

What Can Design Laboratories Do?

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Abstract. The distinction between design and use is getting blurred in several ways as products and services increasingly are co-created in use, and use and users proliferate and diversify. This has led to a growing interest in staging what we here will call design laboratories that both involve future users in codesign and incubate emergent everyday practices of design in use. Very little can be said about novel designs or technologies before it is seen what the users make of it. This is particularly the case when considering mobile technologies and social media where products seem to act more as an infrastructure for design in use than as a provision of well defined services. At the same time envisioning such new designs without being in close dialogue with the people who are to appropriate them in new everyday practices may easily lead to disappointing results. This has led to a renewed interest in codesign and user involvement in such formats as living labs and codesign workshops. This panel brings together researchers from some of the environments that most vigorously has pursued this line of inquiry. Some of the panelists have suggested the concept of design laboratories as a platform for open-ended explorations of the co-evolution of artifacts and practice. They see the design laboratory as a confined space of controlled experimentation with what can be collaboratively imagined, scalable through its rehearsals of experimental practices. With this definition of these new collaborative formats the panel asks what it is that constitutes a successful design laboratory and what we can expect design laboratories to accomplish in a world of diversity.

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