TOWARDS SPATIAL JUSTICE

Achieving meaningful participation in co-design processes

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Research summary

Co-design is defined in this research as the act of designing collectively, sharing power and exchanging knowledge.

The built environment has always been complicit in political change, economic pressures, and social movements. It is actively shaped by multiple actors – those in power and those disempowered – with different values, contested interests and varying degrees of agency. Reflecting on the theme of 'connecting communities', the research acknowledges and addresses the power dynamics at play in development, especially in the context of London and the UK where conditions of land tenure produce unique challenges to addressing spatial injustices. In the absence of legal or statutory guidance, too often 'community engagement' is conducted at a tokenistic level, with superficial considerations of what constitutes a community.

The research aims to make a case for co-design as a more inclusive process for development that can empower a more diverse group of actors to be at the table and part of design teams, shape strategic decisions and participate in design and construction stages, which in turn strengthens existing and nurtures new communities.

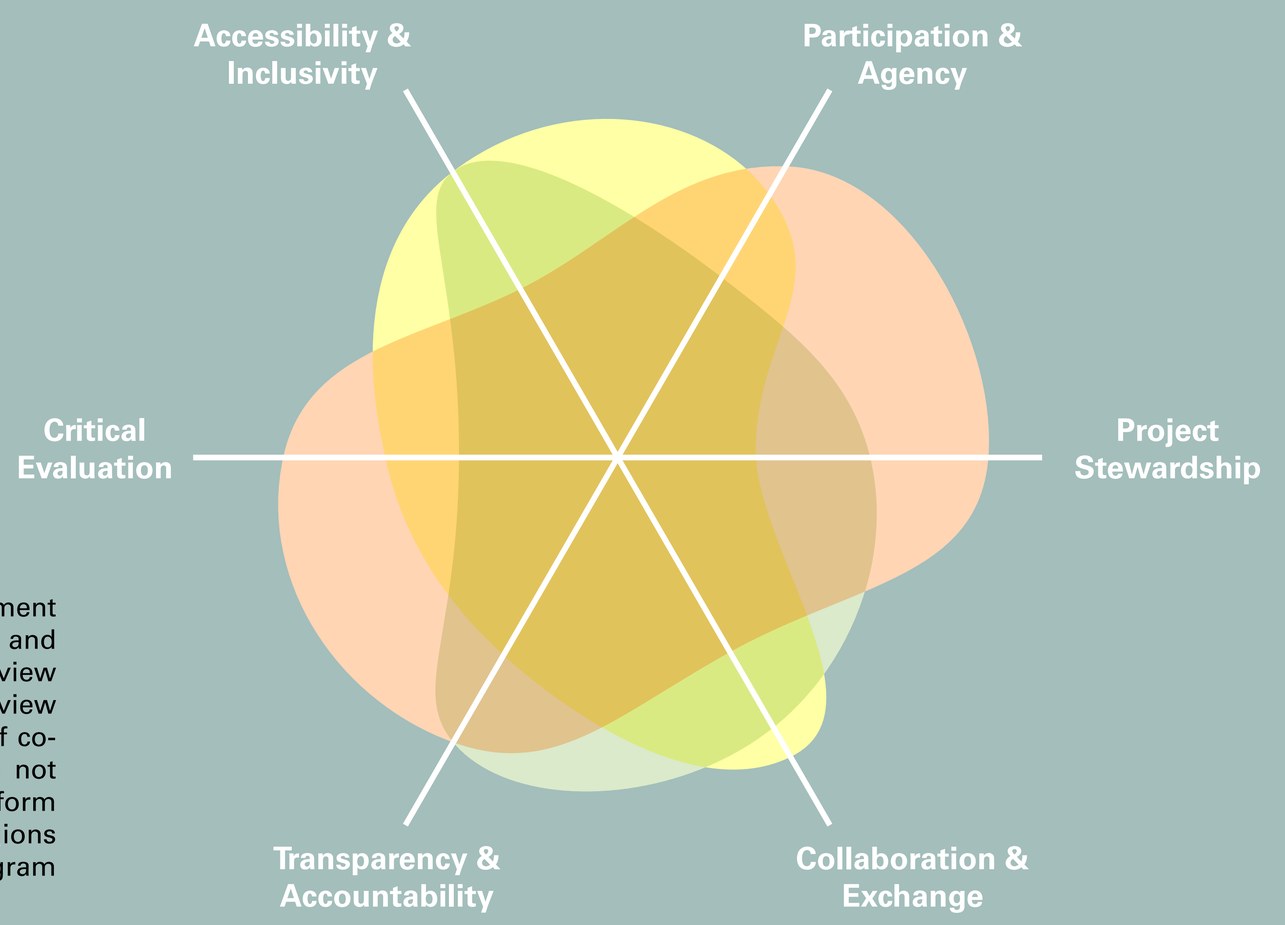

Figure 1: Co-design Assessment Tool to help designers and participants to align and review priorities, based on an overview of the six key principles of co-design. The framework is not intended to be a metricised form of measurement; the regions of colour on the radar diagram above are indicative only.

Why does it matter?

In the context of a wider societal reckoning with the climate emergency, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Covid-19 pandemic, the research argues that co-design can help address the entrenched lifestyles and inequities in the built environment and advance change towards spatial justice. As a methodology, co-design can embed an intersectional lens to address the multiple crises in health, race, climate and others in design, reinforcing their mutuality: regenerative design is most effective with community stewardship; deep-rooted petroleum-fueled habits are inextricable from mobility injustice; the city cannot nurture its inhabitants' health without addressing socio-economic inequities.

What was the process?

Building on literature review, interviews, workshops, case studies, and a symposium held at UCL, the research builds a critical understanding of co-design in theory and practice. Based on experiences of and findings from our collaborator network, including individuals from ACD, Arup, Ashford Borough Council, Fluid/Soundings, Fundación Fibra, GLA, Intervention Architecture, LSA, Public Practice, Sustrans, Urban Symbiotics and Yes Make, the research identifies the characteristics of successful co-design projects, speculates ways that co-design processes can interface with traditional professional work stages (e.g. RIBA's) and proposes strategic recommendations for its wider adoption across education, practice and civic action.

Case Study: Tustin Estate, Old Kent Road

Case Study: White Horse Square, Wembley Park

Resources

The full research report, co-design toolkit and case study library can be accessed using the QR Code above or by following this *link*.

Acknowledgements

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Contributors
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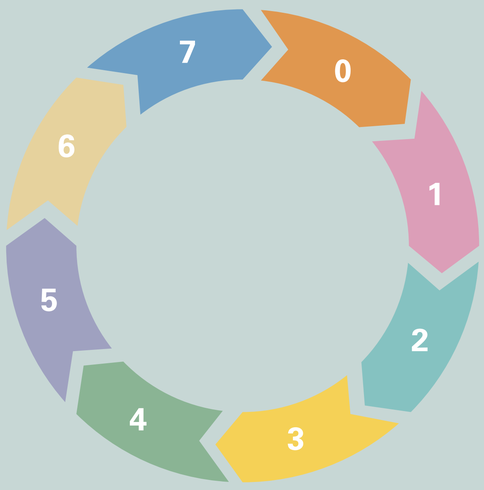

Figure 2: RIBA Plan of Work wheel as represented in RIBA publications, showing the seven work stages in equal segments.

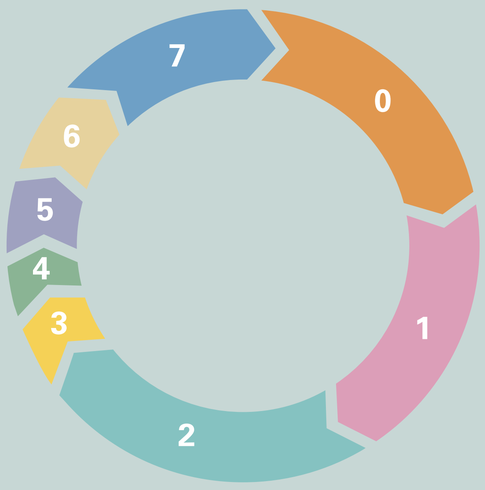

Figure 3: RIBA Plan of Work wheel with stages adjusted proportionally to time and resources needed typically in corresponding co-design stages.

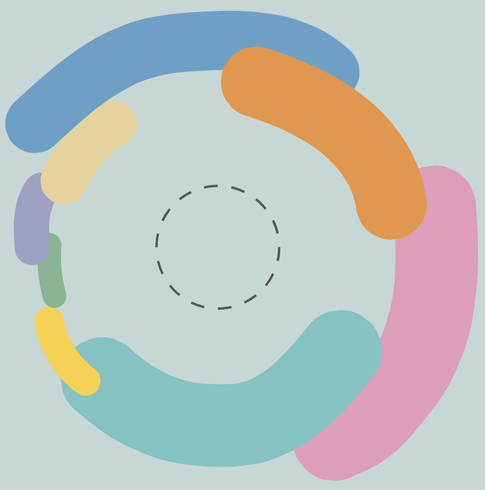

Figure 4: RIBA Plan of Work wheel with softer and looser stages, alluding to the importance of factoring in more organic and fluid processes within the framework of RIBA stages.