Mobility, Mood and Place: The A-Z of Co-Design

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Co-design, or participatory design, is about the meaningful involvement of end users in the design process. By taking account of a wider range of perspectives and experiences, we can design more inclusive - more innovative - solutions, products and services that are better suited to users' needs.

Presented in bite-sized form, this A-Z explores the origins and background of participatory design. It looks at the practical methods and techniques you can use in a participatory design project, and at the key roles, principles, and issues these projects entail. It explores topics you might be familiar with and others which might be completely new.

Many of the hints and tips are based on our own experiences of delivering co-design, a rich, varied programme of co-design activities as part of the three-year research project, Mobility, Mood and Place. Bringing together architecture and landscape architecture students and older adults, we investigated how we can design environments that are enjoyable to be in, and easy to move around, as we age.

We’ve combined insights from this work with those of experts from a range of fields - from planning to design, geography to health, sociology to gerontology. Extensively referenced, we hope you will find this handy, practical guide both supportive and inspirational in your future participatory design endeavours.

References & further reading:


The Centre for Accessible Environments truly welcomes this engaging tool which will help us all to use participatory design as the norm. We hope to see it storming walls everywhere!"
FEEDBACK AND FEEDFORWARD

In its design project, feedback is where outcomes inform information management plan before any design activities begin, while developing a clear set of questions to ‘ask’ of the users to become engaged design decision-makers. Importantly, the design of the feedback and feedforward is iterative to participatory design.


GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a tool used, analyse and visualize spatial information so as to determine patterns and relationships that can inform decision-making (Lam and Sayers, 2002). Spatial data for GIS is commonly collected from historical paper maps and satellites, and combined with many sources of information (Hasking and Sin, 2008). The power of a GIS is that it combines multiple layers of spatial data from various sources. GIS enables the programmer to continuously improve the type, resolution and variety of the image and the data we are comfortable with. Either way, GIS is a form of participatory framework in which the user is allowed to access to the method, a form of ‘participatory GIS’ (PGIS) has been developed which is “context and action related rather than technology-led and seeks to emphasise community involvement in the decision process and use of geographical information” (Ezubiu, 2007: 611).


MAP

Community mapping entails the production of a spatial map in collaboration with members of a community, often through the use of storytelling, knowledge and resources (Rambaldi et al., 2006). Taking into account diverse information, community maps may be constructed using multiple tools and techniques, from simple paper and pen, through four-square, online mapping of GIS (Geographic Information System). The process of community mapping is not a linear process and can be incorporated into the co-design process. Community mapping can be used with other participatory techniques, such as photovoice and interviews. This can be used as an entry point to any participatory design process, since the number of participants tends to decrease as the process reaches completion.


REPEAT

Repetition is a principle for improving participatory design processes and protocols. Learning to do it can lead to big improvements. Although the best way to do it is still not entirely clear, it can be improved by knowing how to manipulate cycle and repetition. Matters such as the duration of any participatory activity plus the frequency and number of community mapping, facilitators, can be altered through repetition. Repetition the second, third, and fourth time, however, to produce different outcomes since all are different.


RESEARCH

Photovoice is a community-based, participatory research method valued for uncovering rich, first-person descriptive data. Further, it is used for users to validate, and maintain their participation, through enabling the researcher to view photos of the environment. They allow for richer and potentially more meaningful data that can be used to inform decision-makers. They elicit people’s opinions in such a way that others don’t feel intimidated by the other’s ideas (Krug and Casey, 2003). Photovoice is a participatory method for generating new and exciting ideas for design.


XPERIENCE

The term experience or related experience within a participatory design process will inform the type of participatory activities that can be used in a participatory design process. The term experience or related experience within a participatory design process can be used to inform participatory design activities that can be used in a participatory design process. The term experience or related experience within a participatory design process can be used to inform participatory design activities that can be used in a participatory design process.