Initiating Participation: Methodological and Practical Challenges of Living Lab Projects for Early Stages of Research and Development

Andreas Bischof[1], Albrecht Kurze[1], Sören Totzauer[1], Michael Storz[1], Kevin Lefeuvre[1], Arne Berger[1]

[1] Technical University of Chemnitz, Chair Media Informatics, Research Group

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Abstract

Involving people in research and design is a common goal of Living Lab projects. A growing body of work is critically investigating the meaning and quality of participatory methods, seeking to understand the foundations and implications of such user involvement. However, it is rarely addressed from a methodological point of view, how participation is initiated within a design process. The paper discusses practical challenges and methods for initiating participation in an early stage of design. We present the case of a »Social Living Lab« project for designing technology for older adults. Thereby we combined several methods of user involvement and outreach in the center of a mid-sized German city. By analyzing and reflecting our activities, we derive methodological implications for the ongoing debate on configuring participation through »Living Labs«.

Keywords: *Social Living Lab; Methodology; Participation; Initiating; Living Lab Project*

1 Introduction

Involving people in research and development has become a common goal in many scientific communities. Various practices and methods of user involvement are discussed in hindsight to their practicability, outcome, meaning for the people involved and their ethical and political connotations. Remarkably, this discourse is rarely addressing the beginning of participatory projects. Although Vines et al. asked for reflections on „beginnings of participation“in their special issue on participation in Human-Computer Interaction (Vines et al. 2015b), none of the published articles addresses those as a key topic.

This is particularly interesting for the growing methodological interest on the “fuzzy front end of design” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008: 4-5): The questions how a project discovers, understands and frames its problems reaches back to the beginnings of design theory (e.g., Rittel & Webber, 1973). It is surprising that this problem has to our knowledge not yet been linked to participatory methodology forLiving Lab projects. Instead, it remains mostly unclear, how the involved people and methods influence or negotiate the aims of participatory research and development when setting the goals for a research project. We want to discuss this observation as methodical question, how to initiate participation in early project stages by applying a »Social Living Lab« project approach (Dezuanni, et al. 2016).

In the first section we take up on the discourse on configuring participation in Human-Computer Interaction (e.g., Vines et al., 2013). Thereby we highlight two crucial factors pre-defining the participatory negotiation of design problems before they are tackled, such as the temporal structure of research and design projects. In the second section we will critically discuss the concept of »Living Labs« as an environment for early co-creative activities.

In the third section we will present the case of an implementation of such a *»Social Living Lab«* project to initiate participation, outset design goals and structure future researching a design project for older adults. This includes the depiction of the concrete methods we used and crucial factors of their conduction.
In the fourth section we discuss the results of the application of this framework. By reflecting upon our experiences, we derive methodological implications for the initiation of participation from an HCI researcher’s point of view. This includes the importance of practical enactment of participatory methods and the creation of occasion for unstructured encounters with people.

Concluding, we discuss the limitations of our case and derive therefrom the organisational requirement to schedule and budget such initiating phases for participatory projects.

2 Methodological Challenges of Initiating Participation

Participatory researchers and designers have always favored to use a set of methods instead of one *single participatory method* (Kensing & Blomberg, 1998: 177). However, only some have developed methodologies that systematically organize their participatory design practices. “Contextual Design” for example, provides a series of process steps: contextual inquiry, interpretation, data consolidation, visioning, storyboarding, user environment design, and prototyping (Beyer & Holtzblatt, 1997). The “Cooperative Experimental Systems Development” approach is another example for overarching participatory design methodology (Grønbæk et al., 1995). It emphasizes the active involvement of participants throughout the entire development process, suggesting the use of prototyping methods from the very beginning of inquiry. But even those well-balanced methodological frameworks struggle to “inform and inspire the exploration of open-ended questions” that stand typically in the beginning of design in HCI and CSCW (Sanders & Stappers, 2008: 6-7), such as ‘how can we improve the quality of life for older adults?’, or ‘how can we integrate communities through digital media?’.

Sanders and Stappers refer to these open-ended question as “fuzzy front end of design”, since the ambiguity and complex nature of these questions is necessarily too large to be solved by a series of design methods. Instead, at this early point in participatory projects “it is often not known whether the deliverable of the design process will be a product, a service, an interface, a building, etc.” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008: 7). However, this phase is critical for the factors enabling/disabling participation. Contrary to the methods of designing and evaluating a product for and with participants, this “fuzzy front end” remains mostly unreported.

Central challenges for initiating participation are e.g., how deep the involvement of participants should be (Caroll & Rosson, 2013; Whittle 2014), how researchers and participants co-construct each other within the process (Le Dantec & Fox, 2015), and who should actually benefit from the participatory involvement (Vines et al., 2013). In line with these studies, we argue that the crucial factors for enabling participation become operative well before a Living Lab or Living Lab project opens its doors. In the following section we present two factors that challenge the initiation of participation in such contexts. Instead of distinguishing them as formal aspects of participation (e.g., Fish et al. 2011, Kelty et al. 2014), we want to consider them as *practical problems* occurring when initiating participation in actual Living Labs.

Defining Problem and Solution

Overall, there is high orientation towards solutions in research and design overfraing the importance of defining the problem of a participatory undertaking. The key methodological challenge for working participatory is to avoid limiting the “activities in a process to maximize

a single outcome, usually the ‘product’ that is to be designed” (Whittle, 2014: 129). By narrowing down the interactive negotiations between the definition of the problem and the search for solution too early, a central opportunity of participatory design is missed. In particular, the definition of the problem mostly does not happen in a participatory manner, instead research assignments as well as pragmatic considerations like methods and materials at hand carve out a “useful problem” for design and research processes. Sometimes even the technological solution of the addressed problem is defined before a design process even started. Carried out alike participatory methods are not participatory, but merely an inquiry on the acceptance of pre-defined solutions. Instead the ability for participants to reconfigure the design process and its goals (Vines et al., 2013: 436) is crucial to participation.

Defining Target Group and Needs

The definition of “users”, “stakeholders” or “beneficiaries” and their needs is in the same way crucial to configure participation. As has been shown for elderly target groups, prevalent discourses among the researchers might skew the picture of addressed users: Vines et al. found for example that the discourses in the development of computer systems often classify elderly as a lonely, deficient, and homogeneous group (Vines et al., 2015a). In comparison to gerontologic research the authors showed that these conceptions descended from assumptions and eventually configured the participation within these projects. This is an issue of self-conception and methodological conduction: A recurring problem in socio-gerontologic contexts is the intense involvement of secondary and tertiary users like medical and care personal to design technology for elderly adults. Involving participants whose age, habitus, or cultural milieu vary from the researchers’ and practitioners’ backgrounds challenges the personal and societal assumptions that implicitly configure participation (Vines et al., 2015a: 2:20).

3 »Social Living Labs« to Initiate Participation

In order to avoid these unintended but common configurations of participation of a design project ahead of its implementation, we propose a methodological framework to empirically ground the initial phase of research and practice in a Living Lab project. Therefore, we critically discuss the potential of Living Lab projects as initial ‘incubator‘ for such a grounded research agenda.

Due to their nature, design problems in social contexts have no pre-defined starting, nor stopping rule (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The researchers and practitioners are thus asked to structure the process accordingly to their research interest, the participants and the phenomena they are dealing with. In order to create a starting point for such a grounded research agenda, we propose to use »Living Lab« projects as an incubator to discover, understand and frame the problems of the design project in a participatory manner.

»Living Labs« have been prominently discussed as a research concept to enable and facilitate participation. The concept is framed as open and innovative, close to “real life environments”, enabling multiple methods interacting with users and assigning them an active role in the design process (Ogonowski et al., 2013: 1540). However, the methodological cornerstones of »Living Labs« are not systematically defined: either parts of the compound can be emphasized. Accordingly, the term »Living Lab« is as well used for laboratory studies in artificial environments, as for participatory pop up-stores in inner cities. Furthermore, Living Labs can be institutionalized organizations that run several projects over a longer course of time, or rather short-termed projects. In this article, we focus on Living Lab projects which can be implemented within research and design projects.

On the one hand, »Living Labs« imply broad activities and a strong motivation to involve users. On the other hand, it remains sometimes unclear, how participation is methodically facilitated and how meaningful it is for participants as well as for the projects themselves. Meta-studies on »Living Labs« show accordingly diverging paradigms of participation. Pallot et al. (2010) distinguish a rather observing (“user-centered”) and a rather participatory (i.e. partner in design) mindset of applications. Comparative studies (Følstad, 2008; Mulvena et al., 2010; Vanmeerbeek et al., 2015) correspondingly state an ambiguity of participatory activities in »Living Labs«. A quantitative survey amongst 56 »Living Lab« initiators (Mulvena et al., 2011) emphasized the ambivalent condition of user involvement. For example, a clear majority of the respondents (80%) answered it was easy to get in contact with people, but 61% found it difficult, or very difficult to involve all groups of potentially affected people (Mulvena et al., 2011: 21). The authors concluded that more complex and participatory interactions were less frequently achieved (ibid.). The main mode of interaction seems to have been methodologically not controlled kinds of interaction as one answer in the questionnaires puts it: “the human presence, it's the best way to involve the users” (Mulvena et al., 2011: 22). To conclude, the concept of »Living Lab« provides great chances to engage with potential stakeholders, but lacks the level of reflection, grounded research agendas imply. This becomes particularly evident, when »Living Labs« are used as a mean of “evaluation” or “testing” of usability.

In contrast, we argue for considering »Living Lab« projects as an incubator for participation on a very early point in a project. Similar to the function of the biological or business incubators as institutions a »Social Living Lab« can provide an environment to grow and maintain participation for the beginnings of projects (Dezuanni, et al. 2016). It allows a multitude of activities and methods (see next section) in order to involve people in the discovery, understanding and framing of a design problem. The methodological ambiguity of low-threshold contact between organizers and participants becomes a strength than, since the negotiation of the “fuzzy front end of design” requires a relatively broad scope. In the following section we want to give an example, how such an incubating »Living Lab« can be structured.

4 Case Study: Setting up a »Social Living Lab« to Initiate Participation

In the following section, we want to depict the key elements of a public »Living Lab« project we implemented in summer 2016 as place and occasion to initiate participation at the beginning of a design project on Internet of Things technology for older adults. In order to present our case, we elaborate on the research goals and the combination of methods chosen to reach them in the first step. Referring to the features derived from our methodological framework, we highlight three important aspects of the implementation. Upfront we want to introduce place and duration of the »Living Lab« shortly.

We conceptualized a 30-day public »Living Lab« with diverse outreach and inclusion activities to initiate participation. We rented a temporarily unoccupied shop in an inner-city pedestrian area of mid-sized German city. The former boutique with a size of around 100m² offered ground-level access and was within sight of the marketplace, just in the middle of a vibrant area with shopping options as well as restaurants and bars. We were open from Monday to Thursday from 10 am to 6 pm, but reserved some timeslots during these times to conduct closed workshops. Thereby around half of the week was dedicated to conduct formal methods (i.e., group discussions), whereas the other half was open to occasional visits and public events.

Goals and Methods of Case Study

Goals

Our group consisting of six researchers originally trained in design, engineering, computer science, and sociology aims to design Internet of Things devices for older adults in the context of neighborhoods. When we began to engage in co-design activities and fieldwork in neighborhoods, we soon realized obstacles: The technological basis (i.e., smart home technology) was not very accepted among older adults, and the willingness to participate in our project was relatively low. As a group with none background in care, gerontology or social work at the beginning of the project, we did not know much about the life of elderly.
After a series of one-day workshops with experts, we decided to set up a »Living Lab« project, where our knowledge on the lifeworld's of older adults and methods to reach them could incubate. The main goals thus were to identify potential stakeholders and to create access, methods and tools for a participatory, co-creative processes. But we were also interested to put the aim of designing technology to encourage the inter-generational communication in neighborhoods to discussion:

- Integrating participants in the negotiations on the aims and means of our project
- Contacting local stakeholders and initiating relationship to build mutual trust
- Understanding technological and communicative practices of older adults
- Empowering participants to understand, criticize and independently use IoT devices
- Co-ideation of possible usage scenarios for IoT enhanced communication in the

neighborhood

Methods of User Involvement

As implied by these multilayered goals, we aimed on facilitating different levels of user involvement and co-creation. We addressed those with a set of methods from participatory design and qualitative research.

Engaging discourses on living together

A timetable with twelve public events like talks and workshops hosted in the »Living Lab« was organized, published and spread among local neighborhood organizations with the goal to attract possible stakeholders and engage with them. Furthermore, we conducted group discussions with a critical stimulus (Superflux, 2015) that fostered discussions on the questions if or how our participants would want to live in a "smart home" environment or not. We also ran a campaign to send us photographs from places in the urban region that are linked with specific connotations like "This place needs a change-over", or "I like to be here with friends". We made these photographs explorable on a multi-touch table, publicly approachable in the »Living Lab«. People could thereby view and comment the pictures but also engage in group discussions on the depicted places.

Understanding needs

We conducted group discussions and interviews with older adults in order to understand, how elderly communicate and call for support in their housing context. The questions were phrased quite broad: "How do you stay in contact with your friends, relatives or neighbors?", or "Which devices do you use?" The conversations moved from here to topics like family or intergenerational issues as well as societal problems or the health of the interviewed person. In order to understand communicative needs of especially older participants we regularly visited field sites outside the »Living Lab«: For example, we conducted group discussions in a retirement home and a social center and did participant observation in computer courses for elderly in a local community center.

Empowering technological literacy

We initiated several activities that aimed at empowering participants for a more autonomous dealing with "smart" technology. Driving from the competence-based concept of "technical action" (von Wensierski & Sigeneger, 2015) we wanted to increase the participants' knowledge, ability of critical reflection, and self-determined use - with the ultimate goal to enable them to create own applications. Therefore, we developed own workshop formats. One aimed at the exploration of commercial wearables with the aim to inform about the data flows of the applications. We also implemented a media education concept for an intergenerational workshop to learn the basics in programming Arduino technology. Thereby, we seek to adapt do it yourself and maker movement approaches in academic design research. Additionally, we provided technical help on a low-threshold level and became a "smartphone clinic" (see next section).

Co-Ideation

We also conducted actual co-design methods on prototypes in order to involve participants in the ideation of IoT applications for the context of housing. Supported by a specifically created interactive design tool (Lefeuvre et al., 2016), we let participants explore combinations of IoT sensors and actuators and encouraged them to develop scenarios of application, such as "How would you inform your neighbor that you need help for buying goods?" Using the LEGO serious play-kit we also conducted a co-design game to explore desirable and less desirable situations of living together. The aim of this was to rebuild small world models of apartment houses after criteria provided by design cards, such as "make it more/less communicative".

Features of Implementation

We chose a rather narrative form for presenting key features of the implementation, including details that became influential for the resulting knowledge and further steps in the research agenda.

Recruiting

It was important to us to initiate broad contact with diverging potential stakeholders (i.e., individuals, social workers, neighborhood centers) in order to find out, how to address and involve them in our processes. The »Living Lab« project was therefore conceptualized as open space rather than a closed lab setting. We avoided any extraordinary dress code or behavior; frequently we were regarded as a student initiative or a startup company. The »Living Lab« took place over the whole month of June 2016, which overlapped with the start of summer holidays, beneficial to the number of people strolling in the inner city during the daytime. Beside the focus on older adults, there were just a few criteria to narrow down the addressed groups during the »Living Lab«. We did not look for 'general elderly', a conception that is misrepresenting elderly as a homogenous group (Vines et al., 2015a: 2:12-2:15). Instead we decided to acquire participants in an iterative manner based on their social networks organized around local initiatives, active individuals, or shared activities. The underlying concept was to target communities emerging from social relations (Caroll, 2001; Le Dantec & Fox, 2015: 1349), e.g., elderly that become connected through a mutual computer course.

The main sampling strategy used was a variation of "snowball sampling" led by the social connections of older adults. Initially we followed two approaches to reach out to these networks: public relations and connecting to organizations. Firstly, we adopted a broad public relation strategy using press releases and social media, which established a basis of trust among occasional visitors, who had heard about our public »Living Lab« and stopped by. Secondly, we contacted the organizational heads of around 40 groups or institutions that were mentioned in brochures providing local services and amenities for older adults. With the responding ten groups we arranged visits and introduced our aim to acquire participants and visitors. Additionally, we offered them to come to the »Living Lab« to introduce themselves to other publics. "Social hubs", such as very active individuals, professional social workers, or groups of interest proved to be the most valuable contacts for that sampling strategy.

Engaging

We did not understand the initiation of participation as a separate work package for a specialized team member. All researchers took part in organizational tasks like outreach (e.g., visits in social centers), or speaking to passers-by. While present, it was everybody's obligation to welcome visitors and engage them in our activities as well as being open for questions. Thereby we were confronted with an unexpected kind of assumption towards our »Living Lab«: Frequently passers-by from different age groups asked us to assist them with their smartphones or tablet devices. We reacted by spontaneously installing a “smartphone clinic”, made public by a sign asking, “Got smartphone problems? Researchers of the University can help!”. This led to a series of encounters where we helped out on minor issues like debugging software, checking hardware or even help to change the mobile data carrier. Another kind of mutual, informal activity we regularly took part in were coffee rounds in community centers. In these personal encounters we did not act foremost as researchers, but as accountable social beings that are willing to engage (Le Dantec & Fox, 2015: 1356). This engaging with older adults on eye level did not just lead to an increase of participation in the formal workshop formats we provided. These mundane activities also built ground for a broader mode of participation, e.g., discussing the overall goals of our research or building technology for housing contexts. For example, we learned that most people above retirement age we had contact with rejected the assumption that they would be the target group for assistive technology. The need for help was forwarded to “older-old people” - even by an 82 years old woman. This strong and recurring notion confirmed the aim to define problems (and possible solutions) participatory with the addressed users.

Methods of Documentation and Analysis

As emphasized in the presentation of the methodological framework, our multifaceted activities of initiating participation need to be reflected explicitly and methodically. We met this by writing ethnographic research diaries and adapting the praxis of memoing provided by the GTM (see above). Beside the material from the closed workshops and discussions, 61 additional pages of diaries and methodical memos were written during the »Living Lab«. The goal of keeping the diaries was primarily to capture data from us, as researchers, as we lived through the experiences of engaging with older adults. All six researchers noted events, situations, encounters, and reflective thoughts they found relevant. Each Friday we met non-publicly inside the facility to discuss and reflect our diaries and conclude therefrom methodological implications for our design project.

The adaption of theoretical memoing as proposed by Grounded Theory played a crucial role here. Writing memos according to GTM has a practical and methodological function. The practical function is to record knowledge to enable the reflection upon it, instead of reconstructing it retrospectively at the end of the project. The original methodological function of memos is to generate conceptual connections from the very beginning of the research on, e.g., by elaborating on possibly generalizable factors of an instructive case. We adapted the focus in our practice of memoing: Instead of generating hypotheses on our participants’ behavior, we used them as a methodological reflection source for our own activities.

While the contents of the diaries were mainly observations and vignettes, the memos came with explicit instructions throughout the preparation and implementation of the »Living Lab«. Every researcher had to reflect before and after the conduction of his workshops on questions ranging from rather technical aspects like “how was the stimulus presented”, to the methodological core of participatory methods like, “what are the assumptions of the method” and “what role are the participants assigned thereby”. Apart from self-assessment, the memoing helped to gradually join the dots of our different methodical activities, the stakeholders’ expectations and actions, and to empirically ground the research agenda of our project. These documentations and reflections are also the main source for this paper.

5 Results: Untangling the “Fuzzy Front-End”

In this presented »Living Lab« project we conducted formal methods like group discussions and design workshops on 24 occasions with 84 participants altogether. Furthermore, we engaged in informal encounters that sum up to 150 additionally documented interactions over the 30-day period. These numbers do not just represent data, but experiences and contacts that accumulated through the practice of conducting the »Living Lab«. Some of the results of these efforts are reported in greater detail elsewhere (Lefeuvre, et al. 2016). Others are still in progress to be evaluated, since they inform longer-range methods, i.e. fieldwork in communities acquired through the »Living Lab« project. Due to the methodological scope of the paper, the results presented in this section show, how the »Living Lab« project helped us to untangle the “fuzzy front end” of our design project.

We outlined above, that the methodological framework of grounded research agendas proposes a design process which is reflective and explicit on its decisions on the basis of constant grappling with life worlds. We argued for participatory methods to become key in reaching those decisions. We want to highlight the features of the »Living Lab« that helped us most to untangle the open-ended goals of our design project, such as “How can we enhance older adults’ situation in their homes?”, and “How can we initiate inter-generational communication among neighbors?”.

Understanding through Practice

We learned that the practical enactment of involvement is key to initiate participation. Participation has to be regarded as hands-on practice instead of discursive poll only - although it might include discursive inquiries (see below). The »Living Lab« project approach we presented is a call for action on multiple levels. Possible participants or visitors are hard to reach by exclusively putting a leaflet in their letterbox. Furthermore, participants may be completely indifferent to the goals and contexts of a design project. We learned that the outreach especially to vulnerable or marginalized groups, like solitarily living older adults, requires adaptation. We learned that every methodical step in initiating participation demands

practical activity and effort in crossing the boundaries from academia and entering the life worlds of those older adults.

This practical enactment is sometimes difficult but on an epistemic level key to the untangling of the “fuzzy front end”: The experience of engaging within the life worlds of older adults allows for a kind of understanding that is different from reading socio-gerontological literature. Like in ethnographic inquiry the experience of those difficulties, the necessity to adapt to needs and habits and also feelings of inappropriateness or incertitude become data to inform the design process. As distinct from ethnography, the practical enactment of participation becomes explicitly reciprocal: We framed the undertaking as mutual learning and engaged with our participants on eye-level. An example for the therefrom derived understanding that informs further design steps is the meaning of word-of-mouth for building trust among older adults. By our sampling strategy we learned how networks of older adults informed each other on the reliability of persons approaching them in the context of housing. This strategy is important to them to secure oneself against fraudulent doorstep deals for example. By adapting our sampling to it (i.e., asking participants to recommend us), we did not just acquire participants but learnt an important feature of the communicative practices of trust building, that informs our design of communicative technology in neighborhoods.

This understanding through practice concerned different instances to untangle the “fuzzy front end” of our design project. Beside practices of trust building it informed furthermore our conceptualization of older adults as members of social networks, who cannot be regarded as homogenous group, nor as deficient, like it unfortunately happens in many HCI studies (Vines et al., 2015a).

From People to Stakeholders to Active Participants

The second important implication of our methodological framework and its implementation through a »Living Lab« concerns the importance of mundane encounters. Occasional talks, encounters on the side of events and casual meetings in the spatial context of the life worlds have proved as most influential source to initiate participation in our case. Whereas we thought that the formal methods would make people to participants of our project, we learned that the everyday level of encounter contributed much more to a meaningful involvement. An instructive example is the role of unstructured talks conducted with occasional visitors in or in front of the »Living Lab«. By talking to passers-by and interested lurkers, we learned that older adults do not feel addressed by calls for participation in “assistive technology”. Either part of the articulation distracted them: they did not saw themselves as needy, nor as technically talented. The idea to develop IoT technology to enhance communication seemed very unfamiliar to them, they feared that it would substitute existing relationships. These positions would not have become part of our data, since the people distracted from the call for participation would not have taken part in the formal methods. Additionally, we could adapt to the needs and attitudes encountered and eventually find both phenomena, we were looking for initially: Practices and materials of inter-generational interaction and social support among

older adults in neighborhoods.

The mundane activity like inviting people for a coffee or to take part in social events of community centers had an important implication for our role as researchers and designers. We had to be accountable and reliable as persons before as functional role. Initially we profited from the leap of faith provided by the name of our university in the local context and our role as researchers. Meaningful encounters, like participation in a formal method or establishing a long-term contact, however required a familiar face or building on previous contact. Almost every insightful talk or experience with older adults happened in the second or third encounter between participants and designers. Moreover, we could change between rather narrow and deep initiation of participation with individuals or small groups of people, and broad but comparably lower levels of involvement. To reach out by media and visits in community centers, as well as to organizations and individuals and holding public events we gathered a broad sample and diverse contacts. Those connections that became stronger resulted in deep and rich encounters, such as reiterated confidential conversations or even amicably relations extended beyond the duration of the »Living Lab«. As pointed out, the creation of occasional and rather unfocused opportunities for informal contact and mutual gatherings was central to engage with people and involve them in our processes.

6 Implications for Initiating Participation

In line with the discussions on configuring (Vines et al. 2013) and unfolding (Vines et al. 2015b) participation, we argued that the methodical initiation of participation shapes the participatory nature of design. We presented a methodological frame for empirically grounding the fuzzy initial phase of a design project in empirical insights. To give an example we presented the case of a public »Living Lab« project and its implementation. We showed and discussed the multitude of outreach and involvement activities and their implications for the design project as well as the stakeholders. Conclusively we want to give at least an organizational recommendation for initiating participation practice and research: It is necessary to explicitly schedule and budget methods of initiation in »Living Lab« projects.

Some of the recommendations provided by our case seem mundane: Talking to people, visit people in their life worlds, overcome assumptions and shyness, provide an active outreach policy, etc. However, their enactment especially in the fuzzy beginning of a project is not mundane, nor self-evident. To integrate stakeholders in the discovery, understanding and framing of a problem is an exhausting and time-consuming process, demanding the researchers as professionals and persons. This time and this effort must be scheduled and budgeted in »Living Labs«.
We are convinced that this does not just apply for small-scale community-based design processes, but for every project aiming to involve people in the definition of the project goals. Unfortunately, large-scale user involvement, such as citizen science or smart city projects, tend to rely on significant narrow modes of involvement as shown by analysis (Qaurooni et

al., 2016). We argue that this calls for an explicit implementation of work packages for initiating and unfolding participation in participatory processes. The responsibility to promote this is as well in the hands of funding agencies as in those of researchers and designers themselves.

7 Summary

We discussed the methodical and methodological question, how to initiate participation in early project stages by applying a »Social Living Lab« project.
In the first section we identified two crucial factors pre-defining the participatory negotiation of design problems. In the second section we critically discussed the implications of »Living Labs« literature on enabling co-creative activities in early project stages.

In the third section we presented the case of an implementation of such a »Social Living Lab« project to initiate participation, outset design goals and structure future researching a design project for older adults. In the fourth section we discussed the results of the application of this framework. By reflecting upon our experiences, we derived methodological implications for the initiation of participation from a HCI researcher's point of view: This included the importance of practical enactment of participatory methods and the creation of occasion for unstructured encounters with people. Concluding, we discussed the limitations of our case and derive therefrom the organizational requirement to schedule and budget such initiating phases for participatory projects.

Overall, we showed that creating occasions for informal activity and other open-ended opportunities for contact initiate a participatory process that is sustained, iterative, and reflective.

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