"Tricky like a leprechaun" – navigating the paradoxes of public service innovation in the context of austerity

"We use the term 'wicked' in a meaning akin to that of 'malignant' (in contrast to 'benign') or 'vicious' (like a circle) or 'tricky' (like a leprechaun) or 'aggressive' (like a lion, in contrast to the docility of a lamb). We do not mean to personify these properties of social systems by implying malicious intent."

(Rittel & Webber 1973)

Introduction

This chapter explores the challenges facing those designing to ensure equitable access to public goods in times of austerity. It briefly describes the wider context of the financial austerity seen to be driving the reform of local government services in the UK between 2010 and 2020, and warns against an efficiency-led approach to public service reform that forgoes experimentation that might improve effectiveness.

It illustrates the impact of these reforms on public service innovation by reflecting on examples of the 'collaborative design experiments' of the Public Collaboration Lab, an action research partnership between a London council and researchers, staff and students from the University of the Arts London that explored a new way of building and developing local design capacity for service, policy and social innovation.

It proposes that pubic service innovation in a climate of austerity is 'tricky', rather than solely complex or 'wicked', in that challenges appear to be deceitfully and craftily constructed. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the relationship between 'designerly' approaches and practices and the 'trickiness' of this design context.

Background

Facing intensifying financial austerity within UK local government, those responsible for the quality and continuity of public services recognise that innovation in service design and delivery is critical if effective public services are to be secured. The UK Local Government Association (LGA, 2013) suggests that massive financial savings could be achieved by a collaborative approach to service delivery that aligns different agencies' objectives, activities and resources. Current research and practice in design (Manzini and Staszowski 2013) suggests that greater involvement of, and collaboration with, citizens and other agencies may also foster improvements in service quality by involving end-users in research, prototyping and testing of services, and engaging citizens and other agencies in the co-production (design and delivery) of services, enabled and supported by public agencies.

The approaches offer particular potential when considering 'relational services', those services which are "deeply and profoundly based on the quality of interpersonal relations *between* participants" (Cipolla et al. 2009: 46). However, despite growing interest and appreciation in the potential of these approaches, the design and delivery of 'public and collaborative' relational services is not straight forward, should not be uncontested, and requires the consideration and navigation of complex and sometimes wicked (Rittel & Webber 1973) scenarios in the process. Worse still, these scenarios are further compounded by conditions of austerity, giving rise to some new 'tricky' characteristics; desirable outcomes that are not contested by different publics involved in their deliberation and delivery, but denied by available resources, as illustrated by the examples shared later.

Something wicked this way comes

Public service innovation is complex, integrating as it does the constituent complexities of service innovation (Gallouj et al. 1997), human interactions (Cippolla et al. 2009) and public goods. This complexity and unpredictability is further compounded by the diversity of peoples' perspectives and the subjectivity of peoples' expectations and experiences. As societal scenarios become more complex, interventions and their effects become more

contested since addressing one element of the system is likely to impact another. The more we understand of the complexity in societal systems, the more we understand the limitations of ambitions to plan or manage them. Rittel and Webber (1973) explain that "plurality of objectives held by a plurality of politics make it impossible to pursue unitary aims", suggesting that social problems are not for solving, or not in ways that can satisfy all the diversity of publics within society. According to Rittel and Webber the best we can hope for is resolution – not solution, "societal problems are never solved only re-solved – over and over again". This frames address to 'wicked' problems in society as an open-ended and 'agonistic ' (Mouffe 2007) process of argument and contestation.

It is agonistic dissent that enables pluralism to survive and diversity to thrive. And this diversity - with its myriad potential for success and failure – that ensures some 'right' answers for some of the people some of the time, if never all of the people all of the time. Wicked problems are resolved through an "argumentative process in the course of which an image of the problem and the solution emerges gradually among the participants, as a product of incessant judgement, subjected to critical argument" (Rittel and Webber 1973). Resolutions to wicked problems are always incomplete, they are examples of 'satisficing' – 'good enough' answers to the problems addressed (Simon 1996: 27). This understanding rejects the hubris of solutionism and control, accepting the uncertainties of society as a complex adaptive system. So, public service innovation can be seen as a wicked challenge given the complexity and contestation that accompanies its proximity to the social. As navigators in this ocean of uncertainty we do not hope to tame the sea but to learn to sail.

However, in the current context of austerity there may be something more to be said about the wickedness or otherwise of this design scenario. As the quotation at the head of this chapter makes clear, Rittel and Webber's use of the term 'wicked' to describe these problem properties does not imply the problems are themselves 'ethically deplorable', nor do they seek to imply 'malicious intent' in the problems they describe. However, they do suggest to us that "we may agree that it becomes morally objectionable" for the planner (politician/designer) to treat a wicked problem – a problem with no clear definition and no clear resolution "as though it were a 'tame' one, or to tame a wicked problem prematurely, or to refuse to recognise the inherent wickedness of social problems" (Rittel and Webber 1973). When we look to public service innovation imposed by austerity it appears that we are dealing with just such a 'morally objectionable', 'ethically deplorable' design scenario, one created with 'malicious intent'.

Tricky challenges – constructed contradictions in desirable outcomes

Advocates of marketisation argue that public services are more efficient and effective when stimulated by competition. However, this position ignores the fundamental contradiction between the desired outcomes of accumulating private wealth and realising public goods. The neoliberal[1] proposal denies the paradox of this wicked scenario, characterised by contradictory desirable outcomes, and suggests that the marketisation and financialisation of public services will deliver both private and public value. However, an examination of the context in which public services are seen to be failing reveals a 'malicious intent' on the part of the advocates of marketisation that frames the challenge of public service innovation in the current climate not as a wicked challenge but as a *tricky* one, characterised by the 'deceitful and crafty' (Oxford English Dictionary) nature of its conception.   So, the assertion here is that the challenges faced by local government reforming public services are not solely wicked challenges but rather 'tricky' challenges. They are not insolvable by dint of their complexity and subjectivity but as a consequence of malicious intent.

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[1] In an article on personalization in health provision, Savard (2013) defines neoliberalism as 'the (re)privileging of liberal principles, including the notion that individuals are atomistic, rational agents whose existence and interests are prior to society', citing Petersen and Lupton (1996).

Local government has four main sources of funding; the Revenue Support Grant from central government, monies from local business via the Business Rates Retention Scheme, Council Tax paid by residents and fees and charges for council services. Public servicing of private debt linked to bank bailouts and fiscal initiatives such as the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) have seen central government increase the burden of debt servicing on local government, at the same time reducing funding to them by an estimated 37% between 2011- 2016 (National Audit Office 2014) with a predicted further £7.8bn or 78% reduction over the next four years to 2020. This is anticipated to drive an unprecedented number of councils into financial crisis (Nolan and Pitt 2016: 4).

The poisonous fruit of this austerity is a drive for efficiency. The Local Government and Accountability Act 2014, has driven many councils headlong into cost saving measures, and round after round of restructuring and cost cutting, attempting to make financial savings whilst improving outcomes for residents. This sounds like a sensible response, as waste is not a virtue, but this pursuit of efficiency appears to ignore the 'wicked' nature of the scenario making the challenge a 'tricky' one, constructed in such a way that to engage with it from the dominant-hegemonic position[2], i.e. to strive for efficiency to save services, will thwart its resolution. Efficiency is not the same as effectiveness. Furthermore, when pursuit of efficiency means people's needs are left unmet in one public service area it often increases demand, and costs to the public, in another.

This is especially true in the case of 'relational services' defined earlier, such as Adult Social Care and Mental Health services for which demand is increasing as life expectancy[3] and incidence of mental health treatment[4] increase. Adult Social Care services account for roughly 30 to 35 per cent of total local government expenditure, expenditure which it is feared could be significantly reduced in coming years. The Local Government Association (2016) estimates that Adult Social Care in England and Wales faces a funding gap of £1.3 billion by the end of the decade. This funding gap is already seen to have led to unmet need amongst some of the UK's most vulnerable citizens, and increased costs to National Health Services, a grim illustration of the folly of prioritising efficiency over effectiveness. Evidence to the House of Commons health select committee states this plainly:

"Cuts to social care funding over a number of years have now exhausted the capacity for significant further efficiencies in this area. We have heard that the savings made by local councils in the last parliament have gone beyond efficiency savings and have already impacted on the provision of services. Based on the evidence we have heard we are concerned that people with genuine social care needs may no longer be receiving the care they need because of a lack of resource. This not only causes considerable distress to the individuals concerned but results in significant additional costs to the NHS." (Health Select Committee 15th July 2016, para 86)

Perhaps 'trickier' still is the way in which efficiency limits innovation by driving out redundancy - the 'space' to experiment, reflect and learn. In the language of local government, 'redundancy' typically points to reductions in staffing rather than

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[2] The term 'dominant-hegemonic position' is used here to describe the scenario in which efficiency is taken for granted as desirable in relation to public services, such that to respond in a different way, especially one that is oppositional, is deemed illegitimate.

[3] Between 2015 and 2020, over a period when the general population is expected to rise 3%, the number aged over 65 are expected to increase by 12% to 1.1 million, the number aged over 85 by 18% to 300,000 and the number of centenarians by 40% to 7,000. (Parliament.uk, 2015)

[4] One in three adults aged 16-74 (37 per cent) with conditions such as anxiety or depression, surveyed in England, were accessing mental health treatment in 2014. This figure has increased from one in four (24 per cent) since the last survey was carried out in 2007. (McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) 2016)

'superabundance'[5] , a useful surplus that offers multiple ways to achieve objectives and goals in a resilient system. On this positive view, redundancy delivers what Talib (2012) calls 'anti-fragility', "layers of redundancy [that] are the central risk management property of natural systems." As an attack on redundancy, efficiency is an enemy to innovation in that it denies the public sector the opportunity to experiment to find new ways to deal with the complexities of demographic change.

In this scenario the drive for 'efficiency' prevents public servants innovating alternatives to financialisation and privatisation of public services. Without redundancy, space for reflective learning and innovation will be denied to public services and no new ways of delivering public goods to citizens will be forthcoming. In this scenario the neoliberal prophecy that the public sector does not have the capability or capacity to deliver public services becomes self-fulfilling as the pursuit of efficiency prohibits innovation that might deliver effectiveness. Unable to balance the books, councils will have no choice but to abandon public services and public infrastructure to private ownership, at the cost of equitable access to public goods. New models are required. But, the development of these new models demands space to experiment, reflect and learn – redundancy is required for service innovation to occur.

Design education is a bastion of superabundance in thinking and doing that is essential to experimentation, reflective learning, and innovation. It is a social resource with the capacity to share redundancy with those to whom it is denied. By collaborating with local government and the citizens they serve design education can extend learning and practice in collaborative socially responsive design, for students and researchers, and those they collaborate with, within society as an action-learning environment. This practice can offer the redundancy necessary to address the *tricky* challenge of public service innovation in the context of austerity. This is the practice which the Public Collaboration Lab explores.

Introducing the Public Collaboration Lab

The Public Collaboration Lab (PCL) is a prototype public social innovation lab focused on collaborative design for service, social and policy innovation. It shares characteristics with other public social innovation labs in that;

- Project teams are typically multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary
- Projects seek to understand the wider system whilst prioritising human experience
- Collaboration and co-creation with end-users of services and stakeholders is central to the work of the lab
- Approaches are iterative and agile following a robust design process framed as action research in 'real life' scenarios

However, PCL is differentiated by its primary emphasis on collaboration between local government and design education, specifically, local government officers (LGOs) and design students supported by tutors and academic research staff. Residents and other stakeholders become involved via participatory design activities including creative and collaborative exploration, visualisation and visioning of new ways of meeting societal needs and goals. PCL considers design students and university staff to be societal assets and the community context to be an action-learning environment for all those involved. Participants share knowledge, skills, experience and expertise, working collaboratively to address local goals and challenges linked to finding new ways to deliver improved public services and outcomes in the face of austerity.

PCL projects offer participants opportunity for the experimentation and reflection that contributes to innovation, providing greater capacity for local government to work with

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[5] Oxford English Dictionary defines 'redundancy' as "the state or quality of being redundant, superabundance, superfluity."

residents and other stakeholders. Together participants apply methods and approaches derived from human centred design, service design and participatory and collaborative design to discover the diversity and complexity of experiences, concerns, needs and desires in relation to a particular service or issue; co-define and prioritise the challenges and opportunities for intervention; and combine expertise and assets in addressing them. The outputs of these activities include rich qualitative insights that support decision making and priority setting by LGOs and politicians. Alternative possibilities for delivery of services and achievement of outcomes are also explored and proposed, feeding into public service innovation and transformation. Depending on the nature of the projects, the activities may raise awareness and change behaviours or redefine and redesign ways of developing and delivering services. A local government officer described the benefits of the PCL approach:

"PCL offers us the chance to explore new ways of collaborating with our partners and our communities, to design services that are based around the needs of residents [and] tap into the creativity and energy of Central Saint Martin's staff and students." (LGO, Strategic Lead, Strategy & Change 2016)

Projects address diverse operational scenarios and service areas, including how to consult more meaningfully with citizens on public issues such as the future of libraries and the planning process, through to ways of increasing recycling rates, dealing with the effects of overcrowded housing, exploring synergies and alternatives for home care support and reshaping youth centres to facilitate new ways of delivering youth services. Our work in this area has brought us face-to-face with several *tricky* challenges – characterised by mutually desirable outcomes made antithetical by politically imposed austerity. Two examples are shared below.

Observations from the lab – '*tricky* challenges' in the day to day

Since 2015 PCL has worked with council officers, residents and other stakeholders in a London borough to co-deliver a series of 'collaborative design experiments' exploring potential social and service innovations that can improve outcomes for residents and reduce costs to meet medium term financial targets[6].

Example 1. "This is not a courier service" - relational losses in Home Library Services

Many public authorities provide a Home Library Service (HLS) to ensure equitable access to library services for housebound residents. The partnering London borough provides this service to four to five hundred residents at a cost of around £140,000 per year, which it is required to reduce by 60%. Many HLS users find it difficult to access public services outside their homes because of age or medical conditions and receive visits from home care providers, being 'individuals with multiple complex needs' UK Public Service Transformation Network Service's Transformation Challenge Panel (2014). The HLS refers to these residents as 'readers' and their interests and literary preferences are known to the home librarians who visit them on a fortnightly basis. The council was seeking new service models for the HLS to deliver cost savings.

The brief for this collaborative design experiment was to explore alternative, public and collaborative service models. During the research phase, designers shadowed the librarians and observed their interactions with readers, supported by council officers and research and teaching staff from the PCL. This revealed that the services provided by the HLS librarians go far beyond the selection and delivery of reading books. The same librarian had visited some readers for several years, being welcomed into their homes and building trusting relationships with benefits beyond the remit of the HLS. A readers' request for larger print triggered a referral for an eye test and revealed that the instructions on medication were illegible to the reader. The temperature of a readers' home lead to a conversation about

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[6] The identity of the borough is not shared as the opinions expressed are those of the author and can not be attributed to collaborating stakeholders.

heating allowances. A request for 'talking books' lead to an impromptu training session on how to use a CD player. A reader's request for information around care homes led to a discussion around care options and a referral to relevant council support. The librarian's role as a trusted information provider influenced the interactions between them and readers, with books and their delivery providing a platform for trusted encounter and exchange. The service is predicated on recognising the reader as an intellect as well as a body, foregrounding their individual interests rather than their needs.

The project made visible the deeply relational service support that the HLS team provided to readers. The design team's proposals amplified the unique value observed within the service, to improve outcomes and create cost savings in the long term through early intervention. They assigned 'Back office' functions such as sorting, packing and loading books to volunteers so HLS staff could concentrate on relating to their readers, supported by a digital platform to help them make timely and appropriate referrals to other support services. The platform also coordinated informal care support from family members and those who shared interests with the readers – to make volunteering more mutually rewarding through exploring shared interests – inside and outside the home. The new name for the redesigned service, the Home and Community Library Service (H&CLS), referred to the way the transformed HLS model extended interest oriented home care into the community. The service was recognised to be uniquely positioned to deliver 'interest oriented early intervention' whereby home librarians could be trained and supported in making referrals to community activities and support, as well as council services – explicitly amplifying the tacit roles and values that had been identified as being present in their current role.

This service innovation responded to recent research findings in this area;

"Civil society organisations have pressed for a person-centred approach to care, […]. Social relationships, allowing for frequent face-to-face interaction, are recognised as vital to older people's health and wellbeing. Experts say more development on these lines is needed, [and] to invest in internet-based systems designed to promote social interception and combat loneliness." (Tinker et al. 2013: 5)

No one inside or outside the service and stakeholder network denied the value of the service innovation, the relationships that were at its core, nor the potential for these relationships to support early intervention in social care. Some effort was made to explore alternative business models, including the 'Buurtzorg' 'public service mutual' approach, that has delivered exceptional value and performance in home care in the Netherlands[7]. However, sufficient funding was not available to implement this service innovation due to the necessity of cost savings. Related service areas, under similar pressures to make savings, were unwilling to bear what was perceived as a 'cost shunt' from one service area to another and budgetary pressures denied sufficient time to find alternative business models. Consequently, the solution selected was that of a courier delivery model, losing the relational value and its potential to fulfil public service reform objectives around early intervention in Adult Social Care and Public Health. This was not the result of a 'wicked' social challenge born of human subjectivity and conflicting desirable outcomes of actors but of the *tricky* withdrawal of public funding from pursuit of public goods.

Example 2. Finding ways to combine 'hoping' with 'coping' – addressing the challenges of overcrowded living

Many of the UK's cities are densely populated. With a high demand for housing driving up the price of accommodation, increased costs combined with lack of investment for new social housing means that for many families, to remain in their communities means living in

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[7] For a summary of Buurtzorg ("care in the neighbourhood") see Huijbers (n.d.)

overcrowded conditions. Overcrowding directly and indirectly affects residents' wellbeing, contributing to a number of negative outcomes (Table 1).

Indirect or direct effect	Symptom of overcrowding
Direct	Sleep disturbance
Direct	Lack of privacy generally
Direct	Lack of storage space
Direct	Lack of privacy and space to study or job hunt/work
Indirect	Lack of space to socialise or play
Indirect	Stress levels and wider mental health impact
Indirect	Physical health (illness and infection)
Indirect	Family exclusion
Indirect	Relationship breakdowns
Indirect	Anti-social behaviour
Indirect	Educational attainment

Table 1. Impact of overcrowding on residents living in overcrowded conditions. (Source: London borough briefing for the PCL Overcrowded Living Project, 2016)

67% of families in social housing in the borough live in overcrowded accommodation, with little prospect of rehousing. Recognising the challenges this presents to families the council has taken action to support families in addressing them and aims to reduce the impacts of overcrowding for all households in the borough especially:

- Households with children (particularly children aged under 5)
- Households with people with mental health problems or learning disabilities
- Households with people with other health problems
- Households that are part of the Complex Families programme

A council officer responsible for supporting overcrowded families led a design team comprised of design students and researchers, to work with overcrowded families to identify ways to lessen the impacts of overcrowding on their lives. Designers shadowed the council officer visiting families in their homes to see and hear about how they were living, the actions they were taking to alleviate the challenges they faced and the support that they felt could further help to address their unmet needs. In each visit designers applied different tools; visualisations, including maps and models of neigbourhood services and support networks, 'design probes' "evocative tasks meant to elicit inspirational responses from people" (Gaver et al. 2004), and personas that helped residents to identify the challenges and responses most relevant to them.

These tools supported the officer and residents through a process of reflection and planning in response to their overcrowded situation. Through successive visits, the team iteratively developed and tested these tools and used them to first identify and then prioritise the challenges residents faced. The work also explored the assets and resources available to the residents through their own networks and those provided by the council and other agencies and finally set out a plan of action to take to make improvements. To understand how council services were supporting the overcrowded families, the team spoke to officers and front line staff across the council who came into contact with them. These consultations

explored how the tools could help the officers support residents and point them towards further help outside the officers' specific service area.

The team delivered collaborative workshops with residents and officers in libraries and community centres to gather feedback on the prototype tools to ensure their utility and usability for officers and overcrowded residents. The project's main challenge was to support constructive conversations with concerned and frustrated residents, the majority of whom wanted engagement with council officers to result in rehousing. Unfortunately, rehousing was impossible in the majority of cases so the team had to come up with different ways to engage with residents, rethinking home visits and how to support and advise overcrowded households. The design of these interactions needed to be engaging and useful for residents, but also insightful to the council. The resulting tools structured conversations that were meaningful to residents, allowing their challenges to be heard and helping them to understand the limitations of what the council could do for them. The tools helped the council to find areas for intervention as well as supporting referrals to further support. They helped to support the relationship between the council officer and the residents so that they could work together to address a situation that neither felt was 'right' but that they had to deal with nonetheless. This frustration was evident in feedback from the council officer leading the project:

"The probes worked really well on yesterday's visit. We left quite late because it helped the mother to think of the positives for her, about home and community – she said that it made her realise that the best option for her family would be to stay and make the most of the space. Of course, her ideal option would be to move to a 3 bed."

The project revealed the complexity of the residents' situation. Residents sometimes set aside attempts to improve their living conditions to avoid reducing their chances of rehousing by being seen to be 'coping'. A deficit focused 'points system' that attributes points to residents according to indicators of need gave the impression that residents would be rehoused if things got bad enough. However, some severe cases of overcrowding, producing negative outcomes relating to the health and wellbeing of family members, resulted in less than half the number of points required for rehousing. Whilst no one wants to dissuade 'hope' for the long term, residents need support to act to 'cope' in the short term, alleviating some of the negative outcomes of overcrowding. The tools developed helped to structure a conversation around coping that was otherwise difficult to have.

Tricky problems and *tricky* practices

Disentangling the contradiction between coping and hoping, finding ways to deliver early intervention with long term benefits when deprived of even short term investment, these are examples of the *tricky* day to day challenges facing public service innovation in the context of austerity.

These challenges are 'tricky' rather than 'wicked' because they are the result of devious intent and because they force contradiction between *uncontested* desirable outcomes in the day to day operations of local government. As might be expected, designing service and social innovations in this context is itself 'tricky' in that it is difficult and awkward (Oxford English Dictionary). Worse still designers risk their practices being perceived as 'tricky', complicit in the deceitful and crafty action of austerity, if they are not negotiated transparently and inclusively with all the actors involved. Open, participatory and responsive design approaches can help to navigate this scenario.

i) Openness as a response to trickiness

"At the heart of design is the need to mobilize cooperation and imagination. The design process needs to be kept open to requirements that by necessity are evolving, as well as to be able to arrive at novel, and sometimes unexpected, solutions. Openness implies that decisions about possible design trajectories are not made too quickly, and requires that the various stakeholders involved present their work in a form that is open to the possibility of

change. It puts emphasis on the dynamics of opening and expanding, fixing and constraining, and again reopening." (Binder et al 2012: 22)

When dealing with 'tricky' challenges shared visions may be perceived as deceptions if left unrealised. And every shared vision in the context of public services is beyond the gift of the designer alone. Whilst designers have a role in the conception, configuration, communication and ultimately construction of one or other of diverse and sometimes contradictory future imaginaries theirs is at best a *constitutive* power rather than a *constituted* one (Follett 1924 cited in Durose & Richardson 2016: 15) – a *power with* rather than a *power over* others (and therefore outcomes). The designers' actions can therefore be viewed by those they collaborate with either as a 'duplicitous' advocacy of contradictory outcomes or as a 'holistic' countenance of possible futures that might be achieved. Deception is subjectively entwined with expectation and realisation.

The designer is comfortable countenancing seemingly paradoxical possibilities, suspending decision and disbelief, empathising with diverse accounts of the present and imagining myriad possible futures, "mediating between research and action and between potentialities and actualities" (Julier & Kimbell 2016: 39). Whether navigating the contradiction between the dominant-hegemonic neoliberal position of the present whilst designing for a socially just public and collaborative future, or working together with diverse actors, with potentially contradictory perspectives, to address the challenges of the present at the same time as shaping possibilities for the future, it is the designers comfort with contradiction, their ability to hold contradictory present realities and possible futures in the same gaze that equips them to be able to work with, and within, tricky scenarios without cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) limiting their ability to act. But, to avoid the appearance of 'trickiness' in this scenario, to ensure that comfort with contradiction and openness to possibility is not mistaken for double dealing, it is suggested by some that designers 'manage expectations' of participating actors. But, to do so would belie the designer's actual agency in the design process at the same time as closing down rather than opening up the extent and array of future possibilities. Thus, to avoid the appearance of trickiness at the same time as preserving openness, designers should seek to mediate and negotiate rather than manage the expectations of participating actors, in as open and accessible a way as possible, so that the 'trickiness' of the challenge is understood and not projected onto the practices of the designer.

ii) Responsiveness (rather than responsibility) in response to trickiness

"Diverse values are held by different groups of individuals – that what satisfies one may be abhorrent to another, that what comprises problem solution for one is problem generation for another. Under such circumstances, and in the absence of an overriding social theory or an overriding social ethic, there is no gainsaying which group is right and which should have its ends served."

(Rittel & Webber 1973:168)

So how is the designer meant to operate ethically within this contradictory climate? Postpone judgement and harbour contradictory possibilities certainly, but also recognise themselves as *responsive* not responsible, at the risk of appearing 'tricky' in their inability and unwillingness to take responsibility for a situation over which they only have a contributory agency.

Recognising the designer's role in this scenario as that of the *socially responsive* designer we are able to mobilise understandings discussed elsewhere (Gamman & Thorpe, 2006, 2011, 2016) that locate the designer as "a co-actor within a co-design process - sometimes leading as an expert and sometimes not" displaying "pluralism and adaptability". Recognising that "it is not clear which ethical design drivers, or stakeholder agendas, the design[er] should be responsible to" and given "that there may be no 'right answer', or none that can address all drivers and actors equally" the socially responsive designer applies "a

co-design approach" that seeks to be "plural and equitable regarding the agency of actors within the design process." Co-design processes "integrate the individual and collective agencies of the actors within them, and necessitate negotiation of collective goals. Thus, the individual agency of the designer, and other actors, over both the processes and products of (co)design are inevitably subject to compromise". Consequently, designers are only able to be responsive rather than ultimately responsible in the way they engage with, and deliver social objectives through design – and this limitation needs to be understood by other actors in design processes and acknowledged as 'good enough'.

iii) Innovating democracy as a response to trickiness in democratising innovation

As soon as the words "Big Society"[8] left former Prime Minster Cameron's lips (2010) one of the 'trickiest' ethical dilemmas facing the social designer active in public service and social innovation arose. Using design to meet publics' needs was feared by many to inadvertently support the neoliberal destruction of public services. By helping to find ways and means of meeting the needs that the destruction of public services leave unmet, designers risked making something that is very wrong appear alright. However, to seek to remedy is not to condone. The co-design of public and collaborative services is not intended to support the destruction of the public sector but to find alternatives to privatisation, to ensure equitable access to public goods despite politically induced austerity.

Now more than ever, we need to work together to find new ways to deliver public services that safeguard equitable access to public goods, to out manoeuvre the 'tricky' challenges posed by the austerity and efficiency end game that sees impossible odds stacked against the public sector as stewards of public goods.

The limitations of designerly responses are clear. The partial agency of the socially responsive designer renders them impotent to deliver the required service and social innovation alone. Even together with other societal actors, the 'tricky' nature of these challenges means that what is achievable in the short term is 'the best of a bad job' – a good enough resolution given the context at hand – overcrowded families forced to choose between hoping and coping; housebound readers forced into a transactional rather than a relational home library service, losing the potential for interest oriented early intervention that the latter affords; a society forced into a choice between prevention and cure rather than afforded both. The dominant-hegemonic position of neoliberalism appears to have captured even the social designer, limiting her/his ability to reach beyond the trickily constructed present day 'reality' of austerity towards a more socially constructive future where wealth distribution ensures equitable access to public goods.

Despite this bleak reckoning, the designer's open embrace of ambiguity and uncertainty, and of the plurality of present realities and future possibilities, has a key role to play in going beyond present constraints. To work collaboratively in the assembly and service of publics to find new ways to meet the needs of the present, offers a prototype for the future. Design's contribution to a social account of 'democratising innovation' via participatory and collaborative design approaches, finding equitable and inclusive ways to bring a diversity of skills, competencies and resources to bear on collective visioning in response to challenges, is simultaneously a prototype for 'innovating democracy', opening the possibility of finding equitable and inclusive ways to bring a diversity of skills, competencies and resources to bear on the 'tricky' causes of austerity, not just its effects. Erling Björgvinsson articulates a role for design researchers in "infrastructuring agonistic public spaces mainly by facilitating the careful building of arenas consisting of

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[8] David Cameron launches Tories 'big society' plan http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10680062 archived, retrieved December 2016

heterogeneous participants, legitimising those marginalised, maintaining network constellations, and leaving behind repertoires of how to organise socio-materially when conducting innovative transformations." (Björgvinsson et al. 2012: 143)

Whilst much of the activity described above has been focused on facilitating and finding resolutions to tricky day to day challenges via public and collaborative service innovation, in fulfilling this role, designers may help to address what Di Salvo articulates as "the problem with politics". Citing Honig (1993) and Mouffe (2000) he states

"… that the structures and mechanisms of governance often hide or mitigate the essential contests of life. In benign forms, this occurs in an effort to lessen public strife and smooth the processes of governance. In less benign situations, politics become the very methods of extending hegemony by feigning to provide opportunities for expression and action, thereby re-directing or sublimating contestation and reinforcing the status quo." (2010: p3)

Assembling publics for collaborative experimentation in public and collaborative service innovation supports the sharing of different experiences and perspectives. The day to day shortcomings of the dominant-hegemonic viewpoint, that neoliberalism is legitimate and austerity appropriate, are made more visible. Visualisation of these shortcomings from human centred perspectives makes them more accessible whilst collective visioning changes expectations of what is possible. Framed this way, collaborative design for public service innovation becomes a kind of 'political design', that "identifies new terms and themes for contestation and new trajectories for action" (Di Salvo 2010: 4). Building on this understanding, design universities can contribute to the infrastructuring of a 'space' of redundancy, a space in which publics can assemble and act, stepping outside the dominant-hegemonic position of neoliberalism to counter the hegemonic discourse of austerity and its drive for efficiency that leads to privatisation of public services.

Collaborative design approaches can support the constitutive power of publics to both *democratise innovation* and *innovate democracy*. Co-producing public services by prioritising effectiveness over efficiency, addresses the *tricky* challenge of demographic shifts combined with austerity, *at the same time as* collectively making visible, visualising and envisioning alternatives to the neoliberalism that fundamentally contributes to inequality of access to public goods.

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