

EDITORIAL

Emerging Issues in Service Design

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Guest Editors

This special issue is dedicated to Emerging Issues in Service Design. The title acknowledges that service design, though still a young area of research, practice and even younger as a profession, has come a long way. With this special issue, we suggest that the field of service design is now entering a stage where discussions and research need to move beyond descriptions and justifications of what service design is and how it works. What is required to understand its future relevance and applications are studies on its impact and its place and role in business and society. It is time for a more nuanced consideration of the nature and purposes of different services; a regard for the contexts and situations they are supposed to address and transform – or not. This raises new questions, for example, concerning the influence of places and communities in service design projects and vice versa, questions about the responsibilities and ethics of service designers engaging with these. At the same time, it invites us to reflect on the suitability and ability of specific practices to deal in situ with context specific dynamics and realities, such as for example, organizational design

legacies, organizational power dynamics or interrelated networks affected by a given service.

Service design continues to evolve and to change. In its beginnings, service design emerged under the influence of service marketing studies, borrowing from their descriptions of and perspectives on services and service development. These were originally informed by the 'goods versus services paradigm' (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004). Within this paradigm, the Intangibility-Heterogeneity-Inseparability-Perishability (IHIP) model identified key characteristics that differentiate services from products (Zeithaml *et al*, 1985) while descriptions of services as set of 'encounters' (Czepiel *et al*, 1985) or 'moments of truth' (Normann, 1984) between users and the supply system, emerged. In addition, the idea of 'co-production' emphasized the role of customer participation in service performance and quality (Bitner *et al*, 1997). Alternative interpretations have suggested a theatre metaphor for services (Grove and Fisk, 1992) or approached it from the production side of service delivery system, where 'servuction' (Langeard and Eiglier, 1987) combined the terms 'service' and 'production.' Blueprint maps (Shostack, 1977) called for holistic visualizations of interrelated front and back office processes and operations. Service design has absorbed these concepts and sought to integrate them with the ideas of design thinking and 'designerly' ways of changing and innovating. In particular, service design focused on bringing user studies and collaborative design practices to the core of these concepts. Service design has worked to generate its own disciplinary foundations, developing as a distinct discipline apart from other already established design professions and practices, like those of product design, interaction design or information design.

The 'goods versus services paradigm', which informed service design practice, has been challenged in recent literature. Many of today's descriptions and representations of services indicate an overall shift from a 'goods logic' to a 'service logic'. This shift ascribes a different meaning to the term 'service'. Service is understood more as a way of thinking and of doing business (Grönroos, 2006) which may involve different kinds of services but is no longer tied to a specific design object or offering. This has made the distinction between plural 'services' and 'service' as a singular concept significant: in its plural form, services remain associated with specific market offerings where services continue to be treated as discrete design outputs, not unlike goods. Here, we suggest how the design work can be considered as finite, as the contribution of design professionals to business value is in the improvement of actual service transactions. In contrast, we see 'service' in its singular form being more and more used to refer to continuous transformations that challenge existing business logics and focus instead on the co-creation of value across different services and sometimes even in the absence of any specific service (Edvardsson *et al*, 2005) with people and organizations. This

fundamental shift in portraying services indicates a role for service design to align business values with what customers value in their life. It expands on the outside-in service design approach to service innovation but just exactly how, remains one of the emerging issues.

Some concepts rooted in this 'Service Logic' paradigm, such as service systems, complex service systems, and value co-creation, are now being considered in service design research as a way to engage with the global development of service science, 'the interdisciplinary study of service systems, particularly the study of how complex configurations of resources create value within firms and across firms' (Vargo *et al*, 2008: 150–151). In essence, this science calls for new 'abstractions' and a 'new unit of analysis' to better understand innovation – i.e. the 'service system' – intended as 'a configuration of people, technologies, and other resources that interact with other service systems to create mutual value' (Maglio *et al*, 2009: 395).

With this special issue, we question if these 'abstractions' – while useful to introduce design into novel spaces; to develop a new language; to inform interdisciplinary collaborations and to approach a higher level of design complexity – are preventing us from understanding services as situated and distract us from inquiring into what constitutes a service and how services change and evolve on a daily, in-use basis. We wonder if designers experienced in understanding customers' practices and lives who are able to translate this knowledge into value propositions, are similarly prepared to work with and within 'service systems'. What do we currently know about the practical and theoretical issues for how these ideas and concepts of value can be implemented into existing 'service systems'? This question seems urgent, as this is precisely what designers are increasingly asked to accomplish today. It is part of their move from traditional design consultancy models where they 'deliver' one-off service design projects to their client organizations, towards more collaborative innovation processes, where they need to engage with service development, service evaluation and change processes in a continuous transformation driven by more fundamental values. The closer service designers get to the practicalities of change and innovation (i.e. the singular form of service), the more pressing is the requirement for different descriptions and understandings of 'services' (plural) and their particular contexts.

We see a parallel here with how service design tends to refer to design as an abstraction, removed and detached from its context. The emphasis on design 'thinking', for example, threatens to overshadow the realities involved in ongoing design doing, actual design activities taking place already. In our view, this points to two differing design perspectives at work. One perspective promotes design thinking and designing as a singular concept. This view holds that there is only one kind of design thinking and one kind of designing and it is the one professional designers engage in. Design thinking here follows a certain logic and a certain method that is agreed to

be 'design'. The other view understands design thinking and designing as a general and plural concept. This view acknowledges that non-designers (i.e. engineers, public managers, hospital employees, patients or users) also engage in design thinking and designing. It acknowledges that a range of different people care about making improvements and think about how to get things done and how to get the right services for people. This view respects design efforts by non-designers while looking to improve design skills and design capabilities. Both views have consequences for the actual work undertaken, for who gets to be invited and engaged and for what gets to be considered and included in the design project.

Each stance presented above has implications for the outcome of a design project and presents service design and service designers with new challenges. What tools will service designers need to understand the organizational purpose of specific services? How will they be able to capture all service elements relevant to service system? How may they situate service to anticipate the changes they are initiating and simulate? How may new services affect the organizations where these services are embedded in and how may new services impact staff – hopefully for the better? Can service design embrace both design perspectives, the singular and the plural – and if so, how?

With this special issue, we would like to point toward the need for a more situated, embedded, and context aware way of understanding services, designing and changing. After an open call and external blind reviews of all papers from the Service Design and Innovation (servdes.org/conference-2014-lancaster/) conference, we have selected six papers. While touching upon recognized contemporary issues in service design (e.g. establishing complex service networks, scaling up local community-based solutions, embedding design within organizations or commensuration of value in service design), these final six papers, in our opinion, are indicating important aspects for the development of a more enriched understanding of services and therefore of designing more generally.

The first article is a thought piece by Jeanette Blomberg (IBM Research) and Chuck Darrah (San Jose State University) exploring the space and potential role for an anthropology of services in service design. Their critical review of key service concepts through an anthropological lens provides a complementary way to consider services as deeply 'entangled in social life' and designers themselves as part of 'social worlds'. The call for a practice-oriented approach to designing services acknowledges the risk of a reification of abstract concepts such as 'service systems'; they remind us how considering 'service systems' as given and finite objects of design might overlook, for example, issues of exclusion of legitimate participants or unintended consequences of changing and designing.

In line with the recognition of the intrinsic 'messiness' of services as human activities, Alison Prendiville (University of the Arts London)

focuses our attention on the importance of 'place' when designing for services. She highlights the intricate connection of place with human experience and with the way individuals define themselves: 'To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in' (Casey, 1997: 18 cited in Prendiville, this issue, p. 199). Recollecting students' project experiences for Age UK, she, too, calls for an anthropological perspective on services that in her case, by necessity, includes their localities.

Sabine Junginger (Macromedia University of Applied Sciences) points to the inevitable resistance designers face when their aim is to 'embed' design ways of innovating within organizations. She explains why organizations are already full of 'design legacies', arguing that 'The challenge for service designers is that organizations are full of design – full of design thinking, full of design practices, full of design methods' (p. 210). Examples of 'conversational pieces' are then offered as possible vehicles for designers to unearth these tacit legacies.

The following three pieces reflect on the implications of designing and changing within different manifestations of contemporary 'services'. Touching also on organizational issues, Sara Donetto (King's College London), Paola Pierri (Mind), Vicki Tsianakas (King's College London) and Glenn Robert (King's College London) present an evaluation study of the application and development of Experience-based Co-design (EBCD) methodology in healthcare organizations in UK and globally. Key considerations when discussing challenges and barriers to the introduction of collaborative design practices are observations on the inherent resistances of existing medical professional cultures to release power and control over healthcare development and delivery. These authors argue that in order to influence healthcare practices, it is now imperative to examine 'the networks and shifts of power' as and if manifested during and after collaborative work (p. 243).

The subsequent article by Jaana Hyvärinen (Aalto University), Jung-Joo Lee (National University of Singapore) and Tuuli Mattelmäki (Aalto University) offers another perspective but also one that looks into issues of applying co-design within service change (p. 249). Their work focuses on the barriers and resistances to the creation and maintenance of what they term 'fragile liaisons' within cross-organizational service networks. Their review of statements by people involved in a design project offers an intimate look into the dynamics and perceptions of collaboration across various public, private and third sector service actors. The insights from this work suggest how design may generate a better understanding. They also reveal useful hints on where designers could adjust and direct their contribution.

Finally, Nicola Morelli (Aalborg University) turns to the issue of scaling. He discusses the implications and conditions for scaling up highly localized services and their digital platforms. Reviewing his experience within two European projects, he reminds us of what

makes a network 'local', and how the social networking *wildfire* scaling logic, often presented as an ideal, fails when applied to digital social services that are deeply rooted in geographical contexts (p. 271). He calls for increased attention to the local relevance of service offering and trust dynamics as some of the indicators for successful scaling up and argues that these differences have yet to be acknowledged.

We hope that this collection of papers, beyond their diversity of themes and conclusions, offers useful directions for more situated research and a more contextual understanding of service(s) and service design. Our aim is to inform and stimulate future research and future practices in this area.

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