introduction

how to design for, with, and from user experiences

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The contents of this publication were created for the conference, held in Delft, on the occasion of the defence of the first PhD in 'contextmapping'. We had been working on the contextmapping project for a good five years in Delft, so we decided that it was time to bring in international colleagues, designers and former students who are now in practice, to reflect on the current state of affairs, and the implications for research and practice. The response was overwhelming. We ended up with a densely packed programme for a completely full auditorium (over 300 people, half from industrial practice and half from various academic institutions), plus a busy programme of tie-in workshops in the afternoon.

Overview of non TU Delft attendees' afﬁlations (image made using wordle.net)

The response indicates that the role of users is attracting more attention in both academia and industry, and that we all see the benefits of learning from each other's experience. Yet it is by no means clear what kind of role the user can play in design, or to what degree design is something that is 'done' to users, and to what degree design develops for, with, or from the user experience:

'*for*': designers must attend to functional, social, sensorial or emotional factors of how the user experiences the product;

'*with*': the users can help them in this;

'*from*': the users' earlier life experience is the basis for forming this understanding.

In the contextmapping projects at ID-StudioLab, we summarized this role of the user in the design process

The user is the expert of his experience

That role can be one of co-creator or informer, depending on the design project at hand. The name 'contextmapping' illustrates two main elements about the information or understanding that the design team needs: the context of product use, defined as 'all factors which influence the interaction between user and product', and illustrated in the figure as all considerations around the user and product, both literally and metaphorically. The word 'mapping' was chosen to indicate the form of this information: a tool to help access to the terrain of experience, which can take many forms depending on the needs of the traveler for whom the map is made.

Designing **for** users means that considerations regarding the user should play a part in the design process. In our school, this has been in the core definition of what industrial design engineering entails ever since its foundation 40 years ago: 'Designing products for people' has been our slogan for a few decades. Similarly, many companies now realise that technology push won't get us there: you cannot just sell a 'trick-in-a-box'

with a button for the user to push, unless your trick is very new, valuable, and unique. But thinking *about* the users is often not enough any more.

Designing **with** users goes a step further: there is extra value in bringing real users into the design process. Over the years, we have seen many forms of this, of which the usability test (finding out what's good and bad in your concept relating to its use and the user *before* you bring the product onto the market) is an established wisdom. For a long time, this meant consulting users about new products, or testing them – typically, after the ideas had matured. But new roles for the user are starting to emerge, beyond that of a passive object of study or informant. The user is increasingly being seen as a collaborator bringing valuable ideas and concepts, and working together with designers to identify needs and important directions. The term 'co-creation' has been unleashed upon the market as one of the new approaches to designing with users. But involving users in active roles has not been easy, and in many of the cases where co-creation is claimed, we see only shallow forms of user involvement.

One reason for this is that collaboration takes investment and time. Professionals working in multidisciplinary projects always find that it takes effort to develop a working collaboration and shared understanding, and to get useful contributions from people. You cannot just invite someone in from the street and expect them to instantly contribute to something as complicated as designing a future product. You want to involve their expertise.

It takes effort to raise users to their level of expertise. Within the contextmapping project, we developed techniques aimed at involving users as 'experts of their experience', in collaboration with Liz Sanders. These engage users for a longer time, and give them the tools to observe and recall their experiences, reflect on them, formulate insights, and contribute to the design. This insight by people based on reflections on their previous experience is key. Hence the third term, **from**

user experiences, as the users' insights from their own life experience forms the basis on which the designs are developed.
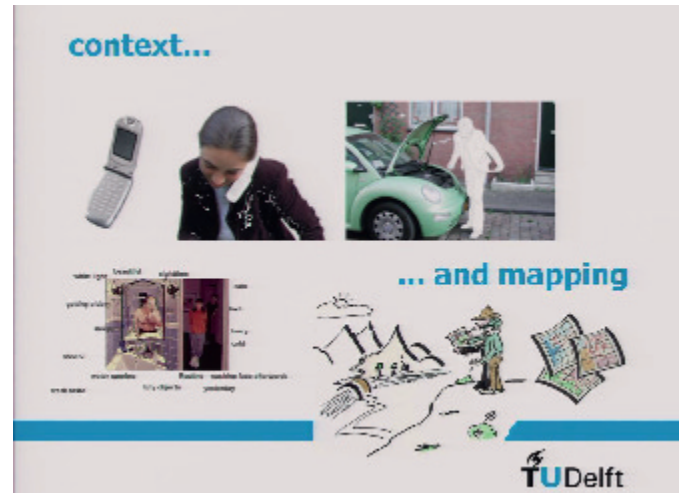
what is it?

A one-paragraph description of the contextmapping approach should mention context, expert, tools, and time:

- The meaning of a product lies in the way it functions in the *context* of the user's life. The design team must not just understand the product, or its use, but focus on all the factors which influence the experience of a product in use. We call this *the context of product use* and it includes factors such as place, situation, time, emotions, and other people.

- The user is the *expert* of his or her experiences. To gain insight into the variety of factors that influence the user's experiences, we need the users themselves. They are the only people who are experts of their own experience. Their input is as important as that from the other experts (in marketing, aesthetics, production, technology, etc), and it needs to be integrated. The user is not 'telling the designer what to do' as some designers fear, but participating in the design team.

- Appropriate *tools* are needed to support users so that they can express their experiences to the design team. The tools

involve typical design activities: making collages, scenarios, diagrams, and even models.

- You cannot ask a user, 'how do you experience your coffee ritual in the morning?' *Time* is needed to become aware of your own daily rituals with a product and which aspects influence the experience of using a product.

Over the last ten years, we have explored and tuned these elements, combining them in an established procedure for designing from user experiences: contextmapping (Sleeswijk Visser et al , 2005). The new MSc programmes in Delft have allowed us to involve about 200 design students each year since 2003, and dozens of them have used contextmapping in their graduation projects. It has especially helped in exploring the needs of large and small design projects for products and services in the fast-moving areas of consumer goods, building, electronic products, interiors and public spaces.

At this moment, the procedure of contextmapping is finding its way into industry on a large scale. Several examples of this come up in the 20 short graduate profiles on pages 43 to 49. About a dozen international workshops have spread the techniques to academics and practitioners outside TU Delft. The first PhD dissertation, 'Bringing the everyday life of people into design,' has been successfully defended, and four more PhD students in the ID-StudioLab are further developing the techniques.

what's in this book?

This book presents the harvest of the symposium. The morning programme consisted of three key notes: three doctors and ten masters. The first speaker was Liz Sanders, founder of SonicRim and MakeTools, who presented her experiences in organising 'mass co-creation' with large numbers of stakeholders in the design of hospitals. Jacob Buur reflected on ethnographic provocation techniques. Froukje Sleeswijk Visser gave an overview of how the contextmapping project interacted with students, and how it related to her PhD project, 'Bringing the

everyday life of people into design'. Ten of these students tellingly related their interaction with practice, and how they did (or did not) apply contextmapping in their jobs (they can be found among the 20 single-column mini presentations).

In the afternoon, about a hundred practitioners and academics brought in their own expertise, in seven tie-in workshops. Findings from these workshops are related in part two, and show how the field is coping with the new developments. Some themes recur throughout these pages, and echo themes from the morning presentations. For example, the roles of users, researchers, and designers are changing; overlapping in some places, mutually supporting each other in others. Furthermore, the developments are not advancing uniformly: some IT and electronics sectors are leading the way in adopting the new techniques, other product, service, and policy sectors are catching up, but still others, such as the building industry, are only just awakening to the new possibilities. Internationally, there are great differences too – not least because contextmapping methods naturally touch upon culture and attitude. But while the workshops revealed a varied and uneven playing field, they also indicated how far contextmapping has come – and even suggested how much further it will undoubtedly go in the future.