Mapping and developing
Service Design Research in the UK

DANIELA SANGIORGI | ALISON PRENDIVILLE | AMY RICKETTS

5 — Conclusions and Recommendations

The Service Design Research UK Network has contributed to making the field more tangible. Our aims were to better define Service Design as a research field, drafting its current landscape, and identifying emerging areas for future research. Here we report our main conclusions and advance some recommendations to our key audiences: academics, practitioners, funding and innovation agencies and commissioners.

Service Design Research UK: the Landscape

The Network revealed a fragmented field of research, with very few actors typically working in Service Design. However the research also revealed the growing interest in services and service innovation as evidenced by the number of PhD students. This Network used 'service' and 'service innovation' as an opportunity to bridge diverse fields of research (i.e. Design Management, Design for Sustainability, Product Service System design); having a common interest, we recognise the concrete possibilities to suggest future collaborations in areas that are not currently at the core of Service Design research.

Most of the research projects mapped, focused on Design for Public Service innovation, with very limited work within and for the private (i.e. construction, energy, transport) and third sectors. Even if this concentration is motivated by a pressing demand for public sector transformation, it does point to a research vacuum, as little attention has also been paid to Service Private-Public Innovation Networks and their prominent role in innovation.

Moreover significant parts of the research work has been dedicated to study ways to embed Design approaches and methods within organisations and to imagine and experiment with improved or novel service delivery models (following the tradition of Practice Based Design Research). In contrast **scant research has been undertaken to closely study Service Design practices, their innovation strategies and actual impact**. SDR UK illustrates with examples, the range of design agency models and their current level of development. Systematic studies of design agencies' work could address the call for more clarity, legitimacy and accountability for Service Design and to better link research with practice needs and challenges.

Finally at the borders of the drafted SDR landscape, experimentations with **digital and social innovation are opening up new avenues while questioning the very object of Service Design and the nature of 'designing'**. In these spaces the traditional definitions of what a Service is and of when Design happens are still an open object of debate.

Service Design Research: Future Directions

The twelve emerging research areas, translated into co-authored essays and key research questions, clearly delineate promising spaces for research that can be used as a starting point for future project work. These areas of research address interrelated issues concerning:

The definition of what Service Design is: discussions on the object and extended design spaces of Service Design to provide different angles with which to look at this practice and its applications;

The core of Service Design practice: most of the essays address issues (i.e. design cultures, measurement, ethics, professional legitimacy) related to implementing Service Design within different contexts or specific sectors (manufacturing, Voluntary Community Sector or healthcare);

The borders of Service Design field: writings that connect Service Design with Digital Innovation, Social innovation, Social Change or Policy Making opens up novel realms of investigation and raises questions that need our attention.

These proposals are all significant contributions to the field as they introduce critical perspectives on Service Design, problematising some of its applications and dispelling assumptions, of what it is and where it is developing; they open up novel spaces for research and point towards the need for an increased inter-disciplinarity.

Recommendations
For Academics

Together with clear research gaps and open questions, SDR UK offers academics, interested in developing this research field, some general recommendations on how to approach future studies, as emerged from our events:

1. Contextualising Service Design Research and Communication - Looking closely at the specificities of SDR UK case studies, it clearly emerged for the need to shift attention to more contextualised research and argumentation around the value and limitations of Service Design and for the development of more effective dialogues and collaborations across disciplines and sectors. Working in healthcare, in manufacturing SMEs or implementing new ventures, designers face different challenges (i.e. language and cultural resistances, ethical concerns, required skills and knowledge or evaluation practices) that can hinder service innovation in different ways.

2. Decentralising Service Design Research - A second consideration that emerged from the SDR conversations was the need to abandon a Design centric perspective when conducting research on and for Service Design. Shifting from focusing on 'designers' to 'designing' helps research to contextualise Design work and place it within existing service innovation practices and with a wider set of innovation actors, including users.

3. Service as an opportunity to expand research collaborations and design spaces - At the borders of the SDR landscape, Service Design is described more as an opportunity for designers to enter different and new spaces of action, and develop interactions with organisations and communities at different levels. By expanding the terms of services, instead of individual touchpoints or products, designers now have the opportunity to work at a different level on unprecedented issues, including contemporary societal problems. Here the ambiguity of 'service' as a concept is justifying a further expansion, beyond what has been traditionally considered as a sector or market category.

For Practitioners

Discussions on existing design practices from current research streams, offers key insights for the attention of design practitioners:

1. Focusing on outcome and implementation
    - A shift of focus towards implementation and impact and how to measure, evaluate and better integrate design's contribution within different kinds of service innovation projects, requires attention. Emphasis on design skills and approaches should be integrated with modes and examples of evaluation practices. Increasingly relevant is the development of ways and approaches to follow through or support more effective implementation.

2. Clear Strategic Positioning - Service Design as a term does not exemplify the variety of strategic positions and approaches design agencies are developing to differentiate from other existing practices. As design demand rapidly changes, a distinctive design offering is becoming imperative for survival. This needs to be accompanied by a clear communication of an agency's strategic position within the business consultancy market.

3. Acknowledging diversity in Professional Language and Cultures - Addressing service implementation, organisational or social change requires working within multidisciplinary settings with pre-existing professional cultures and practices; service designers need to acknowledge these, and reflect on what they bring to the table.

For Funding and Innovation Agencies

SDR UK suggests key areas and questions where research should develop in the future to inform funding and innovation agencies' calls and initiatives. As more general recommendations we suggest here:

1. Focusing on both core and emerging areas - Supporting initiatives and calls should consider the needs of both core issues of Service Design development and implementation. Acknowledgement is also needed of the transformational potential of when the field operates at the borders with areas such as social innovation, digital innovation, or policy-making.

2. Supporting Interdisciplinarity - A great deal of our conversations argue for the need for a better integration and recognition of design within multidisciplinary teams and professional cultures, as well as for designers to acknowledge existing cultures and practices to work with. Supporting these meaningful encounters and mutual recognitions could enable more effective innovation processes;

3. Outsourcing vs Embedding Design - As exemplified by designers' work and existing initiatives, there are two main opposing directions Service Design has been employed: as a consultancy to conduct work for a client or as a consultancy to develop capabilities within organisations. Embedding and Outsourcing are the extremes of a continuum of possible modes of collaborations that can have different consequences for the discipline itself and various degrees of efficacy. Supporting studies on their implications for innovation and the design industry could be a significant contribution to the field.
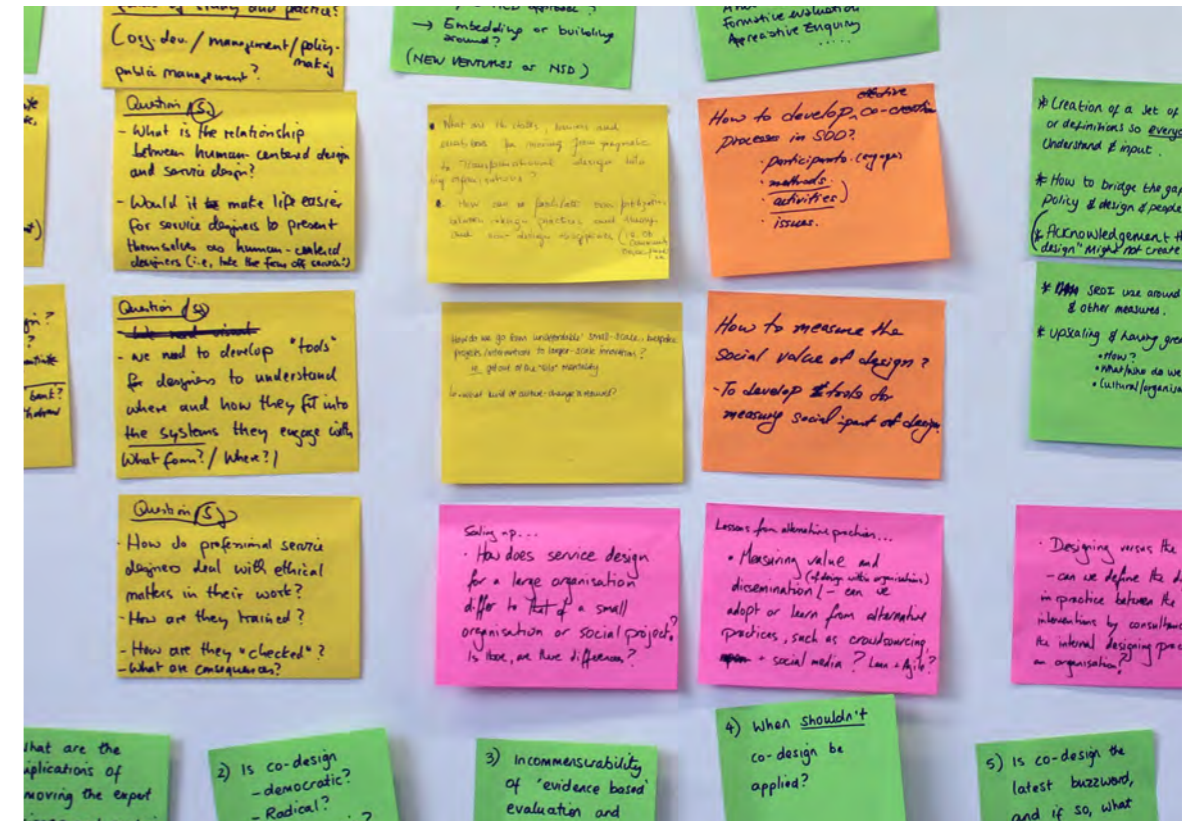
Emerging questions from workshop 02

For Commissioners

Commissioners of design work are still looking for a clear-cut definition of what Service Design is and can do. We provide below recommendations on how to better develop this understanding:

1. Acknowledging the diversity of Service Design practice models - Service Design is a general term that does not indicate the variety of ways designers work with a client organisation or community; while the research and professional community should improve how specific case studies and practices are evaluated and communicated, there is the need for a general appreciation by commissioners, of the different ways and levels that designers operate and the implications this can have on a project and its impact;

2. Addressing the measurement dilemma - As suggested by Macdonald and Robert's essay, there is the need for a reconciliation between more quantitative and qualitative modes of evaluating innovation projects, which should be addressed by both practitioners and commissioners. Understanding the limitations and potentials of each side could generate novel approaches that could be better able to appreciate the impact of complex projects and interventions.

The Service Design Research UK (SDR UK) Network is funded by an AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) Network grant. The aim of the Network is to review and consolidate the current state of Service Design knowledge within the field of Design. SDR UK has delivered three thematic workshops and a website (www.servicedesignresearch.com) with a database of academics, educational courses, research and PhD projects related to Service Design and Service Innovation. Data and insights produced via these activities have then been used to create interpretative maps of the field and to identify emerging research areas and recommendations for future development.

www.servicedesignresearch.com/uk

This report organises the Network's materials to give an overview of Service Design Research in the UK, with its key research themes and sectors, and discusses the nature and challenges of Service Design practice.

In the last section the report offers twelve short pieces by a range of academics, experts and practitioners who have participated in the Network, reflecting on possible future directions and challenges for Service Design research. In our conclusions we bring together all these considerations to offer key recommendations for academics, practitioners, funding agencies, innovation and design bodies as well as design commissioners. We hope this work represents an effective platform to consolidate and develop further the SDR UK community and its links with the international scene.

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