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THE FUTURE IS TODAY. Scripting public debate on Design Anthropological encounters

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In the village Godsheide (BE) controversy exists on the role participatory processes play in defining the decision-making in spatial planning design. This is due to ten years of inadequate communication between the citizens, policy makers and property developers. In 2014 the citizens started a Participatory Design (PD) process with our research group to re-open communication between all actors. We used a Design Anthropological approach wherein we followed everyday activities in Godsheide through Action Research to build collaborative relationships with the participants (Bradbury, Reason, 2003). At the same time, via co-design workshops we engaged more actively with how people perceive, create, and transform their environment and guided this towards spatial scenarios addressing different timelines: past, present and future (Gunn, Otto & Smith, 2013, xiii; Sanders & Stappers, 2008). As Otto & Smith (2013) indicate, this distorted temporal orientation is one of the clear differences between design and anthropology. This position paper engages with the methodological implications of designers engaging with "ethnographies of the possible" or doing ethnography in a a semi-fictional space.

The relationship between participation and decision-making is a recurrent concern in lengthy and complex participatory planning processes (Forester, 2000). To address this, we explored the hypothesis that this relationship can be re-emphasised by deliberately 'scripting' the documentation of the participatory process to engage (potential) participants in a public debate on the process. Two arguments support this. First, publicly documenting traces of decision-making (by designers, citizens, policy makers etc.) creates a resource that 'publics' (groups brought into action around matters of their concern) can debate and contribute to in their own ways over time (e.g. Latour, 2005; Mazé & Redström, 2008; DiSalvo, 2009; Clark, 2013). Second, public debate contributes to decision-making (Parkins & Mitchell, 2005) by enhancing the attention for what is debated (Salgado & Galanakis, 2004).

Anthropological approaches often document fieldwork via thick descriptions to open up for (public) reflection (Geertz, 1973). In Design Anthropological approaches capturing the fieldwork for reflection and the constructive act of giving form possible futures often go hand in hand (Halse, 2008), shifting the focus from description to action (Gunn et al, 2013, xiiii). The use of the term 'scripts' underlines this double purpose of documenting and constructing. In Science & Technology Studies the term scripts is used as the result of innovators inscribing objects with their visions on the world (Akrich, 1992). PD designers find it important to involve participants in making these scripts for action, using performance or video as mediators (Binder, 1999; Brandt and Grunnet, 2000).

Mass media's 'dramatic scriptings' deliberately aim for public debate, being (exaggerated, simplified etc.) mock-ups of everyday and imagined life, relying on different forms of technology, scheduling and dramaturgy (Goffman, 1986). In our co-design sessions the citizens and us critically engaged with newspapers' scriptings (McQuail, 2010) to produce a publicly spread newspaper about spatial scenarios for Godsheide in 2024. This newspaper was intended to function as a public resource of the participatory decision-making process and as a source of public debate. In a scenario workshop, small stories were told in newspaper articles and still images/tableaux vivants of the stories were collaborative performed in the spatial context. The scripts gathered in the newspaper, titled *The future is today*, narrated about a participatory process that started in 2004, co-design workshops in 2014 and imagined actions in 2024 that were presented as if they took place today.

This newspaper thus discloses fieldwork data, but the publics engaging with it are unaware of what actually happened, what is information from the past and what are future projections. During the scripting process this raised some questions: What should the newspaper at least tell about the actual design anthropological encounters with the research context for others to understand the process, discuss it further and contribute to it? What should researchers at least share about what preceded the encounters (past)? What aspects of the design anthropological encounters could we fictionalise to stimulate interesting debates about and contributions to the future design? And finally, how does the balance between documenting and constructing contributes to the public debate and decisions made in the PD process?

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