

De Andere Markt: transferring imaginations of work

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ABSTRACT

What are your capabilities? How do you imagine a workstation where you can apply these capabilities? Where is it situated? These are some of the questions addressed by De Andere Markt (DAM), a Living Lab in the city of Genk. Via the Participatory Design (PD) of semi-fictional ‘workstations’, we research and design the future of work together with local citizens, public and private organisations and our international network of researchers. The findings, methods, tools and artefacts are made public and open source. This allows to transfer them to other projects, locations and times, as a means of supporting a broader, sustainable and informed debate on ‘work’. In an age of participation, many local initiatives have developed their own situated approaches to deal with issues. Our exhibition and workshop wants to constructively contribute to the debate on the values and ways of transferring these types of local initiatives to different groups in the city and other projects in different contexts, locations and times.

CCS Concepts

- Human-Centered computing → Interaction design
- Participatory design

Keywords

Participatory Design; Living Lab; transferability; work

1. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Technological developments, globalisation and privatisation have changed and complicated the relation between design for work, citizens and the city [5]. Genk is one of many cities that tries to keep pace with changes in industry, population and societal challenges like poverty and unemployment. Confronted with the progressive closure of its coal mines (60s - 80s) and more recently with the closure of the Ford plant (end 2014), fundamental questions have been raised: how can work be part of the urban identity? What is the role of different actors (e.g. the citizens, public, private actors, the cityspace, etc.) in shaping this identity?

This changing context backdropped the beginning of the Living Lab De Andere Markt (DAM) in April 2015: a space where new issues and designs around ‘the future of work’ evolve from bottom-up, long-term participation between citizens, design researchers of two Universities (LUCA School of Arts and

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University of Hasselt), the city and other public bodies (e.g. youth organisations) and local entrepreneurs. The lab is framed within a ‘design for social innovation model’, in which infrastructuring processes give form to issues, products or services, principles and ideas [2]. The Lab is located in a shop front in which people can enter freely and functions as an informal meeting place for citizens, an incubator for initiatives to grow and as a physical connection with other initiatives dealing with similar issues.

The lab starts from the existing capabilities [1] of the citizens, inventoried through a series of interventions. It concretely uses a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) printing press mounted on a cargo bike to carry out interventions in different neighbourhoods and talk about work with citizens and other local actors (Figure 1). The researchers invite people to use the press to create a poster that visualises their capabilities [1]. Furthermore, people are also asked to put up these posters in their work or living spaces, creating visual cues of their capabilities in the city (Figure 2). The capabilities are further developed through co-designing ‘workstations’ by citizens, designers/researchers, public and private organisations. These stations are semi-fictional spaces where new types of work, workers, work methods and tools can develop. They represent local people’s real skills, values, desires, networks and experiences (e.g. a local bio farmer’s network), while at the same time they imagine what the station can mean for the future of work. Some workstations are prototyped in underused lots of Genk. Smaller stations are built on our cargo bike. The already realised workstations (shop front, printing press, material and music making workstations) function as testbeds for alternative work spaces and tools, support different work practices and support people to gain work experience or to cooperate with others.



Figure 1: Cargo bike with printing press

2. TRANSFERABILITY

DAM designs on two levels. First, it co-designs proposals or prototypes of future workstations with local actors, who explore issues, methods, spaces, tools and services related to these workstations. Second, the lab collaboratively gives form to the different actors’ capability to discuss and shape their visions on work. To strengthen this two-level co-design process, its sustainability and the debate, all content and tools are made open source and shared publicly. This enables others to work further upon the process and results, in relation to changing project needs and contexts. The people, tools, methods and/or the resulting artefacts we worked with during the interventions and co-design workshops can be transferred to different projects, locations and times. This - again - inspires alternative

imaginations of workstations. Since the workstations differ in relation to the capabilities and spatial qualities that are all location-, project- and time-specific, the results are never generalised. Therefore, we speak about ‘transferrability’, implying that the findings, methods and artefacts can inspire other projects and contexts [3].

The act of transferring local knowledge surfaces a continuous discussion on the tension between dealing with the unique character of a particular PD trajectory and the potential of people, tools, methods and artefacts as knowledge sources to inspire other projects, contexts and times [3,4]. The question we ask is: what allows the knowledge that has been developed locally to be transferred to other contexts, projects, locations, but also to other times, as a means of supporting a broader, sustainable and informed debate on designing alternative futures for work? What means exist to transfer knowledge besides traditional scholarly methods?



Figure 2: Skill-posters of Souliman and Francine

3. FIELD WORK

We will address these questions by zooming into how ideas, tools or people were transferred from one context to another during the fieldwork of this project. An illustrative case is that of Souliman, a farmer who we met during an intervention in June 2015. Souliman grows biological vegetables in a small garden just outside Genk. When we asked about his capabilities, he summarised them with the sentence ‘land is king’. His piece of land was for him the start of a small business wherein he now provides more than 70 families with vegetables. We shared his story and his picture online, in our shopfront and on postcards. It was shared by others in and outside Genk, since many people in Genk identified with him and admired his initiative. During the following months we encountered other initiatives focused on food, that were looking for connections with others to enhance their potential in the city. This is how we met Berke (a ‘compost master’), Ilse (a cook involving vulnerable people), Thomas (a designer retrained as a beekeeper) and Lilli (the food service coordinator of a social employment organisation). All these people’s stories and their capabilities were documented and shared online and in the lab’s space. This is how the idea of a food-workstation started to grow. In February 2016, we brought these people together in a co-design workshop to give form to food-workstations. They conceived these stations as hubs where by-products of farms, nature parks and organic waste could be gathered. Parts of it could be composted and used in community gardens and professional farms to grow food, prepare and sell food. Also, in this hub people can experiment with new tools and spaces to facilitate this circular process. The first version of this workstation will be prototyped in September 2016. This case exemplifies how people and their stories were transferred throughout different contexts and times.

This idea was followed by Francine, a policy maker in the city of Genk. During one of our interventions she articulates her

skill as ‘making place for making’. The workstation concept inspired her and her colleagues to turn the inventorised capabilities of local people into new ‘workstations’ – in the line of her idea of city factories where creative work could develop – using the label of De Andere Markt. Thus transferring the idea of workstations and the working method of the lab to several spaces in the city.

The fieldwork shows that some aspects that are characteristic to how the Living Lab operates, were transferred.

- Using interventions to inventory capabilities, has generated a distributed database of people’s capabilities in Genk, and beyond.
- The idea of co-designing ‘workstations’ has travelled, which allowed to start new initiatives based on local capabilities.
- The method of designing for work in semi-speculative ways and spreading these stories via social networks and physical labs in the city, has generated productive hands-on, imaginative and critical discussions on alternative ways of giving form to work in our cities.

4. EXHIBITION

The tension that is specific to the transferability of PD processes forms the starting point of our interactive exhibition. We will display a visualisation of how people, tools, methods, content and artefacts were transferred to different locations, projects and times, next to a printing station. During the interactive session, we will first discuss some of the past experiences of the project in Genk and how they contributed to co-designing semi-speculative workstations (5 min.). Second, the participants are divided in three groups, that each reflect on one of our fieldwork stories, more specifically on the value of transferring it from a local PD process to a conference in Aarhus. We will also ask them to zoom into the ways of transferring (a picture, a semi-speculative story, a podcast), next to the more known traditional scientific approaches (10 min.). We end the session with a small debate with all groups on the value and ways of transferring local project results, tools, methods etc. (10 min.). We will close the session with inviting people to make a poster of their capabilities with our printing workstation and add them to our trans-local inventory.

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