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Embodied Complexity: Exploring complexity and playing with tensions through embodied experiences

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EMBODIED COMPLEXITY

Exploring complexity and playing with tensions through embodied experiences

A workshop proposal for the the 10th Relating Systems Thinking and Design Symposium

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Purpose and structure of the workshop

The intention of this workshop is to create space for exploration of complexity, systemic transformation, and paradoxes as an embodied experience. When we work with social problems we work with diverse groups of stakeholders and may encounter cultural, educational and language barriers when engaging them and explaining concepts like complexity and systemic design. With this workshop we aim to show that anyone can experience and relate to those concepts and can be engaged in taking conscious action as part of the systemic transformation process.

Participants will experience being part of a simple, complicated, complex and chaotic system (based on David Snowden's Cynefin framework) and experiment with different approaches to transform them. They will also play with tensions, paradoxes and multiple perspectives.

The approach in this workshop is to use methods and games inspired by dance, contact improvisation, and improv theater to create space for embodied experience rather than just intellectualising about designing interventions in a complex system. The workshop will balance between embodied work, reflection and collective sense making.

Alignment with the RSD10 themes

This workshop is a playful exploration of a few of the key themes of the symposium - complexity, systemic design, playing with tensions. It is an opportunity to create a common ground for workshop participants to start conversations about those topics based not only on intellectual understanding but also on physical and emotional level.

At the Digital Society School we have used this workshop to introduce our Digital Transformation Designers in training to the concepts of complexity, systems thinking, and transdisciplinary collaboration. Since our trainees come from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, this workshop has worked extremely well to introduce challenging concepts on a visceral level.

For systemic designers the games and simulations introduced in this workshop can be relevant tools they can use to introduce their approach to the diverse stakeholders they are working with.

This workshop is an opportunity to align thinking, feeling and acting. Embodied experiences allow for deeper understanding and reflection on our thoughts and actions. This workshop creates space for grounding ourselves into our practice as systemic designers and ponder on the, often unseen, impact we may have on the systems we design for. The participants will observe their actions in the moment and practice switching their perspective from actor to observer, to thinker and empath.

Duration of the workshop: 90 min

The workshop will be face to face

Number of participants: minimum 10 - maximum 50 if the space allows for it

Support needed from the organisers

This workshop requires close proximity of participants and physical interaction between them so participants need to be willing to move around and interact with others. Due to corona restrictions this may mean they need to wear masks since keeping 1.5 m distance is impossible in some of the activities (they can also choose not to participate in those activities and just observe).

The workshop is kept appropriate in terms of physical contact and doesn't require special physical abilities, however, if someone from the participants has certain movement limitations, it will be good to know in advance so I can adapt it accordingly if needed. The workshop is intended to be inclusive for everyone.

For this workshop we need a large enough flat floor space for people to move around freely - no tables, chairs or other equipment. We do need about 3-4 square meters per person so the maximum number of participants depends on space availability. It is possible to do the workshop outside if the weather allows it and we have clear and defined space to work in.

We will need flipchart, markers and post-it notes as well.