Designing with people: creating a multi-level interdisciplinary design education environment for more inclusion

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Abstract

Attention for inclusion and diversity in the learning and living environment of students in higher education is important. Universities can play a key role in educating, facilitating and setting a good example themselves in their communication, infrastructure, teaching methodologies, etc. The educational programs of 'Interior Architecture and Architecture' and 'Occupational Therapy' (OT) of [university left blank] both teach about inclusion and human-centered design approaches, but want to join forces for the purpose of elevating knowledge and expertise on inclusion to a higher level (cf. Young et al., 2019).

In a two-year project (Oct '22-Sep '24) we explore how to create the best possible setting to teach inclusive design and create an inclusive learning environment. This poster outlines the steps to develop a new, multidisciplinary inclusive design course 'Designing with people', where knowledge on diversity and inclusion will be gathered and disseminated throughout the design process through the paradigm of Universal Design.

The following three steps are taken:

STEP 1: Optimizing interdisciplinary design teams (within education): Expertise and competences of both disciplines are analyzed according to complementing and strengthening/ reinforcing properties. They are combined to establish a more powerful design team.

STEP 2: Realizing an inclusive learning environment: This learning environment is realized on two fronts. First, students and staff will focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Staff members will test teaching methodologies and alternative strategies to create an enabling environment for everyone. Students will need to communicate and present (within the design team with students of different backgrounds and user-experts, with clients, etc.) in an inclusive way.

Second, for stakeholders involved within real-life cases (clients, end-users & staff) a network is installed in which different clients (with end-users) who initiate a real-life design issue not only learn from the design teams' (i.e. 'experience user-experts' with different backgrounds and students OT and design) spatial analyses of the as-is situation and design proposals, but also from each others problems and possible solutions. Within this network the Universal Design paradigm will be used to open up the design process to the widest diversity of people possible.

STEP 3: Developing a systematic and efficient methodology for inclusive co-creation:

Experiences, improvements and suggestions from the process of optimizing powerful design teams (i.e. step A), from the inclusive learning process (i.e. step 2A) as well as from the Universal Design process within the broad network (i.e. step 2B) will be structurally gathered from all stakeholders and analysed. Insights and lessons learned will be established in a theoretical framework on designing with people to further disseminate to other courses and other environments in order to facilitate diversity and inclusion in real life.

The outcome of this project is threefold: (1) a new interfaculty course linked to structural and sustainable learning networks; (2) more knowledge and awareness towards inclusion and a variety of people, with different (dis)abilities, needs, experiences and backgrounds, not only among students, but also among staff as well as the broader network of real-life cases; (3) the development and dissemination of a theoretical framework on inclusive co-creation.