

CAPTURING SCALES OF INSTITUTIONING

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Institutioning (Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib, 2017) calls for Participatory Designers (PD) to not only focus on the micro-level impact of their work, but to also understand how the institutions they are connected to are involved and impacted. This paper explores this concept within a Higher Education Institution (HEI) and local neighbourhood context, using two methods of analysis to draw out insights around the dependencies and impact of the institution. Firstly using Situational Analysis (Clarke, 2005), the context is captured at a meso-level at each stage of engagement revealing insights into the impact of PD methods. The dependencies and impact (both actual and potential) are captured through a new method called Institutional Frame Mapping, aiming to understand the different scales of connection between the institution and project. The paper concludes with potential opportunities to develop these methods and further embed Institutioning within PD practice.

INTRODUCTION

PD has historically focused on creating a more democratic process by bringing participants and their context expertise into the design process (Halskov and Hansen, 2015). In recent years this practice has been criticised for becoming de-politicised when working in community and social settings, with practitioners focusing too much on the micro-level impact of their work (Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib, 2017). This paper expands on how the concept of Institutioning (Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib, 2017) was explored within a Higher Education Institution (HEI) and local neighbourhood context, seeking to re-politicise PD

through the reengagement and reframing of the HEI within the PD process. Two methods of analysis were used to understand the different scales of involvement of the institution and better understand the impact of PD methods on the context at different scales. The first method is Situational Analysis (SA) (Clarke, 2005), used to examine the impact of PD methods on a meso-level at each stage of the project. This is supported by reviewing the different scales of impact and involvement of the institution, on a micro-, meso- and macro-level, using a new method called Institutional Frame Mapping. In this paper micro-level is defined as the immediate community scale, meso-level as the organisational and institutional scale and macro-level as the policy, economic and cultural scale. This paper argues for the continued need to further engage institutions within PD processes for more effective transformative impact and identifies an opportunity to further embed methods such as SA to understand the impact of PD methods on a range of scales.

INSTITUTIONING

Since its origin, PD has been a politically engaged field and has evolved around the importance of democracy within the design process. Now that the field has spread from technology to more social contexts, designers are working with dynamic networks of people and services, making it necessary for them to be skilled in dealing with contestations, disputes and conflict in these complex “constellations” (Emilson et al., 2014 p.40).

Although PD is rooted in politics and democracy, Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib (2017) argue that recent moves towards community and social contexts have led PD projects to become *de-politicised*, focusing too much on micro-level impact such as capacity building for participants and community-led outputs. With PD and co-design projects normally closely linked or supported by institutions, they believe projects need to be explicit about the impact PD projects can and should have on the institutions they are linked with. When talking about PD projects, designers often choose to distance themselves from institutions and focus on participation ‘on the ground’, contributing to the belief that institutions are inert and apolitical and that change can only happen outside of them. In response to this,

they propose the concept of Institutioning, a reengagement and reframing of institutions within the PD process to position them as “active sites of change” (p.151). Designers should articulate and reflect on the various institutional frames (policy, financial, cultural) that a PD process depends on and explore what direct and indirect effects the process has had on these frames. Being aware of the *ripple effects* of PD projects on meso- and macro-levels, designers can actively explore how PD processes can engage and revitalise institutions, challenging or enriching institutional frames.

Others have also discussed and developed approaches to push PD to have greater impact politically through strategy, networks and scale. Looking at large scale systems and the high rate of failure with new designs, Shapiro (2005) argues that PD offers strategies for “real engagement” in large scale systems through clarity, negotiation, integration and democratic processes (p.36). Bodker, Dindler and Iversen (2017) argue that to ensure sustainable and impactful PD projects, designers need to develop *participatory infrastructuring* and *knotworks* through utilising both horizontal and vertical participation.

The critique that PD has lost its political prowess is an important one and forces designers to critically consider the impact and legacy of their projects, being explicit about how PD processes are *institutionally entangled* and/or how institutions can be further engaged and embedded in these processes. By consciously and creatively including institutions, or decision makers, within the PD process, there is a greater opportunity for mutual learning and potential for institutional and policy change.

CASE STUDY

In June 2018, the Glasgow School of Art's (GSA) Mackintosh Building caught fire, destroying the building and greatly impacting the surrounding neighbourhood of Garnethill. This incident increased tensions between residents and organisations of Garnethill and GSA. In response, GSA decided to evaluate how it impacts and connects with Garnethill by appointing a Community Engagement Officer to focus on developing a more constructive and positive relationship. I took on this role part-time in November 2018 and, running alongside, undertook a two-year research project to explore how PD methods can be utilised within this context to immerse, analyse and rebuild connections between a HEI and a neighbourhood, both dynamic and complex contexts.

This research explored how the civic role of GSA can be developed by opening up effective avenues of dialogue with local stakeholders using PD methods. Following a Participatory Action Research methodology and using methods of conversational scoping, walking interviews

and co-design workshops, context-specific PD tools were developed to facilitate participants in reflection and ideation about the future of Garnethill and the role of GSA within it. The outputs of this value-driven research were a community engagement strategy, co-developed by 20 local stakeholders, and a series of identified engagement opportunities.

CAPTURING MESO-LEVEL IMPACT THROUGH SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The first step in understanding different scales of impact of a PD process is to analyse it on a meso-level. SA offers a reflective framework to examine contexts on symbolic, discursive and relational levels (Clarke, 2005; Clarke and Star 2008). This form of mapping visually captures human elements, materials and symbolic/discursive elements, visualising how they each relate or do not relate to each other and the key commitments and discourses in the situation. SA has been used within PD research to map out engagements and complex interactions, with the aim of making explicit the impact of collaboration and participation through the design process (Johnson, 2016). This process can analyse how a context (or situation) has been impacted by PD methods through highlighting the elements, commitments and discourses revealed at each stage of fieldwork.

After following the first two stages of analysis as outlined by Clarke, situational and relational maps, I created Social Worlds/Arenas Maps based on the data collected at each engagement. I chose to use this option for further analysis as it is rooted in Symbolic Interactionism, the theoretical approach of this research, and focuses on “meaning-making social groups ... and collective action” (Clarke, 2005; p.109). Social worlds are described as “universes of discourse” (Strauss, 1978, p. 120) and by examining these social worlds through specific questions, in this case the impact of PD methods, these maps visually set out collective and complex social action and discourse, providing a meso-level of analysis rather than just individual discourse (Martin et al., 2016). This analysis took place after the fieldwork was completed, using data captured through notes, annotated engagement tools, audio recordings and my reflective journal. I structured the analysis chronologically, mapping the context after each stage of fieldwork so I could compare the methods to see how the research process had impacted the context. I analysed the data collected to identify discourse, commitments and opportunities, focusing on collective social action and actors. The creation of the maps closely followed the process described by Clarke (2005) and further detail is available in my thesis (Simms, 2021).

The first method was conversational scoping over six months from January to June 2019, where I built

knowledge and relationships within the context through immersion and informal, unstructured conversations. Through SA mapping, the data captured shows the current state of the context, revealing the complexities, values and conflicts expressed by local stakeholders and the entanglement of GSA and Garnethill (See Figure 1). Key conflicts were the Mackintosh Fires, exclusive regeneration, impact of students and communication between GSA and Garnethill, as well as in general between local stakeholders.

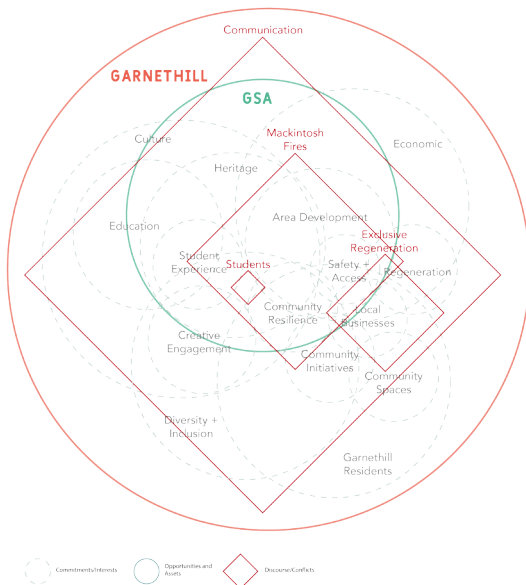


Figure 1: Conversational Scoping Social World Map

With these initial insights I had gathered, the next method I used was walking interviews, focusing on refining the emerging values through more direct and intimate interaction. Between August and October 2019, I conducted individual walking interviews with 16 participants from Garnethill and GSA, asking each one to lead me on a walk through the neighbourhood whilst discussing a series of questions around the context and relationship between Garnethill and GSA. The SA map reveals the method captured personal perspectives, identifying the values of stakeholders and providing them with a space to share their conflicts and frustrations individually. The key conflicts that were raised were issues of power between GSA and Garnethill, trauma and change, visibility and communications and relations. It also identified that many of these values and conflicts were shared between the participants, showing that there was an opportunity to bring them together around these shared perspectives (See Figure 2).

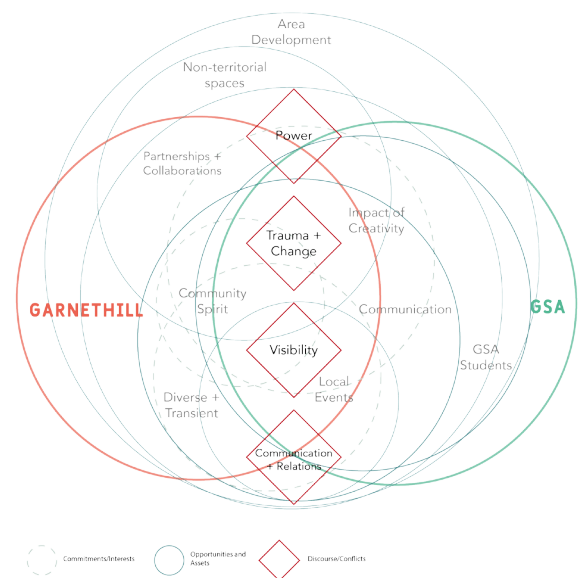


Figure 2: Walking Interviews Social World Map

The next engagement was a co-design workshop in February 2020 where I invited 12 participants, split evenly between Garnethill and GSA, to negotiate and develop the shared values and identify engagement opportunities. The workshop was designed to be value-based, so the conflicts and challenges were reframed as questions and opportunities. The map confirmed that this method focused on opportunities and values, rather than conflicts raised at the walking interviews, as no conflicts appeared in the data collected from participants. Instead the workshop provided a space for constructive dialogue, shared values, and future-focused aspirations (See Figure 3). Key interests for GSA and Garnethill's engagement strategy were healing, accessibility, representation, sustainability, long-term and an opportunity to humanise the institution. The four opportunities identified were collaboration and partnerships, strategy and development, communication and engaging students.

The maps revealed that the value-driven framework and PD methods enabled a process of examining and reframing of the context. It also showed that the PD process allowed conflicts to be identified and heard, but being value-driven there was a focus on finding commonality and shared aspirations that would bring participants together to develop a positive narrative going forward.

SA was used alongside Thematic Analysis (TA) in this research (Braun and Clarke, 2006), with TA analysing and identifying themes from the data. The two methods complemented each other as TA focused on the micro-level, identifying shared themes and values between participants, whilst SA focused on the meso-level and identified changes in the context and the impact of the PD methods.

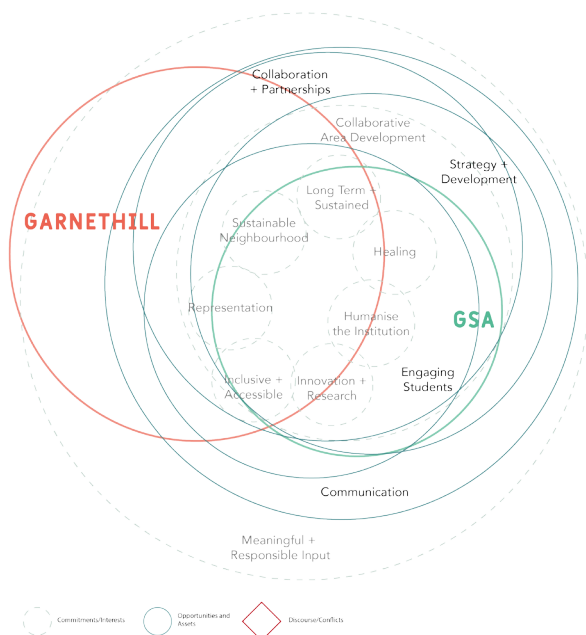


Figure 3: Co-Design Workshop Social World Map

INSTITUTIONAL FRAME MAPPING

When outlining Institutioning, Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib (2017) argue that designers need to reflect on the different institutional frames that a PD project may depend on and affect. To further embed the concept of Institutioning into this research, I introduce Institutional Frame Mapping as a method of mapping out these institutional frames to analyse how an institution has supported and been involved in the process and the impact (and potential impact) of the research on the institution, on a micro-, meso- and macro-level.

For this research, I created a map that shows how GSA has been involved and impacted at different scales (See Figure 4), with GSA in green and Garnethill in orange. Initially GSA was involved through the creation of the Community Engagement Officer role, part of a new community engagement drive in response to the impact of the Mackintosh fire. This then led to an agreement to fund this research which gained the involvement and support of the Innovation School and senior management in the development of the research. Unlike some PD projects, the research has also directly involved the institution through staff and student participants and with GSA's civic role being a focus of the co-design briefs. It was important to include Garnethill stakeholders in the mapping as their involvement and impact were key to the research.

Looking on the right-side of the map for impact and potential impact, the research outputs were a co-designed framework, set of values and developed network with local stakeholders to progress with. The potential impact is based on discussions with senior management and future opportunities to impact policy and strategy within the institution.

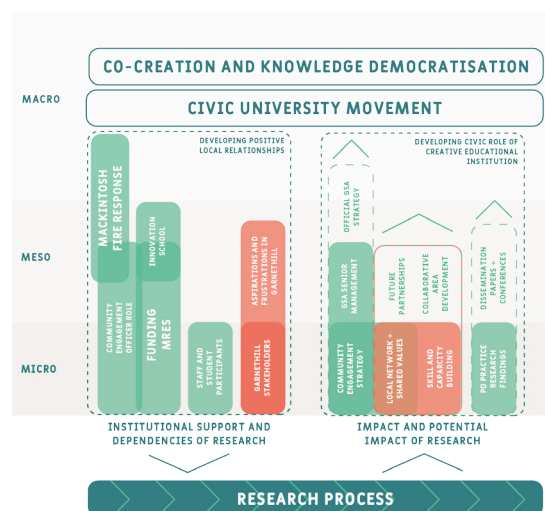


Figure 4: Institutional Frame Map

The map identified that the co-designed outputs have constructively challenged GSA's community engagement drive and have provided a strong foundation for future development of the civic role of GSA on an institutional level. This process of analysing the dependencies, different scales of involvement and impact of GSA within the research provided a clear picture of how the research has and can impact the institution and highlighted opportunities where further involvement and connections could be nurtured between the institution and local neighbourhood.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Both SA and Institutional Frame Mapping were undertaken at the end of the research as reflective methods of analysis and provided strong insights into the scales of impact and involvement, visualising micro-, meso- and macro-levels. There is an opportunity to explore these methods further, using them before and during the research to provide insights to inform the direction and design of a PD process.

Using SA after each stage of engagement, to support findings identified through other forms of analysis, would give designers a greater sense of the context as a whole through an awareness of the conflicts, silences and discourse within it and identifying collective social action. These maps would also capture the impact of PD methods on a meso-level in real time and the maps can be compared at the end of the process to understand how the context has been impacted.

Following Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib's (2017) call for designers to be explicit about how their work is *institutionally entangled*, Institutional Frame Mapping provides a method to capture and visualise this. As the first version is specific to my research, I have created a template map that can be used for similar projects (See Figure 5). It highlights the different institutional frames based within the map and also provides prompts for designers to consider how to effectively design and

structure their research to engage and impact the institution or organisations involved.

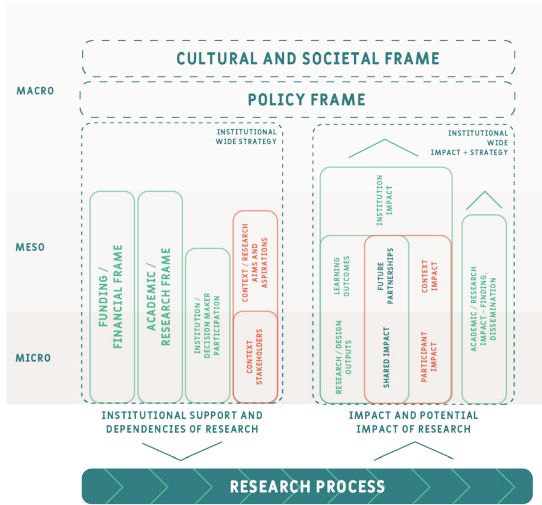


Figure 4: Institutional Frame Map Template

There is an opportunity for designers to conduct this type of mapping at the beginning of their process to inform the design of the research and recruitment of participants. Institutions are highly complex and this mapping method can provide a clear overview of how the institution they are connected to is involved and highlights potential opportunities to involve it further during the PD process. Also identifying the institutional frames, such as policy, would enable designers to understand how their projects can directly or indirectly inform institutional policy through their work and findings. Reflecting on my own research, I feel mapping these institutional frames at the beginning of the project would have helped me understand GSA's different scales of involvement in the research and better inform how I engaged with decision makers and management throughout the process. There is a need for institutions to become more active and engaged with their local areas and communities and PD offers clear avenues to do this, whether that is through direct projects such as this research or indirectly through the research institutions fund and support. Designers have a responsibility to understand the scales of impact of their work and can be explicit about this through embedding Institutioning within PD projects. It is not possible to know at this stage the extent to which these research outputs have had a transformative impact on GSA at an institutional level. However, this process of incorporating Institutioning through these methods of analysis has enabled a clear reflection on the different scales of involvement by the institution and potential scales of impact and participation going forward.

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