

PDC2018 Workshop: Codesigning with public partners: controversies and agonism

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Helping municipality employees to get ready for a role as co-designer

Worldwide, municipalities are taking responsibility to spark green transition, when national governments hesitate. In this context co-creation is seen by politicians and administrative leaders as an attractive strategy. The EU has taken up to support the co-creation wave. As Benedict Wauters, the ESF Transnational Platform's expert on governance and public administration, explained in 2016: 'The principle of co-creation is the process of creating new public policies and services *with* people and not *for* them'¹. From the point of view of municipality employee front personal, co-creation however, implies a new professional role: While traditionally municipality employees who have direct citizen contact, work *for* citizens and *for* the implementation of laws and regulations, co-creation demand that they create new ways *together with* citizens. This was more or less how Participatory Design began in relation to Human Computer Interaction: as a change in professional role from designing *for* users to designing *with* users.

This position paper deals with findings from an EU Interreg project 'SAGROM'² (2016-2018), a collaboration between two Danish and two Swedish municipalities aiming to develop methods and tools that can engage and motivate citizens' green transition choices through co-creation. To reach such goals the municipality employees must act as key players initiating these new forms of citizen engagement. Each participating municipality work on a green transition co-creation case, and through joint physical seminars, workshops and monthly skype meetings, the partners keep each other updated on the progress and difficulties. We, a group of colleagues from Dept. of Communication at Aalborg University are following the progress from a communication point of view. In our capacity as supporting researchers we have together with the municipality partners reflected upon their struggle to conceptualize their new role. We know from PD research, that in order to facilitate co-creation, it has proven vital to find ways that can support the co-existence of heterogeneity and conflict of interest between different groups of stakeholders in co-creative initiatives (Bannon & Ehn, 2012; Ehn, 2008). We have found an additional need to support and make explicit for attention the heterogeneity and conflicts of interests that is experienced locally among and between those municipality employees who are expected to be driving these new forms of co-creative initiatives with citizens.

Especially one workshop in SAGROM has been designed to help the municipality employees to make their role-shift to co-creators explicit to themselves and each other. In this workshop we provided four groups of municipality employees with a tangible tool called '3P': Positions, Perspectives and Priorities' (Andersen, 2016). 3P is designed to support the creation of 'third space' encounters between multiple voices (Bhabha, 2004). "Third space" is a well researched concept within PD (Muller & Druin, 2012). Third space theory regards difference as a constructive and generative force ideally allowing assumptions and differences to be open to question, reinterpretation, refutation and negotiation precisely because of the meeting of differences. Furthermore, the 3P tool is theoretically and conceptually inspired by the positions of dialectic communication and agonist pluralism (Sennett, 2012; Mouffe, 2000). The material form of the 3P tool is designed to handle as well as display opposing conceptualizations of central dilemmas in what Andersen (2016) have called 'versus-positions', which offers a constructive way to assist participants in 'staying with the trouble' - as Haraway (2014) puts it - by making them available for explicit attention and triggers for negotiation. Often in collaborative endeavours when opposing views meet, participants tend to either pursue the conflict into a power struggle or just acknowledge the difference and move on. Listening and inviting each other into a co-examination of underlying premises is rare (Dewey, 1983), and therefor has to be supported methodologically. The 3P communication tool works with two formats: 1) Narratives re-presenting opposing positions and internal controversies on the various municipality partner's roles, knowledge and approaches towards co-creation identified from former SAGROM partner meetings and workshops as well as a literature review on public co-creation reported in (Agger & Tortzen, 2015), 2) colour coded bricks and a game board, offering a visual scaffold for negotiating and making explicit contradicting and conflicting interests and values.

The outcome of this SAGROM workshop showed that even though the 3P tool is designed to focus on constraints, the participants of the SAGROM professional role workshop - after acknowledging controversies - moved into a rather consensus seeking discussion. The four groups ended out independently with a consensus perspective favouring a "citizen-oriented perspective" over a 'municipality-oriented' approach, meaning that they did not find much value in their current role as municipality employees as authorities and professional experts. Instead they favoured a yet non-existing professional role as initiators of innovation, favouring citizens' situated knowledge and an "ideal" democratic approach

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/content/three-essential-steps-co-creation>

² <http://sagrom.com>

to citizen engagement – thereby downplaying the complexity in current and future roles, despite this was laid out by the tool. However, at the same time findings show that using 3P made the actors address and conceptualize their professional role related to co-creating initiatives. In specific, as reported in (Horsbøl, 2018) the use of the 3P tool lead to a much more distinctive stance on professional positions related to co-creative initiatives than had been the case in other more open-ended workshop initiatives in the SAGROM project. Furthermore, the tool assisted the partners in moving from an identification of common challenges to responding to these by starting to select overall directions for future actions related to their own cases. In this case of municipality employees-citizen co-creation, we find that making the municipality employees reflect on possibilities and challenges involved in their role-shift to co-creators is a necessary first step in leading co-creative processes.

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