

ACD- Conversation Lab 5

Tensions and Decision-making

This Lab looked at difficult experiences during co-design projects, and practical tools and strategies to help. The following themes emerged from the conversations.

What tensions or conflicts have you experienced in the co-design process?

1. Communication

- Louder voices in the process can be more authoritative according to their role in the process or the area of expertise. Authorities (such as councils, funders etc) can apply pressure and restrictions, and not give the freedom for design and reflection to take place.
- The community can feel left behind, and as a consequence there is little trust and they create a 'disappointment barrier'. As a result, they might not be fully engaged, or require evidence that their voices will be heard or taken into consideration in the process. It is essential to make clear to all stakeholders what impact their comments will have.

2. Knowledge

- At the very beginning of the process, set out the roles of each actor and what are the priorities or the purpose of this process.
- A lot of information needs to be gathered - how do we use this knowledge and experience at the right time of the process to get the optimum results? Avoid jumping into assumptions or details quickly without gathering enough data and information. Breaking down to details too early can lead to inappropriate justification of actions.

3. Value

- How can voices be heard across the participants, without having louder voices dominate?
- Uncover what the project means to the local community, and give enough and equal opportunities for all voices to be heard without tension and conflict.
- Proving community value enables budget justification, and can help identify priorities.

What are the tools that can resolve those tensions and conflicts?

1. Best-place practice

Reference points to evaluate success from other projects' success

2. Independent Advisor

Someone working independently to assess and evaluate the process and give feedback without bias

3. Communication methods

Common ground to let all participants and actors see the same information

Flexibility to allow others to participate and express themselves

Fluidity, not rigidity, in the process

4. Enough evidence for justification

Evidence of clear reasoning and group participation, to avoid egocentric or minority decision making

5. Different perspectives

Thinking from others' perspectives

Creative approaches e.g. linking people with nature to have a different perspective of others' role in the process

Empathy devices

Core values, looking at power dynamics

'What you took from today's session'

1. Empathy, and the role of nature - imagine yourself in another's position, eg another stakeholder or a bee
2. The vital role of commonality and building empathy
3. Work out balances of power upfront, and then revisiting them through the process
4. Establish from the start how decisions are made - eg informal creation and signing of a participation 'contract'. If things go wrong, participants can be reminded of the original agreement, so sessions can be more relaxed
5. When co-designers are involved from the beginning, parameters can be established early on, making for better relations down the line
6. Find common ground within a group
7. Recognising that the process takes time - give it time and respect it deserves, manage expectations
8. Power dynamics need to be clearly set out

Resources

Free social technology for effective collaboration: sociocracy30.org

Evaluation methods:

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental_evaluation

Methods and principles for better human connection online and physically:

<https://www.deepr.cc/framework>

Microsoft inclusive design principles: www.microsoft.com/design/inclusive