ABOUT THE RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS

On 6 December 2019, more than 200 participants from various disciplines came together in the Nemo museum in Amsterdam for a pilot programme entitled ‘Radical Collaboration’. The labs are intensive full-day R&D workshops in which creatives and multidisciplinary experts join forces to collectively address issues that are too complex for individuals or a single organisation to tackle on their own. The labs are a hands-on application of research through design, focused on gaining a deep understanding of a wicked problem and co-creating new perspectives on it.

COLLABORATIVE AND OPEN PROCESS

The programme took place in two blocks: a morning and an afternoon session, in which we rolled up our sleeves and delved deep into the key issues raised and prepared in collaboration with various partners.

Though each lab had a tailored programme with a very different focus, the outline of the process was comparable.

The results of the labs not only inspire and connect the participants, but by openly sharing they hopefully also inspire others. This collaborative and creative R&D approach can provide essential connections between key stakeholders related to each topic, and open doors for new partnerships, projects, challenges and further events.

PROCESS DURING THE RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS

- Unpacking key issues
  - Unpacking the key issues that were identified, reframing the problem, and creating new perspectives on the topic.
- Reflecting on design opportunities
  - Reflecting on the role of the creative sector and defining design opportunities to make a difference.
- Exploring & mapping the topic
  - Using mapping exercises to explore the problem from different angles and create a better collaborative understanding.
WHAT CAN DESIGN DO

What Design Can Do believes that design is more than making pretty things. Design and creativity can play an important role in transforming society. We need design and creativity to come up with fresh ideas, alternative strategies and provocative thoughts to address the urgent issues we are currently facing. What Design Can Do connects creative communities with public and private sectors utilizing design as a tool for social change.

EVENTS

WDCD events are a vital tool for people to meet live, exchange knowledge and ideas, share stories (as they are so important), get inspired, connect different nationalities, cultures and sectors, and start collaborations. The WDCD events are organized in Amsterdam, São Paulo, Mexico City, Nairobi, Delhi, and are important moments in time to research, develop and accelerate ideas.

CHALLENGES

The objective of the challenges is to actively call upon creative makers to use the power of design to come up with innovative solutions to global problems. The aim is to demonstrate the potential impact that design can have on society, and to activate designers and creative entrepreneurs to use their skills to address pressing issues.

We help to develop and accelerate the winning projects to make their ideas reality and create real impact.

RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS

The Radical Collaboration Labs are a first step in exploring and developing new design challenges. Through formulating questions such as ‘How might we ..’ we aim to pinpoint the issues that are raised by our partners. Moving forward, we can continue the research and narrow down real opportunities for design. The questions, discussions and insights of today will be summarized and shared with everyone who contributed.
INTRODUCTION

WHAT DOES A ‘SAFE CITY’ MEAN?

STARTING WITH A BROAD UNDERSTANDING OF SAFETY
We began the workshop with a broad understanding of what safety means in the context of cities. An initial scope came from preparatory desk research, and we strategically chose to keep the definition broad to allow for collective exploration and definition of the landscape of what we mean by ‘safe city’. We framed our understanding around risks faced by cities. Four thematic risk areas emerged from the literature and our case study collection: criminal, health and wellbeing, technological and natural.

DECIDING WHICH SAFETY ISSUES WERE IN AND OUT OF SCOPE
Throughout the workshop, we established that a few sub-themes were more relevant to and associated with cities around the world than others. A narrowing of scope and focus helped us to think through how we define urban safety, which issues are most relevant in urban contexts around the world, and which themes were most approachable to creatives and designers.

Safer Cities Lab documentation and report are shared on the basis of Creative Commons (CC BY-SA).
Though many cities around the world face natural disaster risks, such as earthquakes, floods, and extreme temperatures (and these are only becoming more extreme due to climate change), this theme was not as universal as many of the others. It also felt further away from the idea of ‘safety’. While there is a lot that design can do in the aftermath of disasters, and even in the awareness and preparation stages (other WDCD Challenges have addressed these), as well as in the very early mitigation stages (helping to curb climate change altogether — again addressed through another WDCD Challenge), these approaches felt less related to ‘safety’ and more related to ‘disaster mitigation or response’ and broader themes of climate change.

Another theme, health and wellbeing, felt too distant from the concept of safety. It was such a broad topic that deserves focus in and of itself. Themes like suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse, loneliness, obesity and depression are all very big and important topics. These topics are in many ways linked to urban safety in various complex ways. Although extremely connected, these topics felt more related to the realm of ‘public health and wellbeing’, and less so directly to our emerging understanding of urban safety. We knew, however, that these themes would not be dormant in our new scoping. They are so intertwined with the social fabric of the city that we may indirectly address them anyway.

**SO WHAT’S IN SCOPE FOR ‘SAFE CITIES’?**

In the latter half of the workshop it became obvious that a few sub-themes were emerging as most pertinent and relevant. These included

1. Unhygienic and unpleasant urban environments
2. Unsafe streets and transportation
3. Lack of opportunity for youth, leading to street crime and gang violence.

This refined scope aligns with other urban safety frameworks. The UN New Urban Agenda, for example, defines urban safety as, ‘the extent to which a city’s inhabitants are able to live, work and participate in urban life without fear of bodily harm or intimidation’. The Agenda goes on to list some examples of common urban safety issues faced in cities around the world, including (but are not limited to):

- Unsafe streets; no street lights, no sidewalks, holes in sidewalks, loose electrical wires, etc.
- Unsafe transportation; unenforced road rules, roads and intersections not designed, built or monitored properly, buses in poor condition, bus network is limited and forces residents to walk on unsafe streets
- Unhygienic urban environments; rubbish, rats, mosquitoes, stray dogs, and other health hazards
- Crime; theft, muggings, drug-related crime

This gave us confidence in our refined scoping. Not only are our chosen three topics closely related to common understandings of what defines urban safety, and are relevant to cities around the world, but they are also relatively easily addressed through creativity. We felt that the urban safety context required its own discussion of what ‘creativity’ means. We also had to be aware of how ‘creativity’ is framed and (ab)used in cities around the world, and how the term ‘design’ can be exclusive in many contexts.
UNPACKING KEY ISSUES

WHAT DOES CREATIVITY MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERVENTIONS THAT ADDRESS URBAN SAFETY?

Scoping and refining our concept of safety in the urban context was a great push forward. Our case study collection helped us to also gauge which safety issues could be positively addressed by designerly and creative approaches, and in which ways.

A MORE NUANCED, CONTEXTUALIZED DEFINITION OF DESIGN? CALLING FRUGAL, RESOURCEFUL, INNOVATIVE AND INGENIOUSLY SIMPLE APPROACHES TO URBAN SAFETY.

Throughout the workshop we explored dozens of case studies showcasing creative approaches to urban safety issues. Stakeholders from the CFIA introduced the concept of ‘frugal innovation’ as a way to understand how ingenuity in resource-poor environments often leads to solutions that are both effective and affordable. This idea is born from the Hindi word Jugaad, meaning ‘an innovative fix or an improvised solution born from ingenuity. Jugaad is the gutsy art of spotting opportunities in the most adverse circumstances and resourcefully improvising solutions using simple means.’

From the get-go, we framed the conversation not just around design and creativity (and the communities we tend to associate with those terms), though these remained a large part of the discussion. There was something unique around hacks or solutions born from a personal community need. Moreover, the elements of resourcefulness and a resource-constrained environment were largely relevant.
It is therefore not just about design. It’s about a certain style, approach to and context of design that is interesting here. It’s design that fixes or improves something, it is needs-based, community-embedded and resource-constrained.

**THINKING ABOUT NON-EXCLUSIONARY LANGUAGE: WHAT DESIGN CAN DO**

The case studies showcased the value of various creative approaches, from product and graphic design, to theatre, arts and crafts. In many of the cases, the ‘change-makers’ did not refer to themselves as ‘creatives’ or ‘designers’ but simply as community members who were trying to make their neighbourhoods a better place.

This was a key point that emerged from the reflection: you do not need to be an official creative or designer to be creative, or to think of an ingenious way and approach a safety issue in a resourceful way. In fact, embeddedness in and understanding of the local community were seen as even more important facets. In addition to progressing in a resourceful way and having a steadfast commitment to your community and vision.

**COMPARING CITIES IN TERMS OF ‘CREATIVE CAPACITY’, ‘CREATIVE CULTURE’ AND SUPPORT FROM CIVIL SOCIETY.**

Just like the concept of safety, we strategically kept the definition of ‘creative’ quite broad, to allow us to critique and reflect upon relevance in the context of safety. We also discussed how cities differ in terms of creativity, creative capacity, ‘creative culture’, etc. Some cities have thriving creative industries, with prestigious art and design schools, and a bustling array of creative studios, organizations and access to funding. Other cities have less formal, albeit thriving or growing, creative communities. It’s about activating creativity, not just creatives.

**WHERE IDEAS COME FROM AND HOW THEY ARE ‘IMPLEMENTED’: BOTTOM-UP, TOP-DOWN AND BOUNCING IN BETWEEN**

Again, the case studies we explored showcased a range of top-down and bottom-up initiatives, and everything in between. When working in the context of making cities safer, it is almost inevitable that there will be some sort of local government involvement. The extent, timing and nature of this involvement depends on a variety of factors, however.

In some cities, local governments play a more active role in encouraging creative approaches to policy issues. In some contexts, they are even the direct instigators and ideators of such approaches. They may have more capacity, resources and knowledge to invest and encourage neighbourhood initiatives. Sometimes this momentum is sparked by a really innovative mayor, and trickles down (think Antanas Mockus, former mayor of Bogotá). Some cities like to have more control over these types of interventions, while devolved experimentation is the name of the game in others. In other cities, government institutions are less reliable and present. Poor governance leaves many gaps in the urban safety landscape and municipal governments are often barriers, not enablers.

Extent of government involvement is also influenced by the type of intervention, the location (if place-based) and the stage of ‘implementation’. There were examples of bottom-up initiatives that started off very ad hoc, with little planning and permission. As they proved successful and started to scale, government involvement became a bigger necessity.
This highlighted the multiple opportunities that exist for different stakeholders and stakeholder groups when it comes to enabling creativity in the safer city space. While we want to encourage local residents to think of creative ways to address safety issues, we should also think about how governments and public services can be more creative themselves, or experiment more with creative approaches. Perhaps more importantly, how can we foster trusting partnerships between the two to make a bigger impact? How can we encourage creativity across and between a range of stakeholder groups?

**THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ‘THE FOUNDER’, INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY AND GAINING SUPPORT FROM CIVIL SOCIETY**

Dianne Wokoyo’s research showcased two successful case studies of place-making interventions. Key success factors include: clear vision, courage, deep commitment to the community and transparency. The commitment, passion and boldness of the founder are essential. With these types of interventions, antagonism can often come from both the community and the government. It is important to anticipate this as soon as possible, foster involvement and support, and gain buy-in through collaborative working, transparency and frequent communication.

**DURBAN**

**PROCESS**

**NEED**

Comparing municipal involvement across two place-based interventions in Durban and Nairobi.

**OUTCOME**

**NAIROBI**

Exploring & mapping the topic

Unpacking key issues

Reflecting on design opportunities

RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS - SAFER CITIES LAB REPORT
REFLECTING ON DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

WRAPPING IT ALL TOGETHER: HOW CAN CREATIVITY HELP ADDRESS URBAN SAFETY ISSUES?

Three key themes emerged from the workshop in terms of where design and creativity can make most impact in making cities safer. These themes feel relevant to most cities around the world. Of course some sub-themes will be more relevant to certain cities over others.

FOSTERING COMMUNITY-LED PLACEMAKING TO PREVENT NEIGHBOURHOOD CRIME

Place-based initiatives, hacks and community-led projects to improve local parks, parklets, gardens, rooftops, squares, playgrounds, markets.

Case studies (R>L): Electric Street Mural, Philadelphia; Dandora Transformation League, Nairobi; The Ugly Indian, multiple cities.

1 Place-based interventions foster community pride, cohesion and ownership and have been shown to reduce crime in various cities around the world. Simple neighbourhood initiatives, like fixing up abandoned properties, repainting shopfronts or growing community gardens can often be more effective than policies that aim to reduce crime by punishing people.

RETHINKING LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND NUDGING BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE TO MAKE MOVING THROUGH THE CITY SAFER

Initiatives, products, campaigns and services that address drunk driving, speeding, motorcycle accidents, cycling accidents and pedestrian wellbeing, intersection safety, public transport harassment.

Case studies (R>L): Mime Your Step, Bogota; Speed Camera Lottery, Bogota; Red Cup Project- multiple cities USA. Nairobi; The Ugly Indian, multiple cities.
THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

• Keep it frugal: resourcefully improvise solutions using simple means

• Keep it local and needs-based: community-based, neighbourhood level, bottom-up, collaborative, community owned, what are fixing, improving and why?

• You don’t have to be an official designer to think like one: we shouldn’t be exclusive in the language we use when inviting people to take on these challenges. There are great examples of non-designers making a big impact in this space. They are locally invested, passionate, sometimes problem-owners themselves.

• Encourage creativity across and between a range of stakeholder groups: from local residents, to front-line public servants.

PREVENTING YOUTH CRIME AND GANG VIOLENCE BY PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

community-based initiatives, places/spaces, services, programmes that offer alternatives to crime

MORE INFO: WHATDESIGNCANDO.COM

IN COLLABORATION WITH

THIS ACTIVITY WAS PARTLY FINANCED BY THE TOESLAG VOOR TOPCONSORTIA VOOR KENNIS EN INNOVATIE BY THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS