Participatory Design and Sustainability
a literature review of PDC Proceedings

Giacomo Poderi and Yvonne Dittrich
IT University of Copenhagen

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Influencing participants, systems, and society beyond the time-frame of PD interventions/projects has concerned PD since its early years.

- Participants’ empowerment to last beyond the intervention itself (Bødker 1996)
- Sustainable system design for better integration in use/work contexts (Kensing et al. 1998)
- Tackling challenges of sustainability as means to make PD relevant also outside academia (Dittrich et al. 2002)

Lack of a specific focus on the concern: often conflated and resolved into «mutual learning» (Iversen and Dindler 2014)
What does «sustainability» means in/for PD?

Literature review

- Search for «sustain*» in *Title, Keywords, Abstract*
- 14 editions of PDC (691 items)

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Papers read and annotated along the questions:
- How does sustainability link to the objectives?
- How do authors define “sustainability”?
- What is the target of sustainability?

Limitations
- Sample limited to PDC proceedings
- Analysis at structural & logic levels of papers
Use patterns for «sustainability»
**PD for Sustainability (PD4S)**

- Papers where PD emerges as an approach that can help tackling the challenges put forth by ‘sustainability sciences’

E.g. *Research agenda of Participatory Design (PD) in the area of collaborative transnational rule-making on global sustainability concerns*. The paper adopts a pragmatic approach to interdisciplinary work, identifying new opportunities for PD by pointing to *social science oriented processes that may be strengthened by the theory and practice of PD*. (Buhmann 2014)
Papers where the challenges of sustaining PD practice concretely are engaged with

E.g. In this paper, we present effects-driven IT development, which is an instrument supporting a proactive strategy for sustained participatory design and implementation of large IT projects. (Hertzum and Simonsen 2010)
Papers that focus on the challenges and approaches that emerge in relation to providing sustainable outcomes

E.g. Objective of the paper are: i) to clarify how Participatory Design could support the sustainability and the effectiveness of an alternative, ii) to present an experimentation with renewable energy as CPR as an alternative model to the actual vision of the energy system. (Capaccioli et al. 2016)
Some emergent and recurring themes

- PD4S: *reconfiguration* and *realignment* (of heterogeneous and diverging interests)

- SPDP: *design-in-use* and *tailorability*

- SPDR: *mutual learning*, *sense of ownership*, and *end-user development*

- SPDP&SPDR: *infrastructuring*
No sound nor explicit definition for «Sustainability»
- a given for granted concept hinting at ‘the ability to continue or be continued for a long time’

Makes it difficult to
- Understand what PDers are after concretely (e.g. Temporality of sustainability)
- Articulate the relationship between sustainability and other PD principles (e.g. Empowerment, participation)
- Retrospectively look at what has been achieved (e.g. Assessing sustainability?)
- Call for explicit position towards and operationalization of «sustainability»
A tentative (and broad) definition

Sustainability in PD as

the durability of alignments among the social and technical dimensions of PD processes, or PD outcomes, independently from and/or after the involvement and active intervention of an external participatory designer or researcher.
FULL
Davis, Janet. 2012. ‘Early Experiences with Participation in Persuasive Technology Design’.

SHORT
Haskel, Lisa. 2014. ‘Bridging the Gaps: Building on Experience with Participatory Design’.

OTHER
Eriksen, Mette Agger, Anna Seravalli, Per-Anders Hillgren, and Anders Emilson. 2016. ‘Collaboratively Articulating “Urban” Participatory Design?!’
Nilsson, Lina, Christel Borg, Malin Hofflander, and Sara Eriksen. 2010. ‘PD 3.1 to the Rescue: Challenges for Participatory Design in a Health Care Context’