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Value platforms as compass in system oriented design for sustainability

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Value Platforms as compass in System Oriented Design for Sustainability

Abstract

System Oriented Design is a natural approach in Design for Sustainability. Products must be designed and evaluated in a longer time-lap, as well as in a wider perspective of human needs, desires, culture, and material life cycles (and more). Hence, the choices of non-material values are also critical, although not seldom a neglected factor. On the one hand, during the last five years the society in general has become stronger aware of the challenges humanity is facing in ecological care and social development. Public economic support has been increased for environmental profiled projects. On the other hand, solutions asked for and suggested by the businesses, researchers and government are not always convincing. Are we actually able to design for change within the same value-frame as before? A researcher and pioneer within Industrial Ecology, John Ehrenfeld, pinpoints that a new care-structure within design and development also is critical for us to succeed (Ehrenfeld, 2008). What does this actually mean? This article describes how two projects include design of a value platform as guideline for co-design with all stakeholders. A bottom up and research related approach is necessary for strong individual and organisational ownership to the success criteria and challenges.

Introduction - Who and what defines the values in design?

Our traditional structures in education, politics and organisations are defined through sectors in close relation to academic disciplines, whereas some of them were established already in ancient time. The joint-problem tasks and needs in the world today, however, ask for inter-, or trans-disciplinarity. Ehrenfeld's new care structure even requires a personal involvement in work. How is this possible to expect from professionals today? What is care in a business-context? Historical innovations and paradigm shifts in thinking can often be traced back to people working in fields of practice, close to the sources where new needs arise or where needs are clearly outspoken by individuals or groups organised. The Norwegian Official Report (NOU 2011:11) *Innovation in the Care Services* from Ministry of Health and Care Services, predicts that future solutions for care for the elderly will find place in co-operations and partnerships between businesses, public institutions, and volunteer organisations. In practice this is a contradiction to both the economic system and legislation today. When quality of life for the most vulnerable people becomes a goal for the design task, or defeating loneliness in society or ecological loss, then our values for strategies must be redefined not only within design, but also within the economics. We design for people and natural values that are outside of the traditional market target. The society must choose to value people and nature for other reasons than short-time perspective profits. One basic principle for sustainability is manifold. In nature a manifold of species creates a totality of strength that sustains the ecological systems as such. This may seem to be the case also for social sustainability, society needs a diversity of people, and within economy we do need to

investigate how suggestions of ecological economics as a new paradigm, is a part of design for a sustainable future (Costanza, 2010).

Designing value platforms for system change and innovation, - two projects

Following are two ongoing projects in Norway shortly explained to show 1) how new values are introduced in the building industry, through a pilot building for co-living, defined by the overarching concept; Gaining by Sharing, and 2) how the future challenge of care for the elderly is partly met by a new service system.

Gaining by Sharing – a concept and process standard for commercial real estate

An owner and leader of a large family-owned building entrepreneur in Norway, decides to invest in a research and development project that can really contribute to design for sustainability in the branch. She involves a partner from an architect office, and an industrial designer with research competence. The goal is to develop a Co-living concept for commercial building projects. Initially a research is executed with student-workshops, literature study, visits to existing co-living housing in Europe, as well as interviews are done with five different dwellers or "ex-dwellers" in co-living houses in Norway. Based on this, a handbook is written, first edition. This shows to be the new value platform for the pilot project. The value platform is named Gaining by Sharing and is in this article presented through a visual model (figure 1). A second model is being developed as a concrete standard responding to the value platform and the process of participatory design with the dwellers, used by the expertise shaping the buildings.

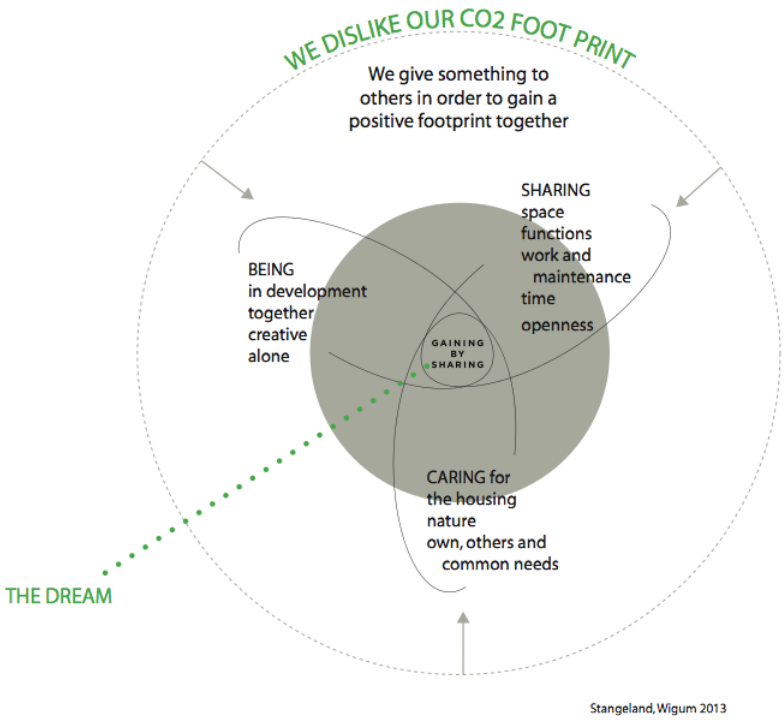

Figure 1. The value platform and model Gaining by Sharing is based on research study (Wigum and Stangeland, 2013). The values presented are supporting design for social sustainability.

A pilot-building is expected to be finished in 2017. The potential dwellers have already become involved through seminar and workshops. In winter 2015/2016, the first complete course will be held, helping new dwellers to make the final decision of moving into the co-living housing, and preparing them for further participatory design, and for the sharing and organisation of daily life. Communication structures and relational ability among dwellers and professionals, become increasingly important. The goal is individual creativity and contribution for both personal needs and sharing qualities. Finally, this shall decrease the ecological footprint, or even create a positive one for the dwellers. The values in the project represent the idea of sharing in order to have a rich and meaningful life, in contradiction to owning all functions individually, and having neither economically freedom nor time to actually experiencing the daily life as wanted.

Joy of life for the Elderly – from volunteer work to Joy of life Communities

The Foundation Joy of Life for the Elderly, starting with volunteer work, is replacing the focus on loss of health, with joy and involvement in the care for elderly. Through systematic design approaches and precise awareness of the individual senior needs, Joy of Life Nursing Homes has become a national strategy and certification system in Norway. The success of this work has led to a new project; Joy of life for the Elderly Living at Home. However, this project showed to become a harder task to solve. The core team of a nurse, industrial designer with research competence, and teacher, has involved a large group of stakeholders into the project, as well as students in product design. Giga-mapping was a method for the team to place all the stakeholders in context, and for planning further detailed involvement and interests (figure 2). All stakeholders are made aware of the value platform, which in these projects are part of the visions of the foundation as such. Arne Naess, the philosopher and founder of deep-ecology, is their inspiration. To reach the “inner glow” (Naess 1989) of both the seniors the volunteers and professional health care workers, is their great goal. This asks for individual awareness on all levels.

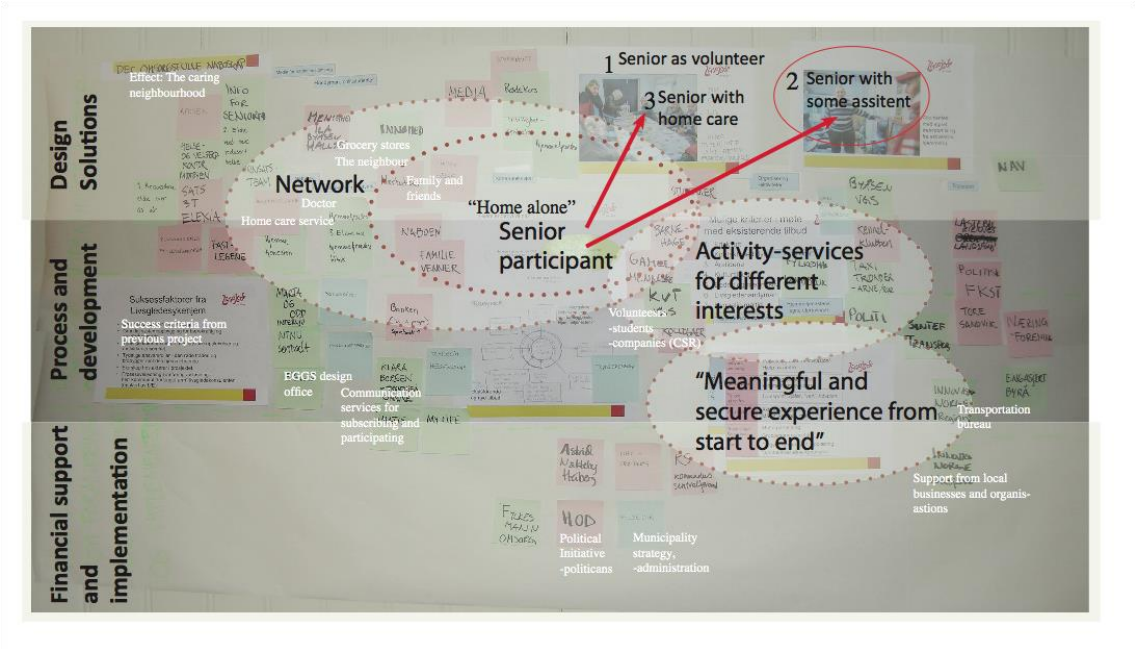

Figure 2 Inspired by Giga-mapping (Sevaldson, 2011) as a tool for the team process, and in communication with stakeholders (Wigum and Stangeland, 2014).

Discussion - Success criteria for value change

The new results become partly standards for practical working procedures, or frameworks for new architecture and co-design processes, however, both are built on existing structures and procedures, as far as possible. This makes the implementation possible within short time, and "live testing" can be executed during the project development. Participants in the tests become co-designers through direct feedback, and in both projects described, they may take part in the final solution as well, if wanted. The ownership of the solutions are carefully planned during the entire process, to ensure successful implementation of final results. The projects must be strongly anchored in both individuals and organisations. These type of projects may seem "soft and low tech", however, the change of values, thinking, and work-practice, require a strong inner compass carried by the development team, in all meetings in order to face arguments for traditional views and approaches. This compass consists of the values that have been defined early as a common platform. The economic facet of the projects must be a parallel discussion along the concept development. The commercial or economic sustainability is a part of the evaluation of the new systems in a long time perspective, for implementation and business. The stakeholders owning the final solutions must see the gain in the effects corresponding to their input. However, when we dare to place economy together with the value platforms and the discussion of other life concerns, the solutions have the possibility to become innovative and actually contribute to system change. This approach also generates other qualities than traditional hierarchic power structures or systems for monoculture. This type of approach results in value-based systems open for individual manifold, as well as the creative interplay between people, nature and culture.

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