

Hyperreal Enterprises: Notes on Bristol Workshop

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Abstract

This document is an initial analysis of our Open Future Design workshop on January 23rd 2023 at Watershed in Bristol. Among the 18 attendees, there were three who had previously participated in a pilot:

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These folks helped with facilitation of small group activities.

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1 Open Future Design workshop: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Our *Open Future Design* (OFD) workshop is mirrored by a collaboration method called “PLACARD” that scaffolds social perception, cognition, and action.¹ PLACARD combines design patterns with futuring exercises and review processes. The OFD workshop walks participants through a cycle of creative learning using these methods, which they can later reuse on their own. Our intention with the workshop is, therefore, primarily to introduce new collaboration methods and to show how they are effective.

Applications of the method range from building new platforms for collaborative design and citizen science, to assisting on-the-ground innovation projects. In the workshop format, we work from the assumption that we are talking to groups of people who have not yet formed a strong group identity, and who are not necessarily all going to work together on one highly cohesive project, but who are likely to need to communicate with each other in the future. We make structural use of breakout groups and full-group discussions to gather information at different levels of significance. We also introduce a technology-assisted quasi-real-time sensemaking process, which allows participants to focus on content, while the technology helps to weave new meanings at the context level.

1.2 Outcomes and Evaluation

1.2.1 Intermediate artifacts

- Mindmaps created with participants
- Group insights in a form of shared future stories

1.2.2 Output

- A constellation of interrelated design patterns outlining potential paths of action, produced by a diverse group of experts based on a collaborative analysis of complex challenges.

1.2.3 Outcomes

- Leverage in a complex challenges, based on a shared understanding of the core issues and a well-articulated design strategy.
- Time-savings, a unified action-orientation, and further multi-lateral relationships, as compared with more naive methods such as interviews, discussions, and focus groups.
- Potential next steps may include new communities of practice, and new initiatives (e.g., grant proposals, working groups).

1.2.4 Narrative Example

On November 3rd, 2022 we ran a pilot workshop in Bristol with the theme “Public Space and Public Health”. This brought together 8 people with varied expertise on these themes for a structured discussion. We discussed the theme, and potential scenarios for development. We then zoomed in on one of the scenarios, and discussed its surrounding motivations. In follow-up analysis, the facilitators identified new ‘design patterns’ that could enable workshop participants to solve the problems they identified. On November 17, 2022, we ran a second pilot with a group of futurists at the Anticipation conference in Tempe, Arizona, focused on workshopping the methods. Following this pilot we reflected on how we could make better use of the direct participants’ skills to facilitate broader uptake beyond the activities in the room.

On January 23, 2023 we ran a longer workshop on a similar theme to the first pilot: “Public space for public health: a call to action”. This time, there were approximately twice as many participants, and we had most of the day together. We had made several changes to the structure of the workshop. In the first session, we used a multi-stage share-back process to understand layered meanings. In the second session, we used manipulatives to elaborate design solutions. In both phases, participants were accompanied by a remote team that worked to make sense of data coming from the room. Each break out group was additionally supported by one or more persons who had attended the initial pilot.

¹Corneli, J., Murphy, A., Puzio, R. S., Vivier, L., Alhasan, N., Danoff, C. J., Bruno, V., & Pierce, C. (2021). Patterns of Patterns: A Methodological Reflection on the Future of Design Pattern Methods. <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2107.10497>

1.2.5 Limitations

Interrater reliability regarding pattern identification from workshop discussions can be presumed to be low. We have addressed this concern through the multi-layered data-gathering protocol, which (in Phase I) gives us data that is structured along dimensions which lend themselves to pattern analysis; and (in Phase II) through an activity that directly involves participants in collaboratively formulating pattern descriptions. Even so, the utility of these patterns as paths to action can only be evaluated later (Phase III, ‘after the workshop’).

2 Funding of public space

2.1 Problem summary

Even though public space is known to increase wellness in the population, well-being priorities that would lead to increased funding for public space aren’t universally adopted.

2.2 Solution summary

Funders typically needs to show some ‘return on investment’ HOWEVER, in the UK funding often goes to projects for digital innovation and other perceived economic growth areas, rather than towards investments in a well-being agenda.

BECAUSE the values upheld by the current UK government (and some devolved governments) lean towards enterprise, it may be possible in these constituencies to develop a well-being agenda within a ‘social enterprise’ framework, investing locally while integrating community into the design process. There are many examples to learn from, i.e., both in terms of their successes and failures. These include the Bristol Pound, which aimed to keep cash in the local economy (and which in its latest iteration might have provided a nice open data set around local investments) and Fromm social enterprise efforts which built nice social housing and schools.

In Wales, there is legislation, in the form of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, which enshrines a well-being agenda into law, and which has been monitored according to national indicators, in “Wellbeing of Wales” reports. THEREFORE, a similar level of transparency around social enterprise investments could show where money is going, and help negotiate a well-being agenda that isn’t legislated.

Historically, investment in public space and community has come from different places and aligned with different value systems (e.g. medieval churches were often at the centre of local communities, now many are unused and available for sale); Kew was up to get in via the turnstile; modern architecture had a long phase in which public space was an afterthought at best. Now, contemporary architecture and urban planning initiatives are rediscovering these social values and, SPECIFICALLY, this may provide a niche for social enterprise to engage.

3 Rebalance social services

3.1 Problem summary

Some behaviours require policing, however, if the balance is incorrect, then self-expression suffers. Similarly, other welfare-related services should be supplied in balance with local needs, though they often are not.

3.2 Solution strategy

Police and other social services exist to deal with problems which are not addressed on their own, HOWEVER in the right environment, criminality, disease, etc., either go away entirely or shrink to a minimum.

BECAUSE there is a limited amount of funding for public services, communities are now faced with dilemmas like closing the library to pay for the park, or removing bus services to pay for police, etc.; and, in fact, the police are already having to deal with a range of social problems which aren’t strictly within their remit, as are teachers and other service providers. Whereas there used to be a *community policeman* who could act with discretion, police officers now are oftentimes are not members of the communities they are meant to serve. Other service provision can feel similarly remote and disconnected.

THEREFORE, what’s needed are more people in the community who provide good examples of — and paradigms for — action, more immediately and directly. One strategy to pursue would be to arrange it so that the organisations that provide welfare services are connected with each other. Much in the way that food co-ops can serve the alimentary needs of a community, other more integrated systems could be devised to tackle the structural issues

that made apparent by current regimes of underfunding and disorganisation. For example, Houston, Texas, significantly reduced homelessness by developing a continuum of care approach. Other societal challenges might be addressed similarly.

SPECIFICALLY, it may be possible, in Bristol, to create a *radical public space* that is taken care of by local people, which provides a range of relevant services. Some good examples of community centres already exist, though they aren't yet widespread into all of the communities that need them. This could be an example of [BROKEN LINK: 570f3d11-d1f6-4ffb-87ed-c815e7efe624]. However, there's more than just a 'space' aspect to such a place. Organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières show that experts are willing to activate around identified needs: can varied expertise be integrated in a similar way to address complex local challenges?

This strategy relates to the concept of *facilitator load* that Abby talked about in the Bristol workshop. As such we have an experience inside the workshop of (potentially) too many things to think about and an over-extended service provision. This relates to the concept of [BROKEN LINK: 80a6488b-af62-4340-b542-eeeb6b922343].

4 Contested space

4.1 Problem summary

So-called public space doesn't always necessarily feel welcoming to all members of the public. It can be overrun with antisocial behaviour. It can feel exclusionary, or uninviting. It can be the site of conflict. When we enter public space, we may see others there only in terms of their stereotypes.

4.2 Solution summary

Public space can feel uninviting: it may be an "only" space; it may be "only space". HOWEVER, we should not see this as inevitable.

The history of public space should be read alongside the history of private spaces. BECAUSE privatisation has had the upper hand in many historical turns (e.g., in agendas of enclosure and austerity), public goods of various kinds suffer. This can be seen not only in attested public 'spaces', but in offerings like council housing, which in current times is often degraded as well as having decreased availability.

This history is not unknown, but responses which aim to assert agency over space often amount to a descent into protest. The People's Republic of Stoke's Croft is one local history, in which protest is paired with other forms of activism. Protest alone may prove ineffective at achieving its goals. THEREFORE, forms of activism that directly enhance public space should be preferred.

SPECIFICALLY, the iDocumentary methods ([BROKEN LINK: 31430561-7338-4b02-8abe-83b651067665]) can be brought into activist settings in a way that gives recognition, builds awareness, and link stories.

- [BROKEN LINK: e83d48ca-47dd-4a20-9928-8fcc1c4348b9] is an example of a space in Bristol that may not feel friendly to all potential users

5 (Inter-)Personal Doughnut

5.1 Problem

Informed by [BROKEN LINK: 56ce8d31-d3d6-4493-bb41-bo7d810afbcc], at the workshop we were ready to work across levels — but did we have the *correct* set of levels for the 'public space & public health' setting front-of-mind?

5.2 Solution Strategy

Something that came up in the discussions around the workshop and PLACARD method was our prominent focus on *the wellbeing of participants*. We could frame this in a rough analogy with Doughnut Economics, HOWEVER the framing would be different in this small-scale format.

BECAUSE 'health' is inherently a complex topic — e.g., considering a "bio-psycho-social" or "bio-psycho-social-eco" model — there are multiple moving parts. If we want to talk about health effectively in future versions of the workshop, we might want to rethink aspects of the workshop itself using *these* components; e.g., the "roles" that we use in Phase II could potentially be rethought this way.

Since we cannot be guaranteed to have teams of participants with expertise evenly divided along the bio/psycho/social/eco components of health, THEREFORE, it could be useful to survey some of the other frameworks that are out there that could be relevant to this reframing, so that we could get creative about reconfiguring them. Examples might include Manfred Max-Neef's Fundamental human needs, Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values.

According to Schwartz, individual values are responses to three universal requirements of human existence, namely needs of people as biological organisms, of agreement in social actions, and of survival and well-being of groups.

SPECIFICALLY, the axes and dimensions that were used to organise scenarios (in-balance vs out-of-balance, scarcity, aliveness, availability of knowledge commons, etc.) provide a very rough framework that was generated by participants. How would we analyse our workshop’s framework in terms of the bio-psycho-social-eco model of health? Does it have natural ‘habitable zones’ similar to the Kate Raworth doughnut? One limiting factor that was drawn into the diagram was based on language/access/education. Since many of our solutions were related to *communication*, these do seem to be relevant factors. How do these limiting factors show up around active participation in (both) [BROKEN LINK: 57f06710-a96c-4cbc-bcc7-57d3d3e550c4]?

5.3 Validation

In the full Bristol workshop, we continued to use the CLA levels, but we presented them as a set of concentric circles, both in our framing presentation, and in visual templates that we distributed to participants (see images below).

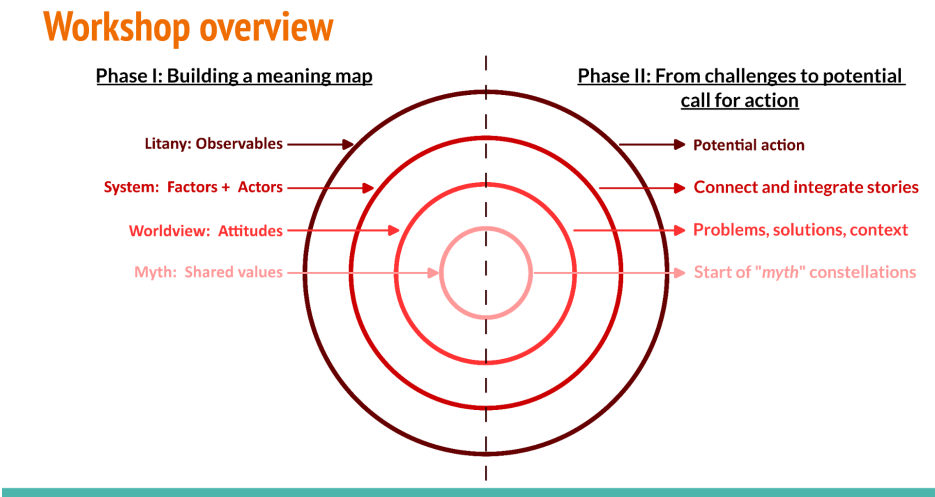


Figure 1: Our pictorial framing of the workshop design

This reframing of the suggests an analysis of the layers in this order of descent:

Psycho-	Litany	Observables	
Social-	System	Factors and actors	
Bio-	Worldview	Attitudes	
Eco-	Myth	Shared values	

Psycho-	Litany	Observables	HOWEVER
Social-	System	Factors and actors	BECAUSE
Bio-	Worldview	Attitudes	THEREFORE
Eco-	Myth	Shared values	SPECIFICALLY

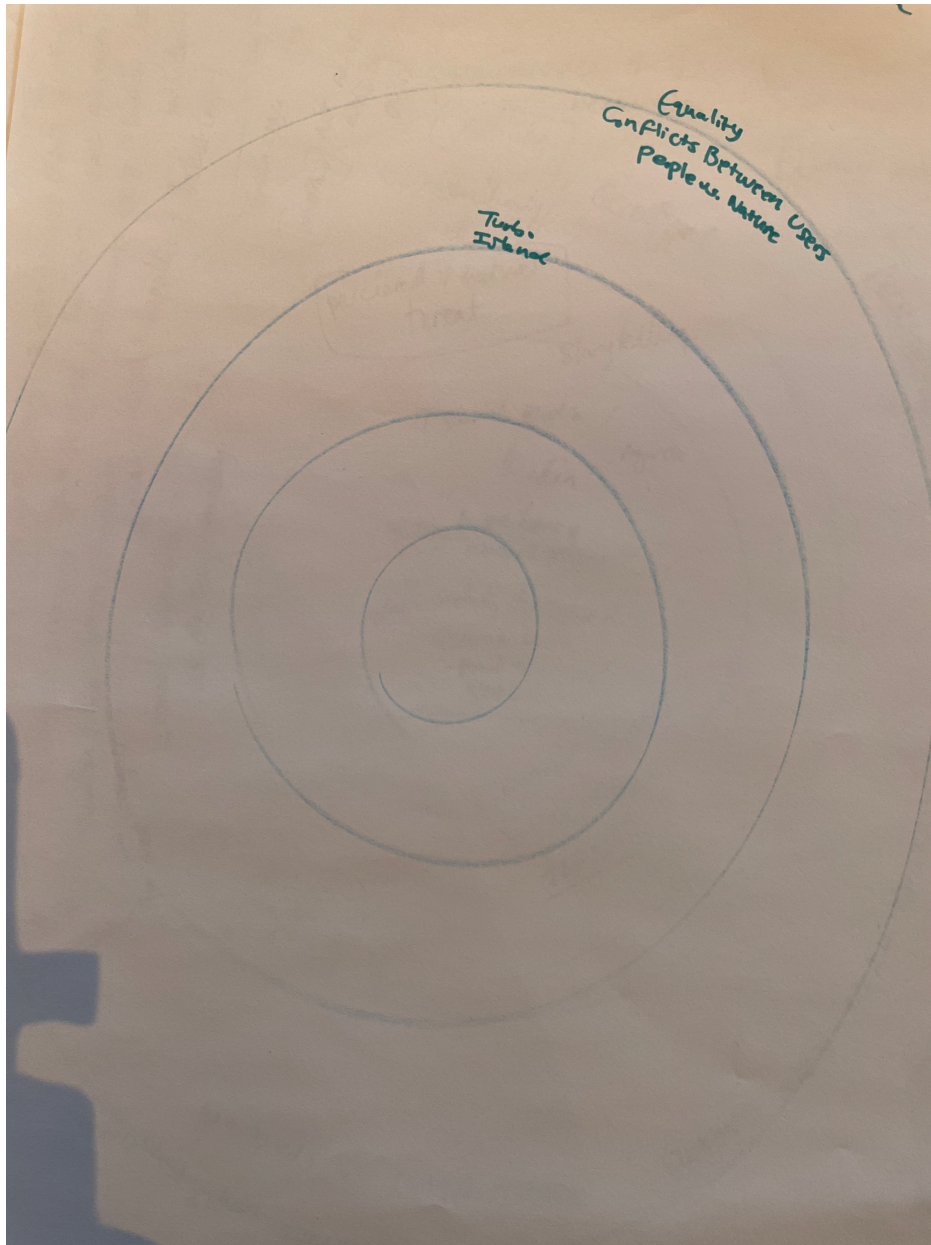


Figure 2: 'Grid' distributed to participants, partially filled in

Again, some brief remarks to narrate this extension.

Conflicts exist at the observable layer. They may be well-known blockers or simply annoyances.

Causal relations are typically derived from social relationships. Here it may be useful to recall George Mead's reframing of 'sociality' in terms co-evolution or change (which is then reflected in our awareness).²

Our *dispositions* to action are filtered through our consciousness, with reference to our existing repertoires of action.

Lastly, although our *values* are not always top of mind, they are not ephemeral, but are, rather, among the most concrete things that we perceive when, to use a turn of phrase, we see with our eyes closed. Specific actions which are not already-programmed by our existing *patterns of action* are likely to relate to these values. (Here we could refer to, e.g., Spinoza's ethics.)

5.3.3 More specific relationship to the Raworth doughnut

With these comments in mind, the relationship to the Raworth doughnut becomes clearer. 'Eco' is at the core of the CLA model, but the periphery of the Raworth doughnut. An 'overshoot' of the *ecological ceiling* corresponds, here, to living a life not in line with our values, or even more fundamentally to values which underspecified. Similarly, a 'shortfall' relative to *social foundation* relates to the underprovision of public goods and to the *fragmentation* of the ecosphere in individual minds (often, themselves, fragmented by craving). We can do something about this in local communities if we REBALANCE SOCIAL SERVICES.

This also suggests a strategy for 'patternizing' materials from the workshop. During the workshop itself, we already began to IDENTIFY CORE CONCEPTS. This gives us a picture of the 'myth' layer. From there, we should be able to work back to new and possibly quite different social relationships.

6 Identify core concepts

6.1 Problem summary

6.2 Solution summary

We see things as complex and interconnected HOWEVER we also need to make sense of things by teasing apart details.

BECAUSE we have potential for overwhelm if we simply live awash in the world, we have evolved language tools that work 'digitally' to give us structure and grammar.

We can use these tools at various levels, ranging from language to written words to digital tools. THEREFORE if we want to make sense of a complex situation it is useful to have all of these tools at our disposal.

SPECIFICALLY in the Bristol workshop, we used mind-maps, cards, and Org Roam to start to digitize the maps.

- Concepts at the 'Psycho-' level may be, usefully, related to [BROKEN LINK: 59798017-boaf-473e-bdcd-108a8ef1e06d], though they will not always start out that way.
- Some of the core concepts will exist at the 'Bio-' level, and correspond to [BROKEN LINK: 827ae14c-27d3-4483-93a9-d4005c5231a8].
- Some will exist at the 'Social-' level, particularly those corresponding to [BROKEN LINK: 26ffbc6f-7955-41bd-8c91-99be46847e72].
- 'Eco-' concepts may be perceived as a conflict, e.g., [BROKEN LINK: 9574546b-4e65-4f40-89e0-95bf41b7eb87], however in a more positive story the concepts could relate to people living in harmony with nature.

7 Building at the boundaries

7.1 Problem summary

If we take it as given that "Bristol needs to grow" (a debateable point), then it can either grow intensively with higher-density housing, or it can grow extensively by building at the boundaries. Both of these have some associated challenges. Here we consider strategies for building at the boundaries.

²George H. Mead, *The philosophy of the present*, Open Court, 1932.

7.2 Solution summary

This should relate to the ‘Avon Mouth’ discussion, see ‘Group 3 details’.

This relates to the concept of [BROKEN LINK: 4ed30e8c-784a-401e-9631-add816f8c2be]. It also relates to both the [BROKEN LINK: 86d1669e-bd6c-487b-a8f1-3ca8a211817f], and [BROKEN LINK: 9574546b-4e65-4f40-89e0-95bf41b7eb87], insofar as the ‘edges’ may be (or may be perceived to be) closer to wild space, and as such may be conceptualised as ‘external’ and ‘public by default’.

8 Remote Facilitation

For the Bristol Full workshop, we introduced a remote facilitation circuit. This wasn’t as effective as we’d hoped, so for now let’s record the problems that came up, and then think about mitigation strategies.

Previously, technology had been used asynchronously, to help identify new patterns in an “offline” analysis; see BRISTOL PILOT SCREENSHOTS, for example.

For this workshop, we wanted to try some real-time analysis, which would reflect what was going on in the room into a org roam repository and Org Roam UI interface that participants could look at. This was something of a stop-gap solution given that the technology+skills aren’t yet available for participants to easily edit a shared graph in real time. (However, this did constitute a ‘pilot’ for such a system, given that Noorah and Leo were working together as two skilled Org Roam operators to create the graph!)

Some obstacles could be expected given this set-up.

8.1 Obstacles

8.1.1 Lossy communication from photos

Remote facilitators were sent photos of text but didn’t have the context. Accordingly, they could start to type up what they saw on the page but didn’t typically know what the contents meant. (E.g., what is “Turbo Island”?)

8.1.2 Briefing over lunch did not have quite the desired effect

Joe had some time over lunch to describe what was going on with the images, but didn’t join the ongoing Org Roam session in progress. We might have been more effective if the remote facilitators had ‘interviewed’ the in-person facilitators about outstanding questions, and recorded their answers into the graph.

8.1.3 Participants did not use the chat function, or at least not much

We set up a way for participants to reach the remote facilitators, using a chat tool rather than a ‘text box’. Participants perhaps didn’t see the point, but in any case they didn’t use it much.

8.2 Potential mitigation strategies

8.2.1 We could try to replicate the setup for an upcoming ERG meeting so that we take notes directly into a constellation

- Rather than sharing one buffer via CRDT, let’s try to co-edit a constellation so that we get more familiar with the workflow.

8.2.2 Other ideas: TBA

9 Bristol Pilot Screenshots

These images were produced by filtering Org Roam for the **WS** and **BP** tags.

