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Ethnography, co-design and emergence: Slow activism for sustainable design

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Abstract

In this article I take the novel step of examining how ethnographic understandings of the futures and intervention orientation of indirect forms of activism can inform design practice. To do this I focus on the example of the Slow City movement, specifically on its development across the UK, Spain and Australia. The focus on process and relationality that is part of the way that the movement works, creates forms of emergence that can lead to sustainability and resilience. Such processes are in many ways coherent with the principles of design anthropology and a phenomenological approach to co-design, and I suggest that by studying the success and limitations of Slow City examples we can see their work as a kind of living lab that brings new insights to design theory and practice for similar or parallel scenarios.

Introduction

Both design and social activism are ways of being active in the world that imagine and engage with the present-future interface and seek to intervene in its trajectory. In this article I take the novel step of examining how we might bring together insights from the study of activism for small town/regional sustainability with those of co-design. I do this in a context where 'there are still calls for understanding, from both designers and actors within the public sector, as to what design actually achieves and how to understand the contribution of design practice in these settings' (Holmlid & Wetter Edman, 2013, p. 28). I advance this discussion by going beyond the question of how to mobilise design practice to 'improve' public sector processes to explore how an analysis of successful activist practice in local government contexts can shed light on intervention processes in such contexts. I propose that such blending between design and social activism research can suggest novel forms of practice for the settings in which there is a shared interest in working for change.

The paper draws on discussions in the field of design anthropology (Gunn & Donovan, 2012; Gunn, Otto & Smith, 2013) and its focus on making (Ingold, 2013) to focus on commonalities between co-design and what I call the *indirect* activism of the Slow City movement (Pink, 2012). This indirect activism is productive of an emergent everyday form of resilience, which is both improvisory, and works towards future aspirations.

My approach is also inspired by Akama and Prendiville's phenomenological understanding of co-design which they see as:

“ ... a reflexive, embodied process of discovery and actualisation, and ... an integral, on-going activity of designing services (2013, p.30). ”

They suggest that:

“ ... co-designing can catalyse a transformative process in revealing and unlocking tacit knowledge, moving people along on a journey to 'make real' what proposed services might be like in the future (2013, p.30). ”

These two change processes – indirect activism and co-design – are united in their emphasis on emergence and the ongoingness of change, offering a strong foundation from which to proceed.

Since 2005 I have researched the development of the Slow City movement in the UK (2005-7), Spain (2011, with Lisa Servon) and Australia (2012-13, with Tania Lewis and Kirsten Seale). The movement was formed in 1999 in Italy, where the majority of its membership is focused, and has since then spread globally. Its members are urban settlements with populations of up to 50,000 including, as for the Slow City of Katoomba, Blue Mountains in Australia (based in the town of Katoomba and encompassing settlements in the Blue Mountains), areas that become 'cities' by drawing together small adjacent hamlets into a larger entity. In 2014 the movement had 187 member cities across 28 countries (http://www.cittaslow.org/download/DocumentiOfficiali/CITTASLOW_LIST_april_2014_PDF.pdf).

The Slow City sustainability framework is not a prototype or a model of a future town, it does not seek to direct change by altering what people do, or by designing into a 'known' future. Instead, it initiates an open process, by which the capacity of *local people* to improvise (i.e. town leaders and other active citizens) is harnessed. The Slow City framework, is not a prescriptive design, it instead inspires town leaders to invest the spoken and the sensory and affective ways of experiencing the uniqueness and specialness of their towns into an identity validated by a global movement. The movement's global success can be attributed partly to the flexibility of its framework, which makes it one of the few urban sustainability frameworks that is transferable across cultural and national contexts. Yet, Slow Cities are also in other ways vulnerable, to the sways of local politics, because they become embedded in the structures of local and regional governance through their relationships to town and regional councils. They are thus in many ways shaped by their relationship to what is both an uncertain world and their own uncertain futures. These characteristics of the movement and the way it works make it an interesting example for the study of local sustainability. I next turn to the literature on design anthropology and co-design before then interpreting the Slow City movement's framework in relation to their agendas, as a malleable design guide for the activity of town leaders.

Design Anthropology and co-design: making the connections

The sub-discipline of design anthropology has forged new relationships between anthropological theory, ethnography and forms of practice. Otto and Smith argue that design brings to anthropology a future orientation, an imperative towards intervention, and a collaborative practice, while anthropology brings to design theory and interpretation, the use of the past to understand the present and 'sensitivity' to the different groups involved (Otto & Smith, 2013, p. 3-4). The future orientation of design while it needs to be engaged with through a critical approach to temporality (as outlined below), is enabling to anthropological thinking beyond its specific application in design anthropology, and also helps us to understand other future oriented activities such as activism. Bringing an 'anthropology' of the change-making potential of indirect activism into the discussion, invites new insights about intervention and change which have previously remained unconnected to design theory.

Key to design anthropology, as suggested by Gunn and Donovan, is the idea of moving 'away from a problem-orientated approach towards designing' (2013, p.1). As they put it, '[p]eople often use things far beyond what designers expect.' They also state, in a way that resonates with the findings of the Slow City ethnography, that '[t]his would suggest that people actively intervene in configuring products and systems in the very processes of their consumption' (2013, p.1). They argue that '[a] process of design thus is not to impose closure but to allow for everyday life to carry on' (2013, p.1). Thus for Gunn and Donovan (following Ingold), a core question is:

“ ... how do speculations, dreams and imaginings of designers become interconnected with the practices of those who will be engaging with the outputs of designing? (2013, p.2). ”

As I suggest below, the example of how Slow City town leaders engage with the framework/proposition of the global Slow City movement offers us one way in which to think about how this can happen.

The contributors to the recent literature about design anthropology (see Gunn & Donovan, 2012; Gunn et al., 2013) make little explicit mention of the concept of co-design. Yet the co- in anthropology is fundamental. The notion of doing research *with*, rather than *for* or *about*, participants is central to contemporary definitions of anthropological ethnography (e.g. Ingold, 2008; Pink, 2013). Collaboration is core to the accepted canon of reflexive ethnographic practice (e.g. Clifford & Marcus, 1986) – ways of knowing and understanding are always co-produced with participants, be this through the mode of intersubjective enquiry stressed in the last century or through modes of tacit and embodied and sensory sharing and empathy (e.g. see Pink, 2013, 2015).

Co-design is a broad field, and here I engage only with its areas of intersection with design anthropology, and potentially with ethnographic practice. Tuuli Mattelmäki and Froukje Sleeswijk Visser's (2011) review of the concept of what they call co-x – to stand for forms of co-design and co-creation – outlines a series of key characteristics that can be identified with the co-x process. These are summed up by Akama and Prendiville through four aspects which involve: designers and users working together; empowerment for people who are not usually engaged in/by design; collaboration with users and stakeholders as in participatory design; and the idea of co-x as a 'general process or tool for collaborative engagement' (2013, p. 30). Akama and Prendiville's insights are particularly pertinent due to their orientation towards phenomenological anthropology, and their emphasis on how the notion of co-design tends to stand for the 'the shifts from *designing* for to *co-designing with people*' (Akama & Prendiville, 2013, p. 30), which corresponds with the idea of doing ethnography *with* (Ingold, 2008). For them co-design in service design is articulated in ways that resonate with the way that Slow City activism (as discussed below) is played out; it 'seeks to re-entangle co-designing back into its lived and enacted contexts' and is 'a reflexive, embodied process of discovery and actualisation, and it is an integral, on-going activity of designing services'. They emphasise how co-designing 'can catalyse a transformative process in revealing and unlocking tacit knowledge, moving people along on a journey to "make real" what proposed services might be like in the future' and can involve 'the very people who are enmeshed in the realisation of the proposed services' (Akama & Prendiville, 2013, p. 30).

There are also some direct connections between this approach and that of anthropology. Akama and Prendiville depart from 'the limitations in service design that tends to see its process as a contained series of fixed interactions or systemized process of methods' (Akama & Prendiville, 2013, p. 30) by connecting to the processual, phenomenological approach of the anthropologist Tim Ingold who understands 'ongoingness' through the metaphor of a shifting entanglement of lines through the world (Ingold, 2010). They thus 'view co-designing as being and becoming, that is constantly transforming and connecting multiple entanglements' (Akama & Prendiville, 2013, p. 30). Thus going beyond design's 'object-centred legacy [which] still holds firm, and with it, its tools and offerings – touch-points, digital artefacts, blueprint, service concept map' towards 'the active power of the process of co-designing' to:

“ ... re-situate services as an organic, co-created process and see co-designing as a journey and process of transformation in how we design our world, and ourselves, with others (Akama & Prendiville, 2013, p. 31). ”

This approach also offers us a way to connect design practice – as co-design beyond an object focus – with the work of indirect activism. Akama and Prendiville suggest this approach to co-designing has two core facets. First that '[t]he co-designing process can unlock tacit knowing that is embedded in our lived experiences' (p. 31). As I show below, the slow city process is similarly focused on bringing tacit knowing into view. Second, they describe a process of 'co-designing through sketching and drawing, giving shape and rhythm to the flows that moves the process along. Each progressive sketch – capturing, synthesising, distilling, combining, imagining, revealing – is a movement that loops past and current understandings, and propels us forward to somewhere further we could go' (p. 31). The slow city process involves forms of making that could be seen as parallel to this process, which entails bringing together of flows and lines, of processes, into new relations and configurations with each other, and sometimes surpasses written description.

The Slow City framework as an enabling/co-design process

In this section I consider two elements of Slow City processes in order to consider how they connect with co-design. First I explore how the process through which slow cities become accredited bring together the tacit and normally unspoken ways of knowing about the town and give them new forms of acknowledgement and activation. Second I explore how Slow City activities bring together people to make things happen. This builds on a *place-making* emphasis (e.g. Pink, 2012) and on the theme of *making resilience* (Pink & Lewis, 2014) and advances the discussion by suggesting that processes invite and enable a form of co-design, which helps to carry them forward as ways of creating and imagining futures.

In my earlier Slow City research in the UK, I focused on the sensory socialities that were involved in the development of Slow Cities. There I discussed how, at all different levels of the movement that I had researched, participants had told me how becoming a Slow City had brought them together and in doing so created their potential to achieve something, to move on (Pink, 2008b). As my work developed in Spain and Australia, the same theme resonated, as is reported on in my publications with Lisa Servon and Tania Lewis (Pink & Servon, 2013; Pink & Lewis, 2014), which have been focused towards disciplines of social anthropology and human geography. Here, I revisit these findings to consider their relevance for the ways in which we think about co-design and the bringing together of people that co-design entails.

In all of my research about the Slow City movement for participants, the bringing together of what was already there to create their Cittaslow membership applications was an important theme, in part because it was a large and a self-defining task. Conventionally the application process involves entering into a table the details through which the town measures up to around 60 criteria established by the movement, and divided into the themes of

environmental and infrastructure policies, the quality of the urban fabric, encouraging local produce, hospitality, and community, and creation of Cittaslow awareness. The applicants then self-assess against these criteria and need to score over 50% in order to be eligible for accreditation by the movement. The applications may be backed-up by supporting materials – for example in the case of Katoomba, Blue Mountains in Australia, photographs were included. Yet this process, while it was a measurement and assessment technology, was also open to interpretation and flexibility in ways that would not be expected of other instruments for sustainable urban development. The criteria were changed sometimes to suit national contexts. For instance at a more micro-level, in spacious Australian towns car parking did not represent the same challenges to those it might in Italy where in small towns there is limited space for car parking (Pink & Lewis, 2014). More generally it has also been necessary for the movement to be able to accommodate different local manifestations of national governance structures in different nation states.

In Yea, in the Australian state of Victoria, Adele, one of the local Slow City leaders described the process of compiling what was needed for their Slow City application as a ‘voyage of discovery’, telling me that ‘I was saying, “I had no idea this much stuff was going on” so I found that really exciting’. Adam explained this process in a way that can be interpreted as stressing the emergent ways in which their Slow City identity had become ‘known’:

“ I think too we had a feeling, in our gut we knew from the outset, this is right, like Yea is definitely a Cittaslow, it was just a case of us capturing the argument and putting it forward, it wasn’t like we had to change the place, and so we started off with that gut feeling and by the time we had gone through the process, by the time we had gone through the conviviums we actually had really strong coherent and cogent arguments of why it really was and so it was a case of ‘we’ve got to capture this (Adam, Yea). ”

Of particular interest in the Yea case was that the capturing of this ‘feeling’ and the pulling together of the different local groups that together made the town a Slow City was not achieved using the conventional form layout. Instead, the group used video, as they explained it:

“ Adele: We did fill in the form and start to put that together, but we found that very onerous

Adam: Yeah, we’d actually seen Goolwa’s, so we’d seen this thing and the fact that they had four big copies of all this stuff and ... we’d done quite a bit of stuff trying to collect brochures and all that sort of stuff ... and we were having a conversation ... it was ... feeling very onerous indeed, and we’d been doing the videoing already, I think of the stuff

Adele: There was that sense that when we all sat down to talk, I think we all sat down to talk one night and realized that if we’d videoed that then we would have had that section of the application done, because with everyone sitting and talking and saying remember this bit and don’t forget that, we had actually answered all the questions... and it seemed such a pity that we hadn’t captured that. It just seemed that from my perspective I would probably much rather be in Goolwa, had sat down with a glass of wine and watched a video ”

What Adele referred to was similar to the experiences I described for UK participants in an earlier article (Pink, 2008b). There, participants shared local ways of knowing and sensing their towns and what was possible in them, and created forms of sensory sociality that were part of the ways in which they worked together to make Slow Cities. Likewise Adele was talking about how she felt she might best share the experience of what it is to live in and be part of a town that is ‘already’ a Slow City, with people who also know in non-verbal ways what that experience is like. In a country as big as Australia, where distances between towns can be vast, it is perhaps not so strange to consider sharing such moments by video over a glass of wine.

In Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, we learned from Sue, who with Ann, had developed the self-assessment documentation that the mountainous region they lived in was not a zone where there was very much local production of foods, which along with the Slow City association with Slow Food, is often at the core of the ways towns self-define as Slow Cities. Therefore, they had interpreted the focus on local produce in a slightly different way to emphasise the character of their area as a place of creative products, focusing on the importance of its creative and cultural scene and its status as the home of a good number of artists and writers, making it the home of a strong tradition of cultural heritage and productivity.

In many cases participants were drawing on tacit knowledge to produce their applications, and in 2013 Lisa Servon and I argued that:

“ Our example of the Cittaslow movement has thus shown that in understanding the making of sustainable towns we need to attend both to representations, models, and frameworks and to those elements of towns, the ways that the flows of everyday experience, history memory, and imagination are lived and felt, that cannot be put into words. The Cittaslow example offers us a way of considering how what Ingold (2008) would refer to as an ‘entanglement’ – conceived as unbounded and produced through movement – might be constituted through this tension between what can be represented and what is not (Pink & Servon, 2013, p. 465). ”

Our emphasis on the tacit elements of the ways in which Slow Cities were made and experienced, was central to our understanding of the way the movement’s framework was engaged locally, and was followed through in the Australian research. Here again I found that participants often turned to sensory embodied experiences of place, of smell for instance to describe what it felt like to be in their towns or areas, or took us to places – a market, buildings, community garden and more – so we could experience what they wished to express (Pink & Lewis, 2014).

Activism as an anticipatory mode

The work of slow city activists is characterised by what we might think of as future-looking or anticipatory orientation. This orientation is part of everyday life, part of the ways in which people often describe their worlds, environments, practices, selves and bodies. Such forms of anticipation can also be thought of through the notion of a ‘project’. The idea of ‘self as project’ was central to the ways in which identity, subjectivity and the individual and embodiment were considered in the 1990s in sociology (e.g. Giddens, 1991), and while I do not follow the same sociological stance in this article, I suggest that the notion of project itself offers us a useful way in which to consider how participants in (at least my own) research projects often talk about themselves or the environments they live in, in relation to the future, that is, in an anticipatory mode. For instance in my work about the sensory home (Pink, 2004; 2012) I came to see the ‘home as project’, because participants in my research so often spoke about their homes in terms of what they would or should be like and how they would change them in the future. Perhaps none of these plans or aspirations would actually emerge out of later processes. Yet what is important is that in this and in later research on the home (e.g. <http://energyanddigitalliving.com/>) a similar orientation has emerged. Likewise, Slow City activists also frequently conceptualized their towns in terms of process, speaking of and actively making plans for the future, and indeed accounting for futures that they wished to create alternatives to when considering the progress of their towns (Pink & Lewis, 2014).

This future orientation, which as I have shown in the last paragraph has been notable across at least three of my recent research projects, is often present when we do ethnography. However it has tended to be latent in ethnographic work. In part this can be explained in that since the 1980s ethnographic writing has been directed towards the ethics of the past tense. The ‘ethnographic present’, which had previously been part of ethnographic representation was at that time defined as a problematic stance that, thanks to scholars such as Fabian and his work on time (1983), which showed how it tended to crystallise ‘other’ cultures through static and objectifying prisms. The ensuing ‘reflexive turn’ in ethnographic writing and practice, along with an emphasis on voice in anthropology (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) likewise called for a more respectful and collaborative way of working with research participants in anthropological ethnography. Part of the outcome of this was that ethnography has since then tended to be written into the past. This temporality of ethnography is a strongly ethical and appropriate mode on the one hand. It means that ethnographers can write about ‘other cultures’ in ways that respect the specificity of the moment in which they learned with other people, and that they can also engage (with) the subjectivity of research participants through the processes of research and representation.

Yet it is simultaneously a temporality focused on the past, and on what has happened, that restricts ethnographers’ capacity to move on into the future with their participants and limits the ways they can participate in processes of change and intervention. It is also ironically rather at odds with the future orientation or anticipatory mode that I have outlined above, and that I tend to see in the ways that people who participate in my research often talk about, enact and imagine their lives. The work of the slow city activists myself and my colleagues and I have written about elsewhere was similarly often future focused. Their gathering of what was already there, was often developed as part of wishing to make a ‘better’ future, and in the anticipation of potential undesired futures. For example, as discussed in writing with Tania Lewis, in Tecoma in the Dandenong ranges in Victoria, the Slow City development group had grown out of a movement working in strong resistance to the building of a McDonald’s burger drive-through in their village. This group might be seen as developing a form of resilience in the face of this encroachment – in a way different to the active campaign of resistance that was simultaneously happening. Similarly we showed how in other towns in Australia the movement was harnessed by town leaders who felt their towns had experienced crises (e.g. bush fires and drought) and wished to move them out of this through their engagement with the movement (Pink & Lewis, 2014).

As the example of the Slow City movement shows, this future orientation or how people already anticipate ways of being that are different to the present, can play a key role in sustainable development when a framework

engages with the hopes, aspirations and dreams of possible futures of local people for their towns and areas. They can also (see especially Pink & Lewis, 2014) enable the making of resilient futures, which might be developed alongside versions of the future that for some were unwanted or feared, but that they cannot completely avert, evade or ignore.

Yet this future-focused way of thinking is not a simple matter of prescriptive planning. Instead people also engaged with the future, through ways of anticipating something else, or something different beyond words, plans or lists. They were concerned with what the future would *feel like*. To engage with other people's future making we need to understand how they imagine the future will feel and how they do not want it to feel. These aspirations could form a core way of thinking about what it is that people are themselves able to conceptualize and work towards, when we are thinking about sustainable futures. The question therefore becomes how we might engage embodied sensory notions of the future or modes of anticipation in sustainable co-design. In the next section I reflect on what we might learn from this from the example of Slow Cities.

Slow cities as example for planning

Several scholars and writers have pitched the Slow City movement as an example of good practice for small town urban development. For example, reflecting on the emergence of small town movements, including the Slow City movement in the 2000s, Mayer and Knox (2010) suggest that the networks that such movement form offer us an example of 'collective, progressive approaches to small-town development [which] highlight ways to create community liveability and social well-being'. These are examples in which, they argue 'The efforts stem against the tide of using traditional economic development, which focuses primarily on place promotion and "smokestack chasing"'. Instead they identify how:

“ ... [t]he emerging sensibilities – food, environmentalism, entrepreneurship and creativity – have the potential to anchor local economies and communities. The city networks we described also give small towns, which often lack the resources and staff, the opportunity to learn from each other and to implement best practices developed and tested elsewhere. The cooperative approaches stand in contrast to the competitive, zero-sum efforts of the past (Mayer & Knox, 2010, p.1563). ”

Indeed there is much about the Slow City movement and the way Slow Cities themselves emerge that is different from traditional forms of town planning. As Amin has stressed, it is not common for models for sustainable urban development to be transferable across national and cultural contexts (discussed in more detail in Pink & Servon, 2013). Similarly writing in the context of a discussion of service design and co-design Akama and Prendiville cite Parker and Parker (2007) who point out how:

“ Government-driven, one-size-fits-all approaches to service delivery to fix social 'wicked problems' are inadequate due to the diverse character and needs of communities. It is increasingly recognised that various stakeholders need to collectively draw on their local, situated. (Akama & Prendiville, 2013, p. 30) ”

During my research into the slow city movement in the UK and Spain, participants who were involved in the local development of the slow city principles in their own towns often noted how the model offered to them by the movement suited their towns (Pink, 2012) and how they were able to identify what they already were with the movement. As Lisa Servon and I described in the context of Spanish Slow cities, Jose who was at the time the Mayor of a Slow City in Northern Spain, told us that he felt that:

“ We cannot apply theories from central Europe and from countries that are more developed. Or yes we can, or we should try to, but it is not easy. It's different. They are different cultures, the years they have spent developing are different, the number of years that they have been democracies are different. ”

For Jose, a framework that specifically suited his town was needed in order to promote its urban development along the lines that worked in that specific context (Pink & Servon, 2013, p. 458). However, as we argued then, this could not be explained through the idea that the Slow City movement offered a framework that was relevant in some cultures, but not in others or that could be transferred across particular cultures that it was suited to. Rather we proposed that:

“ ... the Cittaslow framework does not provide a development model that is applied to towns as a regeneration process but, rather, one that town leaders in Spain [and also in the UK (see Pink, 2009a; 2012)] saw their towns already mirrored in. It offers them a route through which to project and formally validate the experiential uniqueness and authenticity of their towns through a model that offers them a sense of global relatedness. The Cittaslow model is clearly not appropriate for direct ‘transfer’ to towns in which the ways of life it proposes are not already there (Pink & Servon, 2013, p. 465). ”

Therefore, the slow city model offered town leaders in Spain and UK a model for small town urban development that was open and flexible. It enabled them to invest into it the various different forms of local uniqueness that they perceived and experienced their towns as having. The framework thus accommodated and was made by the ways in which it was used. It was also visibly malleable in that its details were adapted by the Slow City national networks set up in each country or region. Significantly Akama and Prendiville argue that:

“ ... transformation is a co-created process, not just between people, but a co-creation that interweaves the specificities and materiality of the place in which designing is taking place. We are constantly ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ through this transformative act (2013, p. 38). ”

This is akin to what happens when town leaders adopt the Slow City framework; that is they use it as something with which to interweave the elements of their town in ways that are somehow visible and evident to them, and indeed in doing so to interweave them in new ways towards an alternative future.

The kinds of activities that are collated for Slow City applications, and are generated and nurtured as part of the ‘ongoingness’ of Slow Cities, demonstrate the kinds of embodied and sensory engagement that build and sustain the towns that join the movement. I have written about various of these elsewhere: community gardens (Pink, 2008b); building local craft skills (Pink, 2008a); festivals and cycles of public events – carnivals (e.g. Pink, 2007; 2011), history festivals, food festivals, jazz festivals; traffic slowing – e.g. slower road speeds; creating shared public spaces; and ensuring that farmers’ markets are ongoing.

Connecting indirect activism and co-design

My interpretation of the Slow City movement has been produced through the theoretical-ethnographic dialogue typical of anthropological practice, although the theory I have engaged for this has not always emerged directly or solely from anthropology. This interpretation has, in my earlier work enabled me to understand the work of the movement as involving the dissemination of an unusually flexible framework for sustainable urban development, into which local town leaders have been able to invest those unique qualities and affordances that they already sense (in the embodied meaning of the term) are part of their towns. The Slow City framework becomes a conduit for the tacit ways of knowing of local people as they understand who they are and where they aspire to be in the future. This, as I have argued with Lisa Servon, has meant that the framework is also (unusually) transferable across cultural and national contexts (Pink & Servon, 2013).

Second, I have also previously argued with Tania Lewis that the ways in which the framework is engaged locally produces a form of resilience that enables town and local Slow City leaders to be able to ‘live with’ rather than in resistance to those local and global flows that do not fit with their aspirations for the futures of their towns (Pink & Lewis, 2014). My interpretation of resilience is, however, not as something that can be planned or designed in advance, but as an emergent quality of the processes that are associated with the ongoing work that is done around the making and maintaining of slow cities. That is, it emerges from the process of being a slow city, something that is never complete but that involves a notion of working towards improvement. Following Ingold’s (2013) notion of ‘making’, it has been argued that resilience is therefore made rather than planned (Pink & Lewis, 2014), the implication being that for sustainable urban development, the open framework of the Slow City movement offers a route that is aspirational but not prescriptive.

The lessons from the example of the Slow City movement offer a model that has some important common ground with the concept of co-design in service design as developed by Akama and Prendiville (2013). First, the Slow City philosophy, manifesto and framework can be seen as propositions and provocations. They do not design *for*, but offer a framework or proposition for town leaders to design *into*. Second, the Slow City framework is set in some ways, but it is also open to local interpretation and adaptation – and local town leaders and national network leaders do develop modifications that are suitable for specific local topographies, socialities and cultures. Third, Slow City leaders work with *what is there already* when they set about making their towns into Slow Cities. In fact they, in my experience, have very often said that they felt their towns were ‘already’ Slow Cities, and that it had been easy to invest what they were into the framework. A reason why it is easy for them to invest these feelings into the framework is because unlike conventional sustainable urban development models, the Slow City framework specifically calls for the specificity and uniqueness of tacit and

sensory ways of knowing to be acknowledged (Pink & Servon, 2013; Pink & Lewis, 2014).

Fourth, I return to Akama and Prendiville's point cited above that:

“ Co-designing interweaves the experiences and knowing gathered through an immersion into a context. This act of transformation is a co-created process, not just between people, but a co-creation that interweaves the specificities and materiality of the place in which designing is taking place. We are constantly 'being' and 'becoming' through this transformative act. Designing services we are engaged in designing ourselves, people and the world around us in an on-going process (2013, p. 38). ”

We could apply this interpretation of co-design to what Slow City leaders are doing when they pull together the strands of local activity and experience needed to complete their accreditation documents. When they do this they create a new version of a past-present-future temporality – in a way similar to that outlined for the design anthropology practice that is highlighted by Gunn and Donovan when they write that:

“ In bringing together *D* [Design] and *A* [Anthropology], anthropology brings an understanding of the past in the present. This however is a wider time frame than is usually given by design history in order to make sense of the present and moves towards the future. *DA* is concerned with making partial connections between past, present and future – what you do in the present is to have a vision in the past in order to make a move towards the future (2012, p.13). ”

Therefore I invite readers to reflect on the question of how we might harness these kinds of human tendencies to make places and open up to possible futures, through designs for sustainable futures. The Slow City framework achieves this through a model that has not originated from a design practice, but is rather the proposition and campaign of an urban social movement. How might lessons from both the example of this form of indirect activism and forms of co-design practice usefully be brought together?

In asking this question I also stress the limitations of the framework; although it has been transferable across cultures and nation states, its transferability is not universal, and is not intended to be. Some researchers of slow cities have been optimistic about the wider applicability of the model (e.g. Knox & Mayer, 2008). However other evaluations reject its utility for certain types of towns. Jaimee Semmens and Claire Freeman describe how for the case of New Zealand:

“ ... a culture of sustainable development is not yet prioritized by the majority of New Zealand residents, and although planners seek to implement sustainable development policies in their planning practice, the concept of sustainable development is yet to be applied comprehensively to small town development (Semmens & Freeman, 2012, p. 20). ”

They conclude that in New Zealand, '[o]bligations for the council and community to continuously implement the remaining Cittaslow policies are seen as a deterrent rather than as a motivator' (Semmens & Freeman, 2012, p. 20). Indeed membership of the movement is limited to towns who correspond with its criteria, thus excluding many from membership; thus:

“ ...[t]he Cittaslow model is clearly not appropriate for direct "transfer" to towns in which the ways of life it proposes are not already there. Towns can join only if they already meet the movement's criteria (Pink & Servon, 2013, p. 465). ”

The lessons we might take from the Slow City example do not involve copying its model or framework directly to other types of context. Instead they derive from the study of the processes that it puts in place, its values and the specific qualities and affordances of its model; as open yet aspirational in the sense of ascribing to a set of ideological principles that can be practically applied and experienced in different ways in different towns.

Conclusion

To end, I do not wish to prescribe or propose a process – these will always be contextual and variable. Instead my aim is to provoke a discussion and/or consideration of what might be possible. Therefore I invite readers to consider the following list of characteristics, derived from my analysis of the movement's potential convergence with the principles of co-design, and to ask how these lessons from the study of indirect activism might be brought together with those of design practice to contribute to co-design for sustainable development in towns or regions:

- An open framework that local leaders and ordinary people can design into, instead of a model that is designed for and onto them
- A type of co-design using a framework that is malleable to local circumstances, cultures and practices, and a process that registers the changes that local people make to the framework as examples of good practice
- A framework that works with and pulls together already present processes and materialities, that enables existing strengths to be brought together in new configurations and reinforced
- A way of bringing people together that creates shared projects and experiences
- A framework that imparts a processual theory of the world; that understands that we live and act in a world in process
- A framework that enables resilience rather than resistance, so that processes with different moralities and values can co-exist and, that recognizes that they often have co-dependencies
- A perspective on the future that unites past, present and future, enables people to imagine alternative futures and takes responsibility for the future in the present

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