Common ground What social design can learn from conflict resolution Judith Leijdekkers Degree project Master of Fine Arts in Design Lund University School of Industrial Design

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Common ground
What social design can learn from conflict resolution

Judith Leijdekkers
In collaboration with Cascoland and many others

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Abstract

A designer who engages in social problems is often an outsider, intervening in an environment with existing social structures. How can a designer contribute to finding durable solutions for social problems? What are the responsibilities of a social designer? And what role do power differences play? These questions were explored both theoretically and practically. The first by comparing social design to the field of conflict resolution, which studies how mediators could intervene in conflict areas. The latter by working and living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Amsterdam in collaboration with the collective Cascoland.

The result is a list of principles, based of observations and experiences in the field. Most of them seem obvious, but in practice they are applied or even discussed too little. The principles are not meant as rules. Rather, they are a starting point for a discussion about the role and responsibilities of social designers when entering a context as an outsider.

Bovendien zag mijn vader in
iedereen die leefde een
gelijkgestemde, want:
'We leven allemaal."

Besides, my father saw
everyone who lived as
like-minded, because:
"We are all alive."

Maartje Wortel

"Equality may perhaps be a right,
but no power on earth can ever
turn it into a fact."

Original: "L'égalité sera peut-être un
droit, mais aucune puissance humaine
ne saura le convertir en fait."

Honoré de Balzac

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Part II: Practice

Acknowledgements

In the academic world, graduate students are stimulated to present their work as an individual project. Having my name on the front of the book suggests that I did the whole project by myself. Many people who start a graduation project actually believe they have to do it all alone. I have seen enough people panic about this idea. Nothing is less true though. Without collaborating, I would never have been able to write this thesis. To make this visible, I decided not to incorporate feedback in the text. Instead, the suggestions people gave me after having read the first draft are visible beside the text.

There are so many people who helped me during the two years of my master, but there are a few people I would like to thank specifically. Claus, thank you for giving me so much freedom to shape the programme. Anna, thank you for always believing in me. Michel, thank you for sharing your knowledge and for connecting me to Cascoland. Roel and Fiona, thank you for giving me the opportunity to work in the field and for all the fun and unexpected days. Hans, thank you for the discussions about design and for always taking time to help out. Lisa, thank you for the countless fun moments in Sweden (and Denmark). Kaj,

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Part 1
Theory

Introduction

When I was about twelve years old, my mother employed a Moroccan cleaning lady, who came every two weeks. Me and my sisters were curious about her culture and asked her all sorts of things about being Muslim and Moroccan. She would teach us how to put on a veil, she made us Baghrir (pancakes with '1000' holes) she even invited us to celebrate Eid al-Fitr – the end of the Ramadan – with her family. She showed me how hospitable and open the Arab culture was. At the same time, the media was – and still is – telling a completely different story. Whenever any Arab country makes it to the news, it is about hostility and destruction. The image of the Middle East and Northern Africa became increasingly negative, and I was more and more determined to go there to see the beautiful side of the Arab culture.

I did my bachelor programme in Industrial Design Engineering in Delft, as I was interested in connecting the arts with science and technology. The programme focused mainly on the creation and production of physical products. The closer I got to graduation, the more I questioned whether some products were worth designing. Did I really have to design an interface for a washing

machine while I know perfectly how to do my laundry? Who was benefitting from a redesigned ice crusher? Weren't there much important problems in the world to address? After graduation, I decided to take a year off and move to Beirut (Lebanon) for four months, where I did a design research internship at the MENA Design Research Center. Most people thought I was crazy to go to a Middle Eastern country. Was it safe to go as a girl? Wouldn't I risk getting kidnapped? Did I have to wear a veil? Could I walk on the street by myself? What about bomb attacks? I went anyway. The internship gave me the opportunity to meet many people in a short time and to see the world from a whole different perspective. It was not always easy. I saw the enormous difference between rich and poor, the many refugees coming from Palestine and Syria, the tension between different religions and backgrounds and the lack of freedom to travel. However, I have never met such warm, hospitable, curious and optimistic people. I got to know so many wonderful initiatives that aimed to do something for society, even though the circumstances were difficult. I never felt unsafe, I did not cover my hair, I often went somewhere by myself, both during the day and at night, and I was not kidnapped. It showed me

how much effect the media has on how we look at the world. When I left Lebanon after four months, I made the decision to use my background as a designer to fight for equal chances.

I could have chosen to do a master programme in social design, where design methods are used to find solutions for social problems. There are several reasons I chose to apply for Industrial Design in Lund instead. First of all, I was free to shape the programme based on my questions and interests. Second, the university offers programmes in disciplines as anthropology, philosophy, political science and psychology – disciplines I wanted to collaborate with and learn from. Finally, I wanted to be in a class with people who were interested in different aspects of design. I used the full master to find an answer to one question: how can designers contribute to finding lasting solutions for social problems? In order to find an answer, I searched for connections with other disciplines, met designers with similar questions, defined and experimented with theories, stepped into the field to set up social design projects myself and made a lot of mistakes.

As part of the preliminary research I did for my graduation project, I interviewed researchers from various disciplines about power. It is a topic that is hardly discussed in the current design practice, while I believe that power structures and differences should be taken into account when working with social problems. I interviewed researchers from sociology, anthropology, law, psychology, philosophy, business administration, social work and conflict resolution in order to find out how these disciplines define and address power. During an interview with Annika Björkdahl, who specialises in urban peacebuilding, I discovered that peacebuilding and conflict resolution have a lot in common with social design. The methods and theories in conflict resolution are a result of decades of research and practical experience in conflict areas. In contrast to social design, where privilege, power and responsibility are not discussed enough, the conflict resolution field addresses these topics extensively. It is therefore that I believe social design can learn from conflict resolution. In this thesis, I introduce both disciplines, after which I discuss the similarities between the two. In the following chapters, I describe what social design can learn from conflict resolution and vice versa.

In the discussion, I reflect on the ethics of intervening and the importance of multiculturalism.

After two years of focusing on one question, I can't say I found an exact answer. However, the conversations, observations and experiences resulted in valuable insights, which I believe are crucial to discuss and consider when working in the field of social design.

The term *social design*

In a world where our structures, systems and beliefs are constantly challenged, design is moving beyond traditional craftsmanship-based professions (Simonsen et al. 2014). Designers are making connections with a wide variety of disciplines and engage in complex questions related to topics as integration, education and healthcare.

Natalie Jeremijenko for example initiated the Environmental Health Clinic in New York. In a normal clinic, people come with health issues and walk out with a pharmaceutical prescription. It works differently in the Environmental Health Clinic. According to Jeremijenko, health is commonly seen as something internal and individual. A study on paediatric practices however showed that doctors in the New York area spent 90 percent of their time on five health issues; asthma, developmental delays, increases in childhood cancers, obesity and diabetes. These are all issues that are directly related to a person's environment. Instead of prescribing pharmaceuticals, patients are asked to improve their environment to not only fight their own symptoms, but also improve the health of others. One of the prescriptions is to improve water quality with a concept called No Park.

Every block in New York has two or more fire hydrants with a parking spot that is reserved for emergency vehicles. These parking spots are rarely used, and the asphalt contaminates rainwater. With No Park, patients are stimulated to remove the asphalt and replace it with plants that filter water. In the rare case of an emergency, vehicles can still park. The plants will be flattened, but they easily regenerate. If every emergency parking spot would become a No Park, it could drastically improve New York's water quality, and with that the health of New Yorkers.

While engaging in complex issues, designers are able to make new connections and show different perspectives in order to contribute to finding solutions. It has led to the introduction of many terminologies, which include social design, design for humanity, critical design, radical design, idealist design, design activism, positive design, inclusive design, design for social impact and design for change. All these terms are used to express the urgency and the desire to do something good for society. Although I believe it does not matter which label is used, I have noticed that *social design* has become a sensitive term. Social designers apply design methods to find solutions for social problems.

Like the words *empowerment*, *participation* and *design thinking*, *social design* has become a buzzword, which is sometimes only used as a marketing tool. With this I mean that the use of the term has become more important than the actual design process. If someone is a social designer, he or she is automatically doing something good for the world and should be praised for that. How to engage in these complex and messy social contexts is not questioned enough.

An example of how social design is used as marketing is What Design Can Do (WDCD). This Dutch organisation aims to "demonstrate the power of design; to show that it can do more than make things pretty. To call on designers to stand up, take responsibility and consider the beneficial contribution that they can make to society." In 2016, WDCD organised the Refugee Challenge. Designers were asked to come up with solutions to support refugees during or after their journey. At first glance, this competition seems to do something good; mobilising designers to help people in need. It is for a good reason however that it was seriously criticised.

The *refugees* were considered a homogeneous group of people, defined by their misery, who desperately needed the *designer*'s help. "Participating in this contest will make you feel good" was stated on the website. Dutch design critic Jeroen Junte characterised the participants of the competition as 'western, highly educated professionals who compete in a mediagenic challenge with strict deadlines and ideas that should fit on a small piece of paper'. The jury only consisted of founders and CEO's of humanitarion or design-related organisations. Not one of them mentioned the importance of having refugees in the jury. Whereas the focus should have been on the refugees and the complexity of the issue, it is mainly about the importance of the social designer – the superhero.

It is for this reason that many designers refuse to use social design as a definition for projects in which social problems are addressed. What I think should be questioned is not the label itself, but the designer's role and responsibilities when intervening in contexts where social problems exist. For this thesis project, I decided to stick to social design. It is the most commonly known term to describe the design process that aims to address social problems and to contribute to social change.

A critical note on social design

In 2016, the design collective No Mad Makers decided to help the large amount of boat refugees arriving in Lesvos. They designed a bag that could be made out of rubber boats with simple tools. In Greece, they showed how the bags could be made. The bags were supposed to be sold in the Netherlands and the money would go back to the refugees. The project was all over the news and got nominated for the New Material Award 2016. There is no doubt that the designers had the best intentions. Unfortunately, they didn't manage to sell enough bags to make a lasting impact in Lesvos. They had to return to the Netherlands, realising that their project had made the refugees in Lesvos dependent rather than empowered.

This project shows that good intentions do not guarantee good outcomes (Parlevliet, 2015). I strongly believe designers can and should intervene in social issues, but the criticism about social design should be taken into consideration. Emilson et al. (2016) note that "there is an ethical issue concerning designers' responsibility to the socio-political consequences of the projects they are working in." George Aye, co-founder of the Greater Good Studio, writes that "for all the talk about human-centered,

one very human factor often gets overlooked - a basic understanding of how power operates in relationships between people. This lack of understanding results in wasted funding, poorly prioritized projects, and broken promises to the very communities that are being served."

Reflecting on my own work, I can see times when my lack of awareness of my own privilege and responsibilities influenced the outcome of the project. For one of the design projects I did during my master, I aimed to find ways in which newcomers in Malmö could shape their own integration process. The existing integration process is defined by the Swedish gouvernment and I had learnt that many newcomers were struggling to find their way in the Swedish bureaucracy. In order to come up with a valuable solution, I believed that I had to involve newcomers in the project. After all, they were the ones going through the existing integration process. I was regularly meeting with a group of Syrian, Iraqi and Somali women my age. I was convinced that I was doing the right thing by involving the women in the project. The interest was mutual but for me, it was for professional reasons. For the women, it was for friendship. As the semester finished, I moved on to a

new project. Although they had volunteered to be part of the group, I realised that I had been the one who decided what we talked about and when we met. I was also the one who never came back after the semester.

Designers are able to understand different perspectives, are aware of the bigger context in which a problem exists and are not afraid of experimenting or proposing unexpected solutions. The complexity and messiness of social problems are nonetheless underestimated. In order to find durable solutions, design can learn a lot from other disciplines. Anthropologists for example situate themselves in a community for at least a few years before being able to draw a conclusion. Social workers are aware of the gap between theory and practice and stress the importance of field work. Political scientists acknowledge that a community is not a homogeneous and static group of people. Fortunately, there are designers who have already made connections to these disciplines. There is however one field that overlaps with design in social contexts to great extent but that hasn't been discussed or analysed by designers yet: the field of conflict resolution.

Isn't there such thing as design anthropology?

"Design is a key site of cultural production and change in contemporary society. Anthropologists have been involved in design projects for several decades but only recently a new field of inquiry has emerged which aims to integrate the strengths of design thinking and anthropological research.

Design Anthropology moves from observation and interpretation to collaboration, intervention and co-creation. Its practitioners participate in multidisciplinary design teams working towards concrete solutions for problems that are sometimes ill-defined. The authors address the critical potential of design anthropology in a wide range of design activities across the globe and query the impact of design on the discipline of anthropology."

An introduction to conflict resolution

The field of conflict resolution studies methods and processes to revolve conflicts peacefully. The discipline emerged during the Cold War in the 1950s. At the time, people all over the world were threatened by nuclear weapons and conflicts between superpowers (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). In an attempt to understand conflicts and find ways to avoid violence and destruction, a group of people in Europe and North America started studying similarities between different conflicts. For the development of the field, conflict areas and processes of conflict resolution have been analysed for decades and disciplines as sociology, political science, psychology, law, philosophy, economics and international relations have been consulted (Parlevliet, 2015).

Within conflict resolution, conflict is not seen as an extraordinary phenomenon. Rather, it is considered to be part of life, "necessary for growth and change" (Dugan, 1996). It is likely to emerge in a context with economic differentiation, social change, cultural formation, psychological development and political organisation (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). Another essential idea in the field is that conflict is not believed

to be eliminated completely. However, its existence should be acknowledged in order to prevent violence and destruction. In other words, as political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2013) describes it:

> "Conflict in liberal democratic societies cannot and should not be eradicated since the specificity of pluralist democracy is precisely the recognition and the legitimation of conflict. What liberal democratic politics requires is that the others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned."

Since the 1950s, many conflict theories have been developed and revised. However, as Ramsbothan et al. (2016) describe in *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, there are a few elements that have remained unchanged. First of all, conflicts can exist between people, families, communities, regions, countries and everything in between. All of these levels should be taken into account when analysing and resolving conflict as they are often

interrelated. Second, conflicts can be seen as complex systems that can only be understood when analysed from multiple perspectives. Therefore, conflict resolution has to be both multidisciplinary and multicultural. Furthermore, despite the general similarities between them, conflicts are context-related. This means that the field demands both a theoretical understanding and practical experience. Finally, conflicts are related to social-psychological perceptions, emotions, and subjective experiences (Lederach, 1997). A merely analytical approach is not sufficient to resolve violent conflicts and should consequently be combined with a normative one.

The process of conflict resolution can involve the intervention of a third party; a mediator. This act of intervening could be seen as 'entering into an ongoing system of relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them' (Argyris, 1970). While aiming for sustainable peace, mediators can initiate dialogue, create trust between conflicting parties, define and clarify the essence of a conflict and support the process of creating alternative situations.

Up to now, I have given a general description of both social design and conflict resolution. To enable a more in-depth discussion, I will concentrate on *asymmetric* conflicts, in which involved parties do not have an equal amount of power. This means that the more powerful party always wins if the power structures are not challenged. In these types of conflict, it is mainly the effects of the unbalanced relationship itself that is causing conflict. The only way to resolve asymmetric conflicts is to "change the structure, but this can never happen in the interest of the top dog. So (…) the third party has to join forces with the underdog to bring about a resolution. (…) This means transforming unbalanced relationships into peaceful and dynamic ones" (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). It is when a third party intervenes in asymmetric conflicts that conflict resolution starts to show many similarities with social design.

Mouffe (2013): "The agonistic model that I propose acknowledges the contingent character of the hegemonic articulations that determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment; as pragmatic and contingent constructions, they can always be disarticulated and transformed by the agonistic struggle. Unlike the liberal models, such an agonistic perspective takes account of the fact that every social order is politically instituted and that the ground on which hegemonic interventions occur is never neutral for always the product of previous hegemonic practices."

Similarities between social design and conflict resolution

Every now and then, decision-making institutions recognise the value artists and designers can add to projects that aim for socio-economic development. Municipalities and housing corporations for example are regularly funding design projects that focus on minority groups and communities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Although both parties might not always be aware of it, there is an imbalanced relationship between the powerful decision-makers and the weaker residents or minorities. In these situations, social design largely overlaps with conflict resolution.

David Laws, Programme Director of the master's programme in Conflict Resolution and Governance at the University of Amsterdam, writes the following about the negotiation process in which a mediator can play a role:

> "There are a number of specific approaches to negotiation that describe a constructive or problem-solving approach to practical and social problems. The main elements common to this approach are: acknowledgement of the legitimacy of difference (in perceptions and in interests); a

Do what is best for you
and the group.

John F. Nash

> focus on practical problems of communication and awareness of their influence on relationships; translation of needs, identities and goals into practical terms; and, finally, the insight that creating an option that all favour over the status quo might be feasible more often than we think."

The concept Buurtpraatjes (Neighbourhood talks) by Buro Kato shows how similar this approach is to social design. Tove and Kaila – Buro Kato's founders – were approached by the Eindhoven-based housing corporation Woonbedrijf. They had received calls from residents about migrant families who had moved to the neighbourhood and kept their curtains shut. Dutch people are known for always having their curtains open and the closed curtains were perceived as hostile. As Woonbedrijf had little experience with migrant families, they asked Buro Kato to help finding a solution. The duo started speaking with both old and new residents. Soon they discovered that the newcomers, who were working hard to integrate in the Dutch society, were intimidated by the open curtains of their neighbours. In their culture, closing curtains is a way to have privacy and to show respect. The curtains turned

out to be part of a deeper problem of misunderstandings based on cultural differences. The old residents felt threatened while the new residents didn't feel welcome. Buro Kato therefore designed a toolbox for the housing corporations to give to their residents. The toolbox contains sugar and coffee to borrow from each other, invitations to come over for coffee and cards with topics for conversations, for example about habits (How do you drink your coffee?), and the neighbourhood (What do you do for your neighbours?). With the toolbox, Kaila and Tove aim to encourage conversations between neighbours to enable a dialogue about differences and take away prejudices.

Both the mediator and the social designer "enter into an ongoing system of relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them." In other words, both enter a context as an outsider. Within this context, there are existing relations and conflicts, differences in culture and power – invisible social structures that are constantly changing. As I mentioned earlier, good intentions do not ensure a good outcome. The influence of the social designer's

privilege is little discussed, and the complexity and messiness of these social systems is underestimated. Within conflict resolution however, these are topics that have been analysed thoroughly. In order to give a better understanding of the designer's role and responsibilities while contributing to social change, I believe social design can benefit from theories and insights from the conflict resolution field.

Comments from professor Hugh Miall, co-author of the book *Contemporary conflict resolution.*

I suppose conflict resolution has come out of a radical and idealist tradition in the social, psychological and systems sciences as well as out of social practice and mediation experience in family and industrial and community and international disputes. So there is a link with broad design thinking of the type undertaken by people like Stafford Beer and the designers of new political systems going back to Thomas More and Kant and people like Elise Boulding and Richard Falk. I came to conflict resolution from a PhD in peace and conflict research, and peace studies is closely linked to ideas about social design because it tries to envisage new types of society that might be characterised by peaceful change. My PhD supervisor Paul Smoker was interested in utopias, futures (there is a journal called Futures which used to have a lot about designing social systems), whole systems and how we could build peaceful communities ourselves. Back then the environmental movement was just coming to fruition and design of radical social experiments and environmentally balanced communities was in the news. We even got involved in trying to design an ecological and self-sufficient community in southern Chile, at the same time as Stafford Beer was designing an extraordinary real-time control system for the Chilean economy for his friend Salvador Allende. Unfortunately the Chilean coup put paid to both projects.

So my first reaction to your thesis is to feel that perhaps peace studies is even closer to the idea of social design than conflict resolution, though having taught both subjects I do see them as closely related and some would say the one comes out of the other. The critics of conflict resolution certainly have negative associations with the idea of social engineering, which both conflict resolution and peace studies are seen as dabbling in. The strongest critics of the field regard peacebuilding and conflict resolution as simply vehicles of existing power discourses, designed ultimately to secure existing power structures and suppress radical change. I get the impression from your thesis that there are similar debates in the field of design.

When we used to live in central London, near Waterloo, a favourite activity on a Sunday would be to walk along the south bank of the Thames all the way to the Design Museum, which then had a riverside site just beyond London Bridge. I used to feel very inspired by the exhibits and some of the industrial designs and the creativity they embodied were an inspiration for thinking about how to better theorise and model existing social systems and conflicts. Actually the whole changing landscape of London would be brought to life by a visit to the Museum, and that in turn would inspire thinking about how past and distant societies and how they came to life – and to ruin in some cases.

Ideally people and communities would design their own products and create their own social rules and deal with their own conflicts with no need for any experts. I suppose industrial design is built on top of an older and longer tradition of vernacular design in which ordinary people were fully skilled and creative. And similarly people designed their own societies and their own traditions for dealing with conflict (sometimes well, sometimes badly). In an age of greater specialisation, designers presumably bring something special to the table, based on the luxury of study and long thought and practice and experimentation in their studios. And similarly people, who have had a chance to study social conflict and think deeply about it, and perhaps undertake some training in conflict resolution, mediation and facilitation, may have something special to bring to the table, though they should never think that they are designing their own solutions rather than facilitating those of the community. In a way there is quite a similarity between the two roles. The matter of the critique of social engineering and by extension social design comes down I think to what is the relationship between the designer and the society? Are they consultants for particular elites or special interests? (I have a friend who works in Intel and says that the mobile phone is the most powerful invention ever designed for manipulating social behaviour.) Or are they working for and with the community, and providing a kind of specialised help? Ultimately, I suppose, the way one designs or practices conflict resolution are matters of political choice, and the ethical issues are never easy.

What social design can learn from conflict resolution

Social problems are complex, messy and chaotic. To provide structure in defining what social design can learn from conflict resolution, I distinguish four aspects that the two fields have in common; the conflict or social problem itself (1), the people affected by this problem (2), the third party that intervenes (3) and the act of intervening (4).

(1) Conflicts or social problems

To be able to set up a well-planned design project, designers tend to simplify social problems to static situations with a set number of stakeholders. Within conflict resolution however, one of the most important ideas is that conflicts are everything but static. A conflict can arise due to a combination of circumstances, it can transform over time, it can be interpreted in many ways by different people and the number of people affected by a conflict can fluctuate. Another essential idea is that conflicts are context-related. Therefore, a conflict or social problem has to be studied in the environment where it exists.

The design practice is known for its problem-solving

"In the documentary *Onbehagen* (...), the famous American biologist and neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky says that the us/them thinking is deeply anchored in our brains. Almost any man, some saints excepted, makes a difference between a group to which he belongs and groups that are strange to him, against which he is rebelling."

Bas Heijne, NRC, 7 april

approach. In a perfect world there would be no problems. Conflict resolution acknowledges that conflict has always been – and always will be – part of our society. Moreover, conflicts are necessary for social change, as it reveals that people with different values and beliefs are part of the same society. Although a conflict is commonly seen as something bad, it can result in respect and recognition of difference.

(2) People affected by conflict

People affected by a social problem are generally referred to as a 'community' or 'target group' by designers. This suggests that these people are seen as "homogeneous, static and harmonious units within which people share common interests and needs" (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The terms are associated with the average person rather than a unique individual (van Dartel, 2015). In Participation: The New Tyranny?, Bill Cooke discusses why these terms are problematic:

> "Usage of terms like 'community', 'village', 'local people', which arose from colonial anthropology,

> and all of which are elements in colonial and postcolonial discourses that depicts the world in terms of a distinction between 'them' and 'us'."

Many social designers don't realise how easily the them/us distinction is made. It seems harmless, as it is just a matter of recognising difference. Nonetheless, them/us could turn into enemy/friend, or excluded/included (Mouffe, 2013). In philosophy, this phenomenon is called *othering*. It is a term that "not only encompasses the many expressions of prejudice on the basis of group identities, but we argue that it provides a clarifying frame that reveals a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality" (powell and Menendian, 2016).

For the social design practice, I would argue that the term community can be used. However, the social designers have to recognise that the people part of the community are unique individuals with their own beliefs, wishes and challenges in order to avoid prejudices and exclusion.

A term that has become a buzzword in social design is

participation, which can be defined as "the involvement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision-making over their own lives" (Gruijt & Shah, 1998). According to Armstein (1969), participation is "the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future." It is the people who live in a disadvantaged environment who are affected by social problems on a daily basis. It is these same people that will be living with the changes in an environment after a social designer – or mediator – has left. To enable a lasting change, the people in a community should be responsible and able to move on independently. It is for this reason that participation is essential. Nowadays, the term is so extremely popular that it has become something that is considered an intrinsically 'good thing'. Everyone seems so believe in it, but its execution is rarely questioned (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

In her essay A Ladder of Citizen Participation, Sherry Arnstein (1969) distinguishes different types of participation, of which most types are rather "nonparticipation." While organisations say that citizens

are participating, it is often nothing more than giving people the opportunity to give their opinion. That doesn't mean that these opinions are actually taken into account, so the power remains in the hands of the decision-making organisation. "Participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless."

In social design, participation has gotten the shape of organised group sessions led by the designer. These sessions are commonly meant to provide the designer with information based on real-life experiences. Arnstein would call it manipulation. Participatory sessions are carefully organised based on design methods. Sometimes topics are already defined, leaving very little room for participants to shape the session. After the session, they will move on with their everyday lives without having gained any power. Whereas participation should actively create room for communities to make decisions, it is too often used as a way to get information.

As Lederach (1997) says, "the greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the

local people and their culture." I believe the whole idea of participation should be turned around in order to really redistribute power; it should be the social designer that participates in a neighbourhood's daily life, not the community that participates in a planned design project.

(3) The third party

In 2000, Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar, known for his socio-political work, was asked to do a community project in Skoghall. The town is known for was its paper mill, providing jobs for a large part of Skoghall's residents. When Jaar came to the town, he observed that a cultural centre or exhibition space was lacking. As the paper mill had provided Skoghall with housing and even a church, Jaar managed to convince them to fund the construction of a cultural space. However, a day after the opening of the space the construction, which had to be made of timber and locally produced paper, the space had to be burnt down again. The opening of the first and only exhibition, in which work of 30 young Swedish artists was presented, was a great success. A part of the community asked Jaar to save the building. Jaar was actually hoping for this

reaction. He told the community that he did not want to be the creator of a cultural space that the residents hadn't asked or fought for. Therefore, the building was burnt down 24 hours after its opening. The project made Skogshall's community realise how important a cultural space was for their town, so they took the initiative to create a building themselves and asked Jaar to make the design.

From the start of the project, Jaar saw himself as an outsider who was intervening in a community for a short period of time. After the project, the only thing he had left behind was a realisation among the community for the need of something new in their town. This was exactly what he had aimed to achieve; his own physical creation was of less importance. This is something that is still uncommon in the design field. Designers are stimulated to stand out, to think about portfolios and to make sure to get recognition for their work. If a mediator would do this while resolving a conflict, he or she would be strongly criticised. The ultimate goal of a third party should be to be completely unnecessary and enable a community to live in peace without the intervention of an outsider. For social

designers, this would mean that the whole idea of standing out and recognition should be abolished.

There are two topics that are barely addressed by social designers, while I believe they are crucial to discuss; privilege and power. In case of working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it is likely that the social designer is more privileged and therefore more powerful than most people living in the neighbourhood. “Privilege increases the odds of having things your own way, of being able to set the agenda in a social situation and determine the rules and standards and how they’re applied” (Johnson, 2006). Privilege increases the power someone has to “effect a specific outcome” (Burman, 2007). When a designer has the best intentions, he or she can be unaware of the power he or she has to steer a project in a specific direction. If privilege and power remain undiscussed in the design field, it will be impossible to actually challenge existing power relations.

As social designers, it is our job to listen, to take everyone seriously, also when people have different values, beliefs and habits. We have to be aware that our values relate to

a specific culture and we should be willing to question them. Having privilege and power does not mean that we know better or that we have more right to make decisions. Although it might sometimes create conflicts, difference is essential. This might be the biggest lesson we can learn from conflict resolution.

As mentioned before, conflicts are context-related. Parties might have different perspectives on a conflict and it could be that they are not aware of the bigger picture. It is important for a mediator to understand the roots of a conflict in order to resolve it. Therefore, he or she has to be present in the environment where a conflict exists. Social designers are still too often working from their studio. They might be in a neighbourhood regularly, but this means that it is easy to miss out the daily life of a community. Conflict resolvers – as well as anthropologists – usually live in the conflict environment and stay there for several years. Only then they can build relationships, create trust and understand the many aspects of a conflict.

Annika Björkdahl, researcher in local peacebuilding, worked for years in conflict areas in eastern Europe. In

Vespa (1985): "To duplicate the effect of arthritis, she taped her fingers and covered them with cotton gloves. To simulate deafness, she plugged her ears. To approximate poor eyesight, she applied Vaseline under contact lenses for a cataract effect. She could play the imposter for 12 hours a day only every four or five days, since it took that long for her skin to recover from the heavy application of makeup."

an interview she told me that she would never smoke in Sweden. However, it is common for people in Balkan countries to smoke a cigarette on the terrace while gossiping and exchanging news. Her constant presence made local people invite her for a cigarette. Instead of declining, she would join them for a cigarette and soon she would know all the ins and outs of the town. If she would not have been situated in the community, she would probably not even have known the habits of gossiping. She would definitely not have been invited to join the locals for a cigarette.

Fortunately, situated design is a term that is increasingly used within the design practice. Nevertheless, it should become normal for designers to situate themselves in the context of a project.

(4) The act of intervening

Before the start of a project, both the mediator and the social designer know that their time in the environment where the social problem exists is finite. It is the people that are part of a community that remain. They are the

ones who are responsible for stability. To make sure the community feels this responsibility, it is necessary for the third party to build strong relationships and trust, which takes time.

The design practice works project-based. It is rare for a project to take longer than a year, after which it is handed over to the client. As social problems are always changing, they are unpredictable. It is impossible to solve complex problems within a few months. Lederach (1997) advocates that conflict resolvers should not think in terms of years, but rather of decades. According to him, "long-term commitment, relationship building, and consistency are crucial" to achieve sustainable peace. Ramsbotham et al. (2016) argue that conflict resolution is "a long-term process, with many actors engaging in various initiatives at multiple levels and with different time frames." Clearly, the social design process asks for a commitment of at least several years.

The unpredictability of conflict and social problems means that the outcome of the intervention is uncertain. As conflicts are dynamic and context-related, it is impossible

The interesting thing is that there are so many innate qualities to the design process that are suppressed in the short-sighted market context but that have all the potential in the world to come to their full right in a different (non-market driven) setting.

to plan the design process in detail. Instead, intervening as a third party requires "willingly letting go of exclusive control over the outcomes of the creative process" (van Dartel, 2016). Of course, this does not mean that social designers should just intervene and see what happens. This is why it is crucial to define goals in an early stage of the process. These goals should not be seen as static – they can change over time – but as a starting point to bring different parties together. As Ramsbotham et al. (2016) describe, "the first element of the capacity to prevent conflict is the degree to which goals are coordinated or, at least, have a capacity to complement goals of others."

Finally, I have always been surprised to by the little interaction between disciplines, both at universities and in practice. By having compared the social design with conflict resolution, I hope to have demonstrated the importance of multidisciplinary work. It might lead to discussions or discomfort. While reading some of the literature about conflict resolution, I had no idea what the authors were talking about. But in the end, multidisciplinary work mostly generates new connections, insights and ideas.

Comments from professor Oliver Ramsbotham, co-author of the book *Contemporary conflict resolution.*

"You say that it is particularly when third parties intervene in asymmetric conflicts that conflict resolution (cr) begins to show similarities to social design (sd). In that case some of the issues you raise and might pursue further are:

(1) Context

Cr would usually begin with a map of the complex and dynamic conflict terrain – who are the (cross-cutting) identity groups involved, what are the main issues, how has the current situation come about, etc. This would include analysis of quantitative and qualitative asymmetries (structural). If you like we could call this the existing *status quo*. I would also include awareness of different and in some cases conflicting perceptions/narratives here.

(2) Authority

By what authority (*quo warranto*) does the intervention take place? Have the mediators/designers been invited in by local initiative, in which case by whom? Are they legitimised from outside, in which case by whom (municipal authority, regional authority, UN)? Who is providing the resources? Who has determined the original mandate – with what end in view?

(3) Recipients

Who are the negotiating parties/intended beneficiaries of social planning at local level? Are there internal divisions or competing needs/claims? Are there cross-cultural issues. Who are the power-holders, resource controllers, decision makers within the relevant internal identity groups? Are these multiple interests/demands reconcilable? Have they been/are they being involved in the mediation/ social planning process?

(4) Interveners

What are the qualifications/skills of the negotiators, intervening social planners? Are they aiming to elicit what happens rather than control/impose it? If so do they, in addition to professional negotiation/planning skills, have the requisite skill-sets/training for eliciting local participation from as wide a spectrum as possible? This includes cultural knowledge and sensitivity, awareness of the ramifications of class/wealth/gender divides etc.

(5) Evaluation

How will success/failure be evaluated and by whom?

(6) Process

All of this needs to inform the overall process of planning, intervention, evaluation and ongoing adaptation. How long is the intervention likely to last? Will it be phased? What are the indicators that can guide flexible, intelligent and sensitive response during this process?

I think that this entire enterprise – your suggested collaboration from the outset between mediators/conflict resolvers and social designers - can usefully be seen to come within general approaches to social intervention and planning that I'm sure you're aware of such as 'theory of change' - or my own approach which I have been developing in recent years: promoting and building a capacity for collective strategic thinking within affected identity groups."

What conflict resolution can learn from design

In 2016, I lived in Lebanon for four months. During this time, my friends took me to the border between Lebanon and Israel, which is known as the Blue Line. Around this area, the Blue Helmets – the United Nation's peacekeepers – are patrolling to maintain peace, or rather, to prevent violent escalation. On our way south, we passed by the UNIFIL's (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) headquarters, which is just a few kilometres from the border. As we drove by, three white tanks drove out of the heavily secured gate to patrol. High, concrete walls retained anyone from looking inside the camp. Armed guards, hundreds of cameras and barbed wire ensured that nobody other than the peacekeepers would feel comfortable entering the UN's territory. Every now and then, we would cross a tank with two or three people with blue berets popping out. Other than at checkpoints for passport control, there was no interaction. I was shocked to see that the UN's headquarters were everything but inviting and that the peacekeepers were not at all engaging with the local community. While looking into other peacekeeping missions, I stumbled upon Malkit Shoshan, the only person I know that connects conflict resolution and peacebuilding to a creative field – architecture in her case.

On the website of her Foundation of Achieving Seamless Territory (FAST), the UN's base camps are described as "self-sustaining islands, shut off from their direct surroundings. The extreme design of these compounds mirrors the power structures and systems of the peacekeeping forces and makes no contribution to improving the lives of the inhabitants of these regions." In order to sustain peace on a long term, the most important resources can be found among local people and their culture (Lederach, 1997). Considering that the Blue Helmets are on a mission with a limited timeframe, it is essential to involve the local community in the peacebuilding process. According to FAST, design can help transform the camps "from closed fortresses into catalysts for local development." With her concept BLUE, Shoshan suggests a four-step change in the architecture of the camps, which gradually allows local communities to access resources and knowledge within the base. At first, the interaction between the UN and the local people is about building trust and relationships. In a later stage, the base camp becomes a shared space, where "UN peacekeepers and the local community develop and execute projects together." At the end of the mission, when the Blue

Helmets leave, the camp should become “an integral part of the city.”

Shoshan doesn’t just make a connection between conflict resolution and design. She shows that it is not just social design that can learn from conflict resolution, but also the other way around. Lederach (2005) states that “the capacity to situate oneself in a changing environment with a sense of direction and purpose and at the same time develop an ability to see and move with the unexpected” is lacking. Parlevliet (2015) observes that “important elements of conflict resolution practice, linked to attitude, innovation and creativity, are neglected.”

I would argue that it is not enough to exchange knowledge on a theoretical level, as I have done now. In order to further explore how to enable lasting and peaceful change, I strongly recommend social designers and conflict resolvers to set up collaborative projects in the field. After all, both disciplines emphasise the importance of being situated in a context.

Discussion

Since I started exploring the field of social design, I have always struggled with thought whether or not I had any right to intervene as a privileged outsider. I justified working with female immigrants in Sweden because I was an immigrant myself. However, I had come to Sweden for completely different reasons. I am currently working in the Netherlands, because I am familiar with the systems and because I speak the language. Still, the neighbourhood I work in is one of the poorest of Amsterdam. It is clear that I grew up in a different part of the city. For these projects, it was either me, the housing corporation or the municipality that took initiative. I was never asked to come by the community itself. In an interview with sociologist Tabitha Wright Nielsen, we came to the conclusion that having power is having a choice. I had the choice to work with the community, they didn't choose to work with me. At the same time, I do believe outsiders can bring new perspectives, connections and show that there are alternatives to the current situation. This ethical dilemma is often discussed within conflict resolution.

> "Who do we think we are? Is it justified for outsiders to choose among people or institutions,

> to make judgements about who or what is 'truly' a local capacity for peace? To what extent might our attempts to do so constitute dangerous and inappropriate social engineering? The fact that aid inevitable does have an impact on warfare means aid workers cannot avoid responsibility of trying to shape that impact. The fact that choices about how to shape that impact represent outsider interference means that aid workers can always be accused of inappropriate action. There is no way out of this dilemma" (Anderson, 1999).

Whether the outsider decides to do something or to do nothing, there will always be a possibility of negative implications. As social designers, we have to accept this. However, we should critically reflect on ourselves at all time, question our own role and be able to see that in some cases it is better not to intervene.

A second point of discussion is the importance of multiculturalism within social design. Working with minority groups and communities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods often involves working with people

from other cultures. It is therefore essential that social designers acknowledge difference. Values in the western society are not necessarily values in other cultures. Western ideas about matters like family, love or success are not necessarily the same elsewhere. In an open society, "we should expect that there will be others who have different views about important issues, but who we cannot say are unreasonable" (Laws, 2013). I grew up in the Netherlands, in a society with western values where we have sandwiches for lunch, where we keep our curtains open and where we are used to being direct to each other. It is what is normal to me. When other people's habits and values differ, my first reaction is to be judgemental just because it is different. It seems unnecessary to stress this, but in practice, this is a serious issue. Within housing corporations, I hear people blaming others for not wanting to invest money in a house or for ruining the street view by hanging laundry to dry on balconies. Within municipalities, civil servants criticise communities for getting too many children, for not trusting and calling the police in case of violent incidents or for not understanding the Dutch language well enough. People can only trust others and participate if they know that they are taken

"The human rights lawyer Burke Marshall, who worked for the ministry of Justice during the times of the American civil rights movement, had a framed paraphrase in his office of *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God* (Mattheus 5:9). His version: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall catch hell from both sides.*"

Bas Heijne, NRC, 7 april

seriously. Therefore, it is extremely important, for designers but also for anyone working with people from different cultures, to be aware of one's own background and to not judge but accept differences.

Having said this, I would like to mention the fact that all sources I have used for this thesis are from western authors. This was not a decision I made consciously, but it made me realise how difficult it is to access sources from different cultures. Even within the social sciences, it seems like non-western sources are not considered relevant. Is it a result of bad connections between universities and research institutes across the world? Is it because these sources are not available in English? Is it because the sources don't fit in our western idea of an academic framework? No matter what the reason is, I would much rather get better access to sources from a variety of cultures and learn how people deal with conflict in other parts of the world.

"Even within social sciences, it seems like non-western sources are not considered relevant." I am not sure if you can just draw this conclusion. Maybe leave it our and let the questions speak for themselves.

Those sources are relatively easy to obtain, but indeed, they are not recognised easily.

Ajayi and Buhari (2014): "[The paper] concludes that traditional conflict resolution techniques such as mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, and negotiation as well as cross examination which were employed by Africans in the past, offer great prospects for peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships in post-conflict periods than the modern method of litigation settlements in law courts."

Conclusion

The field of social design is making a connection between design and social questions. A designer who engages in social problems is often an outsider, intervening in an environment of existing social structures. It is in this sense that the discipline overlaps with conflict resolution. Both the social designer and the mediator aim to intervene, build trust, engage the community in finding ways to (re) solve conflict or social problems and eventually retreat, leaving behind socially and/or economically stronger community.

I am convinced designers bring value as outsiders; they can bring in different perspectives, question existing (power) structures, make new connections, and show alternatives. But how can social designers contribute to finding lasting solutions for social problems? How can they make sure the community benefits from the intervention long-term?

Based on the comparison between social design and conflict resolution, I formulated sixteen principles for social design in disadvantaged environments.

(1) Aim to make yourself unnecessary.

The less important you are able to make yourself in a community, the more successful you are. Your role is to enable people to be independent and take matters into their own hands.

(2) Consider who will be responsible and accountable for the continuation of a project.

Working as a social designer means that you will be working in an area for a limited amount of time. After that, the people in the area should be able to move on independently. You therefore have to consider who could be responsible and accountable in an early stage of the project.

(3) Always start a project by formulating clear goals.

To make sure you don't drown in the complexity of a social environment, it is crucial to formulate goals. These goals can be dynamic and change as the project develops. They are mainly a starting point to bring different parties together.

(4) Participate in the community's daily life instead of making people participants of your design project.

It is a misconception that participation is getting people in a room to create something, just as the idea that every person in a neighbourhood should participate. Instead, you are the one who has to participate in the existing life of a community.

(5) Situate yourself in the environment where the problem you address exists and be visible.

To understand people's values, routines, challenges and qualities, you can't just be in an environment every now and then and work on a design project elsewhere. To contribute to the lives of people in a neighbourhood, you have to be present constantly. Only then you can build relationships and create trust. Make sure to be visible to let people know how and where to approach you.

(6) Social design projects require a long-term commitment.

Social change does not happen in one day. Just building relationships and trust can easily take more than a year. If you want to work with a community in disadvantaged environments, you have to be prepared to commit for several years.

(7) Listen, really listen, and act.

Listen to what someone has to say. Even if you don't agree with what people tell you, take everyone seriously. Respond to what people tell you by doing actions or interventions. It shows that you didn't just listen, but that you also understood what people told you and that you are willing to take initiative and act.

(8) Be aware of your own privilege and power.

There is a big chance you have more privilege than many people in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. It means you have more power to make things go your way. Be willing

to redefine these power structures for the benefit of the community.

(9) Be careful not to decide for others what is good for them.

As designers, we are educated to come up with solutions to all kinds of problems. When engaging with social problems, you are likely to have many ideas. However, it is not your job to impose those ideas on people in the community. Instead, your role is to make people come up with solutions themselves and support them in taking initiative.

(10) Avoid making a distinction between 'them' and 'us'.

This phenomenon called othering may sound harmless, but it easily leads to the exclusion of people or groups. Include everyone at all times and consider yourself to be part of a community as well.

(11) Acknowledge that differences in beliefs, values and habits are a good thing rather than a problem.

A community is not a homogeneous group of people. There will be people who have a completely different view on life than you. Although it can be difficult, you have to deal with those differences. Make difference negotiable to avoid prejudice and misunderstandings.

(12) Actively collaborate with key figures and existing initiatives.

A community always has key figures; they are active, they know what goes on in the neighbourhood and they have a big network. Find these key figures as soon as you start working in an environment and collaborate with them. It makes you reliable, helps to meet people in the community and enables you to build on work that is already being done.

(13) Work from the bottom up but collaborate with people who work from top down.

Bottom up and top down are seen as separate ways of working. However, both are necessary for real change. Decision-makers have to respond to the community's needs and the community should have enough power to shape its own environment. This collaboration can only exist when both parties make an effort to understand each other.

(14) Make sure to have fun.

Although real world problems are not the most joyful topic, it is essential to have fun. Enthusiasm is contagious. If it is visible that you are enjoying your work, both the community and decision-makers will be drawn to the project.

(15) Design in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is an intervention rather than a final solution.

In a neighbourhood, people come and go, environments change, and social structures transform. Designers are aware of this, but solutions are too often presented as if they are static.

(16) Be open to unexpected influences and outcomes.

You should be able to kill your darlings and change direction if the process asks for it. Don't assume, but experiment, make mistakes and look for alternatives.

These principles are not meant as rules. Rather, they are a starting point for a discussion about the role and responsibilities of social designers when entering a context of existing social structures as an outsider. Besides, it has to be kept in mind that so far, this thesis is purely theoretical. It is easy to have a discussion about it within the university, to agree with the principles, and to assume that its application shouldn't be too difficult. However, everything I wrote is only relevant when it is applied in practice.

I was lucky enough to work in the field while working on this thesis. This experience showed me that having a theory to start from is important, but that there are also elements that cannot be grasped in a theory. Empathy, intuition and personality are a big part of working in social design. Besides, I had to try out ideas, interact with many different people and make mistakes to learn how to approach social design projects.

During my whole education, I have not been stimulated to work with other disciplines, nor was it normal for students to apply their knowledge in practice. Instead, we end our

time as a student writing a thesis that needs to fit within a specific framework. I highly doubt that more than five people will read this work. I have serious concerns about the way the academic world is managing to keep knowledge within its system. As the most privileged people on this planet, we need to critically reflect on our way of sharing knowledge and make an effort in finding ways to share it with everyone who can benefit from it.

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Part II
Practice

Introduction

Although theory is based on a collection of many experiences in practice, I am convinced that working in practice always turns out differently than you anticipate. By working in practice during the four months my graduation project, I was able to use and question the principles I formulated in the theoretical part.

In January, I moved to Amsterdam to work with the collective Cascoland. They invited me to set up a long-term project in a neighbourhood where they had never worked before. It allowed me to build on Cascoland's experience, and to work on a long-term project from the beginning. As I was interested in understanding the development of this project over a longer period of time, we agreed that I would work with them for at least two years. This thesis only covers the first few months of this process.

Cascoland

Cascoland is a multidisciplinary artist collective that invites local communities, initiatives and organisations to shape their public space in order to make it accessible and liveable for everyone. As municipalities and housing corporations are usually the ones who can invest in the development of a neighbourhood, they have the power to make decisions. Unfortunately, they are not always aware of what the residents need and tend to spend money on short-term solutions. Cascoland situates itself in the middle of neighbourhoods for years in order to understand and define local needs and collaborate with residents to shape their own environment. The insights of these projects are communicated with decision-making institutions. Although Cascoland is a collective of architects, designers, artists, sociologists and theatre makers, it presents itself as an artist collective. By doing so, the members of Cascoland show that they are not dependent on the bureaucracy of municipalities, housing corporations or other big institutions. It enables them to gain the community's trust and to use public space for experiment.

Cascoland was founded by Roel Schoenmakers and Fiona de Bell. After mainly having worked abroad, they settled down in the Kolenkit neighbourhood in Amsterdam West in 2010. At that time, the Kolenkit was seen as one of the worst neighbourhoods in the Netherlands with high unemployment, poverty, youth crime and school dropout rates. The municipality of Amsterdam put out a tender call for ideas to improve the liveability of the neighbourhood. Cascoland sent in a proposal, stating that only residents from the Kolenkit had the right to decide how the neighbourhood should be developed, as they were the ones affected by the development. Roel and Fiona did not live in the Kolenkit themselves, but they had a feeling most residents had not been updated about the municipality's call. Therefore, they proposed to get two or three apartments in the neighbourhood to constantly be present, get to know the residents and their needs and make changes in the public space based on their insights. The apartments would be used to create places to meet and collaborate with residents. The proposal did not mention any clear outcome, which is not typically appreciated by decision-makers. Fortunately, the municipality understood the importance of this bottom-up approach and agreed to

give Cascoland a budget to work in de Kolenkit for several years.

Roel and Fiona are not the only ones who are part of the collective. They are surrounded by a group of people with different backgrounds and nationalities. This is important for Cascoland, as everyone who joins the collective brings in new insights and perspectives. There is place for everyone, as long as people agree to contribute to the liveability of the neighbourhood.

The first actions by the collective were interventions to make residents aware of their presence, to break through the everyday routine of the Kolenkit, and to start conversations. On the very first day of their arrival, Roel and Fiona gathered a group of friends and as a group, they waved and smiled at everyone passing by on the street. A while later, an actor spent a day in a bed on several locations in public space to study "how hospitable the residents of the Kolenkit are." Someone in a bed in the middle of a neighbourhood was something nobody had seen in the Kolenkit before. It stimulated many questions and conversations. One of the conversations the actor


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had was with a group of people hanging on the street in the evening. According to them, many people were intimidated by them, while they were looking for privacy as they were living in small apartments with their whole family.

The longer Cascoland was active in the neighbourhood, the more insights they got. According to the collective, long-term change is only possible if residents feel responsible for the change. At some point, Cascoland got a request to keep chickens. The collective agreed under one condition: that families living in de Kolenkit would take care of the chickens and clean the hen houses. Several families volunteered and together with residents, hen houses were built and placed on an unused building sight.

Today, the chickens are living in the communal vegetable garden for which sixteen families are responsible. One of the houses has been turned into a guesthouse where residents can host their guests as most households don't have enough space at home. Two Moroccan ladies who live around the corner are managing everything for the guesthouse. Although it is difficult to measure, Cascoland's

intervention to have supported the residents to a great extent. For this reason, the housing corporation Rochdale has asked the collective to start working in another neighbourhood in Amsterdam.

A new neighbourhood

From the beginning of the 20th century, the number of people moving to Amsterdam increased rapidly, which caused a lack of housing. Urban planner Cornelis van Eesteren was asked by the municipality to make plans for the expansion of the city. In 1934, van Eesteren presented the Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan (AUP, General Expansion Plan), which included plans for the expansion of Amsterdam until 2000. While he planned neighbourhoods and recreational and working areas for hundreds and thousands of people, he thought about how elderly people could find their way to the supermarket or how children could safely play outside. At the time, these ideas were revolutionary. The Van Deyssel neighbourhood was one of the many in Van Eesteren's plan. Just as most new neighbourhoods in the UAP. It was built right after the Second World War, offering housing to 1240 households.

Today, the Van Deyssel neighbourhood is labelled as a 'problematic neighbourhood' by the municipality of Amsterdam. 30% of the residents live under the poverty line, a high number of people have debts, health issues and low literacy and crime and school dropout rates are high. On top of that, the houses built in the 1950s are

not in a good state anymore. For these reasons, housing corporation Rochdale and the municipality of Amsterdam now address the Van Deyssel as a 'priority neighbourhood'. Over the next ten years, the buildings will be either renovated or demolished and rebuilt. Currently, 95% of all buildings is social housing. For the renewal of the neighbourhood, Rochdale plans to turn this number into 65%. Furthermore, there is some money for social organisations in the neighbourhood. Some of these organisations have been around for years, others are just getting started. Some focus on social support, others on financial support. Some focus on specific groups, others are accessible for anyone.

As part of the renewal of the Van Deyssel, Rochdale asked Cascoland to come to the neighbourhood with the same approach as they had in the Kolenkit. The current plan is to stay in the neighbourhood for about ten years. Other than that, the course of the project is unknown, as it is dependent on the context and the residents of the Van Deyssel neighbourhood.

The process per month

The reason I decided to join Cascoland is because they are one of the few initiatives that says that they can't tell what the outcome of a project will be. For them, the only way to know if idea work is to observe and experiment on location with the residents. Of course, it is impossible to assume that residents will immediately make an effort to meet us, come up with ideas and participate. It takes time to show what we do, to build trust and to find ways to communicate with the neighbourhood.

To give insight into the practical side of social design, I will explain per month what we did in the Van Deyssel neighbourhood, and why it is important to work in that way. This graduation project only covers the first few months of the project. However, it is important to keep in mind that this is the beginning of a project that will take approximately ten years.

February / March

Cascoland agrees to work in a neighbourhood under two conditions: they get an apartment to provide housing for some colleagues, and they get a space to use as a location: an informal office. As both spaces would only be available from April onwards, we spent our time walking around, observing people's rythms, saying hello to everyone who crossed our path. We started mapping and meeting initiatives and organisations that were already active in the surrounding. This didn't only give us insight in what is already going on in the neighbourhood. It also showed which organisations were willing to collaborate. It was clear that people were a bit hesistant when we explained that we didn't know what we would do yet. The uncertainty of an outcome is something that is difficult to understand for people who are mainly working with protocals and regulations. It is only by showing and doing that people start understanding the value of this approach.

There are two things that immediately stood out after having met a three or four organisations: there are a lot (at least 10) of organisations that provide support for families that are dealing with (mental) health or social problems. One would say these organisations help in gaining insights

in what residents are dealing with. Instead, we heard from organisations, including the housing corporation and the municipality, that the residents are hard to reach, and that organisations are looking for more clients. The numbers about poverty, criminality, illiteracy, etc. are there, but there is no insight in how people deal with these problems on a daily basis, and what exactly happend behind closed doors.

The whole Cascoland team immediately decided to clearly show that we are not another organisation that provides 'help'. Instead, we actively addressed everyone as an equal and started looking for residents to collaborate with.

The main street in the neighbourhood counts 16 spaces that were once meant for shops. During every time of the day, the street is mainly used by cars to cut off a busy road. At night, the snackbar and the coffeeshop (that sells weed, not coffee) are the only places that are open. Even the playgrounds are little used by children. There are no benches on the street where people can rest or meet. Nor are there any bins.

At night, the neighbourhood is badly lit. People clearly don't like to spend much time in public space. Knowing that we would get one of the shop spaces, we started wondering how the space could become a place to try out different functions, both inside and outside, to create a better functioning public space.


Stadhuisweg


CASCOHUIS

April

In April, we got the keys of both the space and the apartment, and I became a resident of the neighbourhood. This meant that I could address people I saw on the street regularly as 'neighbour'. It also meant we were not only around between office hours anymore: we met neighbours in the supermarket, saw people go to work in the morning and heard about incidents and stories in the surrounding.

At the time, the space was in a bad condition. There was no toilet, no running water, no electricity or heating. The walls were not plastered, the ceiling not insulated. The orange letters of the previous business 'Steakhouse West' were still on the window. For us, this was a great opportunity, as it enabled us to slowly build it up and show the residents how much you can do with little money. We tried to be in the space as much as possible, giving workshops to students from different design schools and cleaning the space.

The housing corporation and the municipality had warned us for the fact that these residents were hard to mobilise. However, as soon as I was taking off the letters, the first curious residents started to ask what kind of shop or

restaurant we were opening. When we would ask what people would open if they had the chance, or what they would like to have in the neighbourhood, some of them came with whole business ideas and suggestions. Some neighbours came with tea and coffee, some offered to help ("I am sitting at home all day anyway!") out or just gave us tips about cleaning strategies.

When we were in the space, we would put a bench outside to see if people would use it. Mostly, elderly Turkish or Moroccan ladies sat down to rest between the walk from home to the supermarket. They smiled a lot, but most of them were not able to speak Dutch with us.

May

Cascoland observes and does research by doing. At the start of a project, Fiona uses her experience with street theatre to do interventions on the street. These interventions make people curious, and is a great way in understanding how a neighbourhood responds. The space is right next to a laundrette, that is used by people in the whole Nieuw-West part of Amsterdam. At some point, a woman walked out with full bags. With a smile, she told us: "now I have to go home and iron everything!" We decided to do an outside ironing service for one day. The next day, we were ironing in front of our space, offering everyone an ironing service, and inviting people to help us. Some people did help out, but mostly, it was an image that made people laugh and ask what we were doing. If people stop and ask a question, it means they make time to talk. For us, it is a starting point for a conversation. The only one who was not pleased with the intervention was our neighbour. He thought the laundry and the ironing gave an impression of poverty. These are exactly the kind of reactions that give us valuable insights.

One of the things we first built into the space was a kitchen. By hacking some of IKEA's systems, we created a


WAT IS JOUW HOBBY ?
WAT WIL JIJ DELEN ?


WAT IS JOUW HOBBY ?

kitchen on wheels, including a water tap (with a manual pump) and a stove. Knowing that food always attracts people, we cooked soup on the street.

Several years ago, Cascoland built 'Praethuysjes': a mobile house-shaped object with a small table and two seats in it. By placing them in public space with coffee or tea, curious people sit down to talk. Usually, we use this approach to talk about heavy topics like domestic violence. This time we placed them in public space just for people to use them.

Serving soup made us meet many neighbours we hadn't seen before. At some point, a young man sat down with us and told us he was a hairdresser. He was willing to give children in the neighbourhood a free haircut. The week after, the first intervention with a resident was a fact.

Slowly, we started to get to know more people. By being present, welcoming people and making time to listen, people started sharing personal stories and concerns with us. And then we met Naima.

Naima is a young woman from Morocco, who lives in a neighbourhood close to the Van Deysselstraat. She had just finished her certificate in hijama: a type of cupping massages that is very popular in the Moroccan community. She was looking for a space to start her practice, but did not have enough money to invest (spaces in Amsterdam are wanted and expensive). She explained to us that for her, hijama is not only the act of giving a massage, but the personal contact invites to having a personal conversation. For Naima, listening is just as important as the massage.

For us, this was an eye opener. What if the shops in the street could be filled with entrepreneurs who don't only have a business, but who are also there to listen to neighbours, and signal people who need help or care.

About a week later, René, another resident, passed by. As a pastor of a church, he was looking for a place to cook soup to offer a free and healthy meal for people with little money.

As Cascoland, we rather facilitate people from the neighbourhood that are willing to take initiative than

programming and activating the space ourselves. After all, these are the people that have a network and remain in the neighbourhood when the Cascoland team moves on. I believe it is the best way to make yourself unnecessary.

Both Naima and René responded to a specific need in the neighbourhood, were open to listen, and needed a space to start putting their ideas into practice. This is how the Eendagszaak (One day business) came to be.

De Eendagszaak

Continuing the project

De Eendagszaak is a space where people from the neighbourhood with an idea for a business can try out the idea for one day a week. The space is free to use to facilitate initiative without having to take any risks. However, the space needs to be shared with co-owners, and the co-owner has to be willing to do something for the neighbourhood in return. Businesses that turn out to work well get the chance to get an independent space in the same street. With the housing corporation, we agreed that people that come from the Eendagszaak pay a lower rent for the first year.

René and Naima werethe first ones to open their business: on Tuesdays, René cooks soup from vegetables that are otherwise thrown away. Naima gives her cupping massages on Thursdays. Slowly, the project is developing.

We are noticing that the more we are around, the more residents get curious and pass by. Also, people start sharing more about their personal lives: we hear how people have to choose between paying medication or food, how people become lonely after their partner has passed away, how young people in the neighbourhood end up selling


E
NDAGSZA

drugs. After four months, we were already getting insights the municipality and the housing corporation never got. For now, we will continue with looking for co-owners for the Eendagszaak. On a longer term, we will look for collaborations with care organisations to find ways to connect the information we and the entrepreneurs are getting with professional care. For example, we could develop a training for entrepreneurs to pick up signals of mental problems. Furthermore, we will start looking at the public space itself and start doing short-term experiments like placing benches and lighting.

Our plans are changing on a daily basis. As the project keeps developing, we are getting more and more insights that will lead to new ideas and experiments. To really get an understanding in the context and the process, I am inviting you to visit us in the Van Deysselbuurt.

Conclusion

Having worked in a specific context for a few months, I can only draw conclusions for this specific time. I should keep reflecting on these conclusions throughout future projects. They might change over time.

I do think that all principles I described in the theoretical part are still true. However, I don't think it should be read as a manual: it is not true that working this way always leads to successful projects, where residents take over responsibility and initiative.

What cannot be described in any theory, is how much time you need to make to listen to someone, when to tell someone that you don't have time, or when to make this time even when your schedule is full. I've met people who considered suicide, people that are mentally not well, people that just feel lonely. Sometimes, it is extremely important to put everything aside and listen for hours.

Part of this is personality. Some people in the Cascoland team never hear personal stories. Others spend whole days listening to people sharing their stories. These stories are incredibly valuable in understanding a context.

Personality also plays a role in working with organisations like municipalities and housing corporations. The personality of someone with a specific function has a big influence. We are lucky to work with people that are willing to be flexible with rules, that understand the importance of experiment and don't think in numbers. It all sounds logic, but it is a topic that is not much discussed within the field of design.

What I start to understand, is how de Eendagszaak is a place where people from the neighbourhood meet that have never interacted before. It takes a lot of effort, but the feeling of being part of a community is essential, because it is bigger than Cascoland. If we leave in a few years, this community will remain. We do this by constantly looking for connections, for ways of exchanging knowledge or facilitating collaborations.

One could ask what place 'design' has in these processes. I think it is not the creation of a solution to a problem, but the creation of tools that facilitate residents to solve problems themselves. De Eendagszaak is part of this: we facilitate the space, the interior, the communication

to the neighbourhood (which is all designed), but the Eendagszaak cannot exist without the residents. What we do is show alternatives, and facilitate people who are eager to find alternatives for their own situations.

Finally, I would never encourage to merely work with (social) designers. Sociologists, architects, artists, urban planners, lawyers and other disciplines I have worked with all look at a context differently. It is only together with them and residents that I am able to reflect on my own prejudices, ideas and approaches.

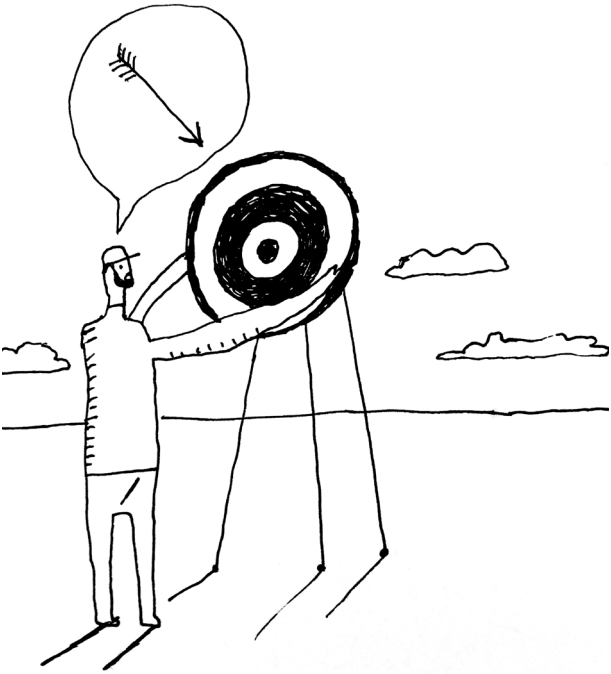
Part III
Principles for social design in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Illustrations by my uncle Hans Leijdekkers

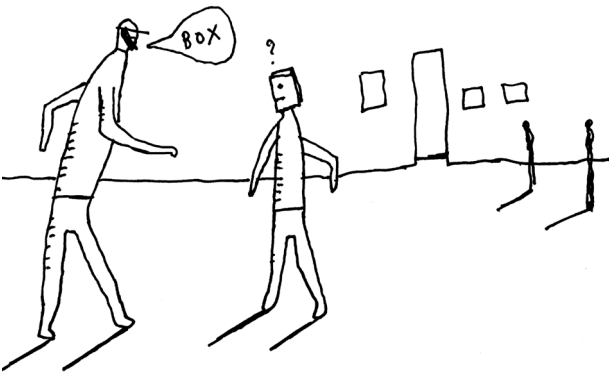
(1) Aim to make yourself unnecessary.

(2) Consider who will be responsible and accountable for the continuation of a project.

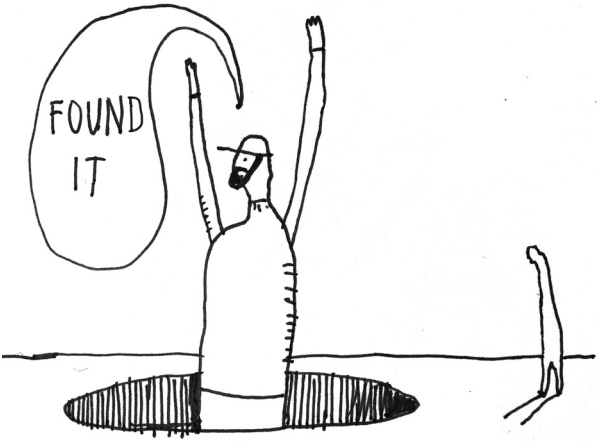
(3) Always start a project by formulating clear goals.



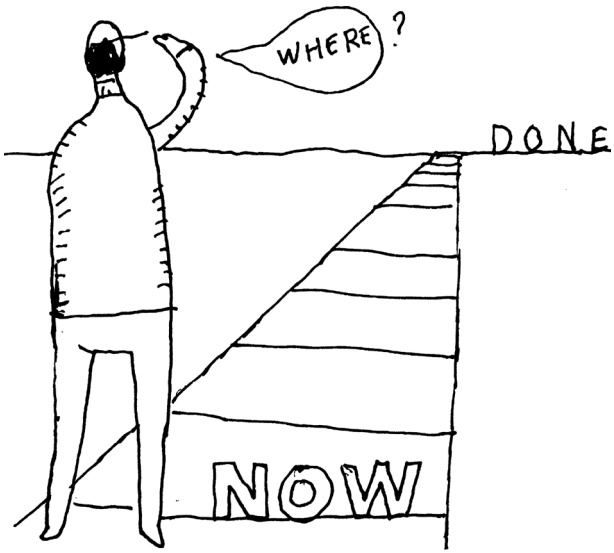
(4) Participate in the community's daily life instead of making people participants of your design project.



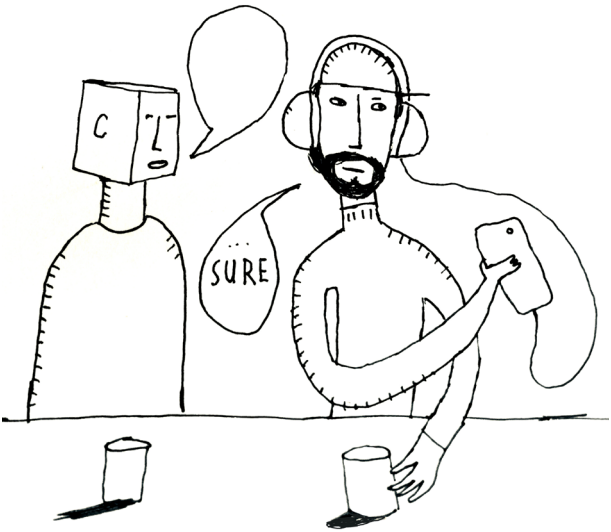
(5) Situate yourself in the environment where the problem you address exists and be visible.



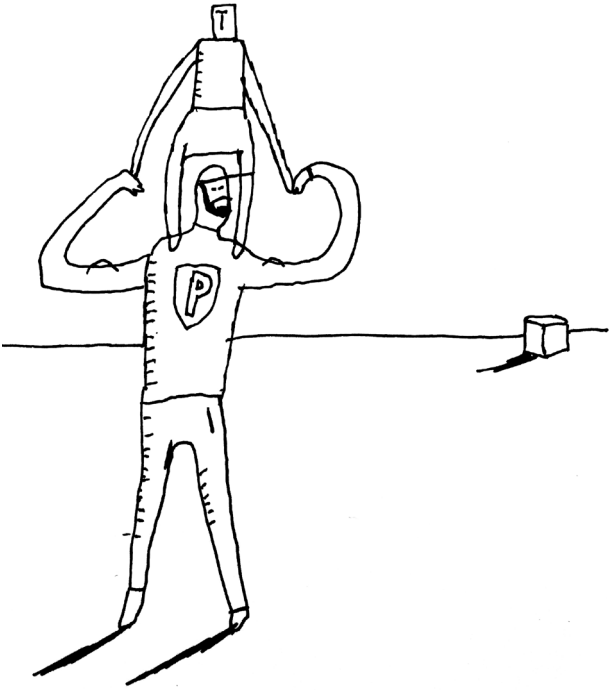
(6) Social design projects require a long-term commitment.



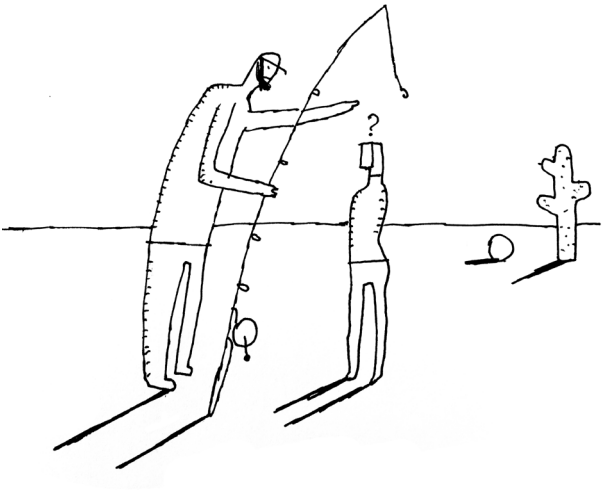
(7) Listen, really listen, and act.



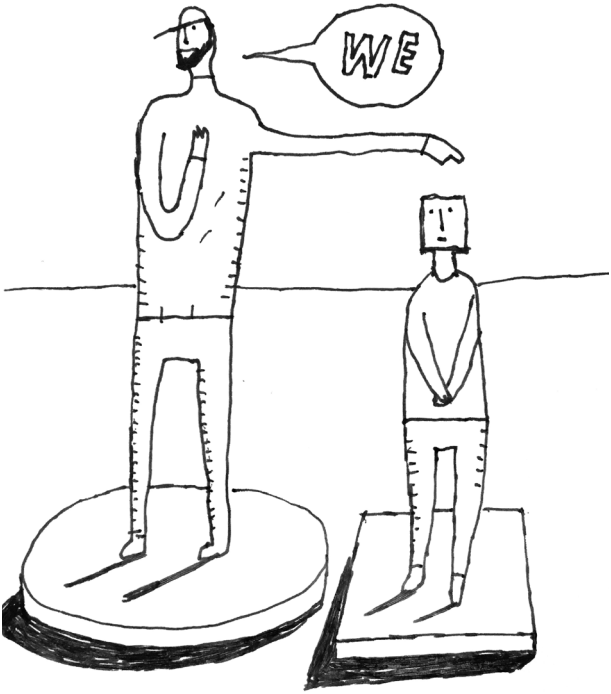
(8) Be aware of your own privilege and power.



(9) Be careful not to decide for others what is good for them.



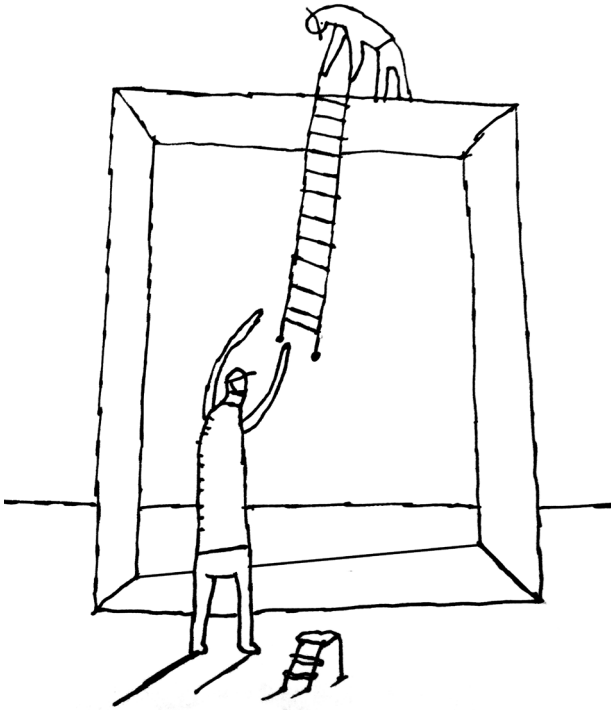
(10) Avoid making a distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’.



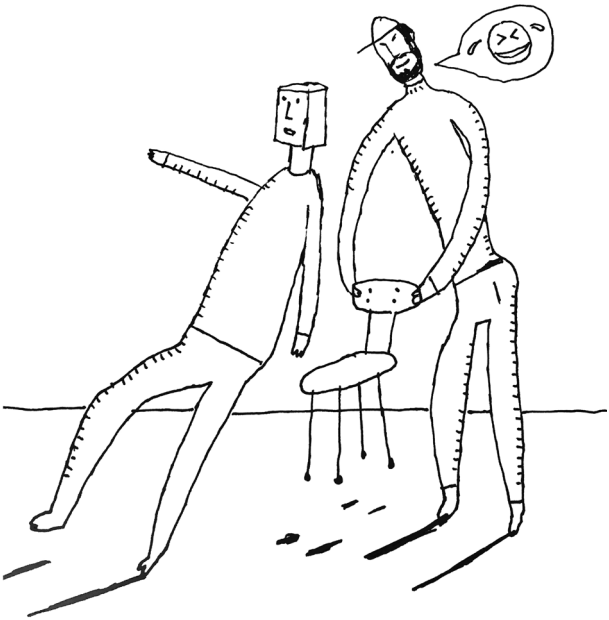
(11) Acknowledge that differences in beliefs, values and habits are a good thing rather than a problem.

(12) Actively collaborate with key figures and existing initiatives.

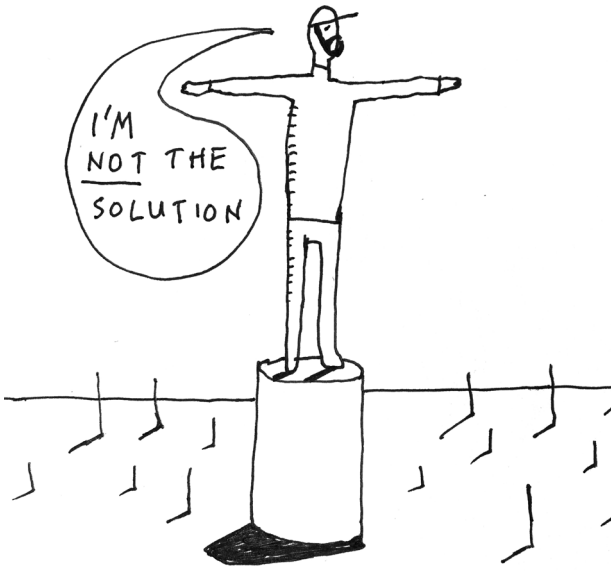
(13) Work from the bottom up but collaborate with people who work from top down



(14) Make sure to have fun.



(15) Design in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is an intervention rather than a final solution.



(16) Be open to unexpected influences and outcomes.