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Daniela Selloni

New service models and new service places in times of crisis: How citizens' activism is changing the way we design services

Abstract

In this paper we discuss how citizens' activism is changing the way we design services, introducing new *service models and places*, and therefore, a new role for service designers.

The reference framework is *'the bright side of the crisis'*, a scenario characterized by a significant wave of bottom-up activism, in which citizens are starting to design and produce a new generation of collaborative services, in order to respond to the deficit of services in our cities.

As service designers we are particularly interested in such phenomena and in the transformation of bottom-up activities in actual services, using co-design and community centred design. In this scenario, one significant example is "Creative Citizens," a project generated within the design doctoral programme of Politecnico di Milano. Building upon this applied-research activity, we wish to better define the new *service models* arising in this scenario and, consequently, the related *service places* emerging as points of connection among citizens, designers, stakeholders and institutions.

Finally, looking attentively at Creative Citizens' results, we wish to focus more on the role of designers in shaping this social learning process: they are more than facilitators because they are able to inspire and lead a community.

Keywords

Service design. Service models. Service places. Social innovation. Design activism.

1. The context: 'the bright side of crisis'.

The crisis that has unfolded since 2008 is not merely economic, it is structural and multidimensional (Castells, Caraça & Cardoso, 2012).

Looking attentively at the complexity of the current crisis we can detect the emergence of alternative practices exploring new and sustainable ways of living.

This is the 'the bright side of the crisis': a renewed activism on the part of citizens, a variety of Creative Communities involved in sustainable social innovation, "people who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living" (Meroni, 2007, p.30).

In these times of crisis, confronted with a lack of services inside our cities, what is happening is that local communities are seeking to solve the problem from the bottom up, changing what is already there without waiting for the arrival of a bigger, top-down intervention.

Phenomena such as Sharing Economy or Collaborative Consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2011) are connected to this kind of activism and they are growing extremely rapidly. They have taken a more definite shape in recent years, showing how crisis can also be a driver of behavioural change, just because many people have found less costly solutions to their problems through new forms of sharing and self-production.

Creative Communities represent also a response to the crisis of governments and their loss of connection with citizens.

Confronted with the crisis of the welfare state and of the public sector, many citizens have started engaging in participation movements, in order to change the power dynamics and to be more involved in the decision making process. The Tepsie research (2012) is currently exploring this phenomenon and has identified two kinds of engagement: public participation, meaning a form of individual engagement within the institutions of democracy, and social participation, which is more related to civic engagement in local communities and associations.

Hence, we can describe the 'bright side of the crisis' as a scenario in which desires meet needs and problems become opportunities for doing things in unprecedented ways, generating original cases of social innovation.

We don't know if these cases are only temporary solutions, but, trying to envision possible developments, they can lay the foundations for new socio-economic models, and this represents a call for research.

As service designers focusing on social innovation we are particularly interested in exploring the development of these transitory and informal solutions in actual services. We are also interested in understanding what kind of role designers can play in this emerging area.

Currently, within service design research, and looking at the work of our group Polimi *DESIS* Lab, there are several projects exploring this field, especially working with the most active social communities.

By using a set of participatory design techniques and an approach known as community centred design (Meroni & Manzini, 2012), service designers are now researching this area, collaborating with citizens for developing prototypes of new and sustainable ways of living.

2. The experimentation of creative citizens

In this paper we particularly wish to focus on a specific case of applied research in the field of service design and social innovation, "Creative Citizens" (Cittadini Creativi). This is a project generated within the design doctoral programme of Daniela Selloni at Politecnico di Milano, under the auspices of the Polimi *DESIS* Lab group.

The Creative Citizens experiment occurred in Milan, within a community of residents located in a particular neighbourhood (Zone 4).

It took place in a local farmhouse, the Cascina Cuccagna, which represents a symbol of Milanese activism. Thanks to a bottom-up initiative, the Cascina has been revived: now it is a green oasis in the centre of the city and a real piece of countryside in an urban area.

Cascina Cuccagna aims to become a permanent laboratory for civic participation and a new public space that will welcome and support the creativity of individuals, groups and associations by offering spaces, equipment and opportunities for collaboration. Currently, the farmhouse is undergoing a transformation and is organising residency opportunities for original projects with the same mission.

Creative Citizens responded to the call for the assignment of temporary spaces in the Cascina, presenting a programme focusing on participatory design between designers and local communities by using the tools of service design research. The project is endorsed by the Zone 4 Unit of Local Government, in direct association with the Municipality of Milan.

An ongoing experiment involving a community of thirty citizens with weekly meetings began in February 2013 and continued until the end of June 2013.

Creative Citizens brought the expertise of researchers to the service of ordinary people, creating a laboratory of solutions for daily life, improving existing services and designing new ones, acting as a semi-public

office for service design and connecting citizens with designers, stakeholders and institutions. In other words, creating a good environment for co-designing social innovation.

The project consisted of a series of co-design sessions dealing with four different service areas: sharing networks, bureaucratic advice, food systems and cultural activities, all of which were connected to simple daily tasks and to existing services and places, such as time banks, purchasing groups, local shops, museums, markets and fairs.

In each session, there was a temporary set design to simulate service situations: it was a simple path of creative participation, precisely because everyone was able to become a designer of their daily life, at least for a few months, while having fun at the same time.

The four service areas were organized in four cycles, each of them consisting of three creative sessions, which can be seen as the three steps of a progressive path.

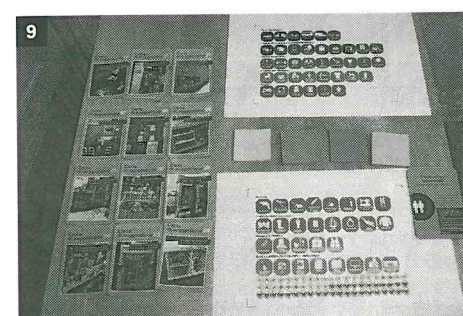
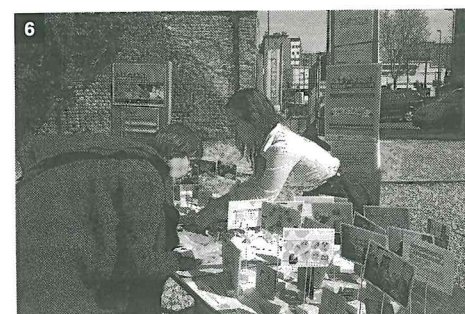
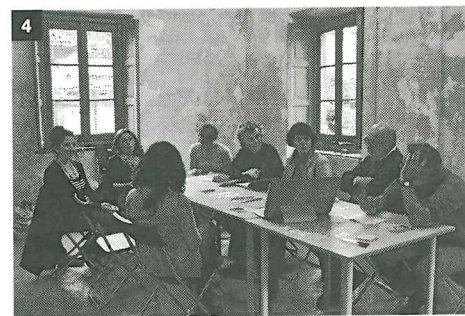
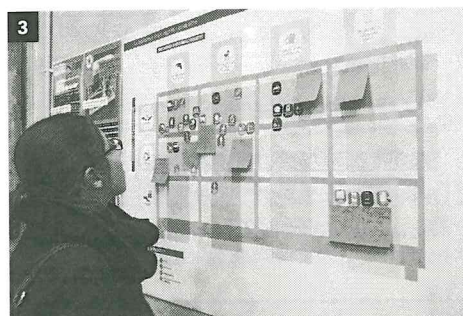
The initial meeting was a *warm up session*, to familiarize participants with the topic by presenting good practices from all over the world. It aimed to inspire people and bring visions of a possible daily life. Participants selected the most promising elements of the presented cases, to be combined in the second session, in order to create as advanced a service concept as possible. This second meeting was a *generative session*, a sort of collective brainstorming bringing together citizens' desires and good practice insights. In the third session, the objective was to move from an ideal service to a real one, identifying the resources that could be involved in the development of the service. It was a real *prototyping session*, using physical mock-ups to shape a service truly suitable for the area in question i.e. Zone 4.

In this last session, strategic players were invited: local associations and committees, representatives of institutions, and professional advisors... all already active in the neighbourhood, in order to join forces and produce synergy, receive encouragement and draw inspiration from existing activities.

This support is provided not only on the 'professional' side but also on the emotional side, because establishing connections between initiatives is the easiest way to activate a mutual process of teaching and learning; sharing skills, platforms and places.

The following table offers an overview of the different co-design experiments within the four thematic cycles framework and briefly presents the results. The methodology used within the experiments is a set of combined participatory techniques, including co-design and community-centred design as already discussed. The research context is informal and thus quite different from the academic one. It requires a specific adap-

- 1 Creative Citizens, presentation kit
- 2 Creative Citizens, generative session
- 3 Creative Citizens, generative session
- 4 Creative Citizens, warm-up session
- 5 Creative Citizens, warm-up session
- 6 Creative Citizens, public exhibition
- 7 Creative Citizens, public exhibition
- 8 Creative Citizens, exhibition to the Municipality
- 9 Collection of co-design tools
- 10 Suggestion Cards



Thematic Cycle 1	Services for exchanging goods and skills
1. Warm-up session	Exploration of existing micro-economies created by local communities in the field of exchange, rental and sale of goods, tasks and skills.
2. Generative session	Combination of previous insights and concept definitions, setting up service elements: services offered, technologies and tools, interactions, transaction typologies.
3. Prototyping session	Two different services are defined by using two kinds of prototypes: a "fake" bookcase to exchange objects and a sort of bulletin board to exchange tasks and skills.
Results:	Augmented Time Bank: a system to exchange skills and small tasks, within both condominium blocks and the neighbourhood, starting from Cuccagna Time Bank. Objects Library: a physical and digital space for bartering, borrowing, gifting, and renting goods in the neighbourhood.
Thematic Cycle 2	Legal and bureaucratic services
1. Warm-up session	Conversation with Rossella Mileo lawyer, founder of a Milanese Legal Desk. Investigation of existing systems of bureaucratic advice, both digital and face-to-face.
2. Generative session	Combination of previous insights and concept definitions, setting up service elements: services offered, technologies and tools, interactions, transaction typologies.
3. Prototyping session	A multi-service advice desk is defined by using two main prototypes: a "fake" front office showing the offering; a scale model of the physical office and its service areas.
Results:	Citizen's Desk: a service for orientation and assistance with bureaucracy, in various domains: legal, fiscal and architectural/building advice.
Thematic cycle 3	Food services
1. Warm-up session	Overview on food-related services and events, presentation of the case studies in two main clusters: shopping and eating.
2. Generative session	Combination of previous insights and concept definitions, setting up service elements: services offered, technologies and tools, interactions, transaction typologies.
3. Prototyping session	Two different food networks are defined by using these prototypes: a paper-cut laptop for testing a digital platform and a map of Milan to discuss possible logistic paths.
Results:	Facecook: a neighbourhood food network connecting restaurants, markets, shops and local residents. Local Distribution System: an alternative distribution network to connect Zone 4 with the Agricultural Park South Milan area, based on the principles of disintermediation and participated logistics.
Thematic cycle 4	Cultural services
1. Warm-up session	Investigation of good practices from the cultural field, divided into three main clusters: zero mile tourism, public art, local initiatives.
2. Generative session	Combination of previous insights and concept definitions, setting up service elements: services offered, technologies and tools, interactions, transaction typologies.
3. Prototyping session	A service of zero mile tourism is defined by using two prototypes: a travel agency board mock up, offering unconventional urban tours, and an interactive Zone 4 map.
Results:	Zona 4 Ciceros: places in Zone 4 adopted and explained by a citizen-guide, organizing unconventional tours to discover hidden or forgotten places.

Table 1 Brief overview of Creative Citizens' co-design experiments and results

tation of methods and tools, making them more attractive and easily understandable.

For each session we designed tools with three main purposes:

- *inspiring tools*, to spark off or reveal unexpected ways of doing things (good practices boards, suggestion cards, video-stories);
- *framing tools*, to elaborate a shared way of doing a specific thing (system maps, customer journey maps, front office and back office displays);
- *implementing tools*, to introduce a model into a local context, involving real players (service mock ups, localization maps, role games and stakeholders maps).

The final result of Creative Citizens is a collection of six everyday services co-designed with the active participation of local people. Each service is now at a different stage of development, depending on the opportunities found in the neighbourhood and in the network of institutions and stakeholders.

In summary, it is possible to identify three possible progressions for the generated services:

- to envisage an intersection with the public sector (this is the case of the Citizens' Desk);
- to foster the birth of original service start-ups (this is the case of the Object Library);
- to join existing services provided within the Cascina Cuccagna (this is the case of the Augmented Time Bank).

3. New service models: collaborative and networked services

The services originated within Creative Citizens call for a new kind of service model, building upon the definition of collaborative services: "services where the end-users are actively involved and assume the role of service co-designers and co-producers" (Manzini & Jégou, 2008, p.32). The end-users are the same citizens who are participating in this new wave of bottom-up activism. Their contribution may cross all stages of the service, from the generation of ideas to actual realization, that's why they are real "service thinkers and makers" (Selloni, 2013).

A new service model is emerging, in which the distinction between the traditional provider and the user is blurred.

This model goes beyond the one-to-one framework to a new one including wider and multiple interactions, and so, from a dualistic model to a plural and networked one, strictly connected to communities and places.

Our intention is to outline an explorative definition of this new service model, starting from the *IMP* scheme proposed by Meroni and Sangiorgi (2011), in which they analyze the four service characteristics: intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, perishability.

By intangibility, we mean that services are not physical goods: they are immaterial and for this reason it is necessary to design touch points and concrete evidence. This is even more important if we deal with the activities of 'service thinking and making' developed by citizens: to use interfaces, visualizations and prototypes is crucial to empathize with the community and create an 'object' for conversation at the co-design table. This new service model indeed requires more representation and materialization than the traditional one.

By inseparability we mean that services generally need the user to be present during the activity. Starting from the assumption that "design for services conceive users as a resource rather than a burden or a problem" (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 19), the users' presence is crucial not only in the delivery phase but also before, in the design phase. In Creative Citizens' project we noticed how co-design was transforming radically the resulting service model, and how the hyper localism of the experimentation influenced the co-production phase. Similarly to the co-creation model suggested by Cottam and Leadbeater (2004) this new service model presupposes the participation of the users in every stage, and the use of distributed resources, both physical and virtual, connected to a specific community in a specific place.

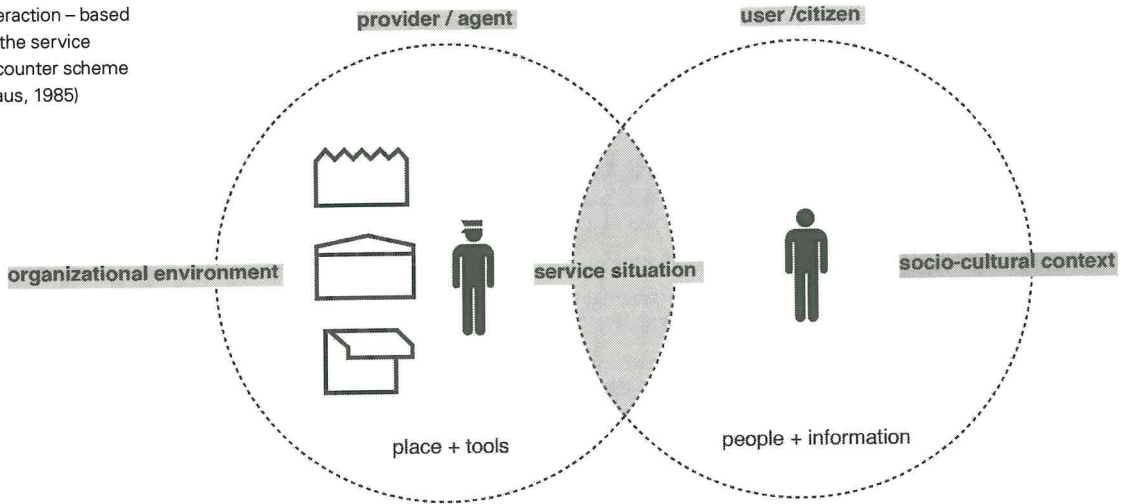
Speaking of heterogeneity, we mean that services are variable, depending on several factors such as time, space and the people involved. Every service situation is different from another, which is why Maffei and Sangiorgi (2006) talk about "situated actions", influenced by the socio-cultural and organizational context. This was even more evident in the experience of Creative Citizens: the context is crucial and it is not possible to divide it from its related service interactions.

The scheme about the service encounter, conceived by Klaus (1985) shows on one side the service provider and its organizational environment, and on the other the user and his/her socio-cultural context. In between there is the service area. This is not applicable to the described activities of 'service thinking and making', in which the two contexts almost coincide: a group of citizens/users covers many roles at the same time, they are service-provider, manager, launcher, advisor, beneficiary... there is a dense network of relations, roles can be exchanged, and new bottom-up expert systems are arising.

Finally, perishability deals with the impossibility for services to be stored and with the difficulty of managing supply and demand. This is also connected with the issues of scaling up and replicating: for achieving these two objectives "service solutions need to consider the interactive nature of services and their local dimensions" (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011). The service context represents again a key-factor: looking at the ex-

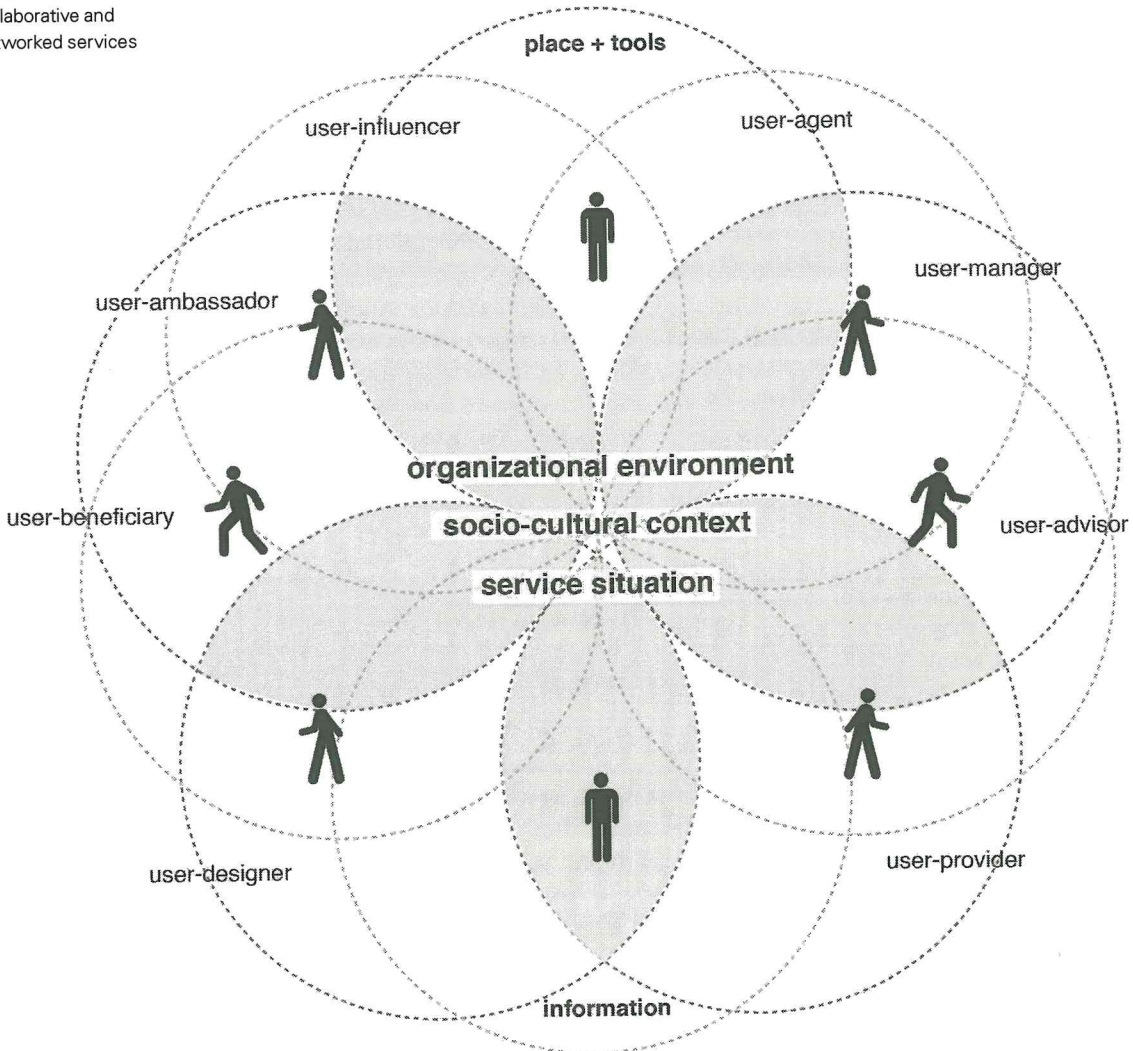
Scheme 1

Traditional service interaction – based on the service encounter scheme (Klaus, 1985)



Scheme 2

Collaborative and networked services



Traditional Services	Collaborative and networked services
Bi-directional relation	Circular interaction
Anonymity	Direct knowledge
Hierarchical organization	Peer to peer / networked organization
Delivery	Enabling
Professionalism	New experts
Division between public and private	Hybrid area semi-public/semi-private
Web as channel/tool	Web as enabler/connector
Focus on how	Focus on why

Table 2 Networked and collaborative services compared to traditional services

perience of Creative Citizens it is difficult to imagine the same services in another place, nevertheless this is a call for research: it is necessary to shape a collaborative service model to be quite flexible, in which some elements can be replicated and others adapted to new situations.

Furthermore, this model should allow the maintenance of the relational and emotional qualities embedded in service making activities, or, at least, contribute to the design of favorable conditions for spontaneous and trustful interactions, recognizing the person behind each individual (Cipolla, 2006).

In table 2 we propose a simplified comparison between the characteristics of the traditional service model and those of the new and emerging one.

In schemes 1 and 2 we show the shift from a traditional service model to a networked and collaborative one, showing how co-design and co-production are contributing in this transformation.

4. New service places: a fab-lab of city services

In Creative Citizens project we experimented a 'new service place', aiming at creating a catalyser of initiatives, a dedicated entity to co-design and co-produce services.

Therefore, close to the idea of exploring new service models, there is the intention of investigating a novel format, a reference point for supporting active citizens in the neighbourhood.

To outline the identity of this new service place, a main metaphor emerges: it is a parallel between the self-production of objects – making (Micelli, 2011) – and the self-production of services.

In the Creative Citizens project, people acted as real 'service thinkers and makers' therefore we can define this new service place as a sort of 'fab-lab of city services'.

This place is not only dedicated to the self-production of services, but it also represents a point of connection between ordinary citizens, designers, local stakeholders and institutions. It gathers together existing

initiatives and also creates conditions to establish unprecedented connections among all the actors involved in the service.

Such a place is located in a hybrid area between the market and society, the amateur and the professional, the public and the private sector and between profit and non-profit. This area is a good environment for fostering social innovation: according to Mulgan (2007, p.34) "social innovations are usually new combinations or hybrids of existing elements" and that putting social innovations into effect usually involves cutting across organizational, sectoral or disciplinary boundaries.

In the Creative Citizens project, individuals, communities, local stakeholders and institutions are involved in design activities and this experimentation represents the prototype of a social learning process in which (service) design knowledge is a key-asset.

That's why, in such a framework, the role of the designer is not only that of a facilitator, but it is evolving into something different: designers bring a vision to inspire and lead the community, using their professional tools to make things happen. (Fuad Luke, 2009).

As a matter of fact, within our experimentation, designers were actual leaders, able to trigger bottom-up activism and transform it in actual services for the community. We also noticed how design expertise was crucial in building scenarios and bringing visions, in developing solutions linked to these scenarios and in providing specific tools to support and share this process.

In this perspective, a "fab-lab of city services" is the centre of a wide co-design and co-production network, a place for design and making, and, hopefully, a place that is pleasant and generative of a broader social learning process.

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