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Dissent & Design

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1. Catalyst Information

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2. Conversation Description

Can an adversarial design approach help to foster public political actions in the refugee crises? How can policy makers by means of adversarial design be supported in mapping out the conflicting visions of all stakeholders involved and how is this helpful in the decision making process?

During this conversation we will explore the role of design mapping out conflicting ideas and opinions around the refugee crisis. Following the agonistic philosophy of Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe we will encourage contestation and dare our participants to relate to one another as adversaries, explore what they disagree on, instead of looking for their common interest.

According to DiSalvo, adversarial design can give literary form to problematic situations which makes them less vague or confusing. He sees it as a form of inquiry; as a process of skilled examination and reconstruction that renders problematic situations sens-able (p.

116) and even thinks that through this practice, adversarial design could become a new way of fostering public political action (p.123).

During the conversation we will explore how adversarial design can be meaningful in the current complex debates around the refugees.

2. Context of Conversation Topic

Due to shifting responsibilities in policy making and the thriving "do-democracy" many governments struggle with how to engage and involve often conflicting ideas and activities of pro-active citizens, entrepreneurs, lobbyist and knowledge institutes. The tools and practices of policymakers have not kept sufficiently abreast of the current societal development (Bason, 2014).

More and more the collaborative practice of design is being looked upon by governments in order to deal with multi-stakeholder policies. In Design for Policy, Bason explores how design can be helpful in finding new means to engage various stakeholders in the policy making process. Design provides highly concrete research tools that can help to define and better understand the root causes of problems (Mulgan 2014). Besides, designers offer various means to stimulate a wide variety of views and are able to synthesize and express these in tangible ways. In short design strategies and techniques might be very helpful to deal with the decision making process in a multiple-helix society.

However, according to philosopher Chantal Mouffe, we are striving for pluralism that we know can never be achieved (*The paradox of Democracy* (Mouffe 2000, p.15-16). Consensus is always impossible, because exclusion serves as the very possibility of consensus. Mouffe argues for an agonistic approach to democracy and encourages contestation. Citizens ought to relate to one another as adversaries, explore what they disagree on, instead of looking for their common interest.

Also De Angelis (2007) stresses that we might be looking too much at the commons today thought as the basis on which to build social justice, environmental sustainability and a good life for all. But in a world driven by capital's priorities there are also sites of struggle that we shouldn't overlook. How can design play a role in this? Whilst there has been a substantial amount of literature written about political agonism as a theory, there are surprisingly little attempts to apply these theoretical assumptions to empirical case studies (Harvey, 2012).

The role of design in making space for contestation has been deeply explored by Carl DiSalvo (2012) who introduced adversarial design as a way to talk about design doing the work of agonism through the conceptualization and making of products and services and our experiences with them. DiSalvo distinguished design for politics where design is applied to politics and supports and improves the mechanism and procedures of governances, from political design that is implicitly contestation and strives to investigate an issue and raise questions concerning that issue. Where design for politics is a field that is now widely being

explored (Bason, 2014), political design might be a direction that we need to push forward more especially when facing complex issues such as the current refugee crisis in Europe.

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Our overarching research question for this conversation is: can an adversarial design approach help to foster public political actions in the refugee crises? How can adversarial design help to give form to the problematic situation that refugees are facing, especially looking into the complex (and lengthy) decision making process? How can policy makers by means of adversarial design be supported in mapping out the conflicting visions of all stakeholders involved and how is this helpful in the decision making process?

Set-up for the session

DiSalvo outlines 3 tactics for an adversarial design process; revealing hegemony, reconfiguring the remainder and articulating agonistic collectives. These tactics as well as techniques from other frameworks, such as Kees Dorst Frame Innovation (2015), will be used to support this session.

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In this conversation we would like look into two recent policy debates around the refugee situation in Utrecht and Eindhoven, the 4rd and 5th city of the Netherlands.

The session starts with a plenary explanation of the case by watching a ten minute video compilation on recent refugee debates in the city of Utrecht and Eindhoven (the conversations are in Dutch but will be translated into English for this conversation session). After this viewing, the audience will be divided into 3 subgroup moderated by one of the 3 main catalysts and others whose participation we are still discussing. Each group starts with identifying the patterns of power and influence in this debate. After that the various groups will map out the stakeholders who according to them are privileged and identify those that are excluded from the discussion. Based on this we will challenge these structures and explore alternatives by means of designing a prototype for an adversarial design. These adversarials will be plenary discussed where we will explore how they can support policy makers in mapping out conflicting visions of all stakeholders involved and how this is helpful in the decision making process.

Type of space and equipment required

This session will take in an open space, where the participants can be divided in 3 subgroups moderated by one of our catalysts. We need a beamer and a projection wall/ screen and 3 flip-overs. We will bring materials for the prototyping of the adversarials.

Dissemination strategy

The adversarial outcomes of these sessions, will be displayed at the various public meeting spaces (lunch rooms, entrance, coffee corners) of the DRS, where they will serve as conversation pieces around the refugee situation (which is supposed to be at that time still a very hot political topic). DRS participants will be asked, by means of our hash tag #dissentanddesign to give feedback on these adversarial design and by means of triggering questions we will try to gather (possibly conflicting) opinions. These opinions will be mapped and published at the end of the conference.

Besides the adversarial designs and the 'map of various opinions they opened up' will be communicated via the various participating organisations represented by the catalysts; Design Academy Eindhoven, Eindhoven University of Technology and the City of Eindhoven. Finally these will be used as input for a summit and exhibition around Design & Democracy in October, during the Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

Finally the adversarial outcomes will be a case study for the PhD research of Danielle Arets around the role of adversarial design in complex policy conversations.

7. References

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About the Catalysts:

Danielle Arets is Associate Reader Strategic Creativity at Design Academy Eindhoven. She explores the role of designing & dissent for her PhD research at University of Technology Eindhoven

Bas Raijmakers is Reader Strategic Creativity Design Academy Eindhoven & creative director of design research consultancy STBY. Bas used design research to support the province of Brabant to develop policy in new ways and introduced design as an approach to several councils in the Netherlands and the UK as a way to engage

citizens in new ways for solving problems, exploring futures and creating public environments.

Vera Winthagen first in house designer' at the City of Eindhoven building on design strategies for policy makers.