

Politics of co-creation research seminar

13.15-13.45

Facilitation as a means for making politics: Pathways towards a reconfiguration of practice

Discussants:

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Hello!

A little about me:



Design & Advertisement

- Graphic design
- Visual communication
- Education
- Political design
- Critical design
- Systems thinking

Intercultural Mediation

- In cross-cultural settings related to politics and human rights-based processes
- Social dynamics
- Verbal and non-verbal communication

Sustainability

- Social sustainability
- Citizen participation
- Public sector
- Minorities and voice

Activism

- Political lobbying
- Asylum and refugee policies
- Educational rights
- Human rights
- Environmental and animal causes

Design & Advertisement

Graphic design
Visual communication
Education
Political design
Critical design
Systems thinking



Casa Dórica, redesign



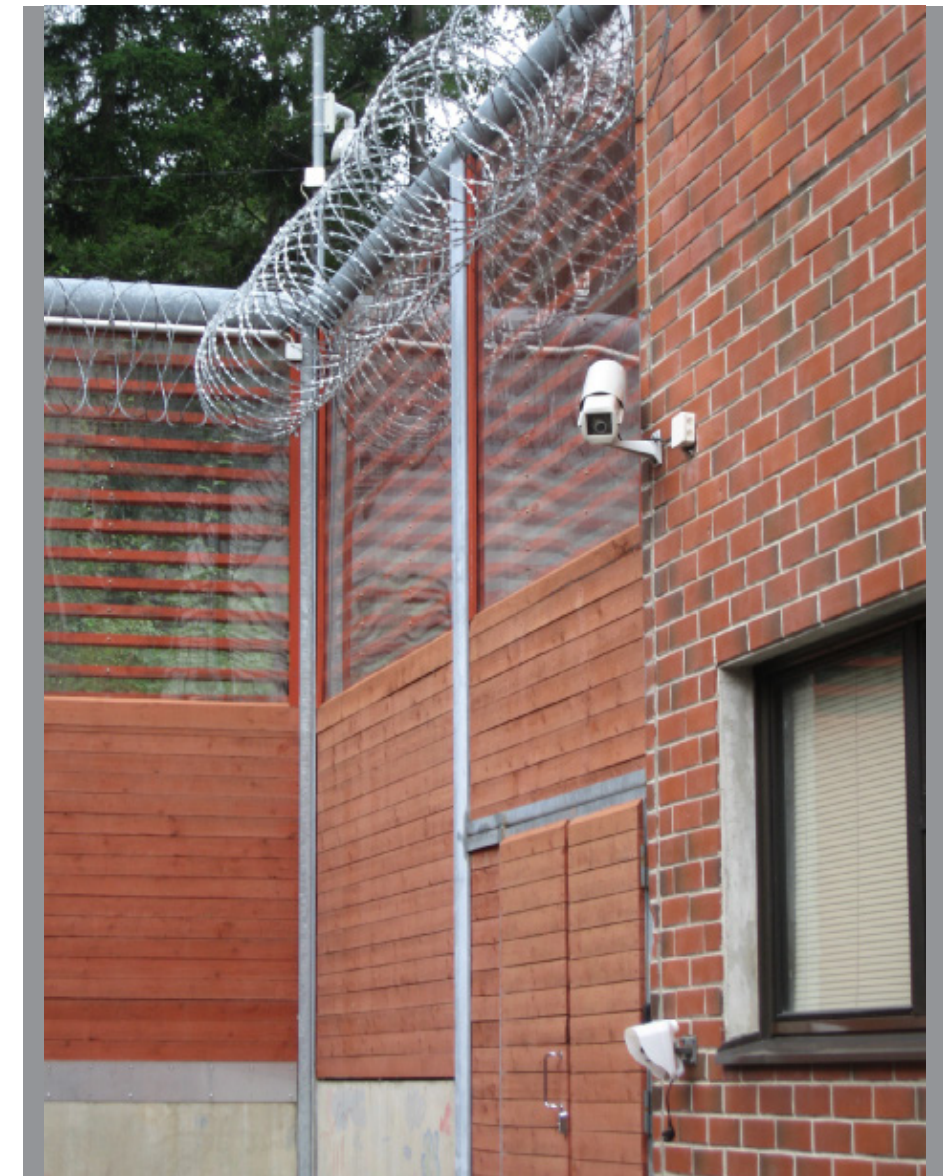
UNDP Iraq, "Best Practices in Emergency Livelihoods Programming Report"

Intercultural Mediation

In cross-cultural settings related to
politics and human rights-based processes
Social dynamics
Verbal and non-verbal communication



We See You, presentation

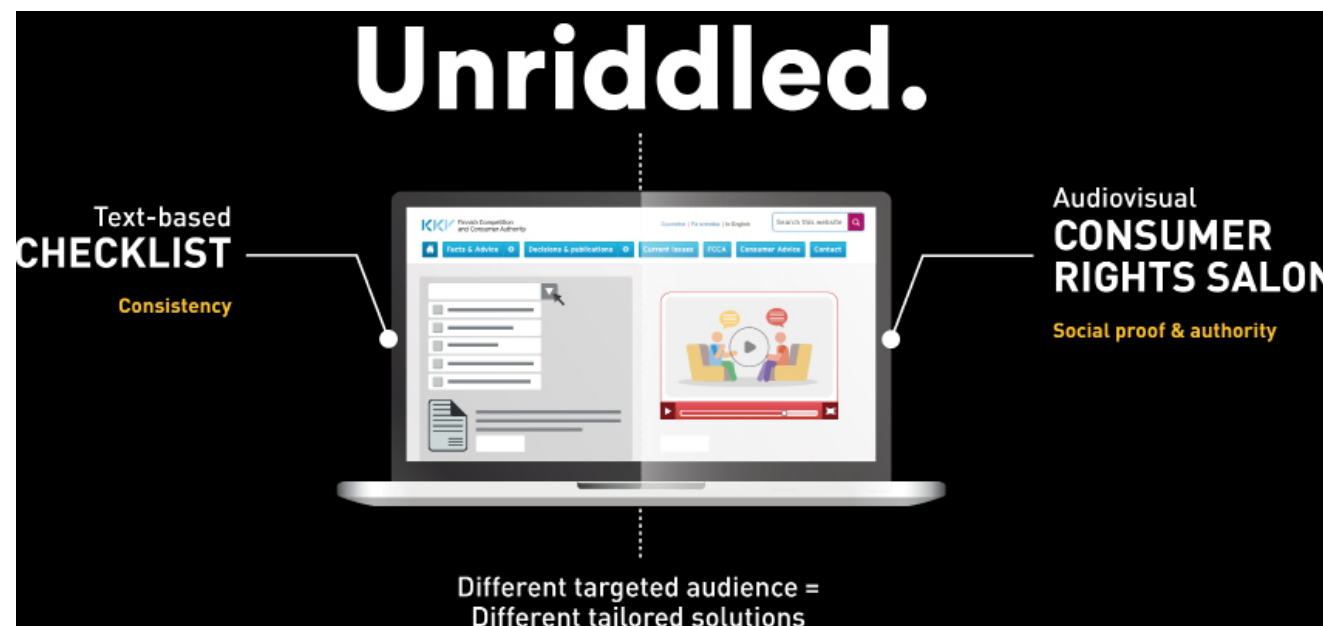


Detention Center Metsälä

Social sustainability
Citizen participation
Public sector
Minorities and voice



Empathy movement, Pakolaisapu x HABITARE fair x Nordic Match



Design for Government, Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority

Activism

Political lobbying
Asylum and refugee policies
Educational rights
Human rights
Environmental and animal causes



Right to live, Helsinki



Art of/as activism, Kiasma

*Different approaches to either voicing out opinions,
staying engaged in contemporary issues or raising awareness.*

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DESIGN

A “study of human action that arises from social situations”

The object of design being “the social”.

Of inherent political nature.

DESIGN FACILITATION

- 1) Process within the realm of participatory design in which the leading designer facilitator acts as a mediator between various actors and towards a set goal.
- 2) Overarching participatory process from getting a brief to compiling and disseminating results.

DESIGN
FACILITATION → *BUZZWORD*
Highlights design facilitation's versatility.

DESIGN FACILITATION → *BUZZWORD*

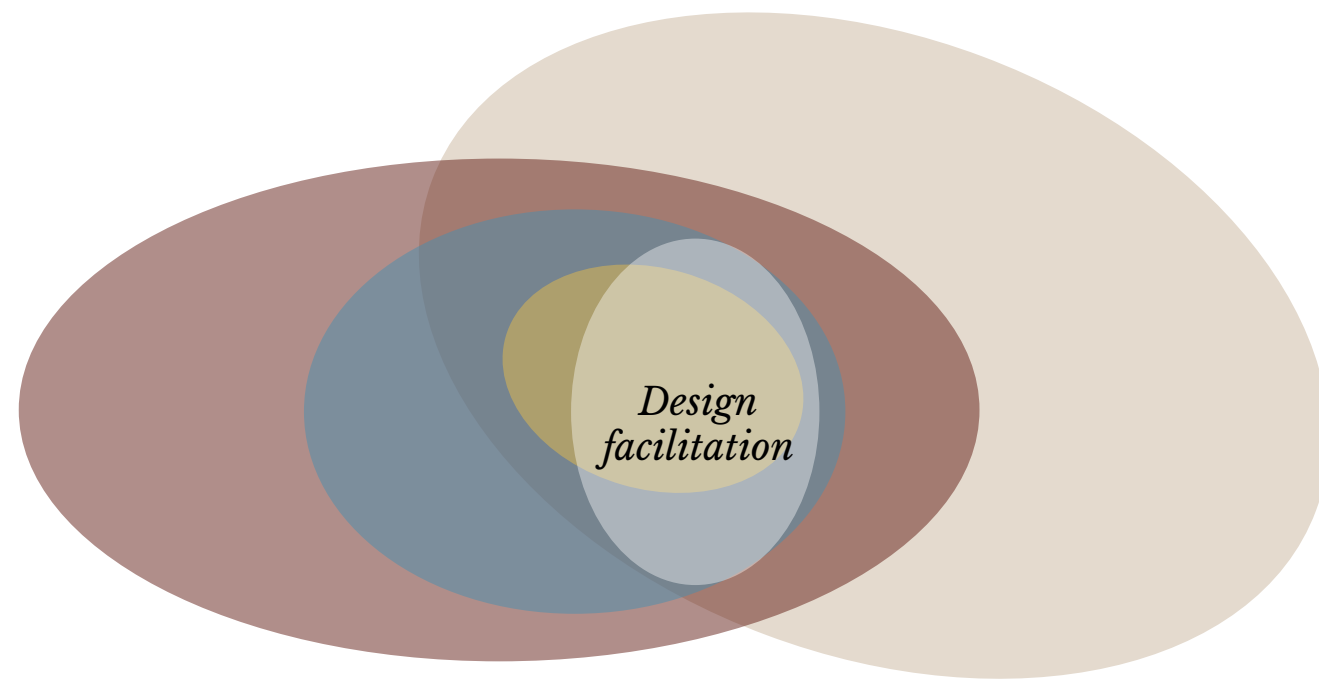
Leaves room for deliberate and convenient interpretations of its meaning, use, and ethical limitations.

DESIGN FACILITATION



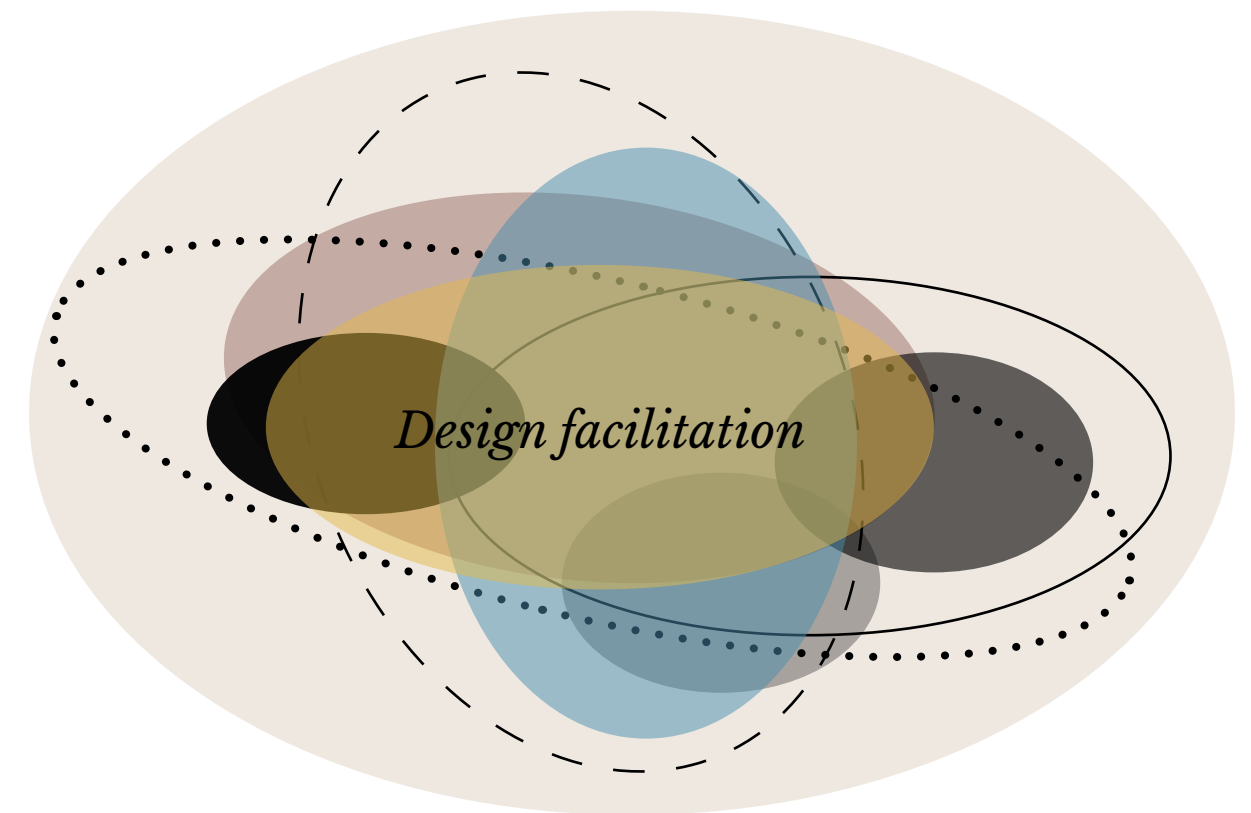
Unpack its significance and to investigate its connection to power and politics, intended as *the political* in relation to design practice.

Macro level



- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| ● <i>Design</i> | ● <i>Power</i> |
| ● <i>Politics</i> | ● <i>Participatory Design</i> |

Micro level



- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| — <i>Materiality</i> | ● <i>Design</i> | ● <i>Verbality</i> |
| <i>"The social"</i> | ● <i>Politics</i> | ● <i>Artefacts</i> |
| - - - <i>Interactions</i> | ● <i>Power</i> | ● <i>Environments</i> |

RQ 1

Through which lenses can we acknowledge design facilitation's intrinsic political nature?

RQ 2

How is power exerted and what is the role of power relations in participatory interactions?

RQ 3

How can power balance-based models of facilitation, prefigurative politics and resistance contribute to possible alternative ways of achieving participation?

Objectives

Acknowledging and rendering visible the often unaddressed political nature of design facilitation by making more explicit its underpinning structures and components.

Highlighting the importance of unpacking concepts and areas of design to foster a more accountable practice and research.

Contrasting contemporary views of design facilitation against revised notions that take into consideration its complex power dynamics and political implications.

Allocating time and resources to draw attention to politically concerned issues.

POWER

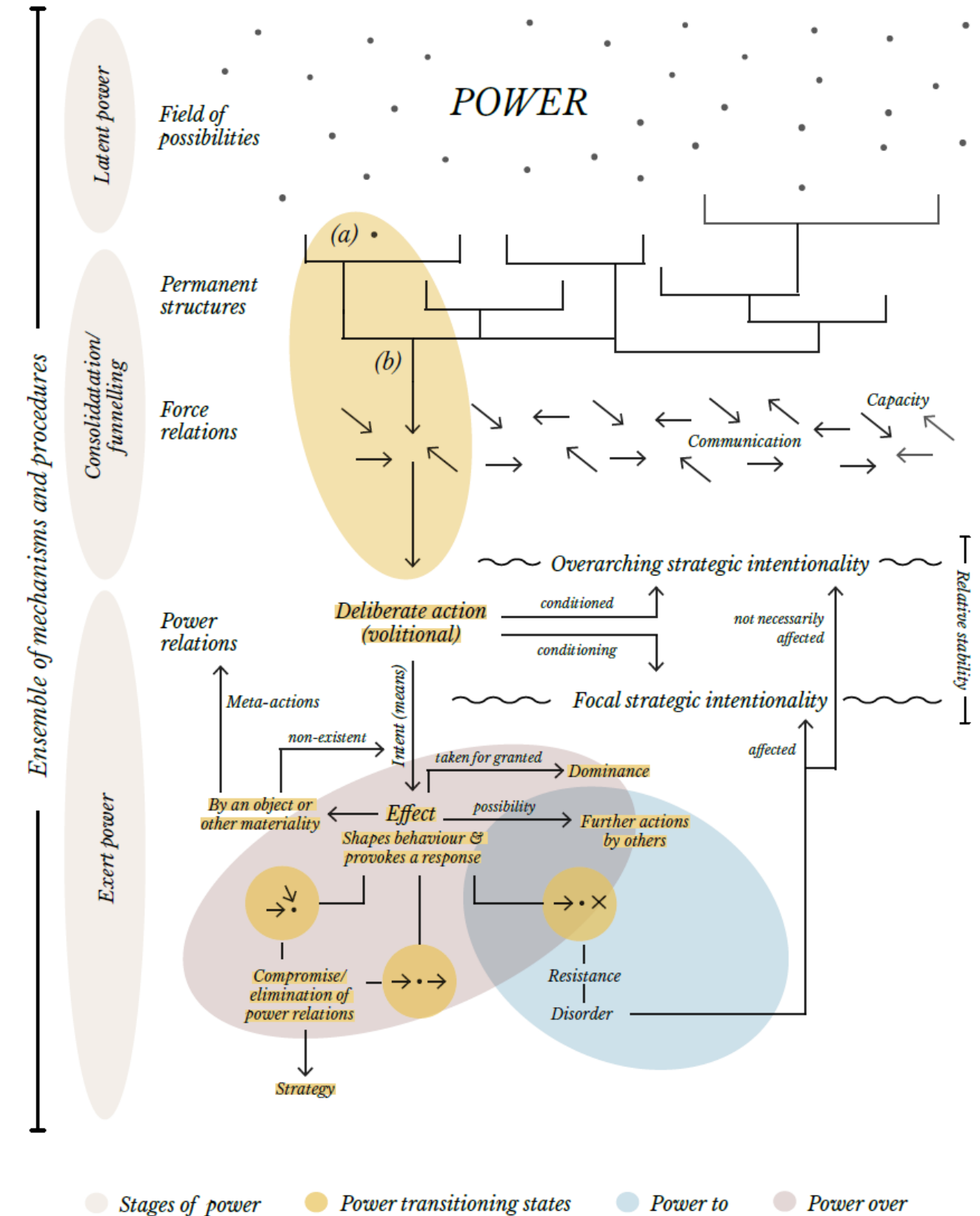
- Highlighting how omnipresent power is
- Exploring how it comes to be brought into society
- Spotting of assumptions, tacit and situated knowledge
- Reinforcing claims about design being political and not neutral

POWER

*Not as a new hypothesis,
but an often (in)visible fact.*

Stepping outside of design

- Definitions and debates about the meaning of power
- Different uses of the notion
- Philosophical and “designerly” characteristics
- Power relation to understand dynamics within relationships
- Examination of the mechanisms behind power exertion



Objectives

Tackle the discontinuity in design research regarding power exertion and agency distribution.

Highlight the role and responsibilities of the facilitator regarding ethics, ownership, accountability, empowerment and claims of power positions.

Delving into the unacknowledged implications of intentional actions.

Spotting different aspects which allow outlining wilful intents of imposing power, to alluding to participation and to steering agency.

FACILITATION

Important to discuss

Power in design definitions —

Parallel between design-related notions and power-related notions are many.

The role of creativity —

Creativity defined as “subtle framing”.

Empowerment —

Social movement-based, ego and illusory empowerment.

Framing, orchestrating and staging —

The configurative nature of design facilitation.

Hierarchy and authority —

How do designers gain legitimacy?

Agency —

Intentionality, temporal extension, proxy and collective agency.

FACILITATION

Determined participation —

Who is fit to participate?

Control and order —

Facilitation schemes, accepted behaviour and partial freedom.

Creative sense-making —

Facilitation as a mediascape materiality and meta-actions.

Consensus and dissensus —

Culture of harmony, obstruction of dissensus, nurturing pluralities.

3 DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

- *Seravalli, A. (2014). Making commons: (attempts at composing prospects in the opening of production)*
- *Keshavarz, M. (2016). Design-Politics: An Inquiry into Passports, Camps and Borders*
- *Hirscher, A. (2020). When skillful participation becomes design: making clothes together*

LEARNINGS

Critique

- Further research on how to transition to a practice that embraces dissensus and learns how to transform conflict and controversy into catalytic action.
- Facilitation mostly understood as a position claim, rather than an area of design despite recognizing the mainstream notion.

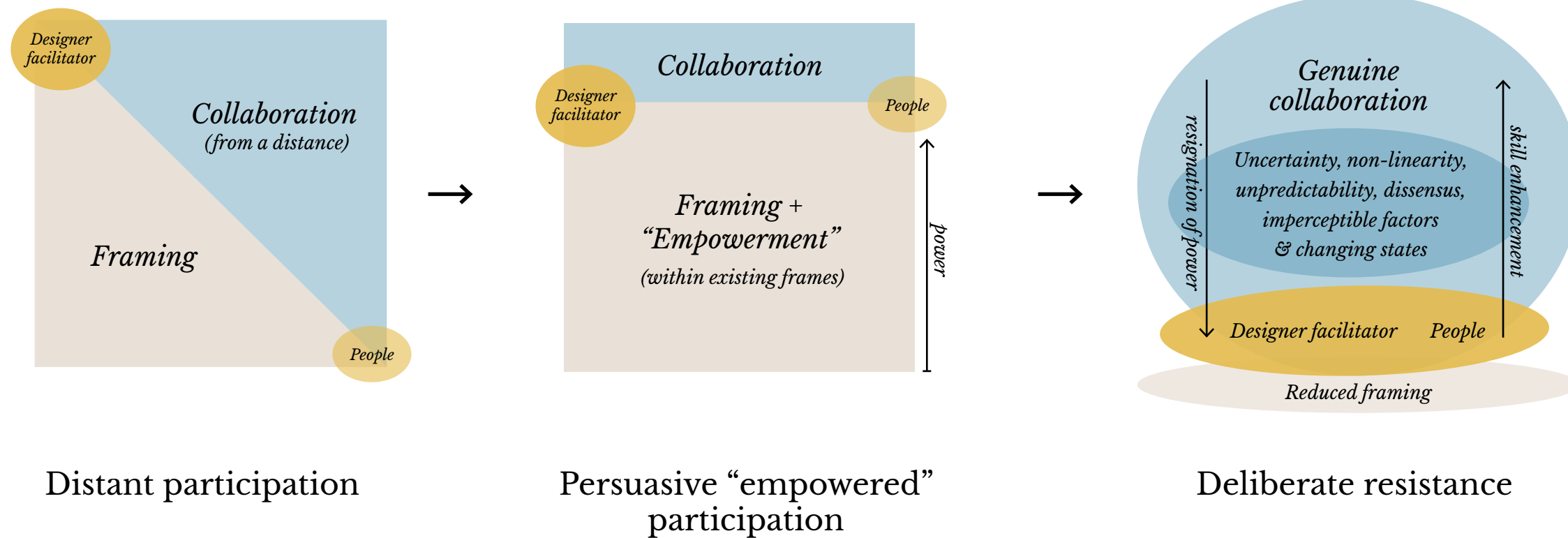
Unpacking

- Often acknowledged are skills and methods. Further research on unpacking what makes them possible: interaction between values, accountability, ownership, causality, language, assumptions, underlying structures, etc.
- Power imbalances are highly present and can take the form of illusory-empowerment. Genuine efforts are needed to achieve more balanced ways of doing.

Language use

- Empowerment: tends to eschew political implications and comes across as a benevolent area of practice.
- Enabling/disabling practice: further discussions on role gaps, expert dominance, control and power relationships can be started.

BALANCING POWER



— *MOVING FORWARD*

“Design facilitation could benefit from adopting a more explicit approach when it comes to embracing its belonging within socio-political systems and rethinking its role within them”.

Reconceptualization —

Lengthy effort: extensive research and resources, iterative experimenting and inevitable failing, learning and adjusting.

Inescapable framing —

Acknowledging and adapting to the ubiquitous presence of framing practices within PD.

Reconceptualization

Lengthy effort: extensive research and resources, iterative experimenting and inevitable failing, learning and adjusting.



Doctoral Studies

At the school of Social Sciences

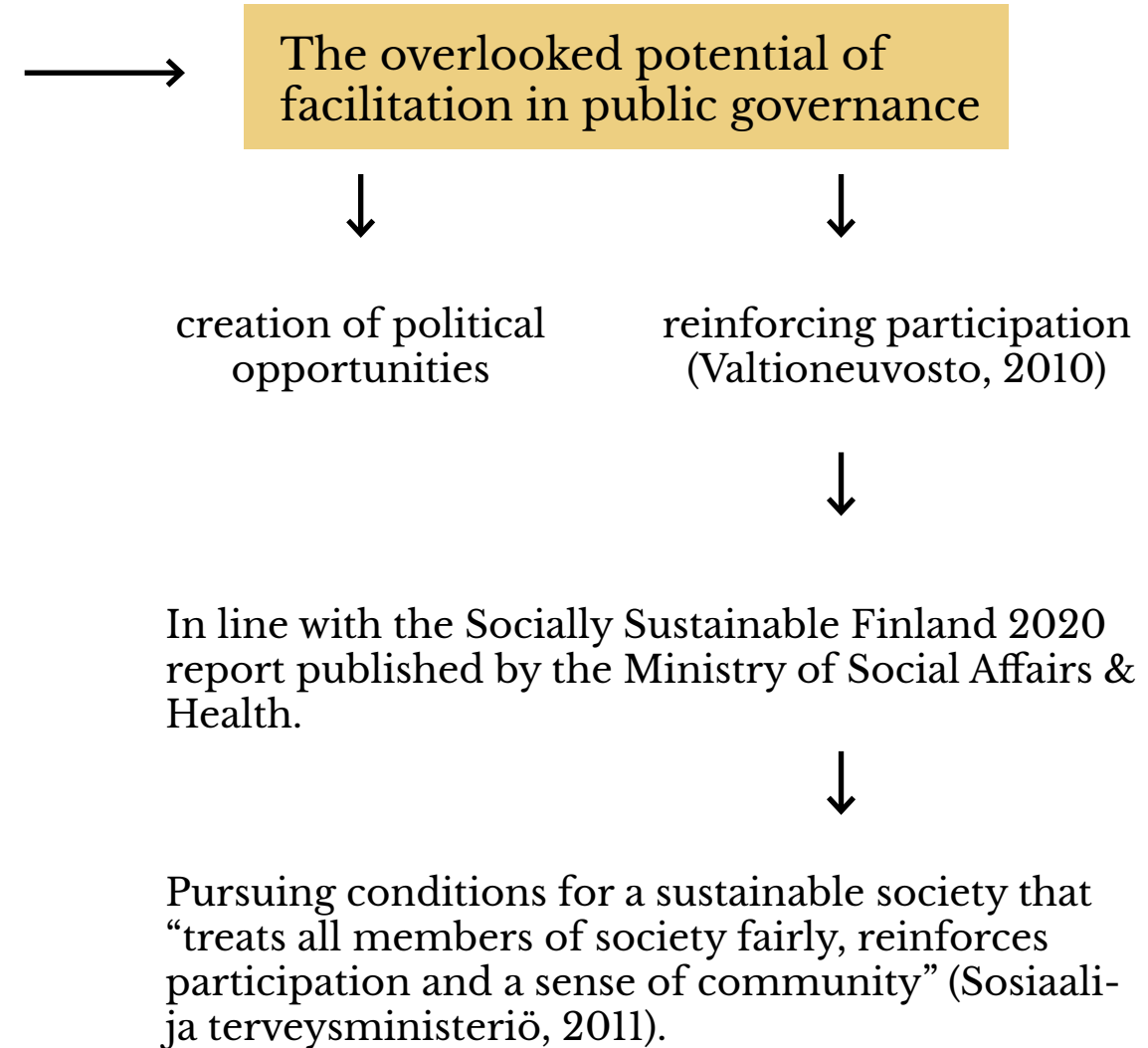
Politicizing facilitation:

Mediating participatory action towards public governance and the creation of political opportunities

Starting point

Despite increasing, citizen participation in governance is affected by its unbalanced deployment (OECD, 2020), often promoting:

- 1) views of distanced governance
- 2) tokenistic participation (Meriluoto, 2018)
- 3) depriving minorities of a voice (Government of Finland, 2020)



Facilitation

The overlooked potential of
facilitation in public governance



Considered an important skill needed in
governance, understanding of its respon-
sibility, potential and political nature is
scarce.



The latter often avoided as a
taboo (Kirk & Broussine, 2000)



Literature around governance and politics
highlight the need for higher co-creation



Focus on the conditions needed to foster
this shift and not enough on how this is
facilitated (Torfing et al., 2016)



Little research on the impact and/or
implications of active political facilitation



Facilitation

Considered an important skill needed in governance, understanding of its responsibility, potential and political nature is scarce.



Buzzword: deliberate and convenient interpretations of its meaning and use



Political potential and claim of neutrality are underexplored



Impact of facilitation on governance-public interactions.



Lacking necessary adaptation to a highly political context and conflicts

Problem

**I choose to
problematize**

Facilitation's claim to be neutral



- Based on scarce literature (Wróbel et al., 2019)
- Leading to naive or manipulative misuses of practice (Villaman, 2020)
- Depoliticizing facilitation by minimizing it to a mere series of methods and tools.

**If re/politicized, it beholds the potential to be a key
component in public governance**



Mediating clashes of
ambition and influence in
the making of politics



Ensuring direction in
dialogues for change

Sought outcome

*A reconceptualization of facilitation as a politicized practice
needed for participatory public governance, rendering it able
to take active part in mediations of struggles for power.*



Redefinition of its role, potential and responsibility in mediating sensitive instances with high systemic impact



Focusing on increased participatory engagement



And the creation of political opportunities (Tilly, 1987).

RQ 1

What can a reconceptualization of facilitation contribute to?

What are the benefits and impact of reclaiming to be a politicized practice?

RQ 2

How does facilitation contribute to participatory public governance?

How can it foster the creation of political opportunity?

Theory

i) Public governance, with a special focus on Finland's objectives regarding social sustainability

ii) Facilitation as a practice, its role, origins, skills and potential

iii) The creation of political opportunity, conditions, and dynamics needed for inclusion in establishing a dialogue between parties

iv) Participation, its potential in governance and crucial role in tackling systemic issues

Contemporary views: public governance & facilitation

- i)** Seek for troublesome dynamics, notions or gaps in the way facilitation, participation, power and public governance are currently deployed and understood among citizens, facilitators, public sector employees and politicians.

The potential of politicization

- ii)** Focused on spotting entry points for introducing change in the current governance paradigm. Experimenting with a model of politicized facilitation through participation, negotiations and dialogue.

Reconceptualizing facilitation

- iii)** A new vision of facilitation and pathways towards political opportunity through participation, and advancing towards a revised vision of facilitated public governance, challenging the previous starting point.

Recap

Problem space:

- The creation and envisioning of favourable conditions for fostering political opportunity in diverse encounters, tackling threats to democracy, namely unbalanced participation, agency and voice.

Providing insight on:

- Facilitation as a role and its implications on politics
- Facilitation as a practice and its potential within public governance, creating political opportunities
- Benefits of facilitation for public governance, and how to move towards social sustainability goals
- The public, implications of being involved in politics, tackling inequality through increased agency.

Aiming for:

- A reconceptualization of facilitation as a politicized practice needed for participatory public governance, rendering it able to take active part in mediations of struggles for power.

Thank you!

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