

Chapter 3

In a finite world, what can we consistently commit to?

Research and text by Shay Raviv

**collaboration
for future**
The research

Collaborations for Future (CFF) is a design research programme in which ten designers and ten climate scientists collaborate one-on-one for nine months without predefined roles or outcomes. The question is what do they choose to work on, and how.

In the programme, we hold community meetings to support the participants in their collaboration process and create room for reflection. For the third community meeting, we invited design researcher and social designer Shay Raviv to host a discussion about the continuity of design initiatives leaning on the research she conducted - Beyond Projects. Now that the collaborations are shifting their gaze towards materialisation and implementation, it seemed more relevant than ever to host a conversation about what might come after.

Why do many social design projects remain short-term interventions? How can we go beyond the symbolic enactment of promising ideas? What is needed to overcome some barriers to the long-term continuation of design for society? Beyond Projects¹ is an in-depth research on social design projects, with outcomes bundled into a visual essay. Shay Raviv, together with a research team and several partners, explored which barriers in social design often limit social design projects' continuity and further development. At its core, the essay proposes five workable approaches to increase the sustainability of Social Design projects and the likelihood of implementation. By being aware of the path for continuity and ideally aiming at it from the beginning of the social design trajectory, some barriers toward implementation may be lowered (see summary below and visit the website for the full essay).

In this chapter, Shay Raviv introduces the workshop based on the Beyond Projects framework and describes some exercises she proposed to the group. She shared the outcomes and reflects on what happened when Beyond Projects was introduced to the Collaborations for Future participants. Raviv shares her insights from the workshop by considering two realms: the visible/material and the invisible/immaterial. This is also the main conclusion she draws from the session. These realms are equally essential departure points for developing paths for continuity, whether it is a seed of a project, an intention, a further developed experiment, or a standing initiative. In a finite world, what can we consistently commit to?

The material realm means exploring continuity from the various project's physical aspects, such as potential resource systems, transportation, and maintenance. The immaterial realm means exploring continuity from the initiative's invisible parts, like continuity strategies, relationships with institutions, desired effects, etc. When working with design processes, especially cross-disciplinary and open-ended ones, it is very challenging to work towards continuity. This chapter shows how explicitly jumping between the two realms can help keep design collaborations to evolve. Paving a continuity path which is grounded and responsible while also stretching the shared understanding of what the design initiative can become.

¹ Flip over to the end of this chapter to read more about why and how Shay Raviv developed the Beyond Projects research, and what its main lessons are.

Workshop methodology: Feet rooted in the ground, head floating in the sky

Raviv expanded the Beyond Projects approach for this CFF community meeting by translating it into a collaborative workshop. The session combined pragmatic thinking with imaginative, abstract notions. Different exercises supported the teams of designers and scientists in reflecting on what is or could be their Beyond Projects journey.

The afternoon started with a quick association discussion: 'What is Beyond Projects for you in one word?':

For some, Beyond Projects is about the beginning of something or its next cycle: birth, afterlife, and afterbirth.

For others, it is about helping something last: maintenance.

Some people relate it to passing something forward: handing over.

For many, it is about the effect, the transmission of energy that takes its own path: snowball, ripple effect in the sea, throwing something into the air and hoping it lands.

It is often remarkable how first associations summarise so well what could then evolve into hours of discussions.

The workshop exercises included context mapping, plotting envisioned outputs by contexts, applying Beyond Projects' framework to each collaboration, bodily mapping and imagining the continuity state of the project as a creature. In between, Raviv shared the research to provide background and support the teams.

Some exercises mentioned above were rather structured and practical, others imaginative and conceptual. The workshop methodology invited the teams to position their research further by focusing on the context in which they act. In parallel, the workshop encouraged imaginative, abstract thinking to enable new conversations about continuity and impact to emerge. It was an invitation to root the feet in the ground while the head floated in the sky. This approach seemed to be a fruitful way of working together that relates well to the encounter of science and design, even more so when working on the urgency of climate change. We need imagination, but we also need practical actions. We should not choose between the two but create a space for both attitudes.

Matilde: What I found most interesting was the whole idea of using the project to involve the community, how the work can impact it (or not), and what happens physically to the work afterwards. As I'm working site-specific, the question of the actual impact and involvement the work can have is very central. Also, what happens to it? Can I repurpose it? Should I leave it behind? Is it my decision to make? Can it be helpful to the community in Texel somehow?

How departing from material and immaterial realms supports continuity in open-ended collaborations

Beyond Project research deals with the continuity and longevity of social design projects. These endeavours are incredibly challenging as they try to imagine the future of an open-ended, explorative process that embodies not knowing in its essence. Social design projects often try to act in an environment between standard organisational structures, which is another challenge in achieving a sustainable future.

In this workshop, the Beyond Projects framework was applied to a design-science collaboration on climate change urgency. Collaboration for the Future, as the name suggests, takes a similar approach. It works for the future planet by bringing together unexpected collaborations. The programme aims to provide guidance and support while maintaining an open-ended process. According to this programme, undefined outcomes are necessary so that intentions can emerge beyond what the conventional role-division and commissioning models prescribe.

The workshop tried to support the teams in working towards longevity while embracing their explorative state. The objective was to add value for each team, wherever they were in their design research process.

Lisa: "Having this workshop at this stage (the stage where we make our ideas tangible) was very helpful. Actually naming what we want out of it and what we want to do with it gave some new directions to how we should design it. I don't know yet how, but I feel like we have created some new requirements for this project now, which will help shape the outcome".

Analysing the afternoon's discussions, exercises, output, and team feedback resulted in a new idea, adding to the Beyond Projects arguments. Looking back, some of the discussions and exercises we had departed from the material world - tangible, visible, concrete, as a means to further continuity. This material realm as a departure point also helps in working with and within the scarcity of resources. However, at times, it was the other way around – departing from the immaterial realm, imaginative, abstract, intangible, as a way to open up the conversation of 'the day after' the CFF lab. Below is a description of some of the main outcomes of the session, mapped through two entry points, from the material realm and the non-material realm.

Workshop methodology: Feet rooted in the ground, head floating in the sky

The designers and scientists of Collaborations for Future are working together to create something new that is cross-disciplinary or yet to be (necessarily) designated to one place. That is often the case with open-ended design processes, which employ other commissioning models than the client-service provider model. And when designers are unsure what they are working towards, it is hard, and may feel frustrating, to be busy with 'practicalities and logistics.'

Let's talk about storage and transportation:

Asking very practical questions early on, such as transportation and storage, can be seen as a Beyond Projects exercise. Where will this work be stored after the presentation/exhibition/accumulation moment? Who/how will it be transported?

Instead of dismissing these 'dull' questions as too practical, they can open up new possibilities about the next steps. These questions can stimulate shared ownership and raise the consequences of the work being produced. This is especially relevant when working on climate change urgency, and it is a conversation that needs to occur sooner rather than later.

When addressed as an invitation to play with different scenarios, very practical questions can offer a helpful way to work towards sustainable continuity.

Frederike: "I think it is very nice to think about continuity at this stage in time. But for now, we are not focussing on that. Yet, it is always good to keep it in mind and see how and where to set the results up so they can be reused. Linking this to PBL (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency), we thought of an open collaboration room where designers could be invited on a more regulated basis to foster these collaborations. Where should we store the result? Can we show it somewhere else together (Willie and me) besides the Dutch Design Week?"

Nikki: "The challenge of storage and travelling the exhibition across the country can make us anticipate it. We also have to see how big the end result will be before diving into that. Besides, we should consider who will transport the work after DDW 24."

Design for Maintenance

The workshop discussed maintenance as an aspect of continuity. If we want to design a long-lasting initiative, we must consider how to take care of it, keep it vital, and maintain it. Including maintenance thoughts in the early design phase can feed into the design choices.

When designing objects and physical spaces, it is a bit easier to include maintenance plans as part of the design. Maintenance is harder to imagine when designing immaterial outcomes - programmes, systems, communities, and networks. Yet even in the case of tangible outcomes, as we know, many artefacts and buildings are not designed for long-term maintenance and, therefore, are often quickly replaced with newer things. But there is more to it, as discussed in the workshop. It is also about how something new usually feels more exciting, engaging, and desired. That may be rooted in our (capitalistic) culture. Furthermore, maintaining something often feels like a secondary, non-creative task.

As beautifully captured in the art maintenance manifesto (the maintenance art manifesto of Mireille Laderne-Miquelez), read spontaneously by Karl during the workshop:

Maintenance is a drag.

It takes all the fucking time. The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs.

Minimum wages, a housewife's equal no pay. Clean your desk. Wash the dishes. Clean the floor. Wash your clothes. Wash your tools.

Change the baby's diaper. Finish the report. Correct the typos.

Mend the fence. Keep the customer happy. Throw out the stinking garbage.

Watch out. Don't put things in your nose. What shall I wear?

I have no socks. Pay your bills. Don't litter.

Save string. Wash your hair. Change the sheets.

Go to the store. I'm out of perfume. Say it again.

He doesn't understand. Seal it again. It leaks.

Go to work. This art is dusty. Clear the table.

Call him again. Flush the toilet. Stay young.

After this workshop, the teams will hopefully consider maintenance as they consolidate their research outcome design, whatever the outcome may be.

"Nikki: Lisa and I have already considered a lot, but this session made us think we should take maintenance to another level. We must first make concrete what our artefacts will look like and then check how to maintain that. Besides, we have to ask ourselves how we can continue the story and maintain it after DDW 24. We have thought of that, but now it should become more concrete."

Bodily Mapping for Imagining Effect exercise

Bodily mapping (also called Empathy Mapping) is a tool for better understanding the group we are designing holistically. It is usually used in design research to identify user needs. In this workshop, the teams were invited to use this framework to imagine the effect they hope to achieve with their proposal and where they wish to add value. The areas of the body are used here almost as metaphors, helping us to think constructively and widely. Starting from the body - the physical world - to unpack complex abstract questions. The framework could help make that design initiative effect more explicit and consider it from different perspectives.

Bodily Mapping

Considering the body parts as different lenses, what effect do you hope to achieve?

Cognitive ('head'): critical thinking, question formulation, sense-making, problem-solving, engagement with theories & approaches

Socio-emotional ('heart'): visions, normative values & ethics, attitudes, affect, emotional responses, social awareness, perspective-taking, empathic listening, care, intentional & consistent self-reflection

Behavioural ('hands'): action, conduct, performance, experiential learning, skills & techniques, practical application & engagement

Contextual ('feet'): connection with places & people, networks

Context mapping exercise:

To imagine and work towards Beyond Projects, it is essential to identify and understand the context in which the teams aim to act. So, if it is about handing over, in which environment could that occur? If it is about the ripple effect, where do we immerse in to begin generating that effect?

As obvious as it may sound, having concrete discussions about context is often overlooked. When working on major, complex questions, it can take time to define a clear context. Defining a context may cause a feeling of limitation and tension in the creative process. But doing so, in an early stage of the process, nurtures conversations about continuity. And it can always be seen as a step in the road, not necessarily the end goal. During this exercise, the teams were invited to choose how they referred to the context within this collaboration. Is it an event, place, group, or institution? (Keeping in mind it's often a combination or in between). Then, the teams plotted the design outputs they had imagined thus far according to the different types of contexts. This intervention functioned as a kind of clustering and sense-making—not so much about making choices as about finding the logic again of each trajectory. In the case of this workshop, most designers and scientists related to the context as an event/period. So, temporality, a moment in time, is the most relevant understanding of context within this design research trajectory. Considering the timely urgency of climate change, that resonates very much.

An example of considering the continuity of the research using the tangible realm and establishing a context was the case of teams working with PBL (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency). The two teams discussed starting a creative space within the institution where artists could collaborate with scientists. That space could provide a working environment and be a storytelling space. A space in which abstract, theoretical research is brought to life with creative disciplines for more people to engage with it.

Merel: "What happens after October? Do we want to stay in touch? Do we want more things to follow from this? Who can we contact to join our idea and movement? How can we set things in motion as a brand? What is our 'business plan', and what are our KPIs? Also, in the longer term?"

The immaterial realm of Beyond Projects

In parallel with considering the material realm as a departure point for continuity discussions, the imaginative world can help us expand our own boundaries. When faced with difficult questions of impact, desired effect, or added value, we can call on the power of imagination.

Tim: "To me, it was an eye-opener. I was too focused on creating something that I did not think much about what to do with the project after the exhibition or the lasting impact we want it to have."

Creating creatures as a way to imagine and embody impact:

In the final exercise, the teams were invited to use the power of their imagination. They were asked to imagine their Beyond Project as a state, a being, an alive thing. Or, in other words, what will become their Beyond Project state? How will it meet the world?

Raviv proposed a few additional questions to guide the imagination process:

- What could help you shape this being? (process, movement, effect, remains, metaphors)
- In what shape/s does your Beyond Projects meet the world?
- Where does your being live?
- What nurtures it? What sustains it?
- Does/will it change shape?
- What may risk/harm it?
- How does it relate to time?

The teams conceptualised different beings to articulate the long-term change the collaboration aspires to, which is often abstract and hard to grasp. This helped make the impact, the effect, and the remains of the collaboration explicit. It added to a shared understanding among the designer and scientist. Returning to the material world, this final exercise resulted in a beautiful series of paper creatures.

Tim and Colette imagine their Being Project state to be fluffy. It is something people want to engage with, soft and inviting. And sometimes that fluff comes off and sticks to people. As such, it can move on from person to person.

Matilde's creation is somewhere between creature and geological landscape, it's ambiguous. It's a shape-shifting sea creature and looks a bit like a skeleton. Her project will touch a little bit on the heavy side of the topic (Climate change in the Wadden Sea) but it's also playful and imaginative. As she cannot fix the problem, she is exploring what new perspectives she can develop. The shape-shifter metaphor can inspire Matilde's process: will shapeshifting be part of the process, or is the project a catalyser for change?

The PBL collaborators - Isabela, Frederike, Willie - formed 1 group - Isabela presents their imagined PPL art and science studio, which offers funding and a space for experimentation. It currently hosts two projects. Willie presents an object: the hourglass. It symbolises that time is running. It is a reminder, but it can also be turned on its side to stop the clock. Willie hopes to contribute to slowing or reversing the effects on the climate.

Merel found the exercise a bit vague and challenging, so she made it very concrete. Her creation is a representation of ice in the Arctic and on land. She aims to substitute the ice we are melting in the Arctic by creating more on land. (Playful, ironic, provocative)

Lisa and Nikki created an amplifier. It shows different perspectives and is a travelling creature that goes into different futures. It has canons of confetti, which are also like seeds. They hope something will grow from their project.

Riad's metaphor is both methodological and religious. He talks about the moment Eve eats the apple in the Bible. It's a moment of shame for humanity, quite like today with climate change. But it also signifies a shift in understanding of the world. Suddenly, Adam and Eve see they are naked, which they had never realised before. This was also a shift in relating to the weather by covering the body differently. His creation is also a satellite. It's connected to nature, but it never touches the ground; it stays distant. For him, this is similar to humanity's struggle to connect to their ecology.

Andrea's creation shows elements moving together organically. Sometimes, they can align. They are close together or distant (like her and Evy?) but always moving. It is a transformative process. Things can change and adapt to new contexts and situations; new elements can join and separate. It's a process of adapting.

Karl created a non-binary ecological virus that infects the brain and changes behaviour to make its host always reflect on its own footprint. He hopes to infect KNMI. (Virus can spread exponentially - The more infected, the faster it spreads from colleague to colleague.

In their follow-up reflections, the designers described this as a constructive way of setting intentions for this collaboration. The fictional creatures became a conversation tool about positive impact, a way to make the implicit intentions explicit and expand the realm of possibilities. What may have been hard to articulate before became, with the help of the creatures, a new shared understanding amongst the teams.

New collaboration and funding structures:

The programme Collaboration for Futures aims to facilitate space for cross-disciplinary work beyond institutional boundaries. This experiment is very much needed, also when considering continuity. Many designs for societal change initiatives encounter financial and bureaucratic challenges in going Beyond Projects (see essay: identifying-barriers). For example, getting funding to start new work is most likely easier than implementing and maintaining existing work. So, if we aim to have a long-lasting positive effect with design initiatives, a positive impact, we need to create better conditions for it. That may mean alternative funding programmes and commissioning models. These should stimulate and support design for maintenance, systems for handover and care, and resources for implementation and continuity.

The power of imagination is very much needed here, as institutional policies are abstract and complex. Collaboration for Futures sets to imagine spaces between current institutional restrictions, find small gaps and open them up for more people to enter.

Karl: "The discussion helped me create a fictional translation of the desired outcome of my collaboration with Frank and the KNMI (The Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute). It didn't have to be the literal final outcome, but inventing a character to embody the shared values and goals of Frank and I helped me be more precise about the intentions of creating an outcome".

Willie: I would say that a continuation would definitely be interesting. The "thing" we are designing is also something we see can be reused for different materials Frederike is working on. I hope the physical and graphical outcomes can be used by Frederike throughout her PhD and could help with presentations. Yet, the problem is a money flow. Making more physical and visual work with PBL would require a proper project request from PBL.

Colette: I think Tim and I have been thinking about longevity since the beginning, which had halted us many times from deciding on a path. I think the maintenance will be hard, as I think it falls on the designer to do this without funding. Currently, we are at the stage where we know what we want to impress on viewers/ participants, and we know the furry substances that come off of our furry project to be like dandelion seeds attaching to everything in a friendly manner.

When Beyond Projects meets Collaborations for Future participants

Before the session, Shay worried that thoughts about continuity in an early design research phase might create resistance and hinder the creative process. That was not the case. The combination of pragmatic content and room for imagination offered a certain ease. Asking questions that depart from both the material and immaterial realm, not as a contradiction but as 'and and', seems helpful for the complex process of going Beyond Projects. Imagining paths for sustainable continuity might quickly translate into making actionable plans. But that's where creativity may be limited. At the same time, thinking only abstractly about impact and desired effects may remain an interesting conversation that doesn't translate to decision-making, bringing us a step further. This workshop provided an interesting addition to the Beyond Project research. In a way, Beyond Projects can be seen as an invitation to engage with two realms simultaneously, the material and non-material, as departure points for discussions about longevity. The invitation is to tap consciously into these realms to initiate new perspectives that help designers work towards continuity rather than one-off intervention.

Thus, rather than discussing plans, we can talk about setting intentions. There is a fine line between the two. The latter is the invitation to imagine possibilities and then consciously face the desired direction. If we want to walk somewhere, we must first face a direction. Setting intentions means making the direction we face explicit and stating the purpose of carving the road as we walk it. How the path will look like, which stepping stones will be built or which obstacles removed will unfold each step of the way.

Riad: "My main takeaways from the session include rethinking the collaboration model and what form it can take. One of the first significant points has been the power of playfulness when working with our hands, creating something on the spot and developing a character or a narrative around serious topics. Such a format allows creativity to flourish and look into the project from a previously hidden perspective. While the research stage is vital for deeply understanding a topic and truly diving deeply into it, it can sometimes hinder its accessibility. The chance to create "characters" that represent our project gave me more insights into effectively communicating concepts that are still vague.

Additionally, it made me reflect on the longevity of the project and its continuity. "Beyond" for me means working towards not a final material project but towards a concept that can float and be fluid beyond the designer or scientist's presence and commitment. Creating a project that can stand independently and have a new life would be a potent method for interdisciplinary collaboration".

Beyond Projects

Why do many social design projects remain short-term interventions? How can we go beyond the symbolic enactment of promising ideas? What is needed to overcome some barriers to the long-term continuation of design for society?

Shay Raviv, a design researcher and social designer, conducted in-depth research on social design projects and bundled the outcomes into a visual essay, *Beyond Projects*. Together with a research team and several partners, they explored which barriers in social design often limit social design projects' continuity and further development. At its core, the essay proposes five workable approaches to increase the sustainability of Social Design projects and the likelihood of implementation. By being aware of the path for continuity and ideally aiming at it from the beginning of the social design trajectory, some barriers toward implementation may be lowered. The essay invites the creative industry, public organisations, governmental agencies, companies, and every other party that believes in the role design can play in contributing to socially urgent problems to appropriate this framework and explore how it can help a promising initiative fulfil its potential in the real world. (visit the website for the full essay).

Social design is a broad field in which the output of design trajectories differs vastly. Each output needs a different process, strategy, and action to achieve sustainable continuity. In addition to having diverse design outputs, social designers are also legally and financially organised in different ways. Given the broad spectrum of social design practice, it is hard to draw strict protocols on how each design entity might implement design propositions. In addition, other major variables come into play when considering the implementation of social design initiatives, such as the context of the initiative or the period in time. Defining one process, recipe, or roadmap towards sustainable continuity is difficult and perhaps unrealistic. Therefore, the essay proposes several approaches for going "Beyond Projects", which can hopefully be applied to the broad spectrum of outputs in the social design sector. Each approach could be further detailed in an action plan that fits the initiative. While these approaches are described as distinct, they can overlap. All five approaches manifest the energy and commitment needed to enable continuity and the creative effort that is an inherent part of the implementation process:

- Embedded approach: embedding an initiative in an existing organisation or institution
- Independent approach: creating a new self-standing initiative
- In-house approach: becoming a product or service owner
- Methodological approach: translating the initiative into transferable knowledge
- Place-based approach: creating a new (physical) hyper-local space

For elaboration on the approaches, visit the 'proposing-approaches' chapter:

<https://www.beyondprojects.shayraviv.com/proposing-approaches>

Colophon

Collaborations for Future: the research

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Chapter #3: In a finite world, what can we consistently commit to?

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