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Design games in codesign: as a tool, a mindset and a structure

Kirsikka Vaajakallio* and Tuuli Mattelmäki

Department of Design, School of Arts, Design, and Architecture, Aalto University, Espoo, Finland

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The increasing interest in engaging users and other partners in collaborative design has led to an increase in the number of methods for organising collaboration. The aim of these methods is to support collaborative explorations of future opportunities in inspiring atmospheres. In this discourse, design games have become a popular concept that has been widely adopted to describe various design activities, which at first glance do not necessarily share many qualities. This paper aims to provide further understanding about the purposes that design games serve in codesign. The main contribution of the paper is the introduction of a play framework that highlights three perspectives on how design games appear to different people experiencing them: as a tool, as a mindset and as a structure. To clarify the components of design games, the paper reflects on the relations between design and games, the two parts of the concept ‘design games’, and two further qualities embedded in games: play and performance.

Keywords: design games; codesign; empathic design

1. Introduction

Designing is about rethinking, envisioning and making. Many codesign activities build on these components, too. In this paper, we will focus on design games as a framework and as a tool increasingly applied in codesign for engaging users and other design partners in the early front end of design processes. In the codesign literature, design games as a concept has taken many forms (e.g. Habraken and Gross 1987; Ehn and Sjögren 1991; Buur and Søndergaard 2000; Iversen and Buur 2002; Brandt and Messeter 2004; Johansson 2005). One of the objectives of this paper is to clarify and deepen the understanding of the concept of design games.

Codesign in our understanding is based on a belief that all people are creative and can contribute to design if provided with an appropriate setting and tools (e.g. Sanders and Stappers 2008; Mattelmäki and Sleeswijk Visser 2011). Furthermore, our application of codesign follows an event-driven design process (Brandt 2001), where collaboration with design partners mainly takes place in arranged situations, i.e. codesign events that have a predesigned structure, tasks and facilitation. The outcomes of such situations are not final design solutions but rather a co-constructed understanding about the context, people’s experiences, potential designs and dreams. Hence, the types of games we discuss enable spanning three time frames: the world as it is, the near future and the speculative future (Sanders and Stappers, 2014). Sanders and Stappers (2012, 55–56) propose the ‘path of expression’ as a framework that can be applied to plan the exploration and understanding of past memories, present experiences and future dreams. Similarly, design games provide

*Corresponding author. Email: kirsikka.vaajakallio@aalto.fi

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a stage and tools for people to share current and past experiences in order to envision future ones. In design games, special attention for setting the stage is paid to the spirit of play, as will be discussed in this paper.

This paper is mainly based on a doctoral research by the first author (Vaajakallio 2012) who studied the border between codesign and game-like activities: play, games and performance were explored to assess their possible implications for organising codesign events among researchers, designers, users and other partners in diverse design contexts. Empirical material was gathered across various case studies during 2005–2010. This paper presents the main results focusing on design games in codesign. Based on the results of case studies and literature, “design games” were defined as:

tools for codesign that purposefully emphasise play-qualities such as playful mindset and structure, which are supported by tangible game materials and rules. Instead of being a well-defined method, it is an expression that highlights the exploratory, imaginative, dialogical and empathic aspects of codesign. The objectives of applying design games are rooted in the design context, i.e., that if one is designing new service models for a bank, the bank practices and their development are connected to the aims of the design game. The means for reaching these objectives are drawn from design practice (e.g., tangible mock-ups and user representations) and from the world of games (e.g., role-playing, turn-taking, make-believe) to deliberately trigger participants’ imaginations as a source of design ideas. (Vaajakallio 2012, 218)

The resulting play framework (Table 1) constructs a platform for participation that can have various applications from organising dialogue, to supporting empathic understanding, to gaining several people’s contributions to the design process.

Before going further in the application areas of design games, we, however, need to establish a core understanding of the approach. We will start by first introducing how design games are discussed in the literature; second, we will explain the relationship between design and games to better understand the concept; and third, we set out the play framework with an example case. Through this understanding, we will return by the end of the paper to discuss how design games relate to probes and generative tools (Sanders and Stappers, in this volume).

2. Purposes and functions of design games

Despite their increasing popularity and broadening area of application, design games have not yet been clearly defined. Instead, there are several descriptions of their characteristics that are dependent upon the particular application context and aims of the game (e.g. Habraken and Gross 1987; Ehn and Sjögren 1991; Buur and Søndergaard 2000; Iversen and Buur 2002; Brandt and Messeter 2004; Johansson 2005; Brandt 2006). Most of these descriptions agree that design games are about staging participation, that there is seldom competition over who wins the game, and that there are rules and tangible game pieces that guide the design moves (e.g. Brandt 2006).

When studying design games, we have identified four main purposes for which design games are employed: (1) for research: to study design actions in a manipulable environment that gives rise to design situations resembling those in real life. In games, as in real life, players’ moves are limited by the existing rules, conventions and principles (Habraken and Gross 1987); (2) for building design competence: to create, play and reflect game playing as a way of teaching interaction design students how to establish social interaction between stakeholders in participatory design processes (Iversen and Buur 2002; Sproedt 2012); (3) for empowering users, i.e. people who are not traditionally part of design processes but are influenced by design: to provide hands-on tools for establishing
a common language between designers and users and to involve users in discussions on existing and future alternatives. This application area has historically also dealt with improving democratisation of workplaces (Ehn and Sjögren 1991); and (4) for engaging multiple stakeholders: to engage diverse stakeholders in expressing, negotiating and generating a shared understanding of users, use contexts and technology in early concept design (Brandt and Messeter 2004; Johansson 2005). In this paper, we focus on the last, where design games are applied to orchestrate codesign with different stakeholders.

Besides purpose design, games also vary in their appearance, style and functions; hence confusion can arise from application of the term. For instance, Brandt (2006) describes a wide range of participatory workshop activities as ‘explorative design games’, although those activities originally had different names such as future workshops (Jungk and Müllert 1987) and acting out scenarios (e.g. Brandt and Grunnet 2000). By referring to them as ‘explorative design games’, Brandt highlights the exploratory nature of these activities. Her mapping underlines four functions of design games in relation to codesign: (1) games to conceptualise design, including, for example, concept design games by Habraken and Gross (1987), who build on highly abstracted and conceptual ‘game universes’ to study design practice (Brandt 2006, 58); (2) games to exchange perspectives in design, typically involving elements of chance which may come, for example, by combining things that at first sight do not seem to fit together. In addition, these games may build on the Surrealist movement of the 1920s, which gained inspiration from the subconscious mind, chance, surprise and playful techniques (Brandt 2006, 58); (3) games to understand the work context and practice through negotiation and workflow orientation, highlighting negotiation and simulations of current situations, including, for

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Table 1. Play framework illustrating the three distinct perspectives related to design games and the qualities and functions typical for each category.
example, Ehn and Sjögren’s (1991) organisational games; and (4) games to create scenarios that describe intended use situations, including scenario-based design approaches such as experience prototyping, body storming and drama-inspired methods (e.g. Brandt and Grunnet 2000; Buchenau and Fulton Suri 2000). These four functions also influence the way a particular design game looks and feels like. For example, games that focus on creating scenarios typically utilise enactment, whereas workflow-oriented games often have a game board with game pieces.

We find Brandt’s (2006) emphasis on the explorative nature of design games valuable in understanding the attitude embedded in the approach; nevertheless, design games often imply more than one of the four functions introduced by Brandt. For example, one of the motivations for utilising scenarios is to exchange perspectives, either the participants’ or the designers’. Furthermore, negotiation seems to be central to all design games, especially in codesign, which builds upon several viewpoints, opinions and skills. To pinpoint functions that most design games share, rather than trying to differentiate various design games from one another like Brandt’s list above does, we propose an alternative listing where four core functions, presented below, exist simultaneously in most design games: (1) creating a common design language; (2) promoting a creative and explorative attitude; (3) facilitating the players in envisioning and enacting ‘what could be’; and (4) helping to define the roles of participants in the interaction during a session. To guide and support these functions, design games include rules and tangible game pieces that guide the design moves and participation. However, the rules and forms differ from game to game.

The main application phase for the design games we discuss can be described as concept search, which precedes the definition of a precise design brief (Koskinen and Battarbee 2003) and combines purposes from in vivo and generative design research in Sanders and Stappers’ table (in this volume, Figure 4 and Table 2). Thus design action in this phase is not about finalised design solutions but rather the aim is to lay the ground for design concepts by pointing out design possibilities grounded in user insights. The activities in design games then include reflective and generative actions of concept search where users are seen as design partners (Sanders and Stappers, in this volume, Figure 3).

3. Definitions of and frameworks for describing games

The terms ‘game’ and ‘play’ have been defined in a variety of ways. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) compared eight definitions of game from different fields and identified 10 key elements of which only one, namely that games are played according to rules, was common to most of them. They suggest the following definition: ‘A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome’ (80). In the domain of board games, games have been defined, for example, as:

> games with a fixed set of rules that limit the number of pieces on a board, the number of positions for the pieces, and the number of possible moves. […] Moves or placement of pieces may influence the situation on a board and how pieces relate to each other on a board. (Gobet, Retschitzki, and de Voogt 2004, 2)

In design games, appearance, form and style differ from game to game, as was briefly discussed in relation to different functions listed by Brandt (2006). Therefore, definitions based on form, such as the two definitions of games given above, are less meaningful. When trying to understand design games it is nevertheless important to look at qualities typically connected to games and play and discuss what they can give to codesign. Since design games’ purposes are rooted in codesign objectives, the codesign context partly defines what game qualities are desirable.
As was described earlier, there are various types of design games similar to games in general. Consider football, chess and solitaire. They differ in form, the number of players, playground, game pieces, dominance of skills and chance, etc., but they are still all games. Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1950, 28–45) highlighted a complexity related to the concept of games resulting from the close connection between game and play and their distinct connotations in different languages. For example, the English word ‘play’ may be translated into Finnish in at least three ways: leikki, pela and näytelmä. These terms are related but highlight different aspects of the word. The first refers to childish activity like playing with dolls, the second has a quality of contest embedded in it and the third means theatrical performances with the qualities of pretending and acting-out. Hence, to better understand the relationship between design and games, we need to expand the view and look at play and performance as well.

3.1 A magic circle as a physical and ideal playground

Play can be considered as a temporary sphere of activity in which the laws of ordinary life do not count (Huizinga 1950, 12). These temporary worlds within the ordinary world are also called ‘magic circles’ (19) or in reference to exploratory design games as ‘a game universe’ (Brandt 2010, 132). One quality of the magic circle is ‘symbolic time’ (Schechner [1988] 2003, 8–10) where the span of activity represented may be shorter or longer than the simultaneously elapsed real time. In codesign, this means the ability to travel between past experiences, the current situation and future dreams. Ideally, the magic circle invites participants to think beyond the ordinary and envision alternative solutions that do not yet exist. Thus, at their best, design games can work as test beds where consequences of different decisions can be played out in safe circumstances.

Design games and the codesign sessions where they are applied can also be considered as rituals (Halse 2008). One reason to look at organised codesign events as rituals is to understand the transitions from daily practices to a magic circle and apply this understanding when organising the event. Halse (2008, 118), for instance, proposes rearranging the codesign space to transform it into a performance space. This can be done, for example, by positioning the chairs as in a theatre to create a stage for action. As codesign often takes place in explicitly staged codesign situations, Agger Eriksen (2012, 399) also points out the importance of the physical location and settings that influence the overall performance. Many people who come to codesign events have previous experiences from ‘classic’ meeting room set-ups, i.e. a table in the middle, chairs around it, etc. Whereas this set-up may work for meetings, it is not ‘good if the formatting of codesigning aims at role playing or rehearsing possible future practices’ (Agger Eriksen 2012, 399).

3.2 Rules of design games

In design games that are played in specially organised events, rules are needed that convey what players can or cannot do in the temporary world. However, whereas typically the rules of a game are ‘absolutely binding and allow no doubt’ (Huizinga 1950, 11), in design games, on the contrary, the rules are open for reinterpretation. Reinterpretations are even encouraged to allow the participants to find a meaningful focus. Actually, as noticed also by Brandt (2006), vague rules and props trigger the players to actively work on the topic and to be explicit in describing how they understand and interpret the props and the elements they find meaningful to work within the topic. This supports building a common language that makes sense to all the participants.
In design games there is rarely competition among the players, as in many other types of games. However, tension – one of the core qualities of play (Huizinga 1950, 10–11) – is a quality of design games entailing the elements of chance and a desire to succeed. In this respect, the concept of winning is closely related to games and play. Instead of simply referring to being superior to others in the outcome of the game (50–52), a sense of winning may derive from the challenges faced in the game. The tension, whether it comes from competition, surprise, learning or some other means, can be a driving force and motivation for playing conventional games and design games alike.

### 3.3 Performance and performance roles

The participants in codesign hardly think of themselves as performers on a stage. Nevertheless, there are certain similarities between design games and theatrical performance when looking at design games’ emphasis on exploration and production of the new, which makes the comparison of theatre and design games worthwhile (Halse 2008, 84). One way to execute codesign as performance is the application of enacted performances for gaining empathy with the experiences of someone else whom we try to understand, as for example in experience prototyping (Buchenau and Fulton Suri 2000). Another way, which interests us more here, has been to understand the process of codesign as a performance.

The concept of performance is useful for its 1) processual connotation, 2) transformational qualities, and 3) for how it incorporates the preparation and use of the physical space, artefacts, performers and audience, and 4) the impact the activity has on all those involved. (Clark 2007, 42)

For instance, within the performance process, theatre director and professor Richard Schechner (2006, 225–255) proposes different roles according to the various levels of engagement people have in the performance. By adapting his categorisation, we can offer accurate terms for the changing roles and level of involvement participants have in codesign, including *sourcers* (authors, choreographers, composers, dramaturges, etc.), *producers* (directors, designers, business staff, etc.) and *performers* and *partakers* (spectators, fans, juries, the public, etc.). Design games allow participants to switch between roles and by doing so gain new perceptions on a topic and an empathic understanding of other people’s experiences. Furthermore, understanding these roles and their changes supports planning and facilitation of the events.

### 4. Play framework

By analysing several design games and their relation to play, games and performance, the first author came up with a play framework (Table 1) that aims to clarify the concept of design games (Vaajakallio 2012). A more thorough account of the analysed cases and the research can be found in Vaajakallio’s (2012) doctoral thesis. Within the frame of this paper, we focus on the outcome of the analysis, the framework that points out three distinct perspectives and ways of experiencing design games in practice: design games as a tool, as a mindset and as a structure. This simplified categorisation underlines dominating aspects of specific roles that people have in codesign processes.

- **For a designer**, design games are *tools* to organise dialogues among different stakeholders in order to support participants’ and designers’ empathic understanding of each other and/or a particular user group that is meaningful, and to identify, frame and solve design problems together with users and other stakeholders.
**For players**, design games appear as a *mindset* that creates an experience of being in a game world, a magic circle, which is a physical and ideal playground with a special ordering of time, roles and rules.

**For a design game designer**, design games offer a *structure* with tangible design game materials that are explicit while open to reinterpretation, rules and performance roles that can be manipulated depending on contextual needs.

From a theoretical point of view, the play framework has been organised around the notion that design games consist of two separate but intertwined parts: design and games. The design part of the term indicates the practical application context, whereas the game part refers to a set of play qualities entailed in most types of play, games and theatrical performances (Table 1).

### 5. Illustrating the play framework through a case study

In this section, we demonstrate the play framework with an example case, a codesign event orchestrated through a design game (Vaajakallio et al. 2010). The case also reflects how design games enable designers and non-designers to co-construct user representations and outline future opportunities together.

The case was part of a project called ‘Developing Extreme Service Design Methods’ conducted in 2008–2010. One of the main design objectives of this case study was to explore collaboration opportunities for a new, strategic B2B partnership between a company in the elevator business and two companies in the construction and housing industry. The codesign activity discussed below (Figure 1) was a half-day codesign event with people from the above-mentioned three companies. The event was facilitated through a design game named Character Game. The design context was senior housing as this was anticipated as a potential platform for strategic collaboration among the participating companies.

#### 5.1 Design games functioning as a tool for designers

The play framework suggests perceiving design games as tools for designers to meet the following codesign objectives: first, organising dialogue among designers, users and other stakeholders (e.g. Mattelmäki 2005; Brandt 2006); second, supporting empathic understanding of other participants and/or some specific user group (e.g. Koskinen, Battarbee, and Mattelmäki 2003; Kouprie and Sleeswijk Visser 2009; Sleeswijk Visser 2009; Mattelmäki, Vaajakallio, and Koskinen, 2014); and third, gaining several contributions to design by inviting people to, for instance, generate design representations, user scenarios and performances (e.g. Sleeswijk Visser et al. 2005; Halse et al. 2010).

The Character Game aimed mainly to enhance participants’ empathic understanding of seniors and to enable identifying new collaboration opportunities among participating companies. This was done by design game materials and role-play activity, which created concreteness in an otherwise abstract and ambiguous phase of early ideation. Game materials and role-play also elicited participants’ experiences and knowledge related to seniors and seniors’ houses by opening up new questions and several interpretations of the topic, both in terms of user insights and potential solutions. Furthermore, the Character Game gave a fresh experience to the participants who had previous work-related knowledge about seniors’ houses, thus eliciting creative thinking and empathic understanding within the design team. Role-playing also allowed making of personal
connections and contributing to the collaborative construction of the users’ worlds – i.e. a future seniors’ house, senior characters, scenarios, follow-up ideas – in verbal, visual and acted-out formats.

After the game, one of the participants revealed a personal discovery that highlights both the empathic user-centred view and the design solution perspective that the design game often aims for:

It was an interesting notion for me that we talk about the senior segment [at the elevator company], even though their needs are even more various than with any other [user] segment. If we want to provide some product or service for seniors, we should think about how it should be provided in the first place Those [solutions] should be quite modular. Somehow, people’s personality in an apartment building should be considered. (Character Game with KONE, March 2009, translated from Finnish)

When approaching design games as tools, several questions arise: who is invited into dialogue; who should gain empathic understanding; and whose contribution to the design process is relevant? Based on the answers to the previous questions, user involvement can be direct (e.g. face-to-face dialogue) or indirect, where the user insights are represented by narratives (Wright and McCarthy 2008) such as a selection of probes or persona descriptions (e.g. Mattelmäki, Brandt, and Vaajakallio 2011).

As the main purpose of the codesign event was to seek potential for new strategic business partnerships, seniors were not directly involved. Instead, they were represented indirectly through the narrative game material and the characters of the role-playing game that the players acted out during the performance of the game (Figures 2, 3 and 4).

5.2 Design games create a mindset for players
User data was communicated in the form of pictures from seniors’ houses and quotes from interviews. These materials were purposefully open-ended to allow the participants to
become active producers of new interpretations by triggering their own experiences and insights on the topic.

One purpose for the role-play type of game was to have the participants become more immersed in the topic they tried to understand. The example below, taken from the middle of performing a scenario, demonstrates the role-immersion as it emerged during play:

It has been some time now [...] . While Oskari was in the hospital, the other residents of the seniors’ house Many Ages have woken up to the accessibility issues and it has become the best seniors’ house in Finland. We meet in the corridor, as usual. I [Oskari] will be there for the first time [after the accident and being in the hospital] and you will start to introduce all of these great future visions, and you will speak very highly of them. (Character Game, March 2009, translation by the authors)

In performances, play and games, the reactions of performers and the audience are real, even though the actions that trigger these reactions are fictional (Schechner 2006, 124).
In other words, even though the story as such is fictional, the situations and themes emerging in it elicit actual reactions, opinions and emotions in the participants. In this case, role-playing made the participants think about the topic from the user’s, not service provider’s, point of view. It also evoked players’ personal memories and experiences, which they shared with other players during the game. Role-playing in this case did not require bodily enactment since the players sat around a table and the story was acted out verbally from particular users’ or characters’ perspective, putting the emphasis on role immersion rather than on movement. This role-playing format can be best described as ‘table-top role-playing game’, and the reason for choosing this format instead of more active acting as typical for live role-play was the difficulties in encouraging participants to act, reported, for example, by Seland (2009) and Iacucci et al. (2000). We did not want the possible unease with embodied acting steal attention away from the actual topic.

Symbolic time enhances participants’ abilities to set their performances into the future and to imagine design opportunities without being fixated, for instance, on the restrictions given by current technology or attitudes. In the Character Game, symbolic time was explicitly employed to guide the participants to think three years ahead to give room for re-imagining events and technologies but avoiding extremely futuristic ideas. This was done when laying out the context for the game by saying: ‘It is a beautiful spring evening in 2012 … Your happy group lives in a seniors’ house outside central Helsinki … ’ In the subsequent performance, the players utilised symbolic time in their own scenarios, inviting reflections on future visions as the previous clip illustrated.

As shown in Vaajakallio (2012), the playful mindset partially comes from the game rules, which may be somewhat implicit or alternatively explicit printouts given to the participants to guide their actions. Reading the printed rules in a step-wise manner creates a positive tension when they gradually reveal the next steps of the design game. More importantly, since rules are easily associated with board and card games, they work as a bridge between ordinary work practices and the special play sphere.

5.3 Design games provides a structure for design game designers

Typically several people may work in the same design (research) project, but only some are responsible for organising codesign events. The same people are also often those who facilitate the codesign activities. Since planning the rules, designing the materials and facilitating the design game events are important phases for orchestrating codesign and
influencing its success, we find it important to pay attention to this role. Accordingly, we propose the role of design game designer as the person who is mainly responsible for organising the codesign event and who manages the collaborative process of designing the design game. For this, design games as a structure refers to the creative manipulation of play qualities such as materials, rules and the participants’ roles in design games in a context-specific manner. The structure is strongly related to the typical purposes of codesign addressed in the play framework, i.e. design games as a tool for a designer to organise a dialogue, to support an empathic understanding and to gain several contributions, within a specific design context, such as new B2B collaboration opportunities related to seniors’ houses. The structure also has a strong relationship with the game rules and materials which all influence each other: the rules are the overall script of a specific game describing its progress, materials, goals and roles. For the facilitator, the rules explain the basic idea of the game and work as starting points for the interaction.

In general, design games’ materials aim to support making, telling and enacting. Although we are aware that predesigned material is not always necessary, we have found it of great help in setting a frame and starting points for design collaboration, in enabling moving between fragments and a holistic view, in providing visual stimuli for eliciting new associations, in playing with alternatives, and in documenting progress and decisions in the process of codesigning. Figure 5 illustrates a variety of design game materials from several design games we have organised over the years.

Open-ended and ambiguous tasks in design games can help the participants to propose new interpretations and alternative solutions in an empathic and playful way. In this quality, design game materials can resemble that of probes as discussed by Gaver, Dunne, and Pacenti (1999) and Mattelmäki (2008). The visual and tangible components of the design game materials are generative tools. In the context of design games, design game materials aim at creating a platform for a shared focus of attention to establish and maintain dialogues and idea generation. Like generative tools, design games result in representations that concretise participants’ experiences, point of views and dreams, and also provide a documentation and reminder during and after the codesign gathering. In the Character Game, predesigned game materials opened up the seniors’ world for discussion and stimulated participants’ personal experiences and opinions, as well as gave boundaries for role taking and scenario building. The materials also served as templates for documenting the discussions and ideations.

For the facilitator whose aim is to find ways to motivate people to codesign in effective but creative ways, design games can introduce practical structure and means such as the game rules. When creating engaging game rules, it is beneficial to understand the diverse roles people may have in codesign events. By adapting Schechner’s (2006, 225) categorisation of performance roles introduced earlier, we can discuss the level of interaction and immersion of a performer and an audience member. In codesign, these roles are typically mixed but can be explained through the following example: in the Character Game, the invited participants became sourcers when they, first, told their personal stories; second, during the design game when they reflected on their own interests and experiences related to the evolving game and role-playing; and third, when they brought in their professional and personal insights to guide the idea generation following the intensive role-playing part. While constructing the game world and creating the scenarios, they functioned mainly as producers by making connections between their own professional knowledge, other participants’ insights and the design game material representing fragments of the seniors’ worlds. When improvising the scenarios, everyone except the facilitator, who acted as a producer throughout the gathering, was a performer.
The dynamic relationships between being a sourcer, a producer and a performer in the Character Game are an illustration of the mixed roles typical to design games. Whether participants are assigned a particular role at some point of the game or they remain in their everyday role during the whole game, they need to make statements about the world within the boundaries of the rules and the context of the design game. Travelling between several roles may clearly be part of the game, but in practice it is often implicit and unconscious. Understanding the meaning of the roles mentioned above allows the design game designer to utilise them purposefully when designing design games and during facilitation of codesign. Depending on the design game, the facilitator can stay outside and take the role of a producer in building bridges and making connections without being involved in the performance, as in the Character Game.

6. Discussion

In this paper, we have focused on design games in codesign as they appear to different people experiencing them, as a tool for a designer, a mindset for a player and a structure for a design game designer. Accordingly, design games are diverse in their purposes,
appearances and outcomes. As we have discussed, design games provide a framework for planning and conducting codesign.

In the case described and reflected above, telling and making were entwined when the participants collectively envisioned and described the future seniors’ house and the users in it, and simultaneously reflected upon their own experiences, views and knowledge during the role-play. This outcome is particular to design games that aim at combining the sharing of user insights and participants’ own experiences; reflecting and making sense of the open-ended materials; and generating new scenarios, ideas and representations (Figure 4).

Core to the ‘design games’ approach is the framework to engage designers and non-designers in codesign by a playful structure and a mindset. In this framework, we propose that design games can be seen also as ‘tools’ for designers. However, we want to highlight that they are not instruments independent of the competences of people applying them or the use context. The play framework can support the process of becoming a skilled design game designer and a facilitator by illustrating how the interplay between design games as a tool, as a mindset and as a structure can be adapted. It explains the core of design games and their multifaceted nature. The purpose of the framework is to illustrate the complexity and diversity of the design games approach to various audiences – to non-experts as well as to more knowledgeable researchers and practitioners. It also provides a vocabulary and lens for studying codesign events and different types of design games.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed a play framework as a way of understanding design games as a tool, as a mindset and as a structure depending on the role a person has in codesign. The play framework was built based on eight empirical cases with tens of codesign sessions influenced by the existing literature introduced in the paper (see all cases: Vaajakallio 2012). To sum up, design games are a playful way to elicit reactions from the codesign partners through game pieces and rules of play. They invite people to co-construct user representations and scenarios as possible futures with designers and researchers.

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References


