

DESIGN!PUBLIC

Trust, Participation, Innovation

On the 20th of April 2012, the third Design Public Conclave, organized by the Center for Knowledge Societies in collaboration with IBM, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Google and the Centre for Internet and Society, was held at the National Museum, New Delhi.

The Conclave brought together thought-leaders and decision makers from the government, the media, multinational organizations and academic institutions for a conversation about transforming India into an Innovation Society. Prominent speakers included Sam Pitroda, Arun Maira, Shanker Annaswamy, Ashok Alexander, Raman Jit Chima, Bhairavi Jani, James Crabtree, and Scott Burnham. The varied audience included representatives from the Planning Commission, the Embassies of Netherlands and Sweden, the American Center, the Ford Foundation, PremSela, DFID, PRS, Lirneasia, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Financial Times, Carnegie Mellon, Cambridge, NID, Asian Paints, Yes Bank, MTS, and many others.



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The conclave began with three panel discussions exploring the relationship between trust, participation and innovation.



Yamini Aiyar, Shomikho Raha, Samanth Subramanian, Scott Burnham, and Namrata Mehta (L to R)

Trust and the Design of Services and Systems

We discussed the present system of governance in India, with its resident hierarchies, lack of transparency and accountability, the lack of agency of the citizens, and the consequent breakdown of trust.

A speaker provided a compelling example of the lack of accountability in budget allocations in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, where a school in Bihar which had no building, was required to buy fire safety equipment based on orders from the Block and District-level Education Officers. The owner of the shop where the equipment was bought was told to hold on to it until the school managed to construct a building.

We also discussed the fact that trust, as an inherently human quality and need, can never disappear completely, and rather can only be reallocated. Hence, public spaces and services need to be designed with trust as an essential ingredient, and this can only happen if we empathize with the final beneficiaries and users.

Participation, Collaboration, Innovation

Here we touched upon different means to generate citizen participation in key decision-making, including using social media, mobile phones and other technological platforms.

These new networking technologies help create spaces for discourse, debate, and an opportunity for collective organization and activity. They also have the capacity to transform the agency and voices of previously remote societies. However, despite their potential to garner massive public participation, they have not really been utilized by most private, public or social institutions.

Moreover, as we discussed with the help of many examples, mere participation is not enough, and it is necessary to moderate the conversation and make respondents accountable for their comments, so that it does not lapse into a meaningless cacophony of anonymous voices. The challenge that remains, then, is to design a platform where both citizens and the government can engage in a meaningful way, without the barriers of language and literacy, and collaboratively arrive at meaningful, actionable solutions.



Joshua Karthik, Eswaran Subramanian, James Crabtree, Ekta Ohri and Raman Jit Singh Chima (L to R)



Aditya Dev Sood, Ashok Alexander, Sukumar Ranganathan, Shanker Annaswamy and Sunil Abraham (L to R)

Imagining India as an Innovation Society

This conversation dove deeper into ways in which the necessary elements of trust and participation could be better incorporated in all the sectors of society in order to enable an innovation culture in India. We touched upon existing conceptions of innovation in India, including jugaad and price-pointing innovation, and the need to move beyond these and create a culture that values systematic, routinizable innovation processes.

When innovating in the public sector and designing systems and processes that affect the larger public, it is especially important to respond to the specific needs of the people. This is where avenues for civil society participation and the design of public spaces become especially crucial, as they function as interfaces between decision-makers and the public.

Each panelist spoke about different aspects of this large challenge, touching upon user needs, education systems, intellectual property laws and methods of innovation. It was clear, as the conversation ended, that a lot more work and planning is needed to even begin to articulate and come to a consensus on what an innovation society looks like.



Sanjay Kumar (centre), with Ashok Alexander (L) and Aditya Dev Sood

Inauguration of the Bihar Innovation Lab

In the beautiful central courtyard of the National Museum, Sanjay Kumar, IAS Officer and Executive Director of the State Health Society of Bihar, officially inaugurated the Bihar Innovation Lab, with Ashok Alexander of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Aditya Dev Sood of the Center for Knowledge Societies.

The Bihar Innovation Lab, a novel public-private partnership model for design-led rural innovation, was conceptualized at the first edition of Design Public in March last year, and has now materialized as a collaborative effort by CKS, BMGF and the State Government.

The Lab will enable collaboration amongst various stakeholders in innovating healthcare solutions for the state, including organizations like Care, BBC World Services Trust and World Health Partners. It will also offer interactive innovation training workshops with partners and the government so as to accelerate the spreading of innovation techniques not only in healthcare, but also other avenues of rural development.



In the afternoon, we split into groups to discuss how trust and collaboration could lead to innovation in specific social areas.

Co-creating Smarter Cities



We tried to define a 'Smart City' in the Indian context, and brainstormed specific ways in which existing challenges in urban systems could be overcome through design and innovation-led approaches.

Participants discussed technological platforms for citizen information and involvement, and articulated the need for a collaborative, user-generated information platform to coordinate between all the different systems in an urban space. This would enable more transparency and accountability in the planning and running of urban systems, greater civil society engagement, a constant feedback loop for better implementation, and most importantly, a sense of citizen ownership of the spaces they inhabit.

50 Steps to an Innovation Society



We used a role-playing game to help brainstorm ways in which different social entities - governments, corporations, NGOs, media, academics and citizens - can collaboratively enable an innovation culture. Participants were divided into groups that represented all these different elements of society, and were given various obstacles, expectations and challenges. In playing the game, participants discovered new and creative ways of collaborating, communicating and working with each other.

Participants also spoke about the need to encourage entrepreneurs and emerging startups, and the requirement for greater attention from the media, government and corporations to create innovation hubs in India.

What do we need to do to build an innovation society?

We used the final panel of the day to discuss concrete areas of possible collaborative action, which include: the further activities and plans of the Bihar Innovation Lab, including its proposed Lab-School for Innovation, the conceptualization of a Startup Accelerator to focus on India's grand challenges, the creation of a think-tank on Smarter Cities in India, and the further definition of innovation networks that can bind existing public, private, social and academic institutions.

Discussions also touched upon the need for more effective conversations that can materialize real, actionable solutions, and proposed that Design and Innovation could be regarded as forms of discourse. We hope to explore this idea further, and will focus on this proposition at the next edition of Design Public in Mumbai in December of this year.

Reimagining Rural Innovation



We explored ways in which the participatory, collaborative model of the Bihar Innovation Lab could be extrapolated to address other areas of rural innovation, such as toilets and sanitation, education and food security, amongst others.

We discussed ways in which coordination between different stakeholders could happen, and the kinds of communication systems and platforms that would be required. A lot of participants pushed for the idea of introducing an innovation incubator within the framework of the lab. This could include opportunities for mentorship, funding, information-sharing and collaboration, thereby enabling grassroots innovations to be realized, scaled and made more effective.

Need-based Startup Innovation



We talked about the best way to promote socially-driven startups in India. One of the main barriers to this is the lack of spaces that provide the entire gamut of mentorship, funding, training, and opportunities for networking and collaborating that is required for a startup ecology to flourish.

Participants discussed the model of an innovation accelerator that would provide all this and be specifically focused on startups that address social challenges. This would necessarily be a collaborative space which offers knowledge, expertise, technological capabilities and other infrastructural necessities. It would require the support of government and policy makers as well as private enterprises, social sector organizations and academic institutions.



Divya Sharma receives her certificate in innovation from Aditya Dev Sood

LAB-SCHOOL FOR INNOVATION: Certificate in Innovation Management

The Center for Knowledge Societies organized an innovation training workshop one day prior to the Design Public Conclave, designed as an introduction to the theory and practice of innovation.

The training session used various case studies and interactive games to demonstrate the three stages of innovation: jugaad, price-pointing innovation and systematic, routinizable innovation. CKS innovation experts provided personalized consultations for each delegate.

In addition, visiting experts on design innovation offered their unique perspectives and experiences to help participants understand how these theories can become practically manifest.

The next edition of Design Public will be held in Mumbai in December 2012. Opportunities for sponsorship and partnership are now open. Visit our website: www.designpublic.in or email us at designpublic@cks.in for more information.

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Delhi
Bangalore
Mumbai
Patna

CKS House, 4004, 100' Road, Indiranagar,
560038 Bangalore INDIA
V: 91 80 412 54373, 4152 3600, 4125 4377

CKS House, D-57, 100ft Road, Chattarpur Enclave
110074 New Delhi INDIA
V: 91 98737 23135,