The Futti Krutti Festival - Teaching Experiences for Social Innovation

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Abstract: This case study explores the future of design education through a teaching module at Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Norway. The module aims to introduce design for social innovation through a hands-on approach of learning service design. In collaboration with Kruttverket, a building situated in the East End of Oslo, the students took part in transforming the building on its way to becoming a cultural centre, by designing a neighbourhood festival. Our teaching approach aims to foster reflective practitioners by providing students with a comprehensive understanding of social innovation and its potential for addressing social inequalities. We believe that this hands-on, practical approach offered rich insights into the challenges of service delivery in an engaging and practical way. By choosing this particular context, the students got the opportunity to explore directly their agency as designers. This case study highlights three lessons: cultivating local relations, learning by doing in the community and cultivating a safe space for students to learn. It demonstrates the importance of practical and experiential learning in design education. We acknowledge that these insights are particular to our course, people, and project, yet we propose that our learnings might be relatable and transferable, in that they may inform and inspire others.

Keywords: Social innovation; Co-creation; Student collaboration; Learning by doing; Agency

Introduction

This paper presents a case study from first semester undergraduate design education that aimed to introduce the potential of design for social innovation as well as utilizing a very hands-on approach to learning and exploring the complexity of service design at an early stage of the students’ learning journey (Hvidsten et al., 2021). Through designing by way of co-creation, making socially sustainable systems and working to understand people's needs, the students are faced with real people, real issues, and indeed, running a real event. They learn tools and methods through their practical application. The design of the event is part of the first semester with a class of 60 students in a five-year Master of Design at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO). This case study presents a cultivation of a design education that fosters reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987). We will explain our main intentions of the pedagogical approach as well as draw out three lessons from our pedagogy that might enable students to tackle the challenges of social inequalities through social innovation. These are particular to our course, people, and project, yet we propose that our learnings might be relatable and transferable, in that they may inform and inspire others.
The pedagogical intent - letting students design with and for people
A multidisciplinary team of teachers plans and runs this first semester of the design education that contains introductory modules from the discipline of industrial design, interaction design and visual communication. The various briefs build on each other in order to strengthen their core design competence. The final module is Experiences for Social Innovation and introduces service design. The task in this module is designed to draw on and summarize the knowledge the students have acquired throughout the semester. The task is for the students to design and co-create a neighbourhood festival named Futti Krutti in collaboration with Kruttverket. The festival brief is set up as a teaching framework for the students to learn about user journeys, insight work, co-creation, and participation in service design (Stickdorn et al., 2018).

The context - Kruttverket and their challenges
The final module and first major project for the students is a collaboration with Kruttverket. Kruttverket is located in an urban neighbourhood in Oslo, with great socioeconomic inequality. The area was previously the headquarter of a criminal biker gang. In the fall of 2021, the students helped transform Kruttverket into a cultural centre. Through strategic tools and methods within user participation and co-creation, the aim was to introduce and open the building to the neighbourhood. Due to the area’s challenging history, we initially focused on making the place safe and accessible for the neighbourhood. The students conducted a site analysis of the neighbourhood, and had conversations with neighbours who lived and worked in the area, as well as staff from Kruttverket/Kroloftet.

Creating the brief
The teachers had a clear pedagogical intention in choosing this context and possibility space. We were required to give relatively novice design students an introduction to service design and many of its inherent challenges relating to working with abstraction, designing with time, and designing for experience. This also included the need to find creative ways to introduce many of the approaches and tools of the discipline in a fun, engaging, and practical way. We also found that having students to actually deliver the service that they were designing, gave practical insight into the complexity of developing, and orchestrating a real service delivery, as opposed to a hypothetical one. This hands-
on practical approach, we believe offered rich insight into the challenges of service delivery. In addition, by choosing this particular context, the students got the opportunity to explore directly their agency as designers to contribute to the solving of social issues in a direct and designerly way. Whilst the project engages with some of the complexity inherent in the context (i.e. social inequality, limited integration. etc.), it is, as a single event, contained enough in terms of time and scope to make it manageable for the students at this phase of their learning journey.

In collaboration with the students, we articulated a brief where the students were to stage an event that invited the neighbourhood into Kruttverket in the form of a one-day festival. As we wanted the students to be contributors and shape the program, they were given the task of involving the neighbourhood in the design of the festival, through interviews, insights, and observations. Due to its success both in regards to a learning process and event outcome, this brief was revisited in 2022 and is now placed as part of the course structure of the first year at AHO.

A repertoire of methods

Service design focuses on creating user-friendly and delightful experiences. As part of creating the Futti Krutti Festival, the students practise service design methods for insight work, user involvement, idea development, continuous prototyping, testing and iteration.

The students are introduced to various design methods:

1. Methods for user insights and co-creation: mapping, interview techniques, and analysis, workshop planning, user insight, key findings, and user journeys (e.g. Hvidsten et al., 2021).
2. Methods for developing a brand identity: strategy, vision, values, position, swot analysis, target group/segment, mood board, visual identity, typography, colour palette, touchpoints, prototypes, and interaction flows (e.g. Wheeler, 2017) (Lupton, 2011).

Choices, choices, choices

With many possibilities available in how to transform the building, the students and teachers prioritized activities that had the potential to reach as many as possible. This was a strategic decision in order to make the location known in the neighbourhood and raise the profile and potential of Kruttverket beyond this festival. Kruttverket wanted something that had the potential to reach as many as possible in an inclusive way and therefore we chose to create available and low-cost experiences on the day of the festival. The activities focused on reaching families with children
from the neighbourhood. Using their insight work, the students created activities and content for the different areas of the building, that could reach a variety of neighbours and people in the area. The students designed a program for the festival consisting of workshops, interactive installations, food experiences, lectures and concerts.

The students shared the insights they had gained from the first stage, before being divided into groups. The group work was divided into program content, information and social media, identity, signage and scenography and interactive installations, uniforms, activities, food and workshops. The cultural centre Kruttverket is yet to be widely known and a central part of making the festival happen was designing wayfinding and promotional material.

Service design methods were employed to create the overall identity, and touchpoints such as social media communication, wayfinding, signage systems, content and program for the festival, costumes, opening ceremony, and rituals. The students had to work out how to keep up the pace throughout the day (the dramaturgy of the day) and indeed how to close the event - in short: how to design the festival experience, from its wayfinding to the flow of events to food service, all with the aim to include and involve.

The students designed activities for children that drew on the children’s own creative power. These were activities where the children themselves, for instance, could build their own fantasy characters in wood, candle casting from 3d-printed moulds made by the students, and interactive light sculptures. The students organised and assisted the children throughout the day. The festival was a day filled with activities, food, dance, and music. The project was carried out in December 2021 and 2022, and each year the students had 3 weeks to plan and execute the festival.
The Futti Krutti Festival

Intention and Lessons

As we have pointed to earlier, we had two clear intentions on choosing this context, project and pedagogical approach. Firstly, we wanted the students to get a sense of the potential of design by contributing to solving societal challenges directly. Secondly, we believe that learning by doing in a real-life project offers rich learning opportunities for understanding the complexity of service design, its methods and tools as well as the inherent challenges of delivering a service. Beyond this, however, we would now like to point to a series of reflections in the form of three lessons from the work on the festival as pedagogical practice:

1. Cultivating local relations - people and places
2. Learning by doing in the community - Working with existing needs and real issues
3. Cultivate safety among the students, cultivate responsibility

Lesson 1 - Cultivating local relations - people and places

We believe that to be able to solve societal challenges, design students must develop a deep understanding of how to interact, listen and respond to people and their needs. We see that students often find it challenging to reach out to people they do not know and we see it as the teachers’ responsibility to make the students comfortable with participatory processes. In order to ensure that the students learn how to interact with actual people and places we found that it was helpful to facilitate the first meeting between the students and the neighbours. It seemed that it made the students more confident when they then had to reach out to people themselves, later in the process. Ethics are of crucial importance, and as educators, we have a responsibility to ensure respectful relations. To answer to this responsibility, we gave a lecture on ethnographic fieldwork and interview techniques. We discussed the importance of ethical behaviour. It is important that the students understand that they are designing for others than themselves.

Figure 10. The students interview the neighbours at Kruttverket to get user insights and do ethnographic fieldwork. They share their key findings to help shape the direction of the festival. Photos by Vera Pahle.

Building Local Relations and Mapping Needs

The goal is to create good experiences for those involved and to create services that are socially sustainable. As part of the insight work, getting to know the area and the people who live there was imperative. We carried out a city tour with Speed Arkitekter who introduced us to the socio-geographical perspectives of the area. Neighbours, entrepreneurs and voluntary organizations were invited to talk to the students. To cultivate local relations the students spend most of the project period physically at Kruttverket. By doing this the students gained a deep understanding of the area’s challenges and potential. We believe this to be an important factor for the ensuing success of the festival. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the students mapped out needs and wishes and learned about people’s relationships with the area that helped shape the direction of the festival.

The lesson was in the careful balance in enabling students to venture out, safely on their own, in contacting people different from themselves and engaging them in design processes. The initial contact was facilitated, but it was a presumption that they would themselves initiate further contact and expand on the people they engaged with. Future design education will have to ensure such an engagement and independence in the students.

This lesson speaks to the future of design education in maturing the agency of the students.
Lesson 2 - Learning by doing in the community - Working with existing needs and real issues

Through learning by doing in the community, together with a local stakeholder, the students learn how to address and tackle real issues. The cultural centre, Kruttverket, is located in an area with socioeconomic inequality. The students learn how social, cultural, economic, and political conditions and processes affect people’s actions, and they learn to design experiences for social innovation within these structures.

The students actively engage in real-life design scenarios, applying a repertoire of design methods. They collaborate closely with both the partner organization and the local community, immersing themselves in the festival’s location. This on-site presence allows them to prototype and refine their ideas within the actual context. By embracing a learning-by-doing approach, students receive timely feedback on their work, enabling them to design solutions that address genuine needs (Bjælde & Najbjerg, 2017). This process cultivates an appreciation for the impact of designing for others, emphasizing the value of their work in creating meaningful experiences.

Learning by doing in the community, influenced by John Dewey’s experiential learning theory, emphasizes the importance of hands-on experiences in design education. It promotes a holistic approach to learning, where students interact with real-world challenges, collaborate with community members, and apply their design skills to create meaningful solutions. This approach nurtures critical thinking, empathy, and social responsibility, empowering students to become effective problem-solvers and agents of positive change (Dewey, 1938).

The lesson was the handling of complex and relational dynamics in a new community - where the perhaps easily identified challenges may originate in a complex blend of social, cultural, economic, and political conditions. Yet, attempting to meet peoples’ needs and creatively engaging them in design processes appeared to be valuable for both the neighbourhood and a great learning experience for the students. They addressed inequality and larger issues that they could not necessarily solve as such, yet were able to accommodate for and work with as a valuable scoping exercise that harnessed their design skills and awareness of the potential of their role as designers.

This lesson speaks to the future of design education by showing how students who are aware and articulate of their skills are able to meet complex societal challenges and transform the use and perception of a location.
Lesson 3 - Cultivate safety among the students, cultivate responsibility

A multidisciplinary team of teachers organized and conducted the semester that contained modules within the discipline of industrial design, interaction design, visual communication and service design. The succession of briefs build on each other. The final module Experiences for Social Innovation summarizes the knowledge the students have acquired throughout the semester. In each module, the students are given learning objectives and assessment criteria (Biggs, 2003). Thereby the students know what is expected of them and this helps to cultivate a safe framework.

As a teaching team, we are passionate about creating a safe space with a supportive attitude among the students. Research shows that a sense of safety and well-being means that students dare to express themselves and that they become more exploratory in the design processes (Cameron & Rideout, 2022).

In order to ensure a thorough design process whilst working in groups, the teachers had to teach skills of collaboration, risk-taking and prioritization, whilst enabling the students to deliver on tasks. It was a challenge for the teachers to ensure good group dynamics. When giving the brief we wanted to ensure students’ autonomy as they were a class of 60 students working towards a shared goal and together delivering one event.

Dramaturgy: The design of the semester and each module

We strive to pay attention to the diverse voices of the students. Getting to know the students is an important first step in creating a friendly atmosphere in class, as this will make your students more motivated to engage in discussions and in-class interactions. As educators with such a large group, we see that we in part work with dramaturgy. The final module Experiences for Social Innovation is designed with a particular focus on flow and rhythm. To obtain a good flow it is important to be attentive to micro-interactions between the students in their process. Consequently, this ensures enthusiasm. In a studio where 60 students collaborate, we encourage everyone to participate. To accomplish this, we dedicate a substantial amount of time working closely with the students, both in group settings and individually. We see that for some of the students, it is easier to share opinions and visually express themselves through digital platforms such as Slack and Miro. Since it is an ambitious project where we also co-create with a local stakeholder it is important to maintain the students’ motivation and perseverance. Initially, we strive to obtain a good balance between the tasks within a timeframe. In our teaching philosophy, we are open to the student’s feedback and willing to adjust along the way.

Peer to peer

As educators, we are eager to foster a sharing culture amongst the students. As the project progresses, we regularly engage with the students to ensure critical reflections along the way, not only to the teachers but amongst themselves. They become familiar with giving critical feedback to each other and peer learning as an educational method and this helps the students solidify their knowledge by teaching each other. One student tutoring another in a supervised environment can result in better learning and retention (Carless & Boud, 2018). Through peer learning and evaluating each other’s ideas and prototypes, the students get to develop their design vocabulary. The teachers give the students evaluation criteria that help them develop their repertoire. When they become practised at giving each other feedback based on criteria, they also become more confident in their own role as designers.

The lesson for us teachers was in creating learning spaces within the student groups. In order to ensure that the students learn whilst working with real spaces and communities yet allow for general teachings in the design discipline, the teachers had to frame and articulate the various stages of knowledge building, and together with the students reflect on the learning outcome.

This lesson speaks to the future of design education in ensuring safety and care, while still fostering creative exploration and tangible outcomes.

Reflections

We are aware that this project is an ambitious brief to give to students and for them to pull off. As the lessons above highlight, there are many pivotal concerns and collaborations that are in part orchestrated and in part left blank for the students to perhaps discover, choose, address and solve. We had several intentions for choosing this context, project and pedagogical approach. The future of design deals with complex societal structures, and by introducing a project that deals with services for social innovation early in their education, the students get the opportunity to develop empathy, engagement and strategic thinking simultaneously. The students get a sense of the potential of how design can contribute to solving societal challenges directly. Learning by doing in a real-life project that they must
actually deliver themselves, offers rich learning opportunities for understanding the complexity of service design, its methods and tools as well as the inherent challenges of delivering a service.

As educators, we believe that design for social innovation is a constructive way to learn how to address contemporary challenges, as well as maturing the agency of students. In today’s society it is important that designers act as flexible and reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987), and learn to address and take responsibility for their own actions. By way of working to understand other people’s needs, co-creation and making socially sustainable systems, the students are faced with real people, real issues and indeed, the running of a real event. As the lessons above show, the role of the design teacher expands as the role of the designer expands. In contemporary practice - although this is a few years off for these students - it is crucial to be able to collaborate and work in groups. Being prepared to engage with societal issues through being a designer, is crucial for developing the design discipline. As we continuously develop our courses and our briefs, identify new obstacles and goals for the students we hope our lessons contribute to the future of design education.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank Kruttverket for the exciting collaboration, especially Danee Feng and Frans Friis. We would also like to thank the first-year design students of 2021 and 2022 that continue to inspire us. A special thank you to our brilliant colleagues Anna Martine Nilsen, Stein Rokseth and Hans Gerard Meier for their important contributions to the festival, and to Josina Vink and Ted Matthews for their valuable and insightful feedback on the paper. Lastly, we want to acknowledge the neighbors who generously gave their time and attention to the students and actively participated in the Futti Krutti Festival. The Festival was generously supported by the Oslo municipality, Bydel Gamle Oslo. This case study was written with the support of the Institute of Design at The Oslo School of Architecture and design.

References
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