The role of the artefact in participatory design research

Birgitte Geert Jensen
Assistant Professor, Industrial Designer
Aarhus School of Architecture
Nørreport 20
DK-8000 Aarhus C

"The audience itself must understand the power it has to shape, develop, and share in our society's creations." (*Schlossberg, 1998)*

Keywords

Designetnography, user observation, participatory design, design methods

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the innovation of tools and techniques for user centred, participatory design. The focus will be looking at the designer's role in creation of the tools and in the expansion of the design language for users.

For several years now we have seen the design process as a close dialogue between various competences in order to find the optimal reply to a given design question.
In such cooperation the designer can be compared to the psychologist, the sociologist, the anthropologist, and others, and the process aims at reaching all the way around a design question.
Ethnography, observing user behaviour (what people do), is the current state of the art in design research. The way the user are understand is primarily through pictures and the analysis of pictures – whether it is video ethnography, photo diaries or field notes which includes maps as well as sketches.
Interviewing and ethnography are structured on the assumption that users are not creative and do not know what they want. Today's standards in design research do not actively involve the intended user in the creative process.

Participatory design is an emerging paradigm shift in the design process. While this approach seeks to include the design research methods mentioned above, participatory design is founded on the belief that users are creative and can play an active role in the design process. This shift means that we are designing with users, not just for them. Participatory design (PD) is a set of theories, practices, and studies (Schuler and Namioka, 1993) related to end-users as full participation's in activities, leading to software and hardware computer products and computer-based activities.

In the early 1990s Scandinavian and North American researchers undertook efforts to marry collaborative practices to product development. At CHI ´94 Morten Kyng´s paper "Scandinavian Design: Users in product development" described a traditional custom project to support the Great Links bridge construction that *also* included partners interested in using the research to design products.

Product developer's efforts to adapt and extend elements of the participatory design approach include low-fidelity mock-ups and prototyping increased engagement and communication with potential users.

The purpose in participatory design is to gain deep insights into people's current experience and dreams. Methods known as projective tools (what people make) place creative tools into the hands of people, enabling them to be creative and expressive.

The tools for participatory design exercises can be scissors, glue sticks, poster boards, scrap book pages, stickers or printouts with words or pictures, cameras, playful shapes, and markers. Stickers or printouts with words or images are especially useful because they can used to express items, feelings, actions, features, etc. For three-dimensional or interactive products, Lego's or building blocks may be used.
People make something from a "toolkit" and discuss it. These "make" tools need to be abstract to provide people a means to think and express themselves in more conceptual ways. The role of the designer in participatory design expands to facilitate this expression.

How does the emergence of the new tools change the role of the product designer?
Designers will participate in the creation of the tools and in the expansion of the design language for users.
Designers will be part of teams responsible for the analysis and interpretation of the "data"; the user generated artefacts and models.
New innovations will be successful because they are derived from people's experience and aspirations.

The question is:
How does one communicate using artefacts and what kind of communication is facilitated that would be more difficult or impossible using other means?

Is it possible to make the same tool being used in different kind of participatory design project, for the reason of evaluation?

This research is innovative and relevant, because new demands for the designer in user understanding make it necessarily to form methods where the designer can gain a close dialogue with the user.

References

Julier, Guy (2002) Culture of design, Sage Pubns, UK
Kyng, M (1994) Scandinavian design: Users in product development, *Proc. CHI ´94*, 3-9.
Laurel, Brenda (2003) Design Research, Methods and Perspectives. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Salvador, T (1999) Design Ethnography. Design Management Journal Fall, 35-41
Schlossberg, E. (1998) Interactive Excellence "Defining and Developing New Standards for the Twenty-first Century. New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group
Schuler. D. and Namioka. A (1993) "Participatory design: Principles and practices. Hilsdale NJ USA: ERL Baum
Tso, Judy (1999) "Do you dig up Dinosaur Bones?" Design Management journal fall, 69-74

www.postdesign.net
www.nextd.org/02/03/01/contents.htm
www.sonicrim.com