting and clustering the themes participants wanted to map, through working on specific topics, to overlaying and juxtaposing the layers produced by different groups.

The aim was to open up a conversation on people's interest in performing collaborative mapping on open source tools (e.g. Openstreetmap, Umap or similar) in a successive workshop (still to be held). The option of collaborative mapping was presented based on prior observations, suggesting that often Madeirans seem to underestimate the things/opportunities that are present on the island. Also, mapping gives the possibility to accommodate a large array of interests, as nearly anything can be mapped. In this case, during the workshop, a session was held to collect the themes people were interested in.

It is anticipated that this interest will be central to a second workshop to discuss how the citizens can appropriate mapping technologies to reflect their interests, goals, and values. The goal is to use mapping as a way to collectively reflect on the island and introduce the potential of commoning practices.

## 2. Issues, Relations and Visions

*WegenWerken* and *Madeira as a Commons* are two extremely different design projects: the former carried out by an alliance of multiple researchers aiming at intervening in the spatial configuration of the city in the centre of Europe to contribute to environmental sustainability; the latter conducted by a single researcher working with a small group of people to question the use of technology in an island in the middle of the Atlantic ocean, addressing the issue of platform capitalism. Nevertheless, in both cases, the projects have been relying on maps as a way of visualising the physical and imagined space to which the people involved can relate when addressing big issues that challenge their environments. The maps have been built collaboratively, through co-design processes, as design visions through which potential future approaches to the issues at stake might be articulated.

In this contribution, we particularly want to explore the question of how these kinds of designed visions - in this case in the form of maps - can contribute to the re-politicisation of PD and co-design. Many authors in these fields (e.g. Bödker & Kyng, 2018) have recently made a plea to re-engage with 'big issues' as a way to re-politicise design. At the same time, there is enhanced attention for the micro-politics of the relations that are built-in co-design and PD (e.g. Akama, 2015). While these two approaches both aim for re-politicising PD and co-design, they are sometimes presented as working against each other with a de-politicising dynamic as a result: the attention on the detail obscures the bigger picture and the other way around. Our hypothesis is that designing

‘visions’ can turn the tension between addressing the focus on the big issues and the close attention to the particularity of relations into a dynamic dialogue that can re-politicise design. In what follows we will explore how big issues and relations are addressed in today’s literature (2.1) to then discuss what role the design of visions can play in the interaction between these concepts (2.2). We will then continue with debating how in design practice visions can take shape through relations in space and time (3), to finally discuss visions as design experimentations in re-politicising design (4).

### *2.1 Big Issues and Relations*

The need for re-politicising PD was recently expressed as a concern by Bødker & Kyng (2018) focusing on the scope of PD projects. They argue that there is a tendency towards engaging with an array of ‘small issues’ instead of grappling with the ‘big issues’ of today.

> *“as a focus on small issues (in contrast to big and important ones) such as products and technological solutions that the users like, rather than on solutions that profoundly change their activities as well as the goals they are supported in pursuing. [...] Since PD has expanded its scope of interests and entered new contexts, the relevance of issues seems to diminishing – the battles PD chooses become focused on smaller and smaller causes, while it doesn’t dare to challenge bigger issues, such as participatory platforms for work which operate globally and cause tremendous inequalities and exploitation throughout” (Bødker & Kyng, 2018).*

They wonder how it is that PD experts often don’t take up the need to address these concerns, where the tensions between work, technology and participation seem to be more aligned to founding principles of PD. All this also resonates with what has been discussed in two previous special issues of CoDesign (and at the Participatory Design Conference of 2018). The first one, on Co-Design and the Public Realm (Huybrechts,

Benesch & Geib, 2017), has connected situated projects with wider scale problems. The second one has focused on rethinking participatory and co-design in the age of platform capitalism (Avram et al., 2019). Both special issues, and the one you are reading now, are aiming at reintroducing a discourse connected to the big issues while maintaining the situatedness of design practices.

At the same time, we observe a move away from the big narratives to the enhanced engagement with the messy complexity of relations as re-politicising strategy, which mimics the relational turn in design more generally, as introduced by Bourriaud (2002) and Buchanan (2002), and later acknowledged as a third phase in design history (Blauvelt, 2008). Relational perspectives on designing digital technologies have been adopted more and more often, mainly to account for the social and bodily complex relations in a messy, real-world (Frauenberger, 2019). While PD and co-design have always foregrounded the relation with people and the world; in the early years of PD (late '70s) these relations were more clearly framed within the bigger issues of democracy at work, advocating for better work conditions and environments, together with the unions. Lately, the attention has moved to articulating the ethics and relations themselves in more detailed ways. For example, Carroll and Rosson (2007), DiSalvo (2013) and Dindler and Iversen (2014) discussed the role of professional and personal relations and the importance of strong social networks to keep design processes going. In this issue, Akama and Light (this issue) have made a plea for paying closer attention to the agency of designers in mediating the everyday relational work of PD activities.

### *2.2 Visions*

Some researchers have discussed the shift toward relations in PD as the tendency or turn from politics to ethics (Bodker & Kyng, 2018). However, our experience in *WegenWerken* and *Madeira as a Commons* showed that when visions on the big issues

are kept in the picture in this relational work, politics is back to the centre stage (e.g. Teli, 2015), taking form through continuous and conscious negotiations and shifts in power relations inside and outside the design process (Lyle, Sciannamblo, and Teli, 2018). Indeed, it is not the intense focus on relations or on grand narratives *per se* that lead PD and co-design work away from politics. It is the lack of *"articulation of divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories of future […] possibilities and assemblages"* in engaging with relations or big issues, that has been defined by Swyngedouw (2007) as de-politicisation, or the post-political condition. This is why in this contribution we wish to explicitly investigate designing 'visions' as articulations of these divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories of future urban possibilities and assemblages, as a re-politicising strategy.

As Fry (2015) argues in 'City Futures in the Age of a Changing Climate', we need visions with a future. What *WegenWerken* and *Madeira as a Commons* show is that co-design and PD can produce such visions that support a deeper articulation on those issues relational design processes want to address. However, Mazé reminds us, designed visions can also work against re-politicisation if they do not, like Swyngedouw (2017) importantly, support the disclosure and development of divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories of future possibilities and assemblages. Mazé argues that the position of certain genders, people, and species is often neglected within visions of the future. Designers' visions thus, often lack acknowledgement of the relations with certain actors that are co-produced (or not) with these visions. For Swyngedouw (2007), this is linked to today's post-political organisation of daily life, which is characterised by a neo-liberal governmentality that *"has replaced debate, disagreement and dissensus with a series of technologies of governing that fuse around consensus, agreement, and technocratic management (ibid., np)"*. So, the danger is that many of the tools we as

designers create, such as our designed visions to organise deliberation on issues, are rather technocratic and consensus-oriented than allowing space for politics.

In this paper, our question is how, in PD and co-design, visions can be designed in order to enable re-politicisation, instead of downplaying it. Political questions are not only relevant in relation to the content development of scenarios and visions but also to *"the designed forms of rhetoric through which they are represented, materialized, communicated and deliberated (Mazé, 2019, p. 26)"*. Designs' way of producing visions indeed adds to textual and abstract statements on issues, by making them material and available for empirical experience, public scrutiny, and deliberation (ibid.). Visions can be designed to enable researchers to position themselves in relation to their design goals. The act of positioning is what allows researchers to better frame the relations in the field, promoting change (Teli and Menendez-Blanco, 2018).

All the papers in this special issue contribute to understanding this process of mutual constitution of issues and relations, through visions, although in different ways. If Akama and Light (this issue) look at how adopting an ethics of care in participatory design entails learning practices of relation-making that are deeply embodied in the designer experience, Mamello and colleagues (this issue) show how tackling societal issues together with relevant allies requires appropriate methods to interpret the unfolding of different relations. Moreover, Spiel et al. (this issue) advance a discussion on how the embodied ethics of the designer constantly requires negotiations and judgements, depending on who are the people the designers relate to, adding to the complexity of bringing a vision into practice. Iversen and colleagues (this issue) directly embrace a societal issue, taking education on computing as the subject that requires to be changed, and they show how a well crafted participatory design project advancing a vision of change can succeed in getting the approval of the established powers (the government in

this case). Finally, Kendall and Dearden (this issue) stress how important it is to choose who to work with, as change is already going on, even without the participation of the designer.

> *"Aligning with actors already present and active in the context, who are committed to remaining over the long term, can be a key strategy for sustainability of project outcomes and of PD practices" (Kendall and Dearden, this issue)*

All this happens in a context, the one of co-design relations, in which the designers always need to manage mismatches in the field between relations that are built over time and the micro, meso and macroscales (Akama and Light, this issue). It is in this relational complexity that the issue that needs to be addressed, and the relations capable of addressing that issue, are made, unmade, and remade through designing visions.

## 3. The design dimensions of Visions

Up to now, we have discussed the importance of producing a vision for PD and co-design researchers that want to be faithful to the local unfolding of relations without disconnecting from the 'big issues' of societal relevance. We have also addressed how visions on issues should be understood as both the product, and productive of, relations that encompass humans, non-humans, theories, methods, and so on and so forth. To feed into the re-politicisation of co-design and PD, we want to go a step further and articulate the design parameters we can work with when designing visions that establish a dynamic and re-politicising interrelation between issues and relations. We do this by referring back to Swyngedouw (2007) to address the role of visions in the post-political condition as tools and techniques of power that can obscure conflicts and, thus, depoliticise. In order to challenge this post-political agency of visions, we suggest their re-politicisation by understanding them as articulations of conflicting trajectories that unfold through space

and time.

That is why, besides addressing the main question on who gets to make visions, as a central question that PD challenges through its history, we argue for the need to historicise and spatialise our visions. We explore how visions can, through the relations developed across a longer timeline and beyond the context they are situated in, help reveal the politics of how the issues are framed and discussed in the here and now. The underlying argument for this question is that we believe we need visions, not only with a future, but also ones that can address *"the situated realities of historical and spatial sedimentations of power"* (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 36). On a more operational level, this means that as designers producing visions we should pay attention to two design parameters that support grasping and representing how relations evolve: space and time. We will illustrate these parameters, via our design endeavours of mapping (in) the public realm in both *WegenWerken* and *Madeira as a Commons*.

### *3.1 Relations in Space*

Designed visions on issues that are tangibly co-defined by relations distributed in space can re-politicise PD and co-design. When we zoom out on a map, the complexity of positioning our projects in relation to different countries, continents or Western and non-Western areas become apparent. A geographical location is inevitably interwoven with a disciplines' specific take on big issues, because they are defined by history, language, culture, economy, and social features in general. Our literature review revealed two closely interrelated pitfalls that designers are confronted with when formulating visions: firstly, their visions on big issues are addressed through research with a limited geographical scope, which - secondly - makes it difficult to make the research relevant in building visions that address issues on other scale levels.

First, an often-heard critique is how designers tend to frame their perspective on bigger issues in relation to their immediate geographical context, which is mainly in Western regions, close to better-funded research institutions (Correia, Paredes & Fonseca, 2018). Several scientometric studies on interaction design venues report the disproportion of contributions coming from the US and the UK, followed by some European countries, Oceania and a few far-eastern countries. On top of that, the publishing rate of papers coming from non-Western institutions without Western partners is even smaller and the growing volumes of publications do not seem to increase geographical diversity (Mannocci et al, 2019). Since this asymmetry between Western and non-Western contexts is clearly verified, specific academic communities (e.g. ICT for Development) have started to openly focus on this. What often is more difficult to perceive is that inside the same country, or even inside the very same region, there are specific geographical characteristics that generate very different views on how design practices can contribute to issues. The dichotomy urban-rural is an often neglected distinction in the question of - for instance - how online social systems can address certain issues (see a new special issue on Rural Computing and HCI in TOCHI Su, Hardy, Vigil-Hayes, Veinot & Bardzell, 2020). Scholars operating in the field of sharing economy (Dillahunt et al, 2017), crowdsourcing (Thebault-Spieker, Terveen, & Hecht, 2015) peer production (Johnson et al, 2016), and collective intelligence (Hecht 2017) have expressed the need of extending their investigations to different geographical areas, as in many cases the outcomes would be different. Or, to say it using the words of Hecht (2017), “same system + different geographic context = different result”.

Second, this limited geographical scope of PD and co-design projects, confronts these fields with the problem of ‘scale’ when trying to address big issues with room for debate, disagreement and dissensus through visions (Frauenberger, Foth & Fitzpatrick,

2018). If there have been few projects aiming at working within PD and co-design at a large scale, even supra-national (such as the *Commonfare* project, Teli, Lyle & Sciannamblo, 2018), the majority maintain a more local dimension. Therefore, the problem is how to connect and confront the local dimension with wider, societal, themes. A recent proposal providing an inspiring direction is the discussion by Light and Miskelly (2019) of the concept of meshing. They have studied sharing initiatives, such as food or bike sharing, and how they work in addressing larger-scale issues. The question that the authors pose is how these relations of sharing can be accelerated, but also critically confronted with each other to contribute to the big challenges of today. Instead of aiming for scaling relations, a common approach which can obscure *"the situated realities of historical and spatial sedimentations of power"* (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), Light and Miskelly (2019) look into meshing, the growth of an ecology of mutually-supportive systems that extend beyond local geographical borders. Through meshing, 'relational assets' - social benefits that emerge over time - are generated in particular areas that support each other, which make further initiatives more likely to succeed. Every local bottom-up relational practice can then, from a meshing perspective, be considered as a prototype strengthening community building, and alliance formation through debate, disagreement and dissensus that supports and creates institutions extending their care beyond the local (ibid).

If we refer back to *WegenWerken*, we can observe how maps as visions of a geographical territory can have depoliticising consequences in representing relations in space, especially in terms of their apparent neutrality. As Corner points out (2011, p. 216), they are "highly artificial and fallible constructions" that are mainly used as tools of governing. This is not only the case for territorial mappings, but also in producing maps as visions of how different types of relations in geographical or conceptual space are

organised, since maps as design objects have an agency towards working in reductive and homogenising ways. The map produced in Belgium addressed a sustainable transformation of the city, a vision that is strongly shaped by the position of working in more urbanised parts of the country. However, in a more peripheral context of Genk, with less availability of public transport, the transformation towards cycling culture, especially within a multicultural community, is not self-evident and can be perceived as benefiting only the urban white middle class. In contrast, in the context of Madeira, whose population often does not publicly express a desire of changing things, the apparent neutrality of maps constituted an advantage. In this activity, the perceived neutrality of positioning existing items on the map allowed our participants to produce a collective inventory of what was present, which brought them to recognise what was missing. Therefore, the whole activity enabled participants to express some desires and thoughts about possible changes, a result that other more direct ways of inquiry would have probably not been obtained.

Designers thus need to be careful in how they position their problem statements and visions in relation to specific geographical frameworks. For instance, presenting an image of PD concerned with primarily democratic technological development is respectful to its history, at the same time, it is very much defined from a European perspective. If we take the politics of geography seriously in addressing big issues, these issues themselves need to be co-defined along geographical layers.

### *3.2 Relations in Time*

The design of visions on big issues is also hugely defined by relations that are developed over time and that can be in disagreement or in mutually oppressive relations with each other. As Otto (2016) argues, designs of future visions entail designs of corresponding past, while both the visions of the future and the past create subject positions that enable

people to act as agents in a process of change. There are two closely intertwined aspects that designers can take into account when designing visions over time: firstly, developing articulated relations to the historical context of how disciplines deal with certain issues and, secondly, building relations beyond the here and now.

First, PD researchers are concerned that many PD projects focus on problems without taking into account the disciplinary history in addressing bigger issues, such as PD's traditional and ongoing attention to the conditions of labour and the need for addressing its transformation (Teli, 2015; Huybrechts, Tassinari, Roosen & Constantinescu, 2018). This preoccupation is shared in the wider debate in the field, as Dilnot writes about how today in design research *"the capabilities of design are understood essentially ahistorically*" (Dilnot, 2015, p. 151), and design problems are seen often outside of their historical context. He puts forward the call to historicise design, so as to mediate temporally, between the *"inherited pasts and the futures to come" (Ibid, p. 154).* In PD, Bødker & Kyng (2018) reflect on this too:

> *"We are critical of current literature in (and around) PD which seems to focus on how researchers set up here-and-now co-creation and collaboration with groups of people for a here-and-now purpose (e.g., making) without much perspective on the future (or for that matter for the past) (...) In contrast, bottom-up, ad-hoc here-and-now activities dominate." (ibid, 2018, p. 6).*

The possibility of re-politicising the process of designing visions by enhancing historical awareness, as well as knowledge of previous actions undertaken in the field became clear in *WegenWerken,* where the relation to a historical spatial vision was not articulated enough in our map on sustainable mobility. Further, the critique on the lack of historical awareness also relates to the design process itself: the contextual history of where a situated design process takes place. Huybrechts, Hendriks & Martens (2017) have written about how the past is often neglected or presented as linear in design, and stressed

the importance of consciously dealing with relations in the past that can be in disagreement with each other, as a resource in the present of design processes linking towards pluralistic futures.

That visions are nurtured by situated relations that are not only produced in the here and now, became clear both in the *WegenWerken* and the *Madeira* case. In *WegenWerken*, the car-city heritage strongly dominates the landscape of Genk both materially and mentally. To counter this heritage, the mental image of *WegenWerken* represented official and community-relevant historical landscape that could challenge the car-city image. The map conveyed a 'slow city' vision in a narrative way by anchoring it in a neglected historical context by collecting oral history of the city and articulating soft connections as an infrastructure of public history. In Madeira, among others, the choice for the particular mapping approach was rooted in two key historical elements: the presence of African slaves in the sugar-cane fields up to the 17th century and 43 years of conservative government, 36 of which with the same president. These elements reflect in the high level of socio-economic inequality, in the hierarchic structure of local society, as well as in a certain cultural stagnation. This context makes it difficult for people to express their desires and aspirations, and thus required an 'easy to do' low-tech mapping approach that made the step to visualise a collective expression as a more historically aware strategy.

Designing visions thus entails doing design work across a pluriversal time perspective. It can suggest directions for the skilful observing, tracing and making visible the already existing paths that condition the vision-making, which makes the exploration of relations across a historical timeline possible.

## 4. Articulating Visions that change

This article started with articulating the need, as formulated by Huybrechts, Benesch &

Geib (2017), Frauenberger et al. (2018), or Teli, Di Fiore & D'Andrea (2017), for orienting future design efforts away from depoliticisation and towards a more active pursuit of targeting change on the level of big issues, such as work organisation, community institutions, or climate change. We argued that, in order to deal with societal challenges, co-design needs to engage more explicitly with the production of visions on these issues. We found that, in order to have a re-politicising agency, these visions need to originate in and support travel through the messy complexities of participatory processes in space and time. The aim of the article was to explore more concretely how these visions on the big issues are produced through design, while avoiding the homogenisation of the rich bodily complexity of PD as relational process made of disagreement, dissensus and debate. We propose to define this search for re-politicising PD and co-design as design experimentations, as foreseen by Binder et al. (2015), with ways in which we can mutually and materially articulate visions of change in relation to big issues through time and space. We will conclude this article with discussing the design of visions that enable re-politicisation of PD and co-design as design experimentations with political articulation through visions, which function as intermediary objects that are intended to change.

Our fieldwork showed how the conscious design of visions requires continuous designerly experimentation on how to deal with the politics of representing relations on the level of space (geographical and scale-specific) and time (disciplinary and case-specific time). To further consider how this can be done, we propose vision-making as a political act that deliberately provides space for aesthetic qualities to be negotiated over time in relation with different actors and communities. Accordingly, how the vision as an image evolves can be seen as a process of ***political articulation*** in itself, and a continuous endeavour of designerly arguing and argumenting for it to be more clear or acceptable to,

but also debatable by other people. Articulating a vision politically is, thus, not only a matter of questioning through design who, what, and how should be represented across space and time, it is also a process of experimenting with an aesthetic language to discover how, when and where people become attached to a vision. This process entails gaining more grounding and influence by aligning with the aesthetic expectations of what a vision could be for different people. In *WegenWerken*, this was achieved by maintaining the iconic capabilities of a 'slow city' image through a clear articulation of the network and its different elements, while placing this image within different spatial and temporal contexts. Iterations entailed emphasising the green quality or integrating the historical layer, in argumenting our case with the actors working on heritage tourism and nature conservation. In *Madeira as a Commons*, this effort has been mainly directed to aligning the maps and workshop materials to the aesthetics of the hosting association, while at the same time maintaining the affordances needed for the activities. Unusual and colourful maps were used to convey a playful feeling typical of the association. At the same time, the need of layering transparent plastic sheets on top of the maps, to allow the juxtaposition of contributions did not correspond to the ecological aims of the association.

While consistent with Mazé's argument for the visions to be material and available for public deliberation, we understand a vision as an ***intermediary,*** and not a finalised design artifact. It can, while maintaining the iconic capabilities of speaking clearly about an issue (e.g. climate crisis) - also retain the possibilities of adapting and adding new layers so it can speak to different relations that are developed in space and time. Via its qualities as intermediary artifact any materialisation needs to be sensitive in mediating between big issues and different particular interests. For many designers this entails designing more modest representations than they are used to, without too grand ambitions that overestimate the power of design to change the world. In the context of

PD that has always embraced design work as mediation, it is often the reverse: the vision as intermediary artefact can enable a stronger development of articulated and clear intentions.

As a final reflection, we would like to state that in its quality of being an intermediary artefact that enables political articulation, a ***vision*** that aims to re-politicise PD and co-design ***intends to change*** (a vision with a future as Fry, 2015, has put it). Bodker and Kyng challenged us as PD and co-design researchers to engage again with big issues in line with the tradition of PD that took work as a topic and aimed for countering managerial goals. The call for papers of the Participatory Design Conference 2018 and many of the papers presented there, including the work that forms this special issue, articulated visions on what constitutes politics and big issues in PD and co-design today. However, in order for these visions to have re-politicising qualities, the relations they produce, and how they were produced, in time (with their disciplinary history) and space (the geographical relations they have developed) need to be articulated. This special issue can thus be considered an open and modest invitation for more articulation by and debate between PD and co-designers of the visions on issues we aim to work on and what changes them over time.

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