GREETINGS TRAVELLER

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD OF DESIGNING FOR TRANSFORMING PRACTICES

This collection of infographics is a visual journey through the development, the application, and the communication of our approach in designing for transforming practices. TP is a framework for transforming practices through a dialogue across different standpoints.

The purpose of the upcoming pages is not to propose clear-cut solutions regarding how to achieve societal goals, but rather to sketch a landscape of learnings, experiences, and opportunities for a specific kind of transformation to happen.

One could see this collection as a ‘hiker for a bigger journey through uncharted territories of transforming practices’. Buckle up and we hope you enjoy the journey.

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DESIGNING FOR TRANSFORMING PRACTICES

Designing for Transforming Practices exists to catalyze ecosystems into transforming existing practices into truly sustainable ones, through design. It does this by initiating and curating multidimensional synergies, driven by beauty, diversity and meaning. The scope is to imagine and propose sustainable futures, which are those futures where all beings are respected and actions to heal the planet are taken, towards a horizon of collective thriving. These futures are populated by people living purposeful lives, in beautiful living spaces.

Transformation | noun
transformation noun
Transformation is a substantial change, often associated with innovation and radical change. Transformation could also mean the realization of a concept or change from one condition or state to another. (Oxford English Dictionary). We see the term “transformation” when designing for innovative and radical change.

Tensions in paradigm shifts are asking for the transformation of practices

The socio-technical revolutions that our humanity has produced relate to paradigmatic shifts. Scientific and engineering developments, in interaction with natural resources and the establishment of new infrastructures open up for new ways to engage and transform our reality, building new futures of value creation.

And where are we now and where are we currently heading?
For many years now, humanity has witnessed, with growing concern, a relentless increase in the number and impact of complex and important challenges. Given the fact that more and more space is being devoted to finding ways out of major societal challenges, we argue that it is not enough to develop alternative abstract value propositions. Given these tensions, we argue that it is time to develop alternative abstract value propositions, which are based on interconnections that cannot be reduced to thought experiments. These include novel practices, attributes of simplicity, and objective knowledge. These systems need to be able to handle external shocks or disruptions like global warming or Covid-19.

The World Economic Forum urges building new models of value creation, using open platforms and objective knowledge. These systems need to be able to handle external shocks or disruptions like global warming or Covid-19.

"Tensions in paradigm shifts are asking for the transformation of practices"

After the emergence of a new paradigm, previous paradigms continue to exist, although they are losing prominence. The attributes of finding are now out of major societal challenges. This means that shifting to a new paradigm is difficult. The simultaneous existence of different paradigms and their interactions, some paradigms by definition do not align and are based on different sets of values and beliefs. Given these tensions, we argue that it is time to develop alternative abstract value propositions, which might address societal challenges. This means that a transformation of current practices is needed to bring new emerging paradigms to fruition, while respecting the historical development of all paradigms (Hummels, 2021).

"Tensions in paradigm shifts are asking for the transformation of practices"
Designing for Transforming Practices relies on carrying out two major activities: 1) arranging funding, setting up of contracts, and understanding what is the ecosystem we want to target and a context-specific proposal, built in a systemic way, depending on the specific context, with local actors, on local practices. 2) initiating the change processes through different media to share experiences and create multiactors’ collaborations. We aim at realising the transformation economy by acting in a local way, considering and working with the challenges and opportunities. During the later phases of the design process, reflecting at high pace can still be beneficial, to address previous reflection in context and approaches, as we to produce new knowledge relevant both for the specific project, and for the development of tools and experiences in Transforming Practices. Before all activities are set in motion and along the whole process, it is necessary to engage actors on their Attitudes and approach. It is important to establish a contract about a design code of conduct, free discussion and interpretation in the collaborative process, and strategies for learning together. Transforming Practices such contract is completely renegotiated in a constructive process of trust and openness.

It is important to start looking at the beginning, with all actors, with the level of transparency involved across all levels to avoid to continuously resist the challenge of transformation of their personal perception as well as from the perspective of the organisation and community that they represent. The collaboration does not follow traditional models or follow the current innovation system. It is a creative and participative process of learning and working together with local actors, beyond their professional roles, in their personal roles.

This dynamic emergence of new challenges along this collaborative process, requires a continuous reflection and efforts to link and transform existing systems. In this process, the collaboration of actors involves some hard work, some soft work.

Humans (2019)
Designing for transforming practices is an approach that transforms current practices into more sustainable ones. In the course of complex processes of responsible codevelopment, a variety of outputs are produced. Such outputs, however, are not the end-goals in and of themselves. Rather we see them as manifestations that inform the transformation of existing practices. Each of these outputs constitutes alternative practices while at the same time it is constituted by practices.
To approach and respect complexity inherent to transforming practices, we need to collectively take into consideration a multitude of perspectives and goals. And equally important is to be able to individually move within this multiplicity of perspectives. The use of lenses makes this possible. The list of lenses is extensive and it continues to grow, informed by the various experiments and discussions conducted through transforming practices activities.

These lenses enable to characterize:

(i) the perspective taken by each of the participants in terms of their motivation, values, behavior, social situation, and so forth (e.g., cultural lenses such as power distance index – uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism – masculinity vs. femininity – long-term vs. short-term orientation – indulgence vs. restraint) (Hofstede, 1991)

(ii) the scales of human, geographical, temporal relationships (e.g., scale lenses such as micro, meso, and macro considerations)

(iii) the modes of engagement in co-creation (e.g., engagement lenses related to ownership – responsibility – accountability)

Micro-meso-macro

To observe and operate on various levels, transforming practices explore and use various lenses, which enable to consider both micro, meso, and macro contexts.

The micro lens, at the core of this triptych, may be applied on the personal or on the organizational level. The micro lens is taken into perspective when one set of rules is followed by a unique agent.

The meso lens is taken to micro sets of rules. Therefore, the meso lens and meso level may be characterized as a set of rules that include micro perspectives, but also take into account the settings and contexts in which these micro rules are applied.

The macro lens relates to macro sets of rules. The macro level of attention is characterized by the use of macro lenses, which enable to consider various societal levels at the same time, connected through the meso level.

Possible, plausible, probable, preferable futures

Hancock and Bezold (1994) describe four perspectives on the future: the possible, the plausible, the probable, and the preferable future. Each perspective allows us to consider different aspects of the future, from the most likely and probable to the most desirable and preferable.

1st/2nd/3rd-person perspectives

The variety of viewpoints in transforming practices enriches both the variety of insights, and the scope of solution opportunities. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd-person perspectives are often utilized to consider various societal levels and their dynamics.

The 1st-person perspective lens focuses on the personal level, considering one’s own experiences, social involvement, and action possibilities. This approach is still situated yet encompasses richer observable and describable experiences.

The 2nd-person perspective lens focuses on a specific person or a comprehensively accessible group of people, considering their experiences, social involvement, and action possibilities. This approach is still situated, yet encompasses richer observable and describable experiences.

The 3rd-person perspective lens focuses on society and ecosystems, away from any specific and situated cases. It demands for expertise and a rather objective view on ecosystems.

Taken separately, these three lenses provide different sets of values to work with towards transformation. Combined, they provide new values contributing to each and all perspectives.
The fully functional ‘Station of Being’ was completed and officially opened in the Northern Swedish city of Umeå in 2019. The design provides a more pleasant waiting experience for commuters: from waking time into time to reflect, to feel, and to be.

The aim of the Station is to make public transport more attractive and promote increased use, thus having positive environmental impact by lowering the carbon emissions of the city.

Developed through Transforming Practices, the Station of Being project was design-driven, addressing a societal challenge in a locally specific way and involved multiple stakeholders. The end result is a fully functional prototype that elicits a new type of experience and thereby influences related behaviour.

The project drew upon a wide-ranging group of local stakeholders. This includes stakeholders involved in the design and research process, such as students and staff from the local design school (Umeå Institute of Design), as well as key actors of the system in which this design project was situated (e.g. public transport company, a real estate owner, a local power company, etc.) and several companies involved in the production of the station. The Station of Being is an example of a type of Transforming Practices output we call "experiential futures."

As a fully functional prototype that can be experienced by the public, a possible new future becomes visceral, perceivable, and directly impacts the daily life of people and surroundings by affording new behaviours; thus, prompting "transformation."

Importantly, the transformation prompted by the Station of Being extends beyond the specific design artifact and the specific challenge it aimed to address. Zooming out, the design and the process create a ripple effect, with practices beyond the use of public transport, kindling further transformations along the way. For example, in addition to having an impact on the use and perception of public transport infrastructure, the Station of Being contributes to a concrete way to establish a vision for Umeå as a Smart City and to embrace the capacity and skills of involved stakeholders to develop this vision further.
How to address the dynamics of mediated human-world relations, where new technologies are not there yet, and which might not be there for the upcoming decades or even century?

To address this question, we explore how taking a first-person perspective influences the imagining of probably, plausible, possible and preferable futures, as well as the influence of the kind of human-technology relations we use for this.

In the RWS Expedition 2050, we have explored how design can support Rijkswaterstaat, the executive agency of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, in understanding and dealing with the changing situation in the Netherlands over the coming 30 years. We created various short stories of persons living in 2050, physical discussion tools, as well as connected speculative prototypes of technologies that might live in 2050. We facilitated several discussions within a cross-section of the Dutch population using these designs.

The stories, discussion tools and probes were used both internally and externally to enrich and discuss the (re)organisation of Rijkswaterstaat. At the same time, the project served as a concrete case to extend an ecological and enactive account of imagination towards the realm of design research. Where most existing design approaches leave the notion of imagination implicit, or where made explicit, are characterizing it as a cognitive process only happening ‘in the head’, we studied how the stories and objects provide affordances for shared imagination (Smith et al., 2021; Hummels et al., 2021).

“The CRISPR toolkit is a handy suitcase to bio-engineer the environment, more specifically blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria. It is one of the prototypes developed for RWS Expedition 2050.”

In contrast to Norman’s notion of affordances, recent movements in ecological and enactive philosophy have led to an account of affordances with a much broader application than motor possibilities. In this account, affordances are situated in the context of a form of life, they are skill-dependent and can be perceived as relevant.

“Arranging the social setting and designing the tools have an influence on the kind of imaginative process that can unfold in a Practice. People are not first imagining the future world in their heads and then building this world from the objects on the table. Rather, relations made by tracing the conversation and assigning meaning to objects and the way other participants act in the process become affordances for further imagination. In other words, the imagined future world unfolds in the shared placing, replacing, moving, taking away and talking about the artefacts on the table. Imagination from this perspective can be regarded as a shared and scaffolded activity.”

The shared and embodied social activities scaffolded by a social and material environment of which our designs were part of, were making the future relatable and discussable from a first-person perspective. For example, by hearing a very vivid story about Delft being underwater in 30 years time, one of the directors of RWS suddenly realised the real impact of the future explorations, since he was living himself in Delft and now could imagine the consequences from the up till then abstract concepts he encountered in his work.

Smith et al. (2021), Hummels et al. (2021)
Organisations & Governance

RISE Research Institutes of Sweden - Organisations in Transformation

We do this by constantly zooming in & out when tackling societal challenges

Activities

Collect & Analyse: collecting the above from the team members, reflecting and analysing outcomes.

The process consciously moved from the inside out to the inside out of the organization. Exploration along this process led to discussions that opened space for intensive reflections and shared projects to be coupled to the realization of the work. Individuals were empowered to leverage individual drives when creating their own strategy, connecting every individual to the strategy whilst also recognizing that the combined effort of the team together creates a unique offer for their customers and clients. Recognizing emerging abilities that were not recognized before.

Outcomes

Collect & Analyse: insights on personal dreams, aspirations, and personal intrinsic motivations.

What do we want to bring to the world, and why?

Reflect on personal dreams, aspirations, and personal intrinsic motivations.

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Outcomes

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What do we want to bring to the world, and why?

Outcomes

Reflect on personal dreams, aspirations, and personal intrinsic motivations.

Outcomes: creation of support within the group, willingness to take the process of designing for transformation practices. Growing attitude of openness and curiosity for the unknown – wanting to transform together.

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NEW LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

Alternative learning ecosystems are needed to address the major societal challenges. These learning ecosystems have to anticipate and contribute to the establishment of future paradigms, formed by a set of shared beliefs and values, common models and acknowledged narratives (Kuhn, 1970). Over the past 20+ years we have been working with colleagues, students, and partners to explore and develop alternative learning ecosystems and alternative practices of learning together (e.g., Hummels & Veen, 2008; Hummels & Ley, 2017). Even though it was not always made explicit at the time, all our efforts with regard to learning were based on the principles of transforming practices: complexity, situatedness, aesthetic, co-responsibility and co-development (Hummels, 2021).

Since upcoming paradigms exist by definition (literally) challenging and shaking, the development of accompanying practices requires a particular attitude and approach: experimenting, learning by doing according to the world, working with resistance and ambiguities (Savin-Baden, 2008, 2012; Tronto, 2011). There is a need for thinking beyond or an environment that continually allows them to be 'in no man's land', i.e., to inherently working and experimenting without a fixed goal.

Transforming practices support people to engage in learning processes without judgment, reason, or surmise by reflecting, and to learn from their actions with the possibility to transform (Hummels and Ley, 2021; Hummels, 2021).

The experiences and competencies we have built up during this long journey have laid the foundation for our next step, which is creating learning ecosystems that enable the transformation of practices on a European scale and beyond.

In June 2021, RISE, in collaboration with the Eindhoven University of Technology, initiated a Design Competence and Experience Centre, with the purpose of catalysing ecosystems and transform existing practices into more sustainable ones. The centre initiates and curates multidimensional synergies, based on beauty, diversity and meaning to tackle nowadays grand challenges and to boost the creation and establishment of alternative paradigms.

Design Competence and Experience Centre

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VALUES with beauty, diversity and meaning

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