



Service Design meets strategic action: exploring new tools for activating change

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Abstract

Design can positively contribute towards the highly complex social, economic and environmental problems we face today. One key area in design for social change is to empower citizens to activate change that disrupts built-in systemic inequalities and exploitative practices. This workshop presents the 'Action Heroes Journey', a resource kit co-developed by designers and CitizensUK community organisers to enable active citizen participation in public life. Based on Joseph Campbell's (2008) Hero's Journey storytelling framework, the toolkit integrates methods from service design and community organising and is aimed to help users to discover and align their personal values with the future development of their community. Although the resource was co-designed with and for young people initially, the archetypal structure allows the embedding of vernacular goals and meanings – i.e. increasing leadership, participation and co-creation that is meaningful at a personal level. It also connects with other stakeholder's priorities, for example, NGOs and local government citizen and sustainability strategies. Participants will learn how service design can be used to develop creative leadership capacity and enhancing wider and more diverse engagement in the socio-political sphere.

Keywords: service design; activism; metaphor; storytelling

Theme to be addressed

In this workshop we will address the theme of *Pluralities*. With design taking responsibilities and standing up for environmental and social responsibility, we stress the importance of engaging at all levels – i.e. not only via sociotechnical innovation and policy groups, but more importantly with civil society organisations, activist networks and citizen-advocacy groups who work tirelessly towards addressing injustices and empower the most vulnerable and underrepresented peoples and issues.

Workshop context

The key context of this workshop is social change. In order to obtain the change they seek, citizen movements and organisations are often driven by strategic action agendas – i.e. action oriented toward success of causes they champion (Jacobson, 2003). For example, the work done by Citizens UK (a UK citizen mobilization organisation) is conceptualised as a ‘broad-based community organising’, a political methodology ontologically rooted in civil society and epistemologically based on the concept of power (Bunyan, 2018).

On the other hand, strategic design seeks to use ‘design principles and practices to guide strategy development and implementation toward innovative outcomes that benefit people and organisations alike’ (Calabretta, Gemser, & Karpen, 2016). Common across strategic design practice for social change are co-production, collaborative and participatory principles, where a wide network of stakeholders are considered in the co-creation of public value. Conceptualising these approaches as *empowerment* (Ehn, 2008) has located strategic design within the wider community as it approached societal issues as ongoing *infrastructuring* (Hillgren, Seravalli, & Emilson, 2011; Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013).

These synergies presented a resourceful and genuine territory for developing joint methodologies that can potentiate empowerment in citizen-driven societal change.

Impact on Service Design Practice

Beyond delivering specific project outcomes, service designers engaged in social change interventions aim to grow the *design* and *change* capabilities within individuals, organisations, communities or multiple stakeholders. This is translated in forms of training initiatives such as participatory and co-creation workshops, and/or collaborative pilot projects. Formalising learning of these processes into transferrable resources and methodologies is part of this strategy (Sangiorgi, 2015). Though this workshop, we intend to gain a wider understanding of how to improve this methodology, as well as sharing it with a wider community of professionals.

Objectives

The objective of the workshop is to present participants with a design toolkit, the Community Action Heroes, developed in partnership with Citizens UK. The toolkit is a set of visual and digital resources, that brings service design and storytelling methods to empower individuals to take active leadership roles in public life, and shape meaningful, actionable pathways that align their personal values with the future development of their community. The toolkit was created in response to the lack of resources that enable young people in one of the most deprived areas in London to participate in community decision-making, severely limiting their representation in the policies developed at local level. Although CUK has established leadership training approaches for participation in public life, they faced limitations in developing the ability in young people to imagine and create desirable futures for themselves in connection to their community as they progress into adulthood.

Workshop Experience

In this workshop we will introduce participants to a new toolkit 'Community Action Hero Journey toolkit' which brings together service design, storytelling and community organising bridging individual vision to community strategy through an actionable pathway.

1. Introduction

- First, we will present background to the toolkit and the workshop goals – 15 mins

2. Using the toolkit – 55 min.

- Select the issue/context – these are pre-defined using several cards on the table with an issue in a context.
- Map the system and envision a user journey – use stakeholder mapping and customer journey tools.
- Translate into a hero's story, using hero's archetypes.

3. Reflection with participants – 20 mins

- Using Kolb's reflective cycle, participants will explore the question of how 'Action Hero Tool' supports them in developing leadership capacity, aligning their individual values and design capability with the strategic needs of the identified community.

Joint strategic action: service design and community organising

The strategic vision for change employed by Citizens UK is based on a view of society that is “comprised of three distinct sectors: 1) the state, the governments and the regulatory boards, 2) the market, companies, corporations, and 3) civil society” (Citizens UK). From a community organising perspective, this means that civil society holds the state and the market accountable of the practices and values they represent. At the core of their methodology lies creating permanent alliances between different civil society group to address *worthwhile and winnable issues*. While such issues might not achieve radical change in the community, the ultimate goal for Citizens UK is capacity building for participation in public life. This is done through relational approaches that seek to identify and train citizens to be leaders who mobilise their communities to take action on issues they care about.

Citizens UK logic of *non-partisan organising strategy with capacity building for leadership* as an objective sets Citizens UK apart from the sporadic nature of social movements, and is parallel to strategic design principles of

empowerment through *infrastructuring* and building powerful alliances that create value for all (Hillgren, Seravalli, & Eriksen, 2016).

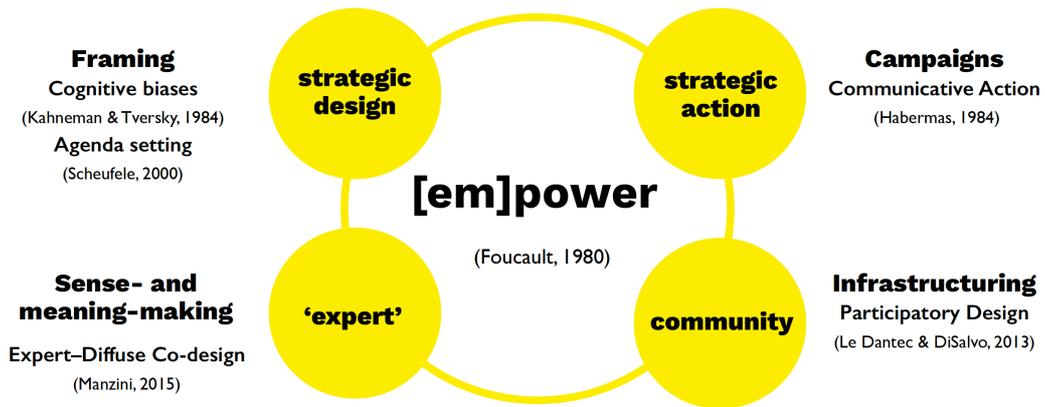
Participatory activities as platforms for learning

Beyond the importance of co-creating framing and strategy with the people and businesses the project will impact (stakeholders and project outcomes), bringing participatory design and the community organising logic of Citizens UK together in the workshop provided mutually beneficial means for knowledge exchange that extends capacity building – or empowerment – for change in many ways. In Table 1, we illustrate how the project enlarged and enriched areas of practice and understanding through this collaborative partnership, with new learnings highlighted in bold.

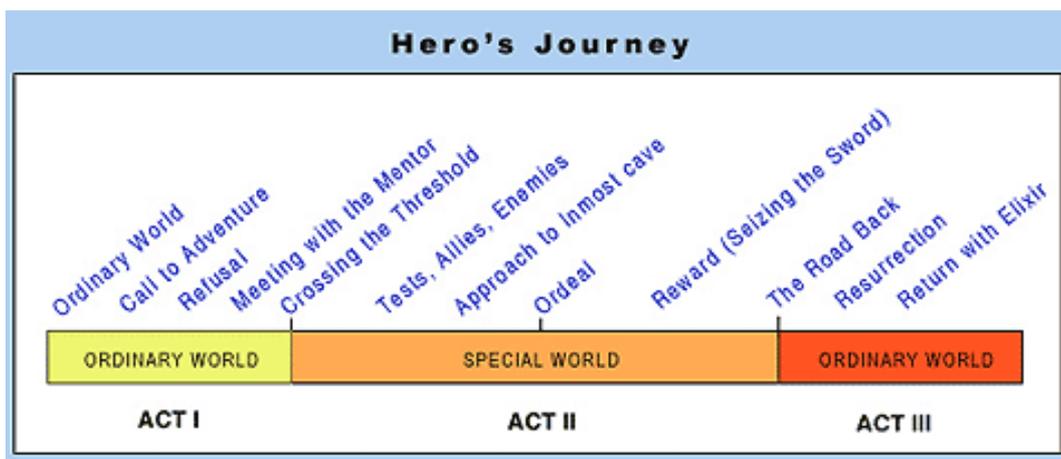
Table 1 – Transformative change through project-based learning

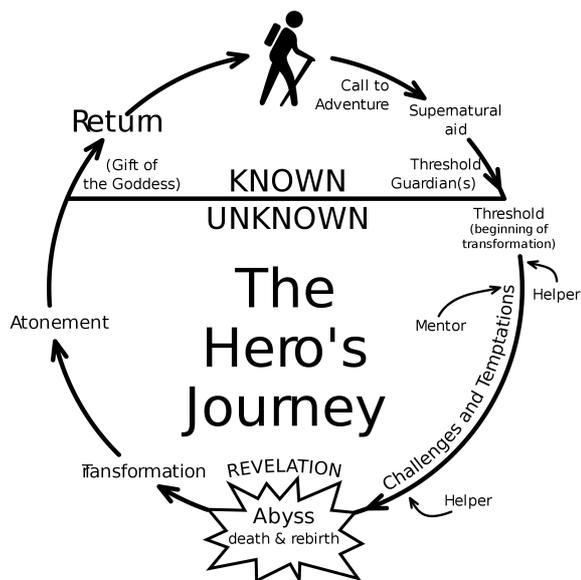
| | Community Organising | Strategic Social Design |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Empowerment through knowledge</i> | <p><i>Capacity building</i> through relational sessions, listening</p> <p>Training for leadership</p> <p>Moving from the debate to materialisation</p> <p>New methods for creating stakeholder ownership</p> <p>Identifying areas of opportunity for innovation</p> | <p><i>Infrastructuring</i> through participatory projects</p> <p>Formalising methodologies</p> <p>Good practice in inclusive, relational strategic leadership for social change</p> |
| <i>Organising strategy</i> | Non-partisan civil society alliances | Stakeholder partnerships |
| <i>Agenda/goal</i> | <p>Explicit. Motivated by citizen participation</p> <p>Understanding that creating value for all stakeholders advances the cause via higher buy-in instead of pressuring.</p> | <p>Implicit. Motivated by co-production of ‘expert-diffuse’ outcomes</p> <p>Setting up mechanisms for motivation disclosure, accountability and transparency in decision making that affects representation of all</p> <p>Reflect on tacit contractual terms of engagement.</p> |
| <i>Vision of change</i> | Rebalancing power (pressure) | <p>Innovation (value creation)</p> <p>Participation and co-creation mechanism as enablers for capacity building and mutual empowerment.</p> <p>A learning vs facilitation mindset</p> <p>Detachment of subjectivity and choosing most effective strategy for achieving legitimacy and impact.</p> |

theoretical framework



Initial constructs to discuss power in expert-diffuse designing





Example of Hero's Journey metaphor construct

Capacity and Facilities

The capacity for the workshop is 20 people. Individuals will be asked to form groups of 3-4 people. To run the workshop we will require a flat room with tables and movable chairs as well as wall space to display work. We will also require the projector for the initial presentation.

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