

Transcript

A brief introduction to co-design

Voiceover: What is co-design?

At the most fundamental level, co-design is a practice where people collaborate or connect their knowledge, skills and resources in order to carry out a design task.

Collaboration is an essential part of design practice, but co-design is not only about joint work, it is about challenging the traditional perspectives of design which puts the designer and their knowledge and skills at the centre of the process.

Instead, co-design is based on the principle of valuing equally all the skills and experiences within the group, and mobilising and connecting them for the benefit of the design process. Co-design puts the people who will be served or influenced by design decisions at the centre and empowers them to take an active part in design.

Co-design is becoming important in the face of complex social, political, environmental, educational, and technological issues, where no one person or organisation has the knowledge and skills to understand and solve them. A different approach is needed to empower people to participate and take control of their own life and environment.

Co-design is increasingly applied to help develop healthcare and other public services (from libraries to community gardens) to regenerate heritage assets and high streets, or develop housing solutions.

Co-design also produces new knowledge as people combine their specialist or personal knowledge to generate and test (new) ideas around a matter of concern, and as they negotiate to develop these ideas.

What is the role of professional designers in co-design?

In co-design, professional designers no longer play the part of problem-solvers, but instead act as design enablers.

A design enabler is someone who can help build the capacity of others to participate or lead a design process.

They do this by helping to unearth and develop skills, knowledge, and relationships, and by motivating and supporting people to connect with one another and to put their collective capabilities into practice.

Here are some examples of the roles an enabler can play at different times:

The mediator devises processes and tools to help others engage in the design thinking process. The mediator uses different techniques to reconcile differences, identify shared values and objectives, co-create ideas or find ways to accommodate differences.

Broker - the broker helps different people connect and negotiate with one another and with those in power to access the necessary materials, funding or expertise needed for the design process.

Educator - the educator helps others build their skills and confidence to use design language and to navigate the formal design process.

Activist – the activist is someone who takes the initiative to create a path for action. They often provide targeted support to energise the process at a critical moment. For instance, they might help to

engage a certain group or prototype an idea, and to set up practices and structures that can be used again in the future.

Champion – the champion advocates for co-design as a practice and helps coordinate and share knowledge and tools to provide inspiration and move the design process forward.

Help build a community of design enablers. Do you have any examples of co-design practices, projects, or tools to share?