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Play Probes For Systemic Design Decisions

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Play Probes For Systemic Design Decisions

A playful workshop for understanding needs, expectations, dynamics, roles and importance of cross-organisational partnerships with a systemic design perspective

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The European Systemic Design Lab (ESDL) is an ongoing cooperation between three European universities. To deal with the complexity that entails the creation of an international platform for Systemic Design such as ESDL, the team will offer an in-person workshop and make use of Play Probes to create a safe space and adopt questioning, risk-taking and exploring behaviours with participants. During this format, they will enter a hands-on, playful dialogue concentrating on the present and, most importantly, on the possible futures of Systemic Design and the potential establishment of an educational programme within it. This type of dialogue is made possible by using a probe kit developed at HTW Berlin, whose goal is to work on three stations ("Expectations, Dynamics and Code of Conduct") while writing key words on "building blocks" and connecting them together in a mindful way, thus creating abstract and organic sculptures. During the building process, participants are motivated to exchange and communicate, not only with others, but also with themselves by reflecting about their thoughts, expectations and wishes. At the end, the team should be able to observe a tangible representation of each participant's wishes in regard to the creation of ESDL that can be discussed and documented.

Who?

The European Systemic Design Lab (ESDL) is an ongoing cooperation between three European universities: the Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), the University of Applied Sciences Berlin (HTW Berlin) and the École de Design Nantes Atlantique (EDNA).

Why?

The long term goal is the establishment of an international educational programme within Systemic Design.

Figure 1: A model developed by the three universities during a workshop at HTW Berlin, describing the emphasis of the content of the ESDL platform.

The centre of Fig. 1 describes the intention of creating an international cooperation platform that can build a critical mass within academia and further help develop the field of systemic design and in turn society. To make such a functioning cooperation amongst students and staff (as described in the light blue area of Fig. 1), there is a need to establish a common language (theory) and to connect the associated networks of the universities. Both these dimensions will contribute to developing new perspectives in design education and practice. The university networks that will be coupled in this cooperation consist of the public sector, business, industry & agriculture, as well as research and education partners.

First approaches have been successfully made to further said goal, one example being a continuous education course called "Practice Oriented Systemic Design (POSD)" which is offered by the three universities in a hybrid format. Nevertheless, the team knows that the organisational approach for an international cooperation between universities such as ESDL demands new pedagogical perspectives, specifically within the domain of communication. At the same time, it demands the extension of perspectives on mobility for student, staff and network partakers.

Communication in this context means being able to reflect or converse based on thoughts of and with others (Krippendorf & Bermejo, 2009; Schön, 1995; B. Sweeting, 2015) within specific situations. This involves seeking a certain level of understanding in the present by studying how thinking and actions affect each other and, based on those findings, how to further act (Ben Sweeting, 2015). Such a perspective implies orienting oneself in the present with who one is, but with a curiosity about the epistemologies of the others and to some extent leaving one's own tradition to be able to understand or recognise these.

What?

To deal with the complexity that entails discussing the needs, challenges and outcomes of a platform for such as ESDL, we will make use of Play Probes (Sjøvoll & Gulden, 2016), a user oriented design method that involves play and systems oriented thinking at its core. This within an in-person workshop. These methods seek to stimulate a natural dialogue amongst the partakers of the workshop. Natural dialogue involves the partakers creating the questions themselves, stimulated by a frame (Bateson,

2000/1972; Jørgensen & Mortensen, 2013; Linderoth, 2012). In this context the workshop rules are the ones creating said the frame.

The usage of Play Probes should establish a safe space to adopt questioning, risk-taking and exploring behaviours. People taking part in this workshop should feel motivated to engage with others in a playful data gathering process that aims to shine a light over individual and shared expectations (Luhmann, 2012) for the creation of ESDL.

How?

The workshop format and methods will make heavy use of the participants' perceptions to navigate within and to embody their expectations and wishes. The team will offer a 90 to 120 min. workshop divided in three stations, which will be explored by the participants twice: one concentrating on the present and one concentrating on the possible futures such a platform and Systemic Design might live through.

- The first station will deal with the participants' EXPECTATIONS (e.g. *What is the purpose of creating such a platform?*)

- The second station will deal with the anticipated or desired DYNAMICS that participants wish to encounter in such a platform (e.g. *How would you/should communication within ESDL beframed? Playful? Hierarchical? Holocratic?*)

- The third station will focus on the CODE OF CONDUCT within the platform (e.g. *What should this platform NOT _____ be?*)

The team wishes to motivate participants to use their hands during this process. A probe kit developed at HTW Berlin during the ongoing research Project "LudiX: Ludic Innovation Experience for Business Punks" will be provided. The goal is to work on the three stations while writing key words on "building blocks" (Fig. 2) and connecting them together in a mindful way that makes sense for the participants' expectations. At the end, we should be able to observe a physical representation (Fig. 3) of the public's wishes in regard to the future of Systemic Design and the creation of ESDL that we will then be able to discuss and document.

EXPECTATIONS

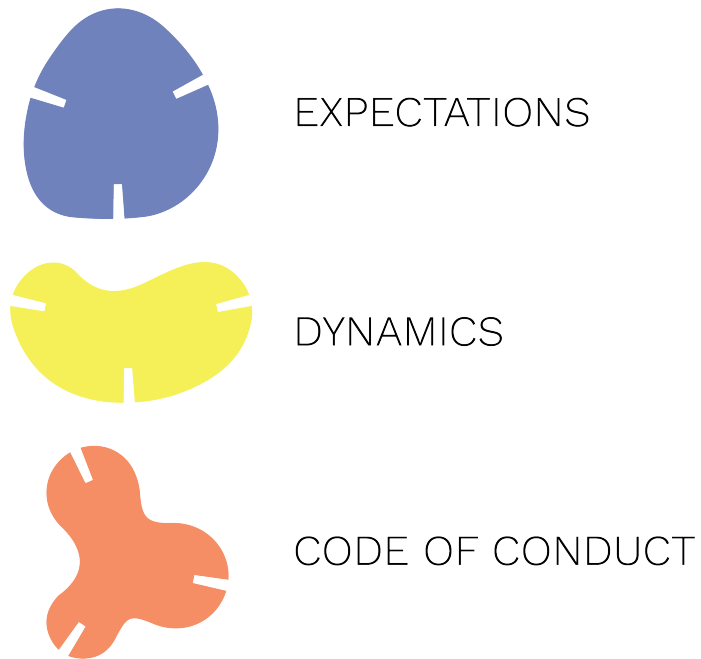DYNAMICS

CODE OF CONDUCT

Figure 2: A rendering of the "building blocks" and which station they will represent during the workshop.

Figure 3: Some insights into the application of the Probe Kit taken during the Re:publica Conference in Berlin.

Outcomes

The three stations loosely draw inspiration from Bateson´s three levels of learning (Proto-learning, Deutero-learning and Trito-learning). The first one, "Expectations" acts as an introductory step into the mind of our participants and their present and fixed projections for a Systemic Design platform. "Dynamics" aims to distance itself from the present and encourages the creation of the first frame for new context markers within a new, hybrid learning platform. For "Code of Conduct", the team draws inspiration in Bateson's Cybernetic explanation by giving participants the opportunity to provide a negative description of the platform, thus opening up the scope of opportunities for creation in a different direction.

Participants are expected to exchange and communicate about the future of System Design, not only with others, but also with themselves. The dialogue with others will originate in the exchange they will be doing with their peers, while the dialogue with themselves is done when reflecting and building a palpable representation of their thoughts and wishes for this platform and Systemic Design. The team wishes to be challenged too, mainly with the feedback it will receive. At the same time, this workshop within RSD11 should further encourage participants in the creation of new networking opportunities for the ever-growing Systemic Design community.

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