Participatory design for sustainable cultures

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Shaping future sustainable cultures can be obtained by new methods, new mindsets, and new strategies. Despite earlier studies in this field there is a knowledge gap on how participatory design can contribute to sustainable cultures. Through case studies it was explored how participatory design can contribute to the built environment in three public institutions. The case studies identified some relevant issues for sustainable design practices. The first context of the study was a school in the United Kingdom where politicians reflected on the high ideological aims of pupil participation but where the strategy failed in practice because of lack of realistic procedures. Learning to be aware of these pitfalls has relevance in practical processes based in sustainable ideology. The second case was at a hospital in Norway where people in a hospital co-created public art. This created a change of communication culture at the ward, but due to lack of everyday follow up it lasted only shortly. It is discussed how everyday follow up is necessary to contribute to long lasting change. The third context was a community based development of public art in an urban park in Finland. The intention during the planning of the park was to be in dialogue with the people and the architecture in the environment. Through placing sculptures representing interior objects in the park the branding of the area changed. It changed from being an urban environment with little social activity to become a social meeting point and a landmark in the city. Through the case studies it is discussed how the participation of people contributed not only to the material design but also to a new emerging social life; a new culture. The discussion aims to identify relevant potential and pitfalls for such cultural innovation.

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