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Project: M2.1 semester
Designing for Wicked Problems

Document: Integral reflection



Comfortable with complexity

Eefje Ernst, social designer at Zet, said to me a few weeks ago: *“Design is like a playfield. It’s nice to feel free to play around, yet it’s also nice to know where the boundaries are.”*

I realized that what I like to do as a designer, is to first explore these boundaries, and then see if – and how far - I can push them. I like to keep asking ‘why’ until we reach that border, when we come to the essence, and co-explore what happens if we take it a step further.

My current approach for my FMP aligns very well with this attitude. I have noticed that I am very comfortable with complexity. When I feel like I can ‘solve’ a situation, I feel triggered to dig deeper, until I have buried myself into a situation I can’t get myself easily out of: that’s where the real game starts. Even though I don’t

plan this up front, I somehow frequently end up in this situation: I had a similar process when researching Social Impact in Kuwait.

For instance, I started my FMP with a different approach, one in which I would rather research an interaction in detail. But as soon as the stakeholder I was investigating showed signs of leaving her job, I left too and got pulled back, like a force of nature, to what turns out to be my research style: conversating with many stakeholders, looking for patterns, exchange perspectives about this and create strategies from this synergy of insights.

I enjoy doing this so much, that I am now even seriously considering a PhD, which – trust me – I did not see coming at the start of my semester.

Goals & Development

User & Society

I set myself two main goals in my FMP proposal:

- Frame the context and research the local values at the start of the project
- Monitor the impact of my project, by applying and co-developing the tools of Zet

I put a lot of effort into framing and reframing the context. Impact monitoring is something I didn’t do very consciously yet, I gathered some feedback from stakeholders that were enthusiastic about exchanging perspectives and are curious to (or even want to participate in!) the future development of my project. However, for my conceptual intervention I still need to make up a plan on how to evaluate the impact of the intervention, for which I will plan a meeting with a colleague of Zet’s Impact team in September.

Business & Entrepreneurship

I set myself one main goal in my FMP proposal:

- Identify value gaps of Zet, incorporate FMP within the processes of Zet, create a business model around my FMP and upscale it within the organization, contribute to the acquisition opportunities of Zet

I wrote this goal with the concept of a Serious Game in mind. With my current approach, I am less interested in creating e.g. a business model around my FMP in the sense that I wrote it down. Yet, funnily enough, I do aim to create a new business model through my FMP, but then one that is based on value exchange. Looking at ‘the designer of the future, being employed by a wicked problem’ pretty much links to Zet, willing to keep working on wicked problems, even when the commissioning of the Provence

stops. If I can alter parts of Zet's business model through my intervention, I unintentionally (though intentionally) tick all the boxes I set for this goal with another concept in mind.

Design Leadership & Entrepreneurship

I set myself two main goals in my FMP proposal:

- Explore the role of designers, designs and designing within governmental organisations
- Reflect during the course 'Design Leadership and Entrepreneurship' what it means to be a DLE'er and how I relate to this profile

Exploring the role of design(ers) is an ongoing journey, though I was able to draw up a status quo that I think covers the knowledge I have so far (see report, chapter context exploration). For the course DLE I wrote an extensive reflection, which I will very roughly summarize by stating that I found out to be interested in 'transformative leadership'. Although one quartile ago I thought that it was impossible for a Master student to graduate in that direction, I am now starting to think if I perhaps will be able to do so with my current approach – this is something I wish to discuss in the upcoming semester with my coach and lector of this course: Caroline Hummels.

Concluding

I dived into complexity this semester and formed a strategic direction out of a synergy of insights. In the upcoming semester, I will facilitate in co-exploring this strategy and co-reflect on what these insights can mean for Zet and for the practices of other stakeholders involved.