

From engaging to empowering people: a set of co-design experiments with a service design perspective¹.

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Abstract

The authors draw a parallel between a set of fast co-design activities within an action research called 'Ideas Sharing stall', and a series of systematic co-design sessions in the framework of the 'Creative Citizens' project. The two experimentations result from a renewed activism on the part of city dwellers, which can be currently observed in the city of Milan.

Both the research projects move in the field of service design for social innovation adopting a participatory approach known as community centred design.

The paper describes the work done in the two contexts discussing their purposes and tools and outlining two formats of intervention for co-designing services with citizen participation. The first model relates to people's engagement, while the second is more linked to their empowerment. Thus the discussion focuses on the relation between them, highlighting the role and form of service designer action in the shift from engaging to empowering people in enhancing social innovation.

In conclusion the importance of service designers collaborating with other local actors in the project development is underlined, suggesting they be seen not so much as facilitators but as vision bearers, triggering, inspiring and leading the community centred design process.

1 Service Design for Social Innovation

1.1 Collaborative Services and the City

In recent years cities have been undergoing a profound transformation, characterized by a new wave of activism on the part of their citizens, who are seeking to improve the quality of their urban life and determine the identity of the spaces they live in.

Cities are now sites of resistance and contestation (Short, 2006), but at the same time they are places of experimentation, where people are starting to innovate what is already there without waiting for the arrival of a bigger, top-down change. This is why citizens are the protagonists of

¹ This paper is the result of collective work, but for the purposes of this paper D. Selloni has written paragraphs 1.1; 2.2; 4; 5.2; D. Cantù has written paragraphs 1.2; 2; 2.1; 3; 5.1

a new innovation age that is witnessing the birth of Creative Communities: "people who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living" (Meroni, 2007, p.30).

Many of these solutions deal with designing services, because it is especially within cities that the growth of the service sector is evident: cities are places where it is necessary to provide and benefit from services, where mature economies have rapidly shifted from manufacturing to service-based economies (Kim & Short, 2008).

Confronted with a lack of services inside a city, what is now happening is that local communities are seeking to solve the problem from the bottom up, in unprecedented ways, generating original cases of social innovation.

The relationship between services, social innovation and the city is at once both a simple and a complex one: Creative Communities are an original outcome of cities because they are born and develop more quickly in contexts characterized by diffused knowledge, a high level of connectivity, and a certain degree of tolerance towards non-conventional ways of living (Manzini & Jégou, 2008). They have found less costly solutions to their needs through new forms of sharing and self-production, originating a new generation of services, known as Collaborative Services. These are "services where the end-users are actively involved and assume the role of service co-designers and co-producers" (Manzini & Jégou, 2008, p.32). The end-users are the same citizens who are participating in the new wave of urban activism. They are real "service thinkers and makers" (Selloni, 2013) who are contributing to building systems of sustainable development, or, as Manzini and Jégou (2003) suggest, a body of products, services and knowledge that enable us to live better together, consuming less and regenerating the quality of the contexts in which they are used.

Collaborative services have taken a less pioneering shape in recent years as part of the collaborative consumption that Botsman and Rogers (2011) have described as traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping redefined by new technologies and peer communities.

All these elements contribute to shaping a form of social innovation in which citizens become designers of their daily lives, co-designing services and developing them using existing assets and resources.

As service designers and researchers in the field of design for social innovation, we are especially interested in investigating how this process could be enhanced, what kind of intervention format could foster it and what the role of the professional designer is within these dynamics in order that an initially informal initiative may develop into a real service, eventually to be scaled-up. This also implies using design methods and tools to explore the shift from engaging to empowering people.

1.2 Participatory Design, Community Centred Design and Co-design

Co-design, co-creation and co-production are buzzwords that refer to the inclusion of users and producers of products and services in their creation. Even though some distinctions have been made (e.g. Sanders, Stappers, 2008) in an attempt to give them different connotations, they are generally defined as broad terms potentially covering activities carried out at different stages of the project development and involving people with various degree of participation.

From a service design perspective we look at these collaborative activities framed into a process that moves from the definition of a service idea - the concept, continues with its implementation together with the stakeholders, and concludes with the service ready to be used. In order to develop this process, the methodology we adopt in our research activities pertains to Participatory Design (PD) as defined by the Scandinavian school (Ehn, 2008; Bjögvinsson, Ehn & Hillgren 2010; Emilson, Serravalli & Hillgren 2011). The authors look at PD as a movement “from designing “things” (objects) to designing Things (socio-material assemblies)” and they argue that “this movement involves not only the challenges of engaging stakeholders as designers in the design process, as in “traditional” Participatory Design (i.e., envisioning “use before actual use,” for example, through prototyping), but also the challenges of designing beyond the specific project and toward future stakeholders as designers (in other words, supporting ways to “design after design”, i.e. after the conclusion of the design process for the specific project). And they see this movement “as one from “projecting” to one of “infrastructuring” design activities” (Bjögvinsson, Ehn & Hillgren 2012, p.102).

This means that the work of professional designers in this process ranges from engaging non-professional designers in envisioning and co-designing future service ideas, to involving potential stakeholders in the process, aligning their interests and empowering them to create self-sustainable services after the end of the design project.

In this framework, co-design is meant as just one of the strategies adopted to increase effectiveness in supporting social innovation. In fact others are used in parallel, such as some forms of ethnographic research and observation in the first stages and alignment of the interest of different stakeholders, depending on the opportunities emerging during the service implementation.

When designers work with a well defined group of people behaving as a community, with common values and a shared vision, PD assumes a specific connotation strictly linked to social innovation: in our research activities we call this methodology Community Centred Design (CCD).

Looking at the work of our research group, Polimi DESIS Lab, design for social innovation is mainly carried out within this framework.

Meroni refers to design focusing on creative communities as CCD, “where understanding values and behaviours and collaborating with the most active social communities in conceiving and developing solutions [...] is the distinctive work of the designer” (Manzini & Meroni, 2012).

This approach moves from looking at social innovation as a driver towards solving emerging social issues, and at creative communities and collaborative organizations as prototypes of new and sustainable ways of living. These ‘prototypes’ could be scaled-up and become models for new behaviours in a sustainable society. CCD is the approach guiding design actions to support these groups of people.

CCD does not focus on the user (user-centred design) but on the community as the enabler of local change, as a resource to be valorised and from which to learn. In this perspective two main competences are required from the designer working with this approach: on one hand, the ability to gain knowledge about the community by field immersion and the development of an empathetic relation with the people; on the other hand, ability to use design knowledge to design *with* and *for* the community, developing specific tools to enable them to co-design solutions to their own needs.

In this paper we focus especially on co-design activities as a peculiar work of designers and researchers working for social innovation. We call them “experiments” for their experimental nature and uncertain results. In fact the aim of the research activities described in the following paragraphs is to understand how service design can foster social innovation by developing a set of participatory and community centred activities in a defined context. More specifically what we are investigating in our research is how a set of co-design experiments could foster the growth of a new generation of services enhancing social innovation.

2 Two sets of experiments with local communities

The research activities presented here enhance understanding of the way designers can work with small groups of citizens, what we called creative communities, and foster their participation in the process of service design.

In order to provide a tentative answer to the research question, we present two research activities consisting of a set of co-design experiments involving citizens in the design of collaborative services. After the description of the activities the two are compared to highlight similarities and differences and to define two formats of design intervention. The two sets of experiments are conducted within two frameworks: the *Ideas Sharing Stall* and *Creative Citizens*, both aiming at engaging and empowering people in creating innovative services in their neighbourhood and the city as a whole. The two experimentations use different intervention formats but share the same co-design techniques and community centred design approach.

2.1 Ideas Sharing Stall

The Ideas Sharing Stall (ISS) is an initiative conducted at the Earth Market, the first farmers’ market on public land in the city of Milan. It consists of a set of co-design sessions taking place within a stall space, during the monthly market.

This initiative, born within the framework project “Feeding Milan. Energies for Change” (www.nutrimilano.it), promoted by Slow Food, the Politecnico di Milano-Design department and the University of Gastronomic Science, aimed to reshape the way the city feeds itself by creating short food supply-chain services and shared infrastructures connecting the periurban area of the Agricultural Park South Milan with the city. In this multi-annual project the Ideas Sharing Stall activities were conducted intensively for 1 year, from September 2010 to July 2011. Then, during 2012, due to the temporary interruption of the Earth Market, occasional sessions were held in different locations such as Fa la Cosa Giusta fair, Terra Madre Lombardia, an event organized by the Slow food association, and Cascina Cuccagna, the future space of CC. Currently, co-design sessions are held from time to time in the Earth Market’s new city location.

The idea of the ISS was to have a physical space in which to make contact with the potential users of the services to be developed, co-creating, prototyping and testing ideas before their real implementation. The place selected, the farmers’ market, is the first service launched by the Nutrire Milano project. It is characterized by the presence of a mix of services and functions besides the selling of produce (e.g. taste workshops, education activities, street food catering, etc.). For this reason it offers the opportunity to get in contact with a huge variety of

local stakeholders, the producers from the periurban area, and people attending the market, including ordinary citizens, local representatives, associations, retailers, the Slow Food community and even politicians during their campaign. This human richness and multi-functionality of purpose (Cantù, 2012) created a good environment for co-designing for social innovation.

The co-design activities, carried out during more than one year of experimentation, were thematically oriented, dealing with services and systems related to local food production and consumption, but varying in typology: some of them working on the co-design of new service concepts and others aimed at testing and evaluating new functions for already existing services and organizations. An example from the first group is the “Farmers’ box”, where an idea for a food-box delivery scheme was presented at the ISS using a mockup of the box and a visual questionnaire. People passing by the stall were asked if they were willing to use that kind of solution and if they would help in defining the service features that best suited their needs. Another example was to discuss and design with the producers 3 collaborative service ideas to be developed on the Nutrire Milano digital platform. In this case, the activity was supported by draft visualizations of the platform’s screenshots, including questions on the contents and possible forms of collaboration. By contrast, an example from the second session typology was inviting Milanese associations to hold do-it-yourself workshops, offering free courses to create a vertical home garden using recycled materials, or promoting a collaborative mapping project of community gardens in the city. In both cases, a fast prototype of the service was performed asking for people to take part.

For almost all the experiments done at the ISS, the method adopted was to create a fast service prototype, developing the mock-up of a single touchpoint or staging the entire experience, depending on the opportunities emerging from time to time. For each session we designed tools with three main purposes:

- *engaging tools*, to attract people to the stall, generating interest and curiosity to get them in the mood for co-designing;
- *enabling tools*, to share a common understanding about the object of conversation and lead the dialogue for the time of the activity;
- *collecting tools*, to collect qualitative and quantitative data in order to share, analyse and reflect on them.

In the following table some examples of the co-design experiments carried out in the ISS are briefly presented.

Co-design Experiment	Brief Description
The Farmer's Box	Fast service prototyping of the "Farmer's Box", a service concept for the delivery of fresh and local produce in the city area of Milano, with the aim of co-designing it with the people attending the Earth Market.
Digital Platform Survey	Development of two surveys (for the producers and consumers) aimed at measuring the community's rate of collaboration and its habits in using on line platforms. The two were presented at the Ideas Sharing Stall, promoted on the Feeding Milan website and sent by email to the markets' producers.
Collaborative Producers	Visualization and discussion, with the producers attending the Earth Market, of three collaborative service ideas to be developed on the Feeding Milan digital platform. The services' ideas are the results of the "Digital platform survey" action.
The Christmas Bag	Co-design and fast prototyping of a new function in the farmers' market aimed at offering the tools to transform people's groceries into a nice present for Christmas.
Groceries Home Delivery	Fast service prototyping of a home delivery service by bike in the farmers' market in collaboration with the organization UBM-Urban Bike Messenger.
Supercoop	Co-design with the producers and consumers at the Earth Market of the "Supercoop", a supermarket totally managed by its members. The service idea was divided in 4 topics: logistics, offering, community and communication. Activity carried out with the students of the Master degree in design - Laboratorio di Sintesi Finale (Services) - a.y. 2010/11.
Bike Sharing	Fast prototyping of the bike-sharing service in the Agricultural Park South Milan. Activity carried out with the students of the ASP, Alta Scuola Politecnica - a.y. 2010-11.
Urban Gardens MAP	Experience prototyping of the "Orto diffuso" initiative, aimed at diffusing and mapping horticultural activities in the urban environment, in collaboration with the no-profit association Rape Metropolitane.
DIY Vertical Garden Workshop	Experience prototyping of a workshop activity at the market in collaboration with Campagna Urbana. The activity was presented at the Ideas Sharing Stall with specifically developed communication tools and carried out by the hosted organization in the Convivial Tables area of the market.
The Park Agency	Fast prototyping of a set of 10 service ideas for tourism activities in the Agricultural Park South Milan. The concepts were designed by the students of the Master in Product-Service System at Politecnico di Milano, a.y. 2010-11
DIY Tourism Ideas	Discussion and evaluation of proximity tourism ideas with three of the five farmers involved in the project's development. The services proposed were designed by the students of the Master in Product-Service System at Politecnico di Milano with the aim of making instructables available on the Feeding Milan website.

Table 1 - Selection of co-design experiments carried out at the Ideas Sharing Stall

The Ideas Sharing Stall worked as the engine of the Feeding Milan project, activating a continuous dialogue between the local stakeholders regarding the services to be implemented, and creating a flywheel effect on those ideas. In fact, while co-designing at the Earth Market, designers interacted with a wide variety of people, obtaining first hand ideas and feedback on the services to be developed, and starting a process of citizen participation in defining the city to be.

More than real empowerment in the decision making process, the ISS research had the effect of informing and engaging producers and consumers in the first step of a potential process of change.



Picture 1 - The Idea Sharing Stall during four different co-design sessions

2.2 Creative Citizens

The Creative Citizens project (CC) (www.cittadinicreativi.it) originated as a result of the Ph.D. research conducted by Daniela Selloni at the Politecnico di Milano, within the Polimi DESIS Lab, in the field of service design and design for social innovation. The objective is to carry out research outside universities, in direct contact with the city and its residents and to attract and include members of society.

This experimentation took place in a space that symbolizes Milanese activism, the Cascina Cuccagna, one of the sixty farmhouses owned by the Municipality of Milan, situated right outside the former city walls, in the Zone 4 neighbourhood.

Thanks to a bottom-up initiative, the Cascina has been revived: now it is a green oasis in the centre of the city and a real piece of countryside in an urban area.

Cascina Cuccagna aims to become a permanent laboratory for civic participation and a new public space that will welcome and support the creativity of individuals, groups and associations by offering spaces, equipment and collaboration. Currently, the farmhouse is undergoing a transformation and is organizing residency opportunities for original projects with the same mission.

CC responded to the call for the assignment of temporary spaces in the Cascina, presenting a program focusing on participatory design between designers and local communities by using

the tools of service design research. The project is endorsed by the Zone 4 Unit of Local Government, in direct connection with the Municipality of Milan.

An ongoing experimentation involving a community of thirty citizens with weekly meetings began in February 2013, continuing until the end of June 2013.

CC has brought the expertise of researchers to the service of ordinary people in Cascina Cuccagna, creating a laboratory of solutions for daily life, improving existing services and designing new ones, acting as a semi-public office for service design and connecting citizens with designers, stakeholders and institutions. In other words, creating a good environment for co-designing social innovation.

The project consisted of a series of co-design sessions dealing with four different service areas: sharing networks, bureaucratic advice, food systems and cultural activities, all of which were connected to simple daily tasks and to existing services and places, such as time banks, purchasing groups, local shops, museums, markets and fairs.

In each session, there was a temporary set design to simulate service situations: it was a simple path of creative participation, precisely because everyone was able to become a designer of their daily life, at least for a few months, while having fun at the same time.

The four service areas were organized in four cycles, each of them consisting of three creative sessions, which can be seen as the three steps of a progressive path.

The starting meeting was a *warm up session*, to familiarize with the topic by presenting good practices from all over the world. It aimed to inspire people and bring visions of possible daily life. Participants selected the most promising elements of the presented cases, to be combined in the second session, in order to create as advanced a service concept as possible. This second meeting was a *generative session*, a sort of collective brainstorming bringing together citizens' desires and good practice insights. In the third session, the objective was to move from an ideal service to a real one, identifying the resources that could be involved in the development of the service. It was a real *prototyping session*, using physical mock-ups to shape a service truly suitable for the area in question i.e. Zone 4.

In this last session, strategic players were invited: they were local associations and committees, representatives of institutions, and professional advisors...all already active in the neighbourhood, in order to join forces and produce synergy, receive encouragement and draw inspiration from existing activities.

This support is provided not only on the 'professional' side but also on the emotional side, because establishing connections between initiatives is the easiest way to activate a mutual process of teaching and learning; sharing skills, platforms and places.

The following table offers an overview of the different co-design experiments within the four thematic cycles framework and briefly presents the results.

Thematic Cycle 1	Services for exchanging goods and skills
1. Warm up session	Exploration of existing micro-economies created by local communities in the field of exchange, rental and sale of goods, tasks and skills.
2. Generative session	Combination of the previous insights and concept definition, setting up service elements: offering, technologies and tools, interactions, transaction typologies.
3. Prototyping session	Two different services are defined by using two kinds of prototypes: a “fake” bookcase to exchange objects and a sort of bulletin board to exchange skills.
Results	Augmented Time Bank: a system to exchange skills and small tasks, within both condominium blocks and the neighbourhood, starting from Cuccagna Time Bank. Object Library: a physical and digital space for bartering, borrowing, gifting, and renting goods in the neighbourhood.
Thematic Cycle 2	Legal and bureaucratic services
1. Warming-up session	Conversation with Rossella Mileo lawyer, founder of a Milanese Legal Desk. Investigation on existing systems of bureaucratic advice (digital and face-to-face).
2. Generative session	Combination of the previous insights and concept definition, setting up service elements: offering, technologies and tools, interactions, transaction typologies.
3. Prototyping session	A multi-service advice desk is defined by using two main prototypes: a “fake” front office showing the offering, a scale model of the physical office and its service areas.
Results	Citizen’s Desk: a service for orientation and bureaucratic first aid, in various domains: legal, fiscal and architectural/building advice.
Thematic Cycle 3	Food services
1. Warming-up session	Overview on food-related services and events, presentation of the case studies in two main clusters: shopping and eating.
2. Generative session	Combination of the previous insights and concept definition, setting up service elements: offering, technologies and tools, roles, interactions.
3. Prototyping session	Two different food networks are defined by using these prototypes: a paper-cut laptop for testing a digital platform and a map of Milan to discuss logistic paths.
Results	Facecook: a neighbourhood food network connecting restaurants, markets, shops and local residents. Local Distribution System: an alternative distribution network to connect Zone 4 with the Agricultural Park South Milan area, based on the principles of disintermediation and participated logistics.
Thematic Cycle 4	Cultural services
1. Warming-up session	Investigation on good practices from the cultural field, divided into three main clusters: zero mile tourism, public art, local and diffused initiatives.
2. Generative session	Combination of the previous insights and concept definition, setting up service elements: offering, technologies and tools, roles, interactions.
3. Prototyping session	A service of zero mile tourism is defined by using two prototypes: a travel agency board mock up, offering unconventional urban tours, and an interactive Zone 4 map.
Results	Zona 4 Ciceros: places in Zone 4 adopted and explained by a citizen-guide, organizing unconventional tours to discover hidden or forgotten places.

Table 2 - Brief overview of Creative Citizens’ co design experiments and results

The methodology used within the experiments is a set of combined participatory techniques, including co-design and community-centred design as already discussed. The research context is informal and thus quite different from the academic one. It requires a specific adaptation of methods and tools, making them more appealing and easily understandable.

For each session we designed tools with three main purposes:

- *inspiring tools*, to spark off or reveal unexpected ways of doing things (good practices boards, suggestion cards, video-stories);
- *framing tools*, to elaborate a shared way of doing a specific thing (system maps, customer journey maps, front office and back office displays) ;
- *implementing tools*, to introduce a model into a local context, involving real players (service mock ups, localization maps, role games and stakeholders maps).

The final result of CC is a collection of six everyday services co-designed with the active participation of people. Each service is now at a different stage of development, depending on the opportunities found in the neighbourhood and in the network of institutions and stakeholders.

Summarizing, it is possible to identify three possible evolutions for the generated services:

- to envisage an intersection with the public sector (this is the case of the Citizens' Desk);
- to foster the birth of original service start-ups (this is the case of the Object Library);
- to join existing services provided within the Cascina Cuccagna (this is the case of the Augmented Time Bank).

Looking at these possible evolutions, we can see that the format of intervention shaped within CC is placed in a hybrid zone between public and private, market and society, amateur and professional, profit and non-profit.

It is probably no coincidence that this hybrid zone is the same area in which social innovation arises, according to the “connected difference” theory of social innovation suggested by Mulgan (2007).

He argues that “social innovations are usually new combinations or hybrids of existing elements” and that putting social innovations into effect usually involves cutting across organisational, sectoral or disciplinary boundaries. Remaining in the framework described by Mulgan, this hybrid zone also creates conditions to establish unprecedented connections between different actors, because “social innovations leave behind compelling new social relationships between previously separate individuals and groups”(Mulgan, 2007 p.35).



Picture 2 - Creative Citizens during four different co-design sessions

3 Defining two action formats for service design

The two research projects presented can be seen as ways for service design to work at different stages of the design process. The Ideas Sharing Stall works especially on the co-design of concepts for new collaborative services and on the testing and prototyping of new activities at the market, informing and engaging single citizens, organizations and other actors in a participatory process. This is done in very short co-design sessions and one spot experiments, which is probably why the level of involvement in the specific service design is relatively low.

On the other hand in Creative Citizens the sessions are held with groups of 10 to 30 participants who ideally participate in more than one co-design session (lasting two hours), with the opportunity of going into the topic tackled at greater depth and having the possibility of making real decisions, at least regarding the service ideas co-designed.

In the first case, the objective is to inform and engage people in the first stages of a longer conversation, while in the second it is to really enter the process of involving people personally, giving them the professional support of a service designer and other specialists in the design of their own solutions.

This interpretation of the two experiences is indeed supported by the way they were planned. In fact, the Creative Citizens project, which grew on the ground prepared by the Ideas Sharing Stall, takes it a step forward and the group of citizens participating in the majority of

the Creative Citizen sessions first made contact with us, Polimi DESIS Lab, at the Earth Market when participating in the co-design activities at the Ideas Sharing Stall.

The experience gained through the research activities leads us to make a tentative definition of two intervention formats for service design for social innovation. They are different in their overall purpose and in their typologies of co-design session, but they are both Community Centred Design processes.

	Ideas Sharing stall	Creative Citizens
Theme	One main theme: local food systems	Four thematic cycles: 1. Services for exchanging goods and skills 2. Legal and bureaucratic services 3. Food services 4. Cultural services
Place/context	A stall in the first farmers' market on public land in Milan, the Earth Market. A multifunctional place offering a wide variety of services and events	A dedicated room open to the public in an urban farmhouse, a multifunctional and public space with a high symbolic value for the city and the neighbourhood
Participants	People attending the market sensitive to local food production and distribution but not specifically there to participate in the co-design sessions	A mix of motivated people already aware of the activities planned and people just intrigued by new initiatives
Co-design session typologies	- Concept definition - Testing and evaluating	- Warm up sessions - Generative sessions - Prototyping sessions
Interaction	Face to face dialogue with 1 or 2 people	Conversation within a group of between 10-30 people
Co-design session time	5 minutes (average)	2 hours
Approach	Fast and sharp co-design	Systematic and intensive co-design
Methods	- face to face interviews - questionnaires - mock-ups - service prototypes - observation	- case studies - mock ups - service prototypes - observation - personal accounts - strategic conversation
Tools	Engaging tools Enabling tools Collecting tools	Inspiring tools Framing tools Implementing tools

Table 3 - Definition of action formats in the Ideas Sharing Stall and Creative Citizens

Thinking about the formats in terms of metaphors we can define the Ideas Sharing Stall as a sort of *window* for the framework project Feeding Milan, where the reference communities of producer and citizens, jointly with potential stakeholders in the public and private sectors, get to know the possible services to be implemented in the city, inspired by previously proposed solutions, at least in draft form, to attract them and start a conversation. Here they have the opportunity to enter the “shop” and to co-design and personalize the ideas already available and to provide insights for new forms of collaborative solutions.

On the other hand the experience of Creative Citizens aims to shape a model of *semi-public agency* for services and explore the possible contributions of service designers in the co-production of services, both for public and private sector partnering with the local community. This laboratory in search of a definition can take the form of a "Fab-lab for city services" (Selloni, 2013), a sort of co-design bureau potentially linked to institutions and other urban hubs collecting activities and characterised by designer involvement at the service of citizens.

4 From engaging to empowering through co design methods

The formats of service design action described embed two different levels of citizen participation: the ISS produces a form of engagement, while within CC it is possible to observe the shift from engaging to empowering. Both these participation forms play a key role in creating favourable conditions for social innovation.

The co design activities performed within the ISS have the effect of establishing contact with citizens: this is the first stage of connection, in which people are informed about new possibilities of doing things and of benefiting from services. Even though all the sessions ideally belong to a longer conversation on food systems, each of them can be perceived as independent and effective, achieving the result of a first engagement in a bigger process of change.

According to the Tepsie research (2012) it is possible to distinguish two kinds of engagement: *public participation*, meaning a form of individual engagement within the institutions of democracy, and *social participation*, which is more related to civic engagement in local communities and associations. The form of engagement achieved by the Ideas Sharing Stall is the second one, social and civic, and it is the direct result of the community centred design approach.

On the other hand, within Creative Citizens, social and local engagement are embedded in the project itself, because the starting point is a group of people who are already active (though they may be mixed with another group who are less engaged) and want to change something in their neighbourhood and in their city. They benefit from the previous engagement path developed within the ISS, and this process is reinforced by the weekly sessions and by establishing a broader network of citizens, researchers, local stakeholders and representatives of the institutions.

Co-design and community centred design have a key role in fostering this process and this is specifically meaningful in our reflection on social innovation. At the end of the co-design sessions the participants reach a level of "pre-empowerment": they have identified an issue, they have been inspired and led by a vision shared with other players, they have fixed some guidelines to develop a service, they prototype it with designers' support. Specifically, they perceive themselves as a collective actor able to get in touch with institutions and stakeholders, in order to take the project forward. CC makes the effort to try empowering people through leadership development and enhancement of their capacity to collaborate with other strategic players, working on coalition building. Thus doesn't truly change power dynamics because citizens are not really involved in decision making and this is why it is not possible to talk about a full process of empowerment. However, it is the starting point to activating one, because citizens reach a collective awareness of the possibility of playing a key role in designing and changing things.

5 Bringing a vision for social innovation

5.1. Building a network of local actors to enhance social innovation sustainability

The two research activities presented in the paper highlight two formats of service design action to enhance social innovation at a local scale. These can be performed as autonomous interventions or in sequence in order to trigger a process of citizen empowerment towards the implementation of a new generation of collaborative services. It has to be noticed that the ideas developed in the two research projects, some of them focusing on a specific district of the city, has the potential to be scaled-up and replicated on an urban scale. Thus potentially going in the direction of a systemic change in the way services are generated and offered in the city.

These formats, developed in multifunctional places (such as the Earth Market or Cascina Cuccagna), facilitate the building of a network of local actors. This supports both the process of social innovation, as explained in the paragraphs 2.2, creating engagement and empowerment of citizens, and the ‘alignment’ of interests of local stakeholders defined by Redström et al. as “design after design” (2008). The latter is indeed the key factor to obtain self-sustainable solutions by including actors potentially interested in managing the service right from the first phases of the service testing and implementation.

In this process of collaboration, service designers are not just facilitators but are bearers of vision, suggesting, inspiring and leading the community centred design process.

5.2 The role of (service) designers in the social innovation process

The contribution of designers in the described processes is made through specific skills. Designers are able to give substance to ideas by visualizing and prototyping them and this is particularly relevant if we consider services, which are intangible by definition and need physical evidences to be explained and shared. The ability of designers in creating visions and objects is crucial for managing a conversation among multiple actors, because it offers a common item on which to dialogue. That’s why service designers play a key role in these practices: they are more than facilitators, they bring a vision and this is the starting point for sharing it and boosting engagement and empowerment processes, and consequently possible social innovations. Bringing proposals is peculiar to designers, it is something related to the proactive attitude embedded in the nature of design: make projects, test different solutions, try to innovate the traditional way of doing things...And they do this adding an aesthetic quality which confers to the experiments an aspirational character, so that citizens are attracted and want to join them. Creative sessions within ISS or CC are pleasant and generative of sociality, where the aesthetic quality is the harmony that comes from combining agreeable locations with a proper set of design friendly tools, in order to facilitate and make participation more enjoyable and convivial.

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