

# A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF TEAM LEADERS IN DESIGN WORKSHOPS TO FACILITATE SOCIAL IMPLEMENTATION

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## ABSTRACT

Design workshops have become an important method for fostering innovation and addressing social issues, particularly in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While these workshops promote idea generation, the role of team leadership in realising social implementation remains underexplored. This study investigates how team leaders influence the success of social implementation within participatory design workshops conducted from 2012 to 2024. Employing a Participatory Research approach, the study analyses leadership dynamics, compares successful and unsuccessful workshop cases, and examines community collaboration. The findings reveal that close cooperation between team leaders and local stakeholders significantly enhances the likelihood of implementation. Based on these insights, the paper proposes a workshop management model that strengthens community collaboration and supports the development of sustainable, socially embedded solutions. This research offers practical guidance for leveraging design workshops to drive real-world change.

*Keywords: Design workshop, SDGs, social implementation, design thinking*

## 1 BACKGROUND

Design workshops have recently gained attention as a means for creating innovation and addressing societal issues [1]. Particularly in initiatives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [2], design thinking [3]-based workshops are considered effective for obtaining collaboration from a wide range of stakeholders. In general, design workshops (DWS) require momentum to link the ideas generated by participants to social implementation. However, there is insufficient understanding of how leadership [4][5] influences the specific workshop processes and subsequent social implementation activities. Leaders play a role in uniting the team and fostering collaboration with local communities and stakeholders, but it is crucial to clarify how their actions impact social implementation and what common factors exist in successful leaders. Unfortunately, the importance of team leaders' roles has not been sufficiently examined in cases that lead to social implementation, and this lack of focus is one of the factors hindering the connection to successful social implementation.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

This study aims to clarify the relationship between the operation of participatory design workshops and social implementation, with a particular focus on the role of team leaders. The goal is to identify the relationship that maximises the potential for social implementation and to propose more effective workshop management methods. In this paper, "social implementation" is defined as the process by which ideas or projects emerging from participatory design workshops are realised in tangible forms and sustainably applied or developed within real-world societal contexts.

## 3 METHODOLOGIES

Using Participatory Research methods [6][7], this study will examine the relationship between workshop management methods and social implementation through case studies of participatory design workshops. Specifically: (1) Based on data from citizen-participatory workshops conducted from 2012

to 2024, the study will analyse the role of team leaders and changes in factors related to social implementation. (2) Through interviews with team leaders who successfully implemented social projects, the study will identify the motivation and activities related to social implementation and compare them with teams that did not implement such projects. Additionally, the study will focus on the relationships between resources, issues, and opportunities with local communities, to explore the success factors. (3) These results will be analysed to propose workshop management methods that enhance the potential for social implementation.

#### 4 SURVEY 1: DESIGN WORKSHOPS FROM 2012 TO 2024 AND POST-WORKSHOP ACTIVITY RECORDS

From the perspective of the design workshop organisers, we organised the design workshop operation reports from 2012 to 2024, along with records of post-workshop activities (Table 1), to identify the operational policies, the emergence of team leaders, and factors related to social implementation.

*Table 1. Summary of Design Workshops (DWS) from 2012 to 2024 and Subsequent Activities*

DWS Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
DWS Team Numbers	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	6	8	8	3	3
No. of Project Continuation	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	4	4	3	3	2
Management policy and the emergence of team leader	The purpose is to spread design thinking education to society and raise awareness of social issues. The organisers form teams, and leaders spontaneously emerge within the teams.						The goal is not only to spread design education in society but also to put ideas into practice in society. Leaders volunteered themselves and brought issues to DWS.						

The findings from this survey revealed that the main factor behind the increased team activity after the DWS in 2018 was a change in the operational methods. From 2012 to 2017, the DWS focused on design thinking as the core of education, emphasising co-creation and diversity. During this period, the organisers pre-arranged the teams, and members with leadership qualities naturally assumed the leadership roles, focusing on problem identification and idea generation. However, a key issue emerged: excellent proposals were not leading to social implementation.

In response, from 2018 onwards, the focus shifted towards social implementation, and the team leaders began to volunteer to share social issues and make specific proposals using the Double Diamond method. This change led to participants with a strong awareness of social issues taking leadership roles, which resulted in more practical problem-solving. As a result, this led to continuous post-activity initiatives, and expectations grew for outcomes aimed at social implementation.

#### 5 SURVEY 2: INTERVIEWS WITH TEAM LEADERS

##### 5.1 Social Implementation Project 1: Team Leader A

##### 5.1.1 Social Implementation Activities

Team Leader A participated in DWS from 2016 to 2019 and from 2021 to 2023. From 2016 to 2017, A was a team member of DWS. Starting in 2018, as a team leader, A brought local issues from the region into DWS and made design proposals.

Overall, Team Leader A participated in DWS with the goal of "revitalising depopulated areas through design methods." Each year, A proposed ideas from different specific perspectives, and afterward, took concrete steps toward implementing the ideas. For example, A worked on creating a platform to connect cities and regions, organising experience-based events that utilised local resources, among other activities. These practical efforts involved some members of DWS, local participants, and, as needed, local governments and external experts to form a team. The main stakeholders involved are outlined below.

*"Networks are important, and we make good use of the connections we have made through design workshops."  
"In rural areas, women are often in a weaker position in public settings."*

*"We'll have fun doing this. Having fun is important."*



Figure 1. Project 1 DWS Proposal and Social Implementation

### 5.1.2 Main Stakeholders

- **Operation Bureau:** Planning and managing sustainable activities, securing human resources, applying for budgets
- **City Hall:** Providing activity funding, supporting activity locations
- **DWS Operation:** Providing design thinking methods, supporting network building
- **Local Residents:** Supporting activity operations, providing local resources
- **Local Communities:** Supporting collaboration and activity operations
- **Family:** Supporting activity operations
- **External Supporters:** Providing technical expertise and ideas

### 5.1.3 Challenges

#### 1. Fundraising

Fundraising is a crucial challenge in social implementation activities, particularly since a lack of funds has a significant impact on the progress of activities. Securing stable funding is essential for achieving sustainable activities.

#### 2. Gender-based Differences in Roles

Especially in rural areas, the culture of male dominance can result in women being placed in socially weaker positions. As a result, women's participation in society and their opinions are often not reflected. Creating an equal environment is necessary.

#### 3. Local Culture and Customs

Respecting local traditions and customs while incorporating modern values presents difficulties. A balance must be found between respecting unique local cultures and advancing change that aligns with contemporary values.

## 5.2 Social Implementation Project 2: Team Leader B

### 5.2.1 Social Implementation Activities

Team Leader B participated in DWS in 2019 and 2020. During DWS, B addressed the issue of declining usage of the shared bus "Nagisa-go," a vital mode of transportation in the Imajuku region, and proposed a plan for regional revitalisation centred around the bus. The subsequent social implementation involved launching the "Imajuku Project," [9] which brought together students from Kyushu University, staff from Fukuoka City's Nishi Ward Office, local residents, and high school students from various backgrounds to expand the use of Nagisa-go. This included adding tourist information to bus stop signs and making universal design improvements. Furthermore, a website was created to promote the region's history, culture, and tourism resources, with locally sourced information and features about the hidden attractions of Imajuku. To ensure sustainability, numerous events and workshops were organised, and a community platform for local people was formed.

*"Securing funding is always a challenge."*

*"I'm glad that so many university students are participating in our activities. But it's hard to secure new talent after they graduate."*



Figure 2. Project2 DWS Proposal and Social Implementation

### 5.2.2 Main Stakeholders

- **Project Management Bureau:** Planning and managing sustainable activities, securing human resources, applying for budgets
- **City Hall:** Providing regional issue support, partial funding for activities, supporting activity operations
- **Local Government:** Providing activity operation budgets, consultation services
- **DWS Operation:** Providing design thinking methods, supporting fundraising and introducing human resources
- **Local Residents:** Actively participating in community activities and supporting operations
- **Local Communities:** Supporting activity planning and operation, promoting new activity developments

### 5.2.3 Challenges

#### 1. Lack of Dialogue

In local meetings and activities, a few individuals hold decision-making power, and particularly women's opinions are not adequately reflected. Furthermore, the opportunities for dialogue are limited, making it difficult for diverse opinions from the entire community to be shared.

#### 2. Lack of Information

Information about local activities is not sufficiently circulated, resulting in low awareness among residents. Additionally, there is a lack of external perspectives and new ideas, which means that the diverse knowledge needed for the region's development has not been integrated.

#### 3. Fundraising Challenges

There are limitations to fundraising for local activities, with a heavy reliance on grants and crowdfunding, making it difficult to cover all necessary costs. Securing funds for personnel expenses is especially challenging, and many activities are supported by volunteers, which presents a challenge for sustainable operations.

## 5.3 Social Implementation Project 3: Team Leader C

### 5.3.1 Social Implementation Activities

Team Leader C participated in DWS from 2022 to 2024, working on Fukuoka City's "One Person One Flower Movement" [10], which aims to beautify the city by encouraging citizens, businesses, and organisations to grow flowers. Launched in 2018, the initiative promotes planting flowers in public spaces, corporate grounds, and home gardens, involving citizens as "One Person One Flower Supporters." C addressed challenges through DWS and proposed solutions, including a system for sustainably watering flowerbeds using rainwater, recycled water, and other sources. Prototypes were developed and implemented. C also engaged educational institutions in a research project focused on creating a flower city through industry-government-academia collaboration using design thinking.

*"There are so many people who love flowers, and they're a wonderful medium"*

*"I don't know how we can continue our activities sustainably or secure great talent."*



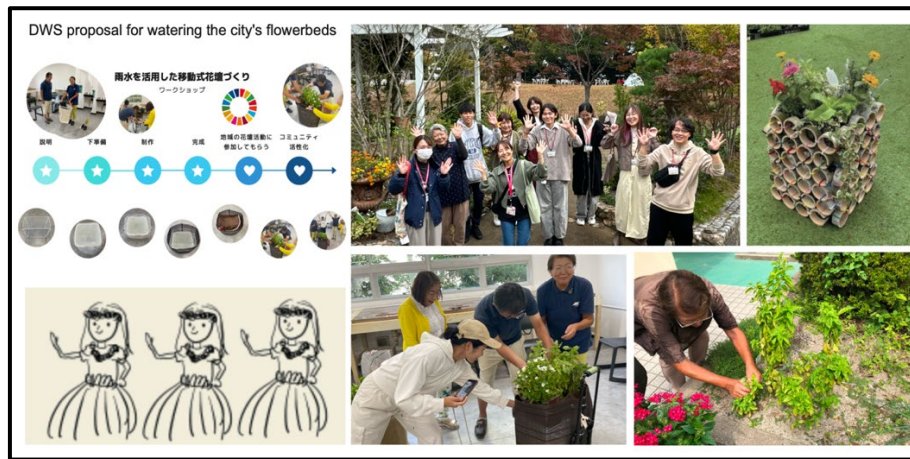


Figure 3. Project3 DWS Proposal and Social Implementation

### 5.3.2 Main Stakeholders

- **Project Management Bureau:** Planning and managing sustainable activities, securing human resources, applying for budgets
- **City Hall:** Providing regional issue support, partial funding for activities, offering activity locations
- **Businesses:** Providing operational funding, offering support
- **DWS Operations:** Providing design thinking methods, supporting human resource acquisition
- **Local Communities (NPOs):** Supporting activity planning and operations
- **Educational Institutions:** Providing participants for activities, researching activity methods
- **Citizen Supporters:** Participating in activities and supporting operations

### 5.3.3 Challenges

#### 1. Establishing a Financial Foundation

Although the costs for operating the activities are currently low, the compensation for operations is also low, and a stable financial foundation has not been established. Therefore, the lack of a sufficient fundraising system for sustaining activities is a key challenge.

#### 2. Passing the Torch to the Next Generation

To continue developing activities, it is essential to foster the next generation of leaders and staff. However, there is currently no clear system for passing the activities on to the next generation, and the sustainability of the organisation is at risk.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

From Study 1, to enhance the potential for social implementation, it is important to:

1. The need to define social implementation clearly within the operational policies of the design workshops. Without a shared understanding, participants struggle to align their post-workshop actions with intended outcomes.
2. Team leaders' prior experiences and social issue awareness play a critical role in translating workshop ideas into implementation. Leaders with a clear sense of purpose and community engagement background were more likely to initiate and sustain social activities.

These findings suggest that the DWS program should more explicitly articulate its goals around social implementation and provide scaffolding for leaders to reflect on their values and motivations.

From Study 2, based on the perspective of team leaders from local communities, to enhance the potential for social implementation, the following three elements are crucial:

1. Diversified fundraising mechanisms: All projects faced challenges in securing funds, particularly for operational costs and human resources.
2. Promotion of inclusive dialogue: Decision-making tended to concentrate among a few local actors, often excluding women or young people.
3. Next-generation leadership development: Collaborating with educational institutions to involve young talents is crucial for continuity.

Furthermore, stakeholder relationships varied significantly depending on the project's theme and geographic area. For example, in Team A's project on depopulated regions, local governments and external experts were critical. In contrast, Team C's flower initiative relied more on citizen supporters and educational institutions. This indicates the need for flexible and context-responsive network building.

The combined findings of Study 1 and Study 2 suggest that successful social implementation through design workshops is not solely the result of design skills or ideas generated in the workshops. Instead, it relies heavily on:

- Embedded leadership rooted in social contexts,
- Collaborative networks that span institutional boundaries,
- Mechanisms for continuity, such as systems for fundraising and talent development.

In this sense, design workshops can serve as incubators of social innovation, but only when they are aligned with local needs and equipped to support post-workshop action. This underscores the importance of viewing workshops not as one-off interventions, but as part of a broader ecosystem of community engagement and social change.

By combining a survey-based analysis with grounded case studies, this study demonstrates how design workshops can evolve into platforms for real-world social implementation. The findings contribute to the growing field of societal design, emphasising the need for strategic alignment between workshop design, community collaboration, and long-term sustainability.

In future research, it may be beneficial to deepen the focus on either the macro-level mechanisms (such as policies, institutional support, and workshop design) or the micro-level processes (such as team leadership, local culture, and stakeholder dynamics). This bifocal approach can enhance both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for designing impactful workshops. The research discusses the transition from ideas and solutions proposed in workshops to social implementation, but long-term follow-up surveys on the actual implementation outcomes have not been conducted. The lack of data collection on the impacts and sustainability post-implementation is one of the limitations of the research. Considering these limits, future research should gather data from more regions and participants with diverse backgrounds, tracking the actual progress and effects of social implementation.

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