

## Leapfrog and Other Actions Moving Between Design Theory and Practice

Dr Leon Cruickshank: Principle Investigator: Leapfrog: transforming public sector engagement by design, Reader in Design, Lancaster University

Dr Roger Whitham  
Lecturer in Interaction, Lancaster University

Gemma Coupe  
Leapfrog Design Manager, Lancaster University

It is quite possible for the tangible demands of research projects with a high degree of external engagement for new knowledge creation to take a back seat. This paper draws on 2 case studies to explore the reciprocal relationship between engagement and new theory creation. Beyond the Castle (BTC) involved co-designing with 2,000 people over 9 months to re-develop a high profile area of Lancaster City. This brought into play post-structural theory concerning hierarchy, power and new flexible structures, for example notions of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996). These ideas, invisible to many of the contributors, guided a series of actions from clay modeling to a role-play roman centurion and swamp fairy. The theoretical implications of this engagement activity played a seminal role in developing new theory on the role of the designer and the future of design, in particular informing new conceptions of Open Design (Cruickshank, 2014).

The second case study, building on BTC, focuses on Leapfrog, the ongoing £1.2 million, 3 year connected communities project developing new forms of creative engagement. Building on BTC's and conceptions of Open Design and co-design, this project is using, and contributing to, theory around the creation of tools for engagement and problematising many of the 'toolkits' currently in circulation. We also explore the creation of tools as an alternative, and potentially more effective research method than the now ubiquitous 'probes' first introduced by Gaver et al. (Gaver, Dunne, & Pacenti, 1999, Carolan, N., Cruickshank, 2011)

In both case studies we describe the rewarding but also at times fractured relationship between theory building and the demands of working with large numbers of diverse people outside academia. This exploration includes, the benefits (and challenges) of stress testing theory in practice, the new PhD, the trade off between ideal research interventions and ideal engagement activity.

Carolan, N., Cruickshank, D. L. (2011). Understanding Design Interventions in Democratic Innovation: a Toolkit Approach. *Design Research Journal*, 2(10), 33–38.

Cruickshank, L. (2014). *Open Design and Innovation: Facilitating Creativity in Everyone*. London: Ashgate Publishing Limited. Retrieved from <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781409448549>

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1996). *A Thousand Plateaux Capitalism and Schizophrenia (trans. B Massumi)*. London: Athlone Press.

Gaver, B., Dunne, T., & Pacenti, E. (1999). Cultural Probes. *Interactions*, (January & February), 21–29.

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Leapfrog Project – transforming public sector consultation by design is a £1.2 million 3 year Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project. The Leapfrog project will be a close collaboration with public sector and community partners to design and evaluate new approaches to consultation.