Designerly approaches for shaping social structures: catalysing intentional change in social systems

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Designerly Approaches to Shaping Social Structures.

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The importance of social structures.

Structure drives behaviour in social systems and these structures are a powerful leverage point for change.

(Meadows, 2008)
The materiality of social structures.

Social structures are shared and entrenched ways of working that include physical enactments and underlying regulative, normative and cultural cognitive pillars.

(Scott, 2014)
The role of designerly approaches.

Previous systemic design work highlighted the value of designerly approaches that tap into people’s embodied ways of knowing and doing to build awareness of complexity and catalyze systems change.
Purpose of this paper:

To conduct an exploratory analysis of how designerly approaches can be employed to intentionally shape social structures.
Approach.

Building on insights from theory, we involved 915 participants in 21 design experiments that had the explicit purpose of shaping social structures. These took place in four countries (Canada, the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden) in various settings, including at conference workshops, in educational environments, within design teams, and inside healthcare systems.
Preliminary reflections.

1. Building awareness of the **invisible aspects** of social structures by leveraging artefacts and actors’ bodily enactments;
2. Tapping into the important **role of the self** in shaping social structures;
3. Exploring the **unintended consequences** of changing social structures through **experimentation at a small scale**;
4. Ensuring adequate **diversity in participation** to enable **recognition of taken for granted social structures**;
5. Appreciating the ways in which designerly approaches are themselves **performing and perpetuating certain social structures**;
6. Building consciousness of the direct links between **changing social structures** and **power struggles** in social systems.
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2. Tapping into the important role of the self in shaping social structures.
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Thank you.
1. Building awareness of the invisible aspects of social structures by leveraging artefacts and actors’ bodily enactments;
2. Tapping into the important role of the self in shaping social structures;
3. Exploring the unintended consequences of changing social structures through experimentation at a small scale;
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