Reflection on the role of co-design in a large-scale international collaboration

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Outline

• The meSch project
• The role of co-design in meSch
  – Co-design workshops
  – Exploratory labs
  – Case studies
  – Authoring feasts
• The meSch outcomes
• Reflection on the co-design process
My journey

• BSc in Cybernetics (1981)
• Career in software development
• PhD focusing on the Evaluation of Information Systems in 2001 (Bucharest, RO)
• How do people learn/know/share in communities?
• Software Engineering, Open Source, Global Software Development (2003-2008)
• Social Media, Communities, Location-Based Social Media (2008-2010)
• Civic engagement, DIY, Community gardens, biodiversity (2010-2013)
• Cultural Heritage (2013-2017)
• Collaborative Economy (2017-2021)
meSch –
Material Encounters with digital Cultural Heritage
12 partners co-creating tools and applications

Material EncounterS with digital Cultural Heritage
Museums and their visitors

Digital heritage

HCl, co-design co-evaluation

Information curation and access

Personalization contextualisation

Embedded systems, smart objects

Art, design and public making
To bridge the gap between physical and digital collections and enable cultural heritage professionals to create novel experiences that best convey the value of their institutions to their visitors onsite and online.
Selected Publications


Preparing for co-design
My team knew little about these practices;  
We started with interviews and observations in Ireland and in Europe.  
PhD student embarked on ethnographic work.

Publications:

Participating museums
Partners collaborating with local heritage institutions and with the meSch heritage partners

Early prototypes to try out ideas and generate “templates” of interaction (“recipes”)

Functionality just one aspect, design and look & feel equally important

Portability: what is the interaction concept?
Museo Storico della Guerra, Rovereto, Italy
Collaboration with local Cultural Heritage Institutions: NL

- Maritime Museum
- Dordrecht Museum
Collaboration with local Cultural Heritage Institutions: UK

- Sheffield General Cemetery
Collaboration with local Cultural Heritage Institutions: IE

- The Hunt Museum, Limerick
Collaboration with local Cultural Heritage Institutions: ES

Co-design at Centro de Arte Dos 5 de Mayo

Co-design at MediaLab Prado
Collaboration with local Cultural Heritage Institutions: UK

Riverside Transport Museum,
Glasgow, UK
The Weimar Historical Cemetery
Co-design activities
Trento: October 2013- scenario built around artefact
Limerick: January 2014- co-design of authoring tool
The emphasis in co-design activities was on:

- co-design in context
- creating shared understandings
- working with actual museum artefacts
Exploratory labs

https://youtu.be/q8NdIYZgw8
• Starting from an open brief – the Compass
• Starting from a working prototype – the Egg

• Publication:
Understanding the needs of cultural heritage professionals and co-designing the tool

Publication:
Case-studies: long-term museum exhibitions integrating meSch technology, in the hands of heritage institutions:

- “The Hague and The Atlantic Wall: War in the City of Peace” exhibition at MUSEON, The Hague (April-November 2015);
- “Feint: Unravel the Illusion of Movement in Greek Art” exhibition at Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (June-August 2015);
- “Voices from Forte Pozzacchio” at Museo della Guerra, Trento (September-November 2015; March-July 2016)
The Atlantic Wall Exhibition, Museon, The Hague

https://youtu.be/sK3AdQU9kkc
Case Study 2: Feint: Unravel the Illusion of Movement in Greek Art

https://vimeo.com/146224161
Case Study 3: “Voices from Forte Pozzacchio”

https://youtu.be/DReu2J7eWx4
The Authoring Feasts
Amsterdam Nov 2016

https://youtu.be/q2qw6N9X7rM
meSch Outcomes
Co-design resources

meSch has put together a resource based on our own experiences with running co-design workshops. The resource will help you to run your own co-design workshops and get the best possible results. You will find templates for co-design methods, accompanied by examples of how they were implemented in our practice.

Interactive exhibits integrated in an exhibition

Addressing the key challenges of a museum

Repurposing smart objects or existing equipment

Designing for outdoors heritage sites

Why should you involve others or create multidisciplinary teams when planning for new exhibitions and the interactive exhibits involved? Simple: because all the different expertise and points of view complement each other and guarantee the best possible outcome for all parties involved, especially for your visitors. Take advantage of these proved methods and start your own co-design workshops today! Above you’ll find four case studies to inspire you! Co-design is one of the pillars that meSch is built on. All our prototypes and exhibitions were developed in cooperation between designers, cultural heritage professionals, technical personnel and future users. Co-design, for us, means bringing together a broad range of different stakeholders and expertise to join forces in creating new interactive experiences for museum visitors that bridge the physical and digital realm.

This website contains detailed descriptions of the co-design methods as used throughout the meSch project and the accompanying glossary contains definitions associated with each of the methods. Each method includes a downloadable sheet, containing information as to how one could use the method. This website was designed to complement the meSch co-design booklet that is available for download here.

http://mesch-project.eu/Co-design/
The meSch toolkit
The meSch toolkit: from hardware to software
Searching, structuring and tagging content
Reflection on co-design in meSch
Reflection on co-design and co-creation as process

- Activity or process?
- Ethos of the project
- Long term (4 years), large distributed team
- During the case studies, sustaining the co-design process outside of dedicated “activities” required effort and mediated communication
- Creation of a project team shared language (from ‘brief’ to ‘blidget’)
- Relying on each other’s expertise -‘transactive memory’ (Wegner 1985)
- Language groups
- Putting time aside to reflect on the process
Reflection on co-design – data collection

• Participant/non-participant observation
• Documenting each activity retrospectively; postmortem after each co-design activity;
• (facilitator: part of the group or impartial?)
• Interviews with participants involved in co-design before and after the case studies
• Curators documenting the co-design process during the case studies
• Observation during and questionnaires after the authoring feasts
Reflection on co-design: power relationships

• The brief sets the tone, the power relationships;
• Who benefits? How do we ‘configure’ participation? (Vines et al. 2013)
• Co-design takes time, while unilateral decisions are quick
• Intricacies, politics, lack of specific skills, lack of continuity
• The priorities of the project vs the priorities of the cultural heritage institution
• Motivations of cultural heritage professionals:
  – control over installation and content;
  – repurposing and reshaping interactive installations;
  – tangibility - the role of replicas
  – use of existing already digitised content; free content
• Is co-design feasible in a museum team? What is needed?
Reflection on co-design: the many facets

- Co-design activities:
  - the kick-off dedicated to team building and setting the tone
  - co-design workshops for understanding curatorial practices and the affordances of the technology
- Co-design of the evaluation framework
- Co-design of the authoring tool
- Co-design of the co-design resource
• Data analysis - still ongoing;
• How are skills and knowledge transferred across professional boundaries? Can we replicate this?
• How is the culture of the organisation influencing this process?
• Is there a way to support/scaffold team dynamics? Who creates the brief?
• How do we make the co-design process sustainable?
• Where do we go from here?
• Will cultural heritage institutions be able/willing to embrace co-design – while adopting (or not) the meSch platform?
Thank You!

For blog entries and links to publications: http://mesch-project.eu
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