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Anatomy of local government/design education collaboration.

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Abstract: The Public Collaboration Lab (PCL) is an action research partnership between the London Borough of Camden (LBC) and the University of the Arts London, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The research explored the potential for, and value of, strategic collaboration between design education (DHE) and local government (LG), and how design research and practice can contribute to service, policy and social innovation in the LG context. The project prototyped and piloted a new way of working that identified and leveraged synergies in the operational objectives of LG and the learning objectives (research and teaching) of DHE. The poster shares findings from the research in the form of an ‘anatomy’ of LG/DHE collaboration, which articulates and visualizes the internal workings of LG/DHE. The ‘anatomy’ serves as a resource for researchers and practitioners seeking to reflect on collaborative projects by inputting data to the models to visualize their activities; and as a generative tool, providing a set of templates that focus discussion around the planning of collaborative projects.

Keywords: collaboration, local government, social innovation

1. Public Collaboration Lab

The Public Collaboration Lab (PCL) is an action research partnership between the London Borough of Camden (LBC) and the University of the Arts London, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The research explored the potential for, and value of, strategic collaboration between design education (DHE) and local government (LG), and how design research and practice can contribute to service, policy and social innovation in the LG context.

The project prototyped and piloted a new way of working that identified and leveraged synergies in the operational objectives of LG and the learning objectives (research and teaching) of DHE. Between May 2015 and October 2016, PCL worked with design students, tutors, researchers, council officers, community groups and residents in LBC to co-develop and co-deliver ‘collaborative design experiments’ that sought to improve outcomes for citizens. Informed by a synthesis of data from a literature review, workshops, interviews and

reflections on the practice of PCL, the research identifies frameworks and practices that support collaborations that innovate place-based solutions to local challenges.

2. Anatomy of Local Government/Design Education

The Anatomy of Local Government/Design Education Collaboration offers a framework for reflecting upon or planning collaborative design projects delivered by local government and design education working in partnership. It is informed by findings from (1) a literature review of research and practice in the fields of; Collaboration and Co-design, Reflective Practice and Experiential Learning, Systems Thinking and Organisational Change, and Public and Social Innovation Labs; (2) an online survey and exploratory interviews with design academics and local government officers with experience of local government/design education collaboration, and, (3) reflective workshops and interviews with participants in the PCL projects. The framework supports practitioners to understand and articulate in detail the conditions required for local government/design education collaboration to succeed in specific contexts.

A full account of the anatomy will be available in a forthcoming report. Here we show the suite of typologies through an example of how they are applied to an example of LG/DE collaboration, that of engaging residents around the future of library services.

2.1 Future Libraries

The Future Libraries project is one of the six 'live' 'collaborative design experiments' held at the PCL between May 2015 and October 2016. As part of a range of measures to address the challenges of reduced funding from central government, Camden Council is exploring opportunities for reshaping Camden's library services with the aim of delivering £800,000 in savings by 2018. MA Industrial Design for Publics, a curricular Unit in MA Industrial Design at Central Saint Martins, explores how design and designers can contribute to collaborative, creative activities that bring people together around issues of concern to them, facilitate the articulation of these concerns, and support collaborative sense making and scenario building in response to them, and share insights in meaningful and accessible ways. In the Future Libraries project, research staff and students worked with council officers and frontline staff to design creative interactions to engage library users and other citizens in talking about their concerns, needs and desires relating to future libraries.

Why - Motivations for collaboration: Mutually beneficial collaboration is dependent on a good fit between the objectives of partners. 'Good fit' is dependent on context. Several examples of 'good fit' have been identified within the research, such as the compatibility of student learning around human centred research methods and analysis with local governments' requirement for citizen engagement and consultation.

What – Mechanisms for collaboration: Different mechanisms involve different terms and conditions and different levels of prescription as regards work and deliverables. For example, student learning opportunities

require a degree of openness as regards the response to a brief and must accommodate the possibility of various degrees of quality in terms of output

Who – Involved actors: Different actors are involved in projects at different stages and with different degrees of intensity. Being able to map these varying intensities of involvement against the process stages of a project is useful in understanding actors' engagement and agency in the project and can help to ensure that all voices are heard and perspectives shared.

Where - Organisational structure of collaboration: For collaboration to be effective and impactful it is important to know where in the organizational processes of the participating institutions the proposed collaboration is taking place.

Local Government organisational structure and processes are represented across three tiers of operation and mapped against the 'extended double diamond' design process model, understood here as a project management process. In the vision and decision level (tier 1) the elected Council (decision-makers) issues a corporate vision, informed by political agendas and data-based evidence, which informs a corporate plan that provides guidance on what and how the vision must be delivered, which in turn demands a strategy for doing so. The strategic level (tier 2) is concerned with (officers) establishing the strategy for designing local government's policy and services. The operational level (tier 3) is concerned with development and delivery of a proposal (developed in tier 2), typically in the form of services to residents.

Design Education organisational structure is represented across seven areas of operation across research, teaching and knowledge exchange. Different areas of operation have different demands and expectations in terms of experience and objective

These models are useful to simplify the complexity of decision-making in local government for design educators looking to engage in collaborative projects addressing local government agendas. Also, to enable local government officers to understand where in the university the project is located. These models act as 'boundary objects' that support exchange and negotiation around project design and reflection.

How - Process, methods and tools: It is important that there is a common understanding amongst partners as to how the collaborative project will be delivered. Research within the PCL demonstrated that mapping projects onto adaptations of a typical design process model, the Design Council's 'double diamond' (Design Council 2005) was effective in supporting this shared understanding. The 'double diamond' structures a process through divergent and convergent stages, progressing from discovery and sense making, through problem/opportunity definition, to ideation, concept development and prototyping of outputs that respond to the challenges/opportunities defined. Within the planning and delivery of PCL projects the process model itself was found to act as a kind of 'boundary object' 'both adaptable to different viewpoints and robust enough to maintain identity across them' (Star & Griesemer 1989).

References

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