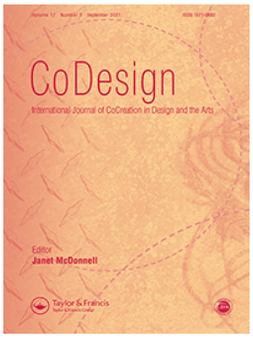

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Plant Hotels: designing the imaginary foundations of communities

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ABSTRACT

Communities can be a significant source of well-being. Design literature has recently paid attention to social design and social innovation and has advanced our understanding of designing for communities in many ways. One thing that has been left to the sidelines has been those imageries that shape communities. They are usually seen but unnoticed, but important in their consequences. This paper builds on Garfinkel's ethnomethodology to explicate some of these imageries through a series of four Plant Hotels in Helsinki and one in Stockholm. Inspired by relational art they were meant to explore community-formation with minimal rules. They were treated as breaching experiments that led us to classify the imageries into four main orientations. The paper discusses how these imageries create a web of assumptions that create and maintain communities and make them robust, and how they can be turned into design material that helps us to reimagine communities.

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1. Introduction

Communities can be good things. We get help and protection from people around us. They give us advice, help in babysitting, resources, skills, and sometimes even financial help. They also help us indirectly by maintaining controls that keep deviant activities at bay – for example, by setting limits to teenagers, telling us who to trust and not to trust, and maintaining memories that help us to navigate our social commitments. Communities may also make our life nasty and brutish – though in modern societies not usually short – by establishing and maintaining controls through gossip and ostracism, sanctioning us when we do something wrong, and by creating status hierarchies that block our access to them.

Communities have become a topic in design during the last 20 years. There exists some theoretical work (for example Margolin 2015; Jantzer Cinnamon and Weinstein 2013; Koskinen and Hush 2016), and there are many socially responsible design papers in literature, for example Design for the Other 90%(Smith 2007) and International Journal of Design Special Issue on Social Design (Chen et al. 2016). Design researchers have also developed several approaches to turning communities into design material. One group of

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approaches argues for social entrepreneurship (see Markussen 2013) and sees social order as a consequence of institutional rules, procedures, or transactional arrangements on the market and political economy (government grants). Another finds guidance from developmental studies (Campbell 2017), conviviality-based (Meroni 2007; Selloni 2017; Manzini and Rizzo 2011), and fictional (Wu 2017) approaches. These approaches see local social controls as a source of order, as do several mapping-based approaches by explicating and then improving existing social relationships (Koskinen and Hush 2016; Johnson 2016). Yet another locates order in vanguard social movements spearheaded by designers through avant-gardist aesthetics, activism, or activism (Willis 2019; Pelle, Nilsson, and Topgaard 2015; Julier 2013; Tonkinwise 2011). Some approaches simulate organisational processes through theatre and aim at making people aware of how unrecognised social patterns may damage communities and their goal-setting (Buur and Larsen 2010).

In this paper, we target social imageries that function behind each of these approaches. Our premise is that we all create images about what moves other people. These imageries have been the basis of several sociological traditions from Weber onwards. As we shall argue, they are often seen but unnoticed, and they are difficult to put in so many words. They are real in their consequences, however. With few authors (Crabtree 2004; Button and Sharrock 1999) we also argue that design literature would benefit from paying attention to how these imageries create and maintain communities.

2. Imageries as a foundation of communities

We all create images of situations we enter using whatever resources we have at our disposal: personal knowledge, roles, master identities, stereotypes, or just lucky guesses. We may add assumptions about how others think, act, and relate to others to these images. These images shape communities in subtle ways, as shown in a series of breaching experiments by Harold Garfinkel (1967). He told his students to interrupt the normal flow of things to uncover the imageries that keep ordinary life smooth. The results were unexpected. For instance, when one of his students asked his partner to explain what he meant by 'having a flat tire', the partner got angry after a couple of questions.

The point Garfinkel made was that the social world by and large builds on unnoticed imageries about how things normally work. When I imagine what others would do, I know they would expect me to do the same. I also know that they would target me if I didn't do this – and vice versa. We use the same methods in construing our actions and in making sense of them. What is at stake here is our sense of normalcy and by implication sense of order, predictability, rationality, and so on. The issue was not about understanding. We are supposed to make ourselves intelligible. If we refuse to be so, the normal flow of things is jeopardised. At stake is our sense of order and through it, rationality and a sense of being a competent person. Because of this background, these imageries become real in their consequences (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1920-1920).

Now, these imaginary foundations can function without any sort of institutional grounding. Institutional rules, regulations, as well as statuses and social roles can be a part of them, however. People use many types of resources to make sense about others. These resources include the master identities of age, gender, and race, and also many types of other bits of information, including occupation, reputation, and history. These

acts of meaning also build on knowledge of institutional knowledge: it is fair to assume that financial advisers know about money, accountants about taxes, and policemen act in accordance with their mandate. Attributions of deviance similarly build on images about normalcy. People keep an eye on rude teenagers and discuss their alleged misdeeds. These discussions may lead to sanctions that range from avoidance and ostracism to reporting the activities to the parents, social workers and police, as in the case of secondary deviance (Lemert 1951; Becker 1991; Baumgartner 1988; Bergmann 1993). These deviant acts can also be productive, as in the case of teenagers initiating fads in Instagram. The point we want to make is that these acts of meaning build on indirect and barely noticed imageries.

These imaginations may be barely noticed, but they can be turned into several types of design resources. As long as people can use design constructs to make sense of themselves and their circumstances, and they know that others make sense of their action using these same constructs, design researchers can study them in many ways. For example, they can be breaching experiments (see Crabtree 2004), utopias (Margolin 2015), minimal change programmes (Koskinen and Hush 2016), or as artistic projects using props including objects like plants, Legos blocks or GPS technologies that carry reconceptualise social meanings and imageries (Willis 2019), or as prototypes of social action (see Kurvinen, Battarbee, and Koskinen 2008). As long as these studies lead participants to create imageries of other participants, they also create a chance of change. We define community loosely as a group of people who came to define Plant Hotels as a constellation of people with a joint purpose that gave them a feeling of being part of a group that made the hotels real for their duration.

3. Plant hotels

We illustrate the argument outlined above through a case. The case is a set of studies initially inspired by Nicholas Bourriaud's relational art (2002) and Grant Kester's conversational art (2004), but also Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (1967).

Building on these inspirations, one of the authors set up five 'Plant Hotels' between 2014–2016. The series of five hotels is from one author's doctoral research that investigated how service design could create new social relations in small-scale contexts (Wu 2017). To achieve that, it used the service concept of helping water plants when owners were away. Plant Hotels invited people to check in their domestic plants, and people who were around to water the plants. The hotels were open in five different contexts of a neighbourhood gallery (PH1), university corridor (PH2), conference (PH3), aged-care service centre (PH4), and the militarised borderline between the Korean countries (PH5). The first four were construed in Nordic countries and the last was fictional (Table 1).

The hotels were designed to be explorations of new communal social relations around a new type of service idea. The series started with the Punavuori hotel. Each subsequent hotel was developed from the findings or reflection from previous ones. The purpose of the series was to focus on generic processes that create relationships. The hotels were not treated as a series of experiments in which each hotel would add an experimental variable to the previous series. The hotels would have been so different in any case that it would have been impossible to confidently attribute

Table 1. Five Plant Hotels in five social settings.

	Plant Hotel 1	Plant Hotel 2	Plant Hotel 3	Plant Hotel 4	Plant Hotel 5
					
Social setting	In a neighbourhood gallery, Helsinki	In a university corridor, Helsinki	In an academic conference, Stockholm	In state-owned elderly service centre, Helsinki	At the border of North and South Korea
Time	27Jun-3 Aug, 2014	Oct-Nov, 2014	3-10 Jun, 2015	Jun-Aug, 2015	Fictional
Guest plants	48	2	14	43-46	NA
Plant owners	24	2	13	11-13	NA
Caregivers	70 among 134 visitors	8	Over 14	Over 5	NA

potential changes in social relations to any single background variable or a set of conjoint variables. The five hotels diverged in terms of context, but we did not see this diversity in terms of causes and effects. We were interested in the relationships and the methods of sense-making that created them instead. In analysing the hotels, we came to see how some participants defined themselves as guardians of institutional realities, which led us to pay analytic attention to how these definitions shaped the hotels, and how other participants aligned themselves with these definitions. Following our interpretive methodology, we took these definitions as an emerging theme rather than reflections of an underlying institutional reality. After realising this, we focused on analysing social imaginaries in this paper: how they developed, impacted activities, maintained the relationships that brought the hotels into being, and kept their temporary realities going. External identities and structures entered the analysis only if they were made relevant by participants. Plant Hotel 5 was a fictional thought experiment. Its purpose was to explore the possibility of reimagining communities in the most tedious and strictly regulated military border site.

As the primary aim of the hotels was to initiate and encourage collaborative efforts and interactions between plant owners and caregivers, the rule was communicated clearly that organisers would not water or take responsibilities for the plants even though they were present. The hotels had minimal rules, operated without contracts, transactional components, sanctions or threat of sanctions, or even without the need of direct physical or social contact. Despite this, the hotels created temporary communities around plants. The glue that created and kept them we claim was the web of assumptions that participants made about other people and how other people would see them. Next, we briefly describe the case of five hotels, built on different imaginary foundations of each

Figure 1. Plant Hotel 2 in the university corridor, in front of the professor office.

social setting, which move from plants, people to institutes. For example, Plant Hotel 2 was in the university corridor in Aalto Arts where the author was from for two months (Figure 1).

The design and operation processes of all five Plant Hotels were documented. The 'plant story' boards attached to each plant and other written texts by participants in all four real hotels were collected and documented. In the first Punavuori hotel, the study was video recorded by a GoPro camera inside of the gallery covering the whole period. Throughout the open hours, the author with another organiser were present as a member of 'service staff' interacting with visitors and also as a researcher taking field notes on visitors' practices. 14 out of the 24 plant owners were interviewed through online questionnaires and emails. While in Plant Hotels 2–4, to minimise strategic response, no fieldnotes were taken directly, but all the informal talks with the participants were recorded, and participants were interviewed.

When analysing data for this paper, we focused on ways in which people imagined what carers would do with their plants and how these imageries turned into the methods that created and maintained a temporary community. While studying the new actions of participants, the authors looked at who participated, how they developed new imageries from existing ones, and how they created lines of action in response to these imageries. These hotels were breaching experiments in the sense proposed by Crabtree (2004): they were prototypes of a potential new form of social action that they rendered visible and observable for research. The hotels worked even though the hotel had only a minimal structure. The reason, we figured, was that they invited people to redefine their relationship to the hotels. When analysing these forms of imagination for this paper, we could classify them into four main categories, which led to the typology we will describe in Sections 4–7. These imageries, we realised, can be organised into a loose order from particular to institutional depending on what kinds of imaginary resources they primarily build on.

4. Plants as mediators

At the heart of plant hotels were the plants. We wanted to study how they would function as mediators to connect people. Placing plants into a 'hotel' carried different social meanings in each hotel. It was an expressive exhibit to display interesting stories and

experiences of the owner around gardening in the gallery, a bold challenge from the student in front of the professor office, an invite for conversations or appreciation from the fellow researcher in the academic conference, or greetings from a younger visitor in the aged-care service centre. In the beginning it appeared that for most participants, thought processes stopped at plants:

4.1. Extract from field notes

Emma is in her early eighties and has been a volunteer in the centre in catering services for almost eight years. She did not see any social or exchange value in her watering act or in Plant Hotel. She did not see her work as particularly valuable to anybody or to the centre. Her attention was only on the plants. In the interview, she appeared excited when she was talking about the plants: it was an overall nice experience to inspect, recognise, and look after various plants and flowers. But when it came to the questions relating to the social aspect, like *'Have you met any plant owner'* and *'Did people talk to you when you were watering the plants'*, they did not even interest her as a topic to think or talk about. (PH4 in the ageing care centre).

Minimally, then, the plants created bonds and people stayed in the background. There was more than met the eye, however. Plants were not just innocent bystanders. The way in which plants functioned is best illustrated in Plant Hotel 5, a piece of design fiction examining potential roles of plants in the military site of Panmunjom. Figure 2 shows the site. It is the blue meeting building at the border of South and North Korea. Panmunjom is the only place that is currently open for the public to viit across the Korean border, defections aside.

Plant Hotel 5 was a thought experiment that examined whether plants could loosen the political tension by bringing people from both sides to open up peaceful conversations. According to the fiction, both sides started with the informal act of watering plants. People from both sides could bring plants under strict surveillance and were only allowed to leave limited words on a small 'plant story' board. Facilitated by plants, the belief was that the hotel would become a place that allowed citizens to meet and have meaningful

Figure 2. Fictional Plant Hotel 5 in the border site, with a fictional news report.

conversations across the border without direct contact. This was important: the hotel sought to gently probe the sensitive balance between the contentious political situation and push it towards willingness for peace and conversation.

In the process of creating fiction for Plant Hotel, the authors realised that these imaginary constructs would, just like imageries about people in ordinary life, shape our activities. In the conflict zone, this indirect connection provided a light version of socialising among people: no direct interaction between people was needed, and therefore, controls could be relaxed. People could come together without having to develop interpersonal relationships or conversations, but still have a convivial relationship.

This claim rests on a fictional case but for this paper it served as a deviant case for going deeper into how people imagine the owners of the plants, and how they imagine the indirect interactions would take shape. When looking at the empirical Plant Hotels, the authors could identify several processes that were similar to the fictional encounters at Panmunjom. In the gallery and the aged-care service centre (PH 1 and 4), for instance, participants developed new interactions with plants and the physical place. Like in Panmunjon, these relationships remained imaginations that did not transform into real contacts. Yet, once the participants had started watering other people's plants, they could decide whether they would like to take this step. Plant Hotels 1–4 suggested to us that reimagining communities can start by creating new interactions between people through objects like plants a d served as indirect validation to the ideas that drove Plant Hotel 5.

5. Imageries of people

The Panjunmon hotel suggested that plants could be empathy-arousing agents in a contentious social situation, but its obvious weakness is that it is fictional. Plant Hotel 1 shows in more detail how imageries about people behind plants are constructed and how they affect the ways in which plants are taken care of.

The hotel opened in the underground gallery in the Punavuori neighbourhood in South Helsinki (Figure 3). Its goal was to create a communal space for neighbours to come together to water plants, socialise, or do any other activity they found meaningful. In order to engage more passers-by to associate themselves with the plants, the authors made plants visible on the street to invite more interaction. During check in, they encouraged owners to share interesting stories and playful tips on the 'plant story' board attached to each plant.

While displaying their domestic plants in the public, people from the neighbourhood left various kinds of messages, telling unique stories *('I rescued it from the garbage bin'*), asking help *('Who knows how to grow chili in Finland?'*), or expressing pride and sharing knowledge (*'The eggshell is secret fertilizer from my father!'*). At the same time, this hotel received more than 100 visits and was reported in two local media. With the participation mainly from plant lovers, it became a showroom for authentic stories, experiences and skill sharing between plant lovers.

However, it took some effort to introduce the concept to passers-by. Visitors saw value in the hotel and could even be persuaded to contribute to the hotel, as in the following note jotted down by one of the authors.

Figure 3. The galley-framed Plant Hotel 1 in the neighbourhood, Helsinki.

Excerpt from fieldnotes

On the second afternoon, a middle-aged woman walked by. When she was approaching Plant Hotel, she noticed the place was full of green. She slowed down, watching the plants placed outside on the pavement.

- Author (A): *'It is a hotel for plants. When you go travelling, you can check in your plants'.*
- *'Wow, that is a really nice idea!'* She got excited and raised her volume, *'I just came back from my holiday. All my plants are dead'.*
- A*: 'These are the checked-in plants. These are the stories shared by owners.'; 'These eggshells are used as organic fertilizer, 'This owner asked visitors to take a photo of his plant and send to him,'; 'These are Japanese shiso herbs, and she was willing to give away seeds'.*
- *'Oh, lovely!'* She bent down, read each storyboard carefully, and giggled while I was telling these stories.
- A: *'All the plants are watered by neighbours who walk by. I don't water the plants. So if you walk by and see a dry plant, you are most welcome to water the plants.'*

- *'Oh, very sweet! It is a neighbourhood-based idea! Nowadays we really need this kind of service'.*
- A: *'Can you water this plant? As you know, it is a neighbourhood-based service. Neighbours bring plants and other neighbours water them. So we want people to meet and hang out'.*
- *'I know, but, how can I water? I don't have water'*. She was confused with a blank face.

> I handed her a water bottle that was just next to her, an object which she did not take into account when she was defining the situation. The lady poured some water onto the plant that I had asked about and gave the bottle back to me immediately without checking other plants. I said, 'thanks,' which was the end of our conversation. She smiled back and walked out. (anonymised, 115-116)

The hotel subtly mobilised local interest in plants and in connecting to other people. We found the same motivation from young plant owners who brought plants to the aged-care service centre in Plant Hotel 4. Their main reason to participate was that they were interested in learning more about the life of the elderly. When going about their daily routines, they seldom had a chance to visit places outside their rounds to develop new types of conversations and relationships. The design of the hotel, as simple and unstructured as it was, enabled the people to construe images of other participants and through them, define a new way to relate to them.

6. People as institutions

When the authors turned to Plant Hotels 3–4, they realised that people also create institutional imageries and that sometimes these in turn create social action patterns around plants. Another set of methods of sense-making build on imageries about the institutional grounds of action. People think about other people as bearers of institutional commitments. For example, we may think that Manny is a nice man to have a BBQ with, but that he is also a lawyer in the police force. If we do not know him well enough, we probably think twice before telling him about a plumber who did a pipe job in the bathroom and took $1,000 without a receipt. People sometimes act in the name of an institution, and the way in which other people make sense of them reflect this fact.

Plant Hotel 3 took place in a setting in which there was not much of an institutional background to fall back on. It was created for a four-day academic conference. The conference took place in Konstfack, Stockholm's leading design school (Figure 4). It had attendants travelling from 30 design related schools from five continents. Before the conference started, the authors visited the school to invite students, teachers and administrative staff to check in their office plants. If they agreed to check in, they would also need to choose one school among the 30 participating schools as the caregiver and present the reason for their choice. During the conference, 14 plants from 13 local plant owners were collected and displayed in the exhibition hall alongside 14 selected schools and these reasons. During the opening day, conference participants learned whether their school was chosen as the caregiver, by whom, and why. The purpose of the setup was to explore how institutional imageries would enter the imagination process.

Figure 4. Plant Hotel 3 in the academic conference hosted by a Swedish design school.

The hotel revealed how conference participants used several identity markers in creating images of other participants. On the one hand, there was a mild adversarial relationship among the schools. School ranking based on various attributes has been part of their relationship, either to attract better students, staff or just national pride. In this hotel, the competitive relation was associated with care giving to plants. Also, there were imageries between hosts from Konstfack and guests, and some of these imageries were adversarial. Would the host want to show hospitality to welcome guests travelling from faraway? Would Swedes trust their plants to Finns or Norwegians, both countries with a sometimes uneasy relationship with the former capital, or Danes, with a different but equally strained relationship?

In the context of academia the authors thought that a Plant Hotel could be a way across these issues. Academics go into conferences to network with fellow researchers, be these familiar or unfamiliar, and to exchange ideas regardless of where they come from. The hotel, the authors assumed, might help to initiate conversations with fellow researchers and surpass potential adversarial relationships.

This happened in a few cases. When the authors discussed the hotel with the participants, they started to see how participants made sense of who their peers were and how they created preferences concerning who to connect with. Some were based on local stereotypes. One Danish researcher realised none of the Danish schools was chosen by his Swedish colleagues. After realising this snub (as he saw it), he insisted on watering all plants and then pasted his school tag to one of the pots.

Another reflection revealed a much broader geo-political complex behind the almost overwhelmingly white, Northern European conference. One local researcher chose an African school due to her appreciation on their sustainability programs. However, later she felt guilty about her choice:

> I have mixed feelings. The positive part is that I asked him to water my plant because I like his school. The negative part is that I feel like I was outsourcing my labour to my guest, which is not very nice. Especially, the sensitive part here, if in a broader sense, I, a white woman, outsourced my labour to an African man who is from far away, is that the right thing to do?

Figure 5. Plant Hotel 4 was open in the city-operated aged-care service centre in the two-month summertime.

We saw traces of institutional imageries at work in other hotels too. For example, the venue of Plant Hotel 4 was the city-operated aged-care service centre, which was primarily built to provide services and care for pensioner customers (Figure 5). The centre, open from 8 am to 4 pm during weekdays, organised various events and classes and provided services like library and catering for pensioners. The hotel provoked younger citizens to reflect their imagery about the elderly. Can I ask senior citizens to water my plants and what would it mean? What kinds of interaction do I want to develop with them? Younger participants further developed new meaning imageries of connecting with the elderly; instead of seeing them as weak, they learned to appreciate their experience with plants. After forming new imagery, three younger citizens brought their domestic plants to the centre while travelling for summer holidays. The hotel broke the usual division of labour between the generations and also opened the doors to a new kind of friendly relationship between them.

7. People as carriers of institutional imageries

This institutional imagery was relevant in another way as well. The authors learned that people who are responsible for institutions also create imageries about their duties and responsibilities and use these to shape their lines of action. If Anna is a manager of a shopping mall with a Plant Hotel, she may think about the plants from the perspective of her mall. How does the mall look like if the plants thrive? How about if they die? If the hotel cannot run on its own, how much work does it require, who does this work and what is the cost? Is maintenance happy with less space in the hallway, what would the fire department of the city say, what would a food inspector say about the hotel, and what would happen in social media?

These imageries became the focus of Plant Hotel 4. The original vision of the hotel was a convivial arrangement that creates bonds between the age groups and also across the boundary of the unit. The centre's vision of the hotel did not align with this vision, however. The head of the centre had originally accepted the idea of collaborative care for plants because she considered it a good activity to activate the centre's customers, as they

called it '*an urban gardening party*'. However, when implementing the concept, she soon found a problem from the service rule of 'whoever is around can water the plants': *'Whoever? But who? We don't know who will water and when. This is too dangerous. We have never had this situation before!'*

The head decided to reorient the Plant Hotel to align it with the institutional ethos of delivering services. Facing the uncertainty and potential result of failure that the random watering might bring, she decided to prioritise the maintenance of the trust in her centre: *'The principle is we shouldn't let plants die. People trust our institution to bring their plants. We cannot let Plant Hotel tear the trust down.'*

The head integrated the watering act with the volunteering structure of the institute. During the opening day of the hotel, she asked a pensioner customer – we call her Maria – to help water the plants at her convenience. It was easy for her, the head thought, because she frequently played table tennis right next to the Plant Hotel. Following this informal request, Maria became the main caregiver that contributed the most watering. The arrangement was successful. Still after two months, all plants were taken good care of and the owners sent Thank You Cards to the centre.

For the head of the centre, the outcome was a marker of success: her institute was expected to deliver a reliable and good service, which it did with the arrangement. The uncertainty factor that the random collaborative care might bring was removed. The arrangement also eliminated the risk involved in having outside visitors watering the plants and searching for water from the centre's kitchen and toilets. The head's arrangement deviated from the original vision of the hotel, but it maintained order in the centre efficiently and safeguarded its institutional mission.

8. Conclusions and discussion: imagination as design material

This paper has studied the imaginary foundations of communities. Communities can make our lives pleasant, long and humane, but also nasty and brutish by establishing and maintaining controls through gossip and ostracism, sanctioning us when we do something wrong, and by creating status hierarchies that block our access to them (for example Baumgartner 1988; Becker 1991; Lemert 1951). If our analysis is correct, a good deal of order in communities, however, comes from imageries that exist prior to explicit organisations, rules and social controls. The case studied in this paper shows how multiple interlocking imageries regarding plants, people, and their institutional connections thrive in the absence of rules and sanctions.

We have focused on the imaginary foundations of communities for two reasons. First, communities have become more than an object in design; second, they can also be turned into an important design material. Their importance has not escaped the attention of design researchers, who have, for example, created several design methods for studying communities, including mapping and fiction (Johnson 2016; Wu 2017). They have borrowed many types of theories from the social sciences, including developmental studies (Campbell 2017), Marxist (Pelle, Nilsson, and Topgaard 2015), actor-network theory (Johnson 2016), and critical (Tonkinwise 2011). They have developed ways to construct and prototype communities through entrepreneurial, convivial, critical, utopic, and aesthetic approaches (see Markussen 2013; Anna 2007; Manzini and Rizzo 2011; Margolin 2015; Jantzer Cinnamon and Weinstein 2013; Koskinen 2016; Willis 2019). They have developed ways to change

communities and their structural foundations too (Manzini and Rizzo 2011; Pelle, Nilsson, and Topgaard 2015; see Koskinen and Hush 2016; Chen et al. 2016). Progress is evident: design researchers know much more about communities today than just ten years ago.

One of the reviewers of this paper raised the question about belief systems. The question merits attention because it gives us an opportunity to clarify the purpose of our argument. Plant Hotels were meant to be loose organisations not built on belief systems, but the reviewer's observation merits a brief discussion. Many aspects of our society build on beliefs, and these beliefs can be almost anything from religions, justice, many aspects of science, or fandoms (for example, Lancaster 2001). These belief systems, however, tend to be supported by structures such as business models, tradition, legal rules, measurement equipment and professional training. We touched upon these briefly in the empirical sections of the paper when we discussed imageries of identities. It is difficult to disentangle these backgrounds from the imageries in abstract, but one of the points of our paper was that people actively construct images of other people and build their lines of action on them. While identities for instance may shape these images, they may equally well not do that. Less precise imageries are enough. By implication, we believe that while lightning hunting and bird watching build in part on imageries, belief systems, communication patterns, and technologies such as expertise ratings in these communities are considerably more sophisticated than the images we wanted to focus on. Studying the former in detail was beyond both the scope and the purpose of this paper, but it would be silly to rule out their importance in other cases.

This issue has larger implications as well. Perhaps most importantly, another reviewer questioned why we did not pay attention to significant differences between the hotels. Part of the reason was that this question would have distracted us away from the argument we wanted to make about the self-organising nature of the Plant Hotels. They were not built to be institutions with rules nor were they built to create permanent organisations. They explored ways in which orderly action arises from nothing more than thoughts about other people. These thoughts, as we have seen, did come with assumptions about institutional characteristics, but they were not needed to lead to the outcomes we saw. This was the case in the Punavuori hotel in particular, but it was also evident in the Hotels 2–4. The Panjunmon hotel made the point sharper: there is a layer of humanity at work behind even enemy imagery.

This is not to say that these spontaneous imageries solely guided the formation of the hotels. As the third hotel in Stockholm showed, participants could also rely on master identities including nationality and the status of the country in building their imageries. These were barely more than stereotypes, but they had real consequences on how the participants took care of the plants. When temporary communities started to form around the plants, the participants built their imageries using knowledge of their home institutions, but although these imageries suggested ways to relate to the plants, they also led to doubts, questions and attributions of guilt about the legitimacy of these imageries. Assumptions about institutional identity or image could be triggers, but ensuing real interactions and conversations were not defined by them after participants started to take care of plants. Another type of imageries we saw was of second order. The head of the aged-care service centre in the fourth hotel created imageries in terms of her role and responsibilities attached to it. Her way of making sense of the hotel used her knowledge of the institutional frame she had been recruited to mend, of her knowledge of the clients of the centre, and also of her

generalised assumptions about people around the service centre. Through these second-order imageries, she maintained institutional structures she was responsible for. Analysing these imageries and their functioning in detail is beyond the scope of this paper.

There are several interpretations of communities at work in design research today, but few of these have specifically looked at the imaginary actions that shape and maintain communities. The device we built to explore these imageries was a series of five Plant Hotels. They were designed to create a temporary community of people who would take care of each other's plants with minimal rules, no commitments, and no guarantees that the plants people checked in to the hotels would be taken care of. They created many types of value for people, however: one could leave home for holidays and assume the plants would be alive after weeks; another could fill his day watering the plants and caring for them. This paper has analysed four types of imageries that created bonds between people who in many cases did not even meet. These imageries were enough to create a relatively robust temporary community with minimal controls. We believe imageries can be turned into design material.

The hotels also taught us a lesson about some limits of hotels as breaching experiments. A relatively small number of people turned their imageries into action. Most involvement remained tangential: people saw the hotels, maybe asked a question or two, and then left. This is a normal state of affairs in most communities, though. A relatively small group of people carry social movements; most are free riders who invest little in the movements but still enjoy the goods (Walsh and Warland 1983), an argument known in the margins of design research as well (see Sassen 1991; Narotzky 2000). A relatively small core group of people participated in Plant Hotels, but they created benefits to many more bystanders and passers-by.

Is the proposed approach applicable to larger communities and formal organisations? Following Chen et al. (2016), our cautious answer is that it may not be. When the scale is larger than in Plant Hotels, it gets harder to create communities and follow them. Still, as we have seen recently in American politics, a small committed group of people who act on an alternative imagery may shake the very foundations of institutions as important as democracy. One reason is that at bottom, even core institutions of the society rest on imaginary foundations. Whether this is good or not, changing this foundation on a large scale is possible – hopefully for good causes.

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