

# Transitions in public design practice: learning from waste management systems

Convenor Name	E-mail	Affiliation	Workshop role
Caio Werneck	caio.werneck@gmail.com	CAW Design e Aprendizagem Coletiva (Brazil)	Convenor
Javier Guillot	javier@circula.com.co	Power Compost SAS BIC (Colombia)	Convenor
Katie Saviano	katies@centreforpublicimpact.org	Centre for Public Impact(USA)	Convenor
Maraya Keny-Guyer	maraya@centreforpublicimpact.org	Centre for Public Impact (USA)	Advisor

In recent years there has been a growing influence of design in the public sector (Bason, 2014; Mortati et al, 2018). A variety of design principles, methods and tools are increasingly being introduced in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and interventions in different policy areas, across regions of the world (McGann et al., 2018; Ferreira & Botero, 2020). The influence between these fields has been multidirectional—designers transforming their practice by participating and contributing to public administration, and public servants understanding their work as a design practice and innovating through design.

In this workshop we aim to welcome the service design community to discuss key transitions taking place in public sector design practice – from non-conscious design to systems-level transformation– with the goal to develop the first iteration of a *manifesto* that can serve to guide those transitions. The case of urban waste systems will be used as a practical and material context for the workshop. Besides being an empirical reference, waste connects with the experiences of each potential workshop participant, because waste management services (e.g. waste collection and pickup) are part of everyone’s daily life in cities, and everyone participates in the waste system, most generally as producers or users/consumers of stuff. Hence, we expect that participants will be able to understand and engage with the three city cases as

inputs for their own reflection, critical thought, and creativity—even if they are not public servants or have not been professionally connected with waste in the past.

**Keywords:** public innovation, waste management, circularity, design practice

## Workshop description

We will start the conversation with concrete examples of equity-centered design and systems design approaches used to innovate in urban solid waste management, based on the cases of three Latin American cities (Fortaleza, Medellín and Santo Domingo) that participated in Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation training programs in 2022. In each city, teams of public servants used co-design approaches to engage residents and key stakeholders to collectively understand a problem area related with waste management, generate a portfolio of ideas in response, and test prototypes of prioritized ideas. This involved transitioning from a *status quo* of non-intentional design (i.e., with no awareness of explicit design principles, methods and tools, and weak capabilities to use them) to equity-centered and systems-oriented approaches that underscore the need to combine multiple interventions in a portfolio, engage various stakeholders and iterate. Building on these experiences, we propose two guiding questions: 1) *How could we bring about more effective transitions in public design practice?* 2) *What principles—i.e., core beliefs to guide action—could we propose to transform practice?*

During the workshop, we hope to illuminate two issues: the transition between design approaches and urban waste as a problem area that requires such transitions for it to be addressed, especially regarding city governments. Recently, a variety of academic and practitioner voices have characterized waste as a “design challenge”, framing the key question as “how can we design out waste?”, and explicitly underlining the systemic nature of the problem and the need to respond with systems design tools (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2022; What Design Can Do, 2021). This characterization has been central to the development of the field of “circularity” and the concept of a “circular economy”, which goes well beyond mere recycling to emphasize systems change. As exemplified by the presented cases to initiate the workshop, the ‘transitions’ that make up a circular visual are values-driven, and their effectiveness depends upon principles to guide action. In this session, we aim to



provide structure and tools for participants to reflect on these issues and draft a first iteration of a *manifesto* with such principles.

## Session set-up

The workshop will have a dynamic team-based structured, with some activities held in plenary and others in breakout groups, following this overall agenda:

Activity	Format / Materials / Convenor roles
Welcome and set-up	Plenary. A small pile of trash welcomes participants as soon as they cross the door. Convenors present workshop objectives and agenda.
Presentation: 3 cases in urban waste management	Plenary. Led by convenors with projected visuals.
Bringing about more effective transitions in public design	Breakout groups (max. 5 people each) will use printed-out materials with guiding questions to reflect and aid documentation.
Sharing space	Plenary. Live sharing of reflections of at least 3 groups, facilitated by convenors.
Principles for transitions in public design practice	Breakout groups (max. 5 people each) will use a <i>brainwriting</i> tool to draft proposed principles, discuss them, and add them to a collective board.
Sharing space and closing	Plenary. Live clustering and sharing of proposed principles.

## Space requirements

We expect to host a maximum of 30 participants, which will work in groups of 5 people each. To this end, we need a space that can comfortably accommodate them, with 7 tables (1 table per group, and 1 for materials), projector with HDMI input, whitescreen for projection, whiteboard or similar (ideally movable).

## References

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## Convenors bio:

**Caio Werneck** is a consultant with 12+ years working at the intersections of design, sustainability and collective learning. Practitioner with experience creating and developing strategy and innovation units in the Brazilian public sector, he has collaborated with several projects, publications and events in the public design ecosystem in Latin America. Caio holds a Master in Public Policy (Hertie School) and BA from the Fundação João Pinheiro.

**Javier Guillot** is a co-founder of Power Compost, a venture that builds circular systems for organic waste, and an innovation coach for the Bloomberg-Harvard City Leadership Initiative. He has 15 years of experience in the fields of public and social innovation, working for government, social and private entities, and in projects with UNICEF, World Bank and NGOs. Philosopher (U. Nacional), Master in Philosophy (U. Penn) and Master in Public Policy (Hertie School).

**Katie Saviano** is a Program Manager at the Centre for Public Impact, a not-for-profit that works for governments and their partners to embrace complexity, relationships, and experimentation - generating better outcomes for residents. She is interested in the intersection of design, equity, and resiliency to create new strategies of community empowerment in local government. She joined CPI from an innovation consultancy and early-stage technology incubator implementing solutions in the federal and city government spaces.

**Maraya Keny-Guyer** is a Program Manager for the Centre for Public Impact, where she leads capacity development programs for city governments to learn and apply design-based innovation to complex urban challenges. A passionate advocate for issues at the intersection of community co-design, social justice, and good governance, she has previous experience working with Human Rights Watch, the World Bank, and local city government.

