



Pittsburgh Left Social Design Process Book

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Table of Contents

Background & Context	3
Brainstorming	4
Initial direction	5 - 6
Field Research	7
Revised direction	8 - 9
Recruiting and planning	10
Co-design sessions	11 - 15
Solution	16 - 18
Putting it All Together & Future	19-20
Appendix	21-23

Background & Context

The goal of this assignment is to work in a group, identify a problem local to Pittsburgh, find participants who are passionate about this problem, run codesign sessions, and recommend a solution back to them.

This assignment is about social design where students no longer act as the center of the whole design process,

but rather, as facilitators who help people to form a self-organizing group to carry on the problem. Students will be delivering “infrastructural” tool kits to initialize the solution as well as the instructions. At the end of the assignment, the students will give a brief presentation back to their audiences, who would play the role as the codesign session participants.



Right. Social design is design that is mindful of the designer's role and responsibility in society; and the use of the design process to bring about social change

Brainstorming

To identify a local problem, we brainstormed at the beginning of the classes. We specifically focused on the problems that are within the scale of this assignment, targeting at community awareness, public safety, and communications.

- Racist rideshare drivers
- Neighbor noise level
- Pedestrian safety
- snow removal
- Driver visibility
- Bar safety
- aggressive behavior
- Road rage
- Forbes bridge splash zone
- Community platform for micro-neighborhoods to discuss things irl
- Collaborative public art - art without a wall
- Make public art more interactive, inclusive, or more engaged with community
- Public health awareness
- Mental health awareness and access
- Keeping track of animals or invasive species (critters) at the house level, have more people (trained) to identify them
- More collaborative way to plan and zone micro-neighborhoods to take advantage of things that city planners may not know about
- Better way for city planners to engage with the public
- Abandoned housing
- Population growth/shrinking based on immigration
- Slowing down before tunnels
- Micro history - for example, what is that thing right there on the side of the road

Right The problems we identified during our ideation process.

Initial Direction

We decided to focus on the shared understanding for communication between community and local government. In many occasions, the governmental agencies use a special set of vocabulary to communicate with the public. Those jargons make it difficult for the community to understand what exactly is going on behind the scene.

We aim at helping civilians understand the process of policy making, urban planning, and governmental development, by re-addressing the policies in a more readable, articulate way, and thus relieve their anxieties over the drastic changes happening around their neighborhood.

This can be conducted by either introducing people to concepts in a more engaging way, such as videos,

posters (in contrast to plain documents), or educating the policy makers to elaborate their reasoning in a better way. We may also develop tools that facilitate both ends, tools that the policy makers and the community can use together.

Coming out of our participatory design session and the synthesis that we'll conduct afterwards, we'd like to accomplish the following in collaboration with our participants:

- Identify core issues impacting or blocking open dialog
- Define strategies, methods, or tools that may help alleviate or address issues
- Articulate actionable next steps

Initial Direction Continued

In order to facilitate a truly inclusive and valuable participatory design session, we want to have representatives from all the major stakeholders within the community. Because we seek to both understand the problem more (shared understanding) and come up with solutions, we will want to recruit outspoken and passionate individuals but also those that won't be there to exclusively push an agenda.

With that in mind, we attempted to recruit:

Community Outreach

How are some of these issues being addressed by non-profit orgs

City Planning

We need to understand the contractor's/developer's/planner's perspective and their willingness to keep their ear to the community

Local Gov Rep

How does local government feel about the discrepancy in language

Community member(s)

Local business owners and residents

Field Research

Inspired by our social design concept, we next sought to vet our own understanding and assumptions of the problem space with residents and business owners in Bloomfield. Our first stop was a nonprofit press, Creative Nonfiction where we were able to speak with Nichole Faina, a coordinating editor very familiar with our topic.

She guided us away from tackling something so complicated and personal for so many as the timeline of this project just inherently made this issue out of reach for us. She also brought up some interesting points around prior and ongoing work in this area, local community activists, projects, and ways to engage that in the near future, we'd love to follow up on as this is an issue we're passionate about.

Following our conversation with Nichole, we were also able to speak with a local city planner, who echoed her thoughts. We knew we'd need a new direction.



Above Marching to Creative Nonfiction to recruit a participant.

Revised direction

A little disheartened from our field research, we went back to the drawing board to see what we could tackle with this project while still providing something meaningful to the Pittsburgh communities that we've really come to love while living here.

After talking it over amongst ourselves, we drew from personal experience around pedestrian safety. As frequent pedestrians, we've noticed that Pittsburgh drivers aren't always the most courteous or even safe when it comes to sharing the road. While bad driving is pretty broad and not a great topic for this project, there is one thing that is unique to Pittsburgh and does actually make road safety that much more challenging. That thing is the Pittsburgh Left.

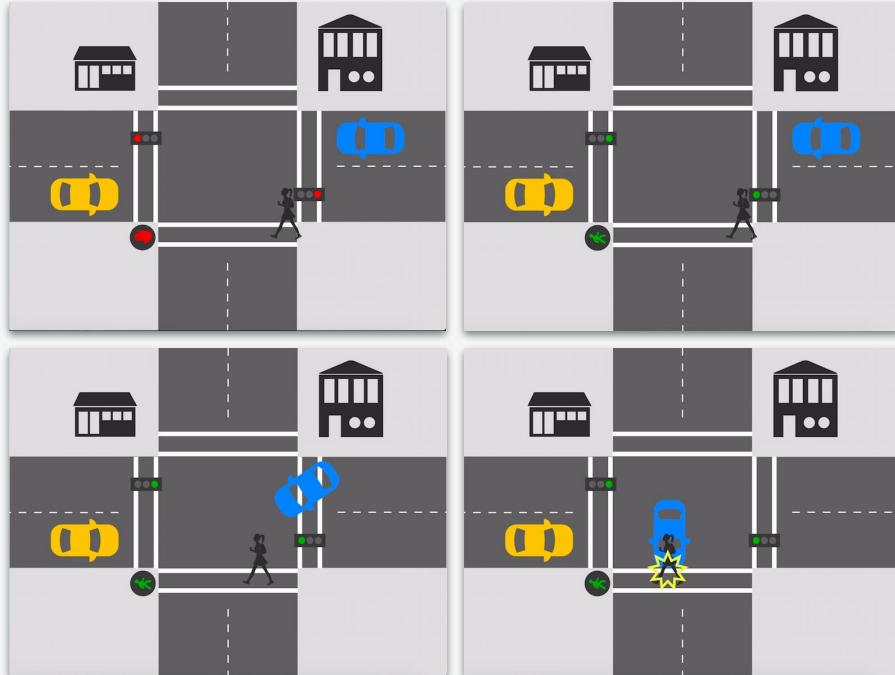


Above Illustration courtesy of Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Revised direction continued

The Pittsburgh Left is a local driving custom that, while technically illegal, is not enforced. According to the custom, the very first car preparing to make a left at an intersection can take that left in front of oncoming traffic when the light turns green. Often this results in unsafe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists due to pedestrian and cyclist visibility and driver focus.

For a problem that is technically illegal, but not enforced, a solution that inspires social change would be really helpful. The outcome of our sessions wouldn't be a change to the law, but instead a change to local perception and attitude of how to share the road. Our initial hypotheses of what would come out of a co-design session ranged from signage, to graffiti, to technical solutions like sensors and cameras. While we didn't want to shape the solution our participants would come up with, we also wanted to be prepared to create something on their behalf.



Above The animation we made to illustrate the Pittsburgh Left. (1) Pedestrians, left turning vehicles (blue car), and straight moving vehicle (yellow car) are all waiting at the intersection. (2) The traffic light turns green. (3) The blue car takes a Pittsburgh Left while the pedestrian is crossing the intersection. (4) The left-turning vehicle hits the pedestrian from her blind spot.

Recruiting and planning

With our new focus, we dove right into seeing who we could recruit to participate in our co-design sessions. We knew we'd need passionate representatives of pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. We turned to Reddit and our personal networks to check on the availability of those we thought would be interested in helping identify a solution to this problem.

Reddit came through for us with two participants, one for each of our sessions. We were also fortunate enough to have several personal connections who are passionate about this topic, making recruitment for two sessions a little easier.

We decided to scope the co-design sessions to something actionable that can be placed at an intersection in order to alert or remind drivers and pedestrians.

[-] [Big_Test_Icicle](#) 6 points 1 year ago
While I know this is not right I just began spitting on people who get really close to me, I mean inches, when making a Pittsburgh left.
[permalink](#) [embed](#) [save](#) [parent](#) [give gold](#)

[-] [Ahrn_City](#) 17 points 2 years ago
Fuck the Pittsburgh left. Such an inconsistent and dangerous move. And this is an extreme version of it. Straightaway traffic has the right of way.

[-] [burritoace](#) 24 points 8 months ago
Can all of you please stop with the Pittsburgh Left in East Liberty ?
FTFY

There are a few cases where I think it is sometimes justified (NOT WHEN THERE IS A LEFT TURN LANE YOU JAGOFFS) but I have seen so many close calls with pedestrians that it is pretty hard to defend.

Above Example comments about the Pittsburgh Left from Reddit.

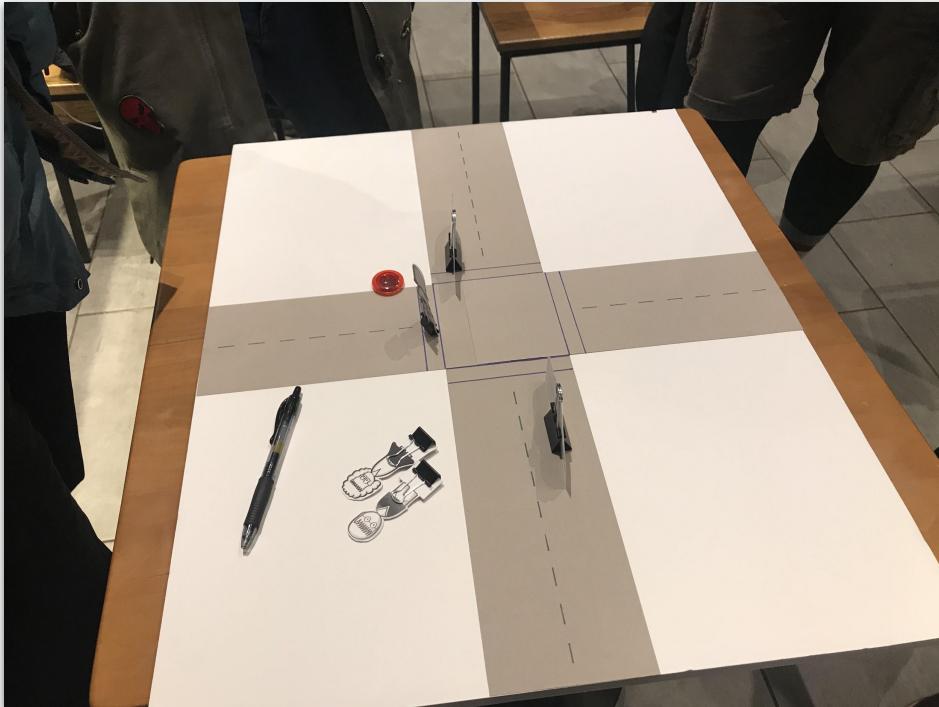
Co-design sessions

Planning

Our participants all had fairly traumatic experiences with the Pittsburgh Left (either with almost getting hit or almost hitting someone) and we knew that if we wanted the best conversation we had to trigger that emotion (but in a respectful way without overstepping our position with strangers).

The initial plan was to start with embodying the problem after doing intros. This involved asking the participants to physically act out their experience. After seeing everyone's skit, the participants would then draw out some proposed solutions, then discuss them with the rest of the group with goal being to pick just one concept.

After piloting this, we realized that bodystorming may be too much to ask random strangers to in front of each other. We then created a foamcore model of an intersection and paper cutouts of people, cars, and bikes for our participants to set the scene and walk us through their experience here.



Above Model of the intersection

Co-design sessions

Co-design 1

Although we had planned this session to be outside, we quickly brought it inside and into a coffee shop due to the weather. Attendees included a pedestrian, a driver, and a member of the Pittsburgh Bike Coalition. Our participants also did not feel like doing some of the drawing activities we had planned and preferred to talk it through.

Full list of ideas can be found in Appendix A.



Above Our participants sharing their thoughts about potential solutions

Co-design sessions

Co-design 1 - Reflections

Solutions

Our participants were gravitating towards a technical solution with sensors, however the issue of cost and community engagement kept coming up over and over again. Painting something on the road seemed to be the consensus but only because of feasibility - it was not something everyone was really excited about.

We also realized some of the best discussion was about the social issues of the turn and how people approached thinking about who had the most ability to affect change.

Facilitation

We had two participants that were hardcore talkers and at times our third person ended up under-contributing to the conversation. We tried to intervene to make sure he spoke up, but it would have been better if we pushed harder towards individual activities instead of just conversation.



Above Our participants engaging with our models

Co-design sessions

Co-design 2

This second session started out outside to help set the scene better, however moved indoors once again due to weather. This group was much more open to brainstorming and sketching their ideas so we were able to stick to our original plan better.

We also modified our model kit to include green/red stop lights and crosswalk signs as well as mirrors that can be found at road corners and intersections.

Although initially the solutions were trending in the same direction as the other session (something technical like sensors), the conversation shifted towards a social solution and facilitating a campaign to raise awareness about the problem.

Chosen Solution

Our participants decided on an idea that involved a PSA on local news or radio channels that would alert drivers and pedestrians to the dangers of the Pittsburgh Left. Full list of ideas can be found in Appendix B.



Above Starting outside then moving indoors to brainstorm

Co-design sessions

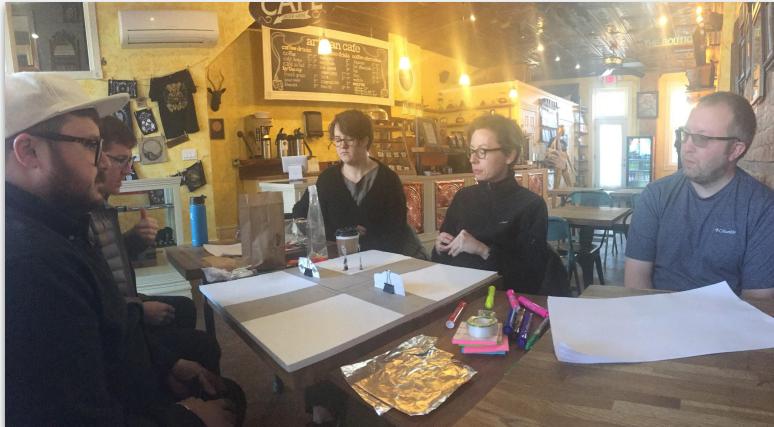
Co-design 2 - Reflections

Solutions

Once we realized that our group was going in a different direction, we decided to go with it and see where the participants took the concepts. We didn't try to force it back into our original scope as much as we did in the first one.

Facilitation

We were wary of the problem from the first session of some people not feeling comfortable participating in open discussion, so we made sure to nudge a bit harder towards sketching and independent ideation. This worked really well and we were able to have a really interesting round robin conversation about each person's ideas.



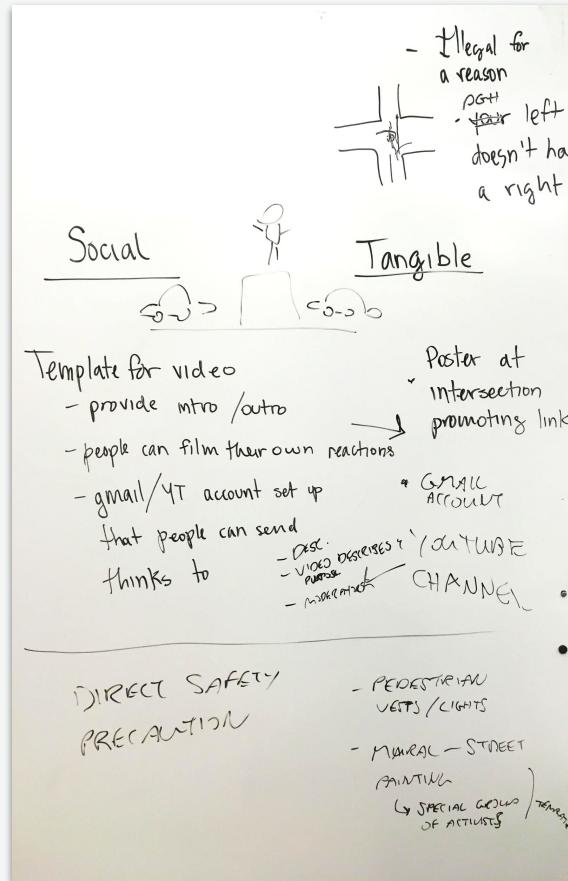
Above Deep in discussion

Solution

Solution Refining

We came back together as a team and thought back to the parameters of the project - how could we facilitate a social change, possibly with PSA, through a self-generating and self-maintaining social solution that would still be aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of the Pittsburgh left.

After a couple rounds of some additional ideation, we settled on creating a publicly accessible repository for people to send their photos and videos that shows how nefarious the Pittsburgh left can be. Although our participants didn't explicitly mention posting videos of actual incidents, they did keep going back putting a mirror up to the people committing the infractions and how that would be a useful tool to make them stop and think. We felt that this tactic would be much more effective than a PSA that would have to be made by a single group and is inherently not self-sustaining.



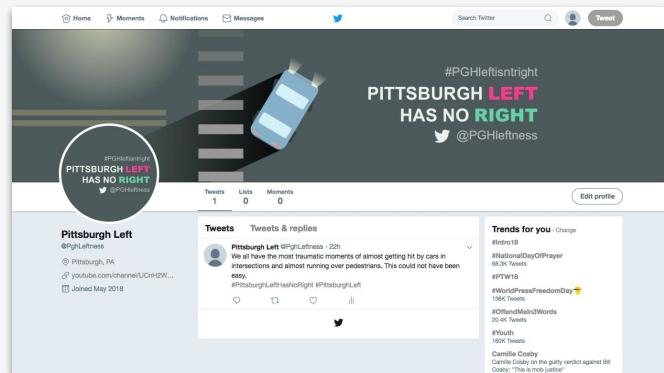
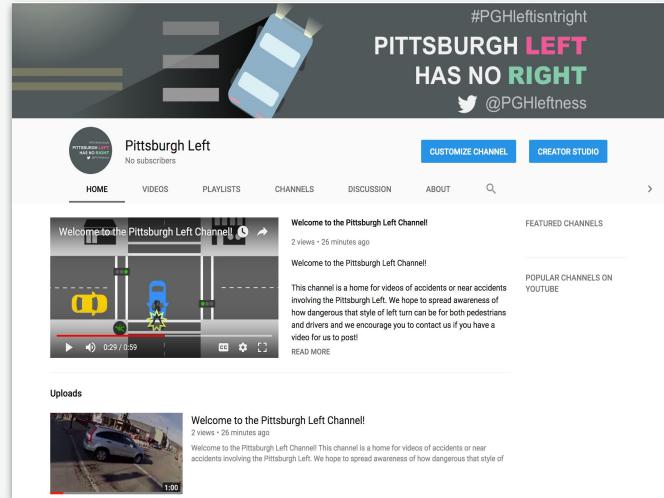
Above Brainstorming about how to make the participant's idea into a reality

Solution

In order to help raise awareness of the need for greater attention to pedestrian and cyclist safety during this maneuver, we propose that our passionate participants moderate a social media outlet that will promote video and images of safety issues associated with the Pittsburgh left. We've set up a Twitter account (and hashtag) and YouTube channel that will share and broadcast incidents of unsafe left turns to both help document the number of occurrences as well as raise awareness among pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers that caution careful sharing of the road.

Here's how it'll work:

1. Moderators will set up confirm their account access and permissions
2. They'll then print out the poster template we've designed (see attached) and post these at what they determine to be priority intersections so that pedestrians can see them
3. Pedestrians (and moderators) who witness dangerous left turns will post photos or videos to Twitter using the hashtag #pghLeft OR post to YouTube and share the link
4. Moderators will then retweet or promote the submissions after reviewing for quality, content, and possibly anonymizing the driver



Above Screenshots of YouTube and Twitter channels

Solution

The artifacts we provided to the audiences:

YouTube channel (Pittsburgh Left)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnH2Wnn1lSo3UowqVnqaWHQ>

Twitter channel (@pghLeftness)

<https://twitter.com/PghLeftness>

Hashtag (#pghLeftisntRight)

Poster template



Above YouTube channel introductory video & poster template

Putting it all together & future

In soliciting photos and video from the Pittsburgh pedestrian community, we're enabling a grassroots effort to create an understanding of the issue and just how common it is. Should this system facilitate the collection of enough data, it could also motivate local media and policymakers to take action in favor of investment in enforcement and infrastructure updates to make intersections safer for everyone. Viewers can send this campaign around to city council, and neighborhood and community organizations - to the places they want to see the difference embodied.

In the near future, the moderators will need to do most of the work involved with creating an online community. Should the community never take off, even having a place for videos and images to be stored for reference would help this issue immensely. If the community does take off, it's possible that it could inspire safer driving, more alert pedestrians, and eventually perhaps a local cultural shift away from the acceptance of this custom to a more pedestrian friendly adherence to state law.

We have also updated the Wikipedia entry for the Pittsburgh to reflect our findings and concepts.

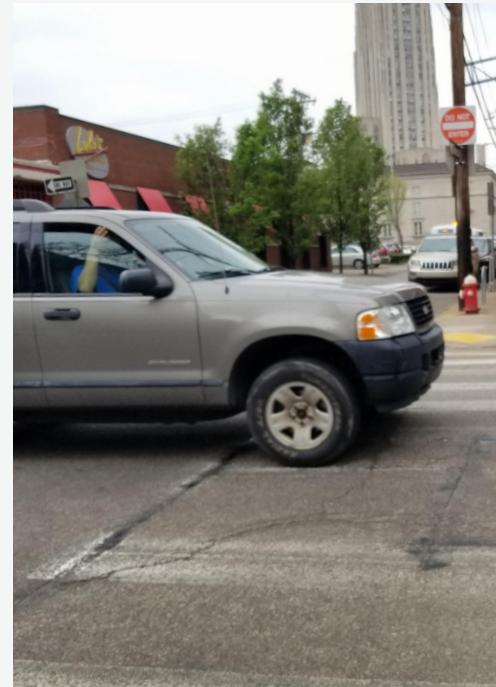
The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for "Pittsburgh left". The page title is "Pittsburgh left" and the subtitle is "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The main content discusses the practice of left-turning vehicles taking precedence over straight-through vehicles at intersections. A sidebar on the left contains links to the main page, talk page, edit page, view history, and search. A note at the top right encourages adding citations. Below the note is a diagram illustrating the "Pittsburgh Left" intersection pattern. A sidebar on the right lists sections such as Description, Signals, Legality, Origin, See also, and References. At the bottom of the sidebar is a link to "Add links".

Above Updated Wikipedia entry for the Pittsburgh to reflect our findings and concepts.

Below bulletin board advertisement that can advertise our slogan.



Kicking it off...



Above Posters promoting our campaign can be seen at problematic intersections in the community

Appendix A - Session 1 Ideas

- Sign: if you have people important to you, you don't want to disappoint them by taking the pittsburgh left.
- Embed things on the crosswalk that would foster ways for pedestrians to look over their phone like LED lights on the
- Graffiti on the road that resembled potholes - both pedestrians and the drivers would be more cautious
- Personal radar detectors
- Change the sequence of the walk sign (pedestrians could start walking a bit later/earlier)
- Facilitate people to calculate the risk / danger of committing a Pittsburgh left (it is very dangerous)
- Some way to suggest "Don't be the first one to go", to prevent people from impatiently waiting to step on the gas pedal.

Appendix B - Session 2 Ideas

- We should try to remove the Pittsburgh Left from the culture, and encourage people to be more patient.
 - PSAs: Radio ads. Local news, etc.
- Press a button, and the cross walk starts to flash, reminding the drivers over the peds.
- Put up giant signs that says “DON’T BE A MURDERER, WAIT FOR THE CAR”
 - Sympathies would make people double think.
- A sign at the corner (can’t remember what this means)
- Add more “buffer” so that people are more reluctant to make a Pittsburgh Left subconsciously.
- More roundabouts. “People don’t know how to use them here. We should have more.”
- Speed bumps
- Enforce it in the driver’s manual

Appendix B - Session 2 Artifacts

