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Envisioning and evolving: Future evolution of the concept and the practice of service design

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Abstract

Service Design is evolving from an emerging field, breaking new ground in the design and service research areas, to a more mature stage, developing a set of fundamental concepts, methods and principles that can provide the foundation for its further significance and impact in both research and practice.

This paper reflects on the roots and recent evolution of service design in terms of fundamental concepts, methods and outcomes, taking into account the papers in the Envisioning and Evolving track. It considers how the growing interrelation with close fields of service research is introducing useful "contaminations" and reports how the Service perspective is revealing its potential to bring life to technical and entrenched systems. It goes on to argue that design should aim to bring services to life to prove its real, distinguishing value and contribution.

KEYWORDS: service design, multidisciplinary, service design evolution

Introduction

As the title of this conference suggests, service design is entering a more mature stage that requires 'proof of concept' of its value and significance for a variety of contexts and within multidisciplinary settings. This track aims to bring together ongoing reflections touching on the future of this field and its diverse geographies and interpretations.

Other tracks explore fundamental questions related to education, practice, environment, measurement and collaboration, and address developing areas such as design for policy, social innovation and engagement, and distributed forms of manufacturing. This track takes these reflections a step further, exploring the future evolution of the concept and the practice of service design.

Our initial call for papers suggested possible areas of interest relating to: the developing forms of service design practices; the multidisciplinary nature of designing for service; the relationships and contamination with close and collaborating disciplines; the positioning and role of service design within the wider fields of service science and service research; and finally on the way transformation of the objects of service design may impact on the practice and identity of service design itself.

Questions connected to the track were: How is the constant evolution of the object of service design affecting service design practice and identity? How can the evolution of service design within a multidisciplinary innovation practice be envisioned?

This introductory paper reflects on the overall topic of envisioning and evolving the field of service design. Starting from the co-chairs' personal recollection of where this practice comes from and where we are heading to, it goes on to review the accepted papers representing three levels of reflection: the fundamentals, the methods and the outcomes of service design. The paper closes by stating that the evolving nature of the field is not really aiming to become an established one.

Where we are and where we come from

Service design builds on the design and service research fields (Patrício et al. 2018a). Early service design approaches came from service research focused on blueprinting to ensure a consistent service experience and to detect and correct service failures (Shostack 1982). This perspective has evolved to address more complex service systems and become more customer-centred, incorporating multidisciplinary contributions such as marketing, operations management or information systems.

Service design can be described in multiple ways, from a problem solving perspective closer to engineering and management, to an exploratory inquiry – "designing for service" – approach (Kimbell, 2011). Within the design discipline, service design has evolved as an exploratory inquiry (Kimbell, 2011) for understanding service problems or opportunities that emerge, by building on a design thinking process (Blomkvist et al. 2010; Brown 2008). From this perspective, service design is viewed as a human-centred, holistic, creative, and iterative approach to creating new service futures (Meroni & Sangiorgi 2011).

We are now in a stage where service design has acquired wide recognition within the realm of design studies (Secomandi & Snelders, 2018), and also attracted growing interest from close fields of service studies such as service research, service science and service innovation (Patrício, Gustafsson, & Fisk, 2018a).

We all know how this field has emerged in the design discipline as an exploratory study in the application of design methods and principles to a new object of design - services - and how this has faced resistance and challenges in proving and illustrating what designers can actually bring to this economic sector and complex area of innovation (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011). This challenge is not over yet, but there has been a significant evolution in how design studies and practice have consolidated examples, fields of applications and approaches that are in constant transformation. Thus, service design has moved on from focusing on improving experiences, interactions and interfaces, to approach the complex and still very contemporary issue of changing behaviours, organisations and complex service systems (Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2017).

Innovating services has also demonstrated the wide variety of sectors and applications, with significant evidence of the diversity and peculiarities of working for public services and social innovation (Bason, 2010; Manzini & Staszowski, 2013; Selloni, 2017). Here, the application of design methods has climbed the ladder, gaining the attention of governments and public institutions, opening up the tangential study area of design for policy (Bason, 2014;

Junginger, 2016). Other special and developing applications concern the infusion of services into manufacturing organisations (Sayar & Er, 2018), or the building up of innovation capabilities in organisations (Nusem, Wrigley, & Matthews, 2017).

The construction of dedicated approaches and methods has been object of investigations, action research and reflections by both design academics and practitioners, with the aim of making design contributions more tangible and clear (Penin, 2018). This initially consisted in adopting and adapting methods from service marketing, service operations, interaction design and participatory design. The application of co-design methods in particular has attracted considerable attention given the co-produced nature of services and the intricacy of service innovation with organisational change (Meroni, Selloni, & Rossi, 2018). We now have a language, principles, an overall methodology and specific methods and tools that have become more established and have attracted the attention of organisations that want to develop their own design capabilities to become more competitive and innovative.

Service design as a design field has therefore gained importance in both research and practice, and has set up its own conferences and communities. At the same time, both design and service research approaches have contributed to evolving and establishing the ground for service design, and both perspectives acknowledge its multidisciplinary nature. However, while some research has tried to integrate these two perspectives (Teixeira et al. 2017; Wetter-Edman et al. 2014), further work is still needed for service design to establish multidisciplinary dialogues and advance as an interdisciplinary area.

The two special issues on service design recently published in Design Studies and the Journal of Service Research, leading journals in their respective areas, demonstrate how service design has become an important field in its own right and a key enabler for service innovation. The articles published in these special issues already build the ground for the evolution of service design as an interdisciplinary field, namely through the study of how it can enrich new service development (Yu & Sangiorgi 2018); the integration of design and management perspectives to understand its impact in institutional logics in organizations (Kurtmollaiev et al. 2018); and the integration of service design and product service system design in a service logic framework (Costa et al. 2018). These are encouraging developments that show how service design is a vibrant and evolving research area.

If we look at this recent evolution of the field, it is also necessary to acknowledge how it is linked with the parallel evolution of the meaning of service and design. As for other disciplines, from the start, services have represented a specific economic sector, with various and very diverse sectorial areas such as transport, storage, catering, wholesale, retail, business services, etc. In the design field, services were also conceived as specific market offerings with characteristics that distinguish them from products, such as intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, or perishability (Zeithamal, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985). As such, design had to articulate and argue for a dedicated approach to design for better services (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011).

More recently, services have been discussed in a "singular" manner, as more than just a specific sector or market offering (Edvardsson, Gustafsson, & Roos, 2005). A service became more of a business logic (Grönroos, 2008): a way to co-create value that has informed the establishment of a meta-level study of the evolution from a good-dominant logic to a service dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008), calling for a paradigmatic change in the approach to economy and innovation. Therefore, when we design for service instead of services, the focus shifts to the transformational processes implied in this change of mentality and perspectives (Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2017).

Similarly, design had some recent evolutions in terms of interpretations and consequent applications of design skills. As for other disciplines, at its origin service design focused on proving the importance of bringing design approaches to service innovation, with a dominant interest in understanding what designers do, and why this is valuable. This designer-centric perspective, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, is still relevant, but it is

increasingly obliged to relate and position within a wider, multidisciplinary area of service innovation, acknowledging the pre-existing work, language and approaches of service design as a multidisciplinary field (Kimbell, 2011; Sangiorgi, Prendiville, Jung, & Yu, 2015; Patrício, Gustafsson, & Fisk, 2018a). This evolution implies moving the attention from the designer to designing, as a multi-faceted activity that requires convergence and collaboration. The term "designing" has also other implications, as it focuses on a continuing process which exists before designers come in, and continues after the design work is completed and the innovation implemented (the so called design-before-design and design-after-design or design in use) (Björgvinsson, Ehn, & Hillgren, 2010; Ehn, 2008). This further shift is fundamental if designers want to acknowledge the pre-existing innovation practices and "design legacies" (Junginger, 2015), if they accept the challenge of accompanying innovation processes to the implementation stage, and it they value the implications of adoption, continuous improvement and change.

What is the current evolution

So we are now at ServDes18, questioning what we have achieved and asking what comes next. We can see, thanks also to many recent PhD studies, how research, has advanced and is touching on some key contemporary issues, that surely need some attention.

One of these areas concerns the mode and strategies for making design knowledge tangible and transferrable and building design capabilities in organisations and communities; this in practice has meant the compilation of numerous toolkits, training initiatives and the establishment of in-house design/innovation labs (Kimbell, 2015; McGann, Blomkamp, & Lewis, 2018). In terms of studies, some authors have adopted the theories of learning organisations and knowledge transfer to reflect on the potentials and conditions for an effective development of design skills, mindset and units in organisations of different kinds (Malmberg, 2017). This area of study is tangential to the multiple investigations on the application of design thinking by other non-design professionals or on the impact of its development within businesses.

Another key area concerns the role digital innovation and digital artefacts are playing in service innovation, calling for collaboration between Service Design and Information System research (Barret, Davidson, Prabhu, & Vargo, 2015). From being just technological tools in the service delivery processes, ICTs have become widely recognised as fundamental transformational resources for service (ibid). In service design, this has not only brought attention to their potentials, but also to the ethical questions that digitalisation and automatization are generating, and the hidden implications of some of these evolutions, for example for the job market (Blomberg & Stucky, 2017).

The technological evolution inevitably has considerable impact on the practices of Service Design, which is converging and integrating with UX expertise as well as being adopted by digital innovation agencies. This convergence is now at the point that it is difficult to consider service design as separate from the issues and implications of digital innovation. First and foremost, there are the still peripheral conversations on the need for cultural and organisational change (digital transformation) when companies need to translate their operations into digital means and channels. This is a space where the original academic service design community is starting to integrate their previous view on service innovation with the inevitable dimensions that the digital innovation introduces.

Another consequence of digitisations is the growing complexity of the service provider system, which is often a combination of different collaborating actors, interlinked by digital media. Service design is increasingly faced with the challenge of designing both within and for complex service systems. Such transformations call for the interconnected design of the micro and the macro, coherent coordination of multiple channels and governance of the unpredictable nature of the emerging systems and their interrelationships (Sangiorgi, Patricio,

& Fisk, 2017). The multidisciplinary nature of service design is a challenge, but also an opportunity. For example, whereas holistic, creative and participatory design approaches are crucial to envision new service futures, more systematic approaches to service operations can facilitate the implementation of design concepts. While the multidisciplinary scope of service design conferences and research initiatives represent important efforts towards that aim, such as ServDes and the Service Design for Innovation Network – SDIN (servicedesignforinnovation.eu), it is important to explore complementarities and develop integrative methods that can support multidisciplinary teams in designing new services.

Whereas the service research community recognizes the key role service design can play in service innovation (Ostrom et al. 2015), how it can contribute in terms of both innovation process and outcomes still requires further effort. Service design contributes to break free from more structured new service development processes toward more creative and collaborative approaches to service innovation (Patrício et al. 2018a). Recent research shows that service design can enrich new service development through a contextual understanding of the user experience; co-design approaches that facilitate value co-creation; or prototyping to improve resource and process configurations (Yu and Sangiorgi 2018). The use of service design methods can also help actors break free of existing institutions and contribute to service innovation (Wetter-Edman et al. 2018).

Service design methods and approaches are also evolving to cope with technological change and to move on from improving interactions and interfaces, towards creating new services to foster behavioural change in organisations and complex service systems. To this end, service design methods are also evolving to facilitate value co-creating interactions in value networks, and to balance potential conflicts among different actors (Patrício et al. 2018b). In this context, service design adopts a participatory and pluralistic approach based on the belief that service systems cannot be completely understood or designed. They can only be collaboratively interpreted, with designers playing a facilitator role (Sangiorgi et al. 2017)

Three levels: fundamentals, methods and outcomes

This paper is an introduction to a session of papers that manifest some diverse answers to our initial questions: How is the constant evolution of the object of service design affecting service design practice and identity? How can the evolution of service design within a multidisciplinary innovation practice be envisioned?

We have selected papers that touch on some of the issues that we have illustrated so far, and that open up further reflections, which we will collect and work upon in our conclusive section. In our opinion the 9 papers that have been accepted for this section and the 2 industrial cases cover three main levels of study: the fundamentals of service design as a multidisciplinary field of study; the developing methods that are constantly trying to evolve the discipline and practice in view of current scenarios; and the outcomes that illustrate research projects in specific areas of applications that exemplify some of the recent evolutions of the discipline.

After a brief review of these contributions, we will articulate our own reflection and then suggest where this all leads and which questions still need to be addressed.

Fundamentals

Three papers provide contributions to evolve service design as a multidisciplinary field. They bring together multiple perspectives for the development of a body of knowledge and a shared ground that are important for service design to evolve as a field and as an enabler of service innovation

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The paper entitled 'Service designers unite! Identifying shared concerns among multidisciplinary perspectives on service design" (Prestes Joly, Teixeira, Patrício, & Sangiorgi, 2018), identifies shared concerns of multidisciplinary perspective on Service Design, through a qualitative study involving focus groups with six research centres in five different countries. The study shows that the service systems is the key integrative concept that crosscuts the different perspectives, and identifies shared concerns at the individual, organizational and network levels. This study contributes to build a shared ground for service design to evolve into an interdisciplinary field, and to leverage the impact of service design on service innovation.

The paper entitled "Bridging design-driven and service innovation: consonance and dissonance of meaning and value" (Korper, Holmlid, & Patrício, 2018) examines the concepts of *meaning* in interaction design and *value* in service-dominant logic, showing that these concepts share a common ground. Based on this analysis, the paper explores new ways to bridge design driven innovation, as radical changes in meaning, and service innovation, as novel reconfigurations of resources. Service designers therefore become key interpreters of meaning and facilitators of the service innovation process by generating new forms of value co-creation. This paper opens a dialogue between design driven innovation and service dominant logic to expand the role of service design as a key driver of service innovation.

The paper entitled "Perceived action potential – a strong concept in development" (Rodrigues, Blomkvist, & Holmlid, 2018) explores how *strong concepts* from interaction design, as abstracted design elements that can be appropriated and used for different instances, can bring useful insights to service design. Using the example of *touchpoint* in service design as a starting point, the paper explores how PAP – Perceived Action Potential can be developed as a useful strong concept in service design. The paper provides illustrative examples of PAP, as the subjective interpretation of an individual's scope of action, and draws implications for service design.

Methods

Three papers propose novel methods for research and design to enhance the ability to capture and interpret data and signs from reality.

The paper titled "Trendslation – an experiential method for semantic translation in Service Design" (Dennington, 2018) explores the potential of service designers as "cultural intermediaries" when designing for new solutions. Here, culture is mostly associated with the search for and translation of cultural and societal trends, amplifying and making explicit the already recognised ability of designers to capture signs and meanings in society, and aligning with recent studies on design-driven "meaning innovation" (Verganti, 2009). A three-stage approach is proposed with some experimental applications in a project with a fashion brand.

The paper titled "Digital Methods for Service Design. Experimenting with data-driven frameworks" (Tassi, Brilli, & Ricci, 2018) instead posits and experiments with the potential of integrating and adapting data-driven digital methods into Service Design research, expanding and not substituting the existing tools and methodologies designers are currently using. Examples of projects illustrate the process used to carefully craft data driven personas, balancing quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as automated and more subjective and visual "designerly" approaches to data analysis.

The paper entitled "Constructing an approach to identify service design narratives: findings of an automated text analysis" (Manhaes, 2018) brings attention instead to research methods used to explore Service Design narratives, meaning how design agencies describe their own work. In this case, the narratives were in relation to the specific challenge of "organisational change" which was posed in the form of hypothetical scenarios. An automated text analysis

of their answers somehow highlighted where their discussion focuses and how this relates to the more academic conversations.

Outcomes

Finally, three papers and two industrial cases illustrate some examples of applications and their implications for the work of designers.

The paper entitled "Resident Autonomy in Assisted Living Facilities: A Conceptual Framework for Transformative Service Research" (Ramdin, et al., 2018) discusses the concept of "autonomy" with the aim to gain some informed knowledge for better designing residential care communities for elderly people, considered as "negative services" (necessary yet undesired) within the field of transformative research. The concept of autonomy is explored from healthcare and design perspectives and then verified through qualitative research, gaining first-hand knowledge on this matter.

The paper entitled "Service Design for Artificial Intelligence" (Gasparini, Mohammed, & Oropallo, 2018) initiates a reflection on the implications of designing AI-supported services, within the specific case of an academic library. Using the typical Service Design tool of the blueprint, the authors reflect on the implications of considering AI-supported services "as a new type of stakeholder" within traditional design processes, where questions of ontology should anticipate methodological ones.

The paper entitled "Designing Convivial Food Systems in Everyday Life" (Ballantyne-Brodie, 2018) proposes a model and some practical initiatives to inform change on a systemic level, when talking about the current industrial food systems. Combining the seven levels of living systems by (Miller, 1978) _ Cell, Organs, Organism, Organisation, Society, Supranational systems _ and the main actions that can leverage a more "convivial" food system model - Growing, Delivery, Gastronomy, Pleasure, Storytelling, Lifecycle and Designing - the authors trace possible tangible interventions that designers can contribute to in pursuit of a transformational aim.

The industrial case "Enhancing industrial processes in the industry sector by means of Service Design" (Attoma Pepe & Livaudais, 2018) by Attoma, a European service design and UX firm headquartered in France, instead explores the potentials of introducing and motivating the application of a service design approach also in industrial settings, and when designing a global IT solution for order management. The emphasis is on the similarity of design needs when approaching industrial processes and sales management, interpreting them as services and employees as customers, while winning the interest and support of the global industrial client organisation.

The industrial case "Service Design: a new oppressive sovereign?" (Favini, 2018) by Logotel, one of the first service design agencies in Italy, discusses and exemplifies an evolution of their understanding and work on service design, running against a perceived risk of homologation of designers' processes and results. The call is for strengthening the editorial and the original interpretative ability of designers, for valuing beauty and people with their real needs as key dimensions of service innovation and for assuring designers' work reaches implementation (service life) and impact measurement stages.

Reflections on the contribution of papers

This session aspired to envision and explore the evolution of service design showing its

growing interconnection with wider fields of knowledge as well as the evident transformation of its object of study and design.

The contributions we collected provide some partial answers and open up further questions. In particular, building on these papers, we highlighted two themes: 1) multidisciplinarity and useful contaminations: the value of multidisciplinarity both as an interpretation and collaborative approach to service design, as well as an opportunity to "contaminate" and enrich service design with new concepts, roles and venues; 2) "service" as a perspective that brings life to technical and entrenched systems, approaches and contexts or *viceversa*, the need to bring life to services (or services to life) intended as an emerging and dynamic entity.

Multidisciplinarity and useful contaminations

Apart from (Prestes Joly, Teixeira, Patrício, & Sangiorgi, 2018), which directly investigates languages and multidisciplinary perspectives on the practice of service design, pointing toward areas of convergence or divergence for better future collaborations, other contributions are pointing toward useful avenues of both theoretical and practical "contamination" that we think can help furthering the growth of this practice. Often these "contaminations" introduce novel interpretations of the designers' role, new conceptual and practical tools or new avenues for developing the field.

We refer here for example to the call for "strong concepts" in Service Design (Rodrigues, Blomkvist, & Holmlid, 2018), by converging reflections from interaction design and theorisations of value co-creation, with the need for "intermediate-level knowledge to support design research practice". The concept of 'perceived action potential' (PAP) as an example of strong concept in service design research, refers to "the subjective interpretation of an individual's (own) scope of action in new or unforeseen situations" which can leverage and widen the potential and usefulness of applying prototyping when envisaging new service solutions.

Of similar value is the effort by (Korper, Holmlid, & Patrício, 2018) to converge conversations on innovation from different fields (management engineering and service science), to explore new venues and modes to interpret and enhance designers' work. The service design narrative strongly dominated by participatory and user centred perspectives, is challenged and integrated with complementary views on value (co-creation) and meaning (innovation), bringing to the fore the role of designers as "interpreters" or "facilitators" of emergent processes of meaning transformation and value co-creation. This is echoed by the more practical study on the role of designers as "cultural intermediaries" and its "trendslation" approach (Dennington, 2018).

Another interesting convergence and contamination is the one with scope and concepts from Transformative Research (Ballantyne-Brodie, 2018), a field of study within service research that aims to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities (Anderson & Ostrom 2015). Here, interesting as an area of design and study is the concept of "negative services" ("necessary yet undesired" as residential care communities are), where the conflicts between elderly people's need for both care and autonomy are explored. These conflictual needs and values are a significant space for research and design as they reside in many kinds of services, in particular public services, where what is conceived as public value (e.g. health, security and safety) conflicts with the individual values and needs of people (e.g. prisoners, or mental healthcare patients). Furthering important concepts and their contradictions and contextual qualities, like the one of "autonomy" for elderly people in the case of the paper, can be the avenue for relevant innovations.

Bringing life through and to Service

Considering instead the implications of the changing nature of the objects of service design, the first dimension that emerges is the strong influence of digitalisation and the advent of new technologies that are transforming the modes and potential of service provision. The

reflection on how this can affect the processes and methods of design and research, and how this affects the interpretation and the practical implications of transforming the object of design are both significant.

The paper exploring the use of "digital methods" in service design (Tassi, Brilli, & Ricci, 2018) expands both the skill sets and approaches necessary for designers when approaching services used by people who increasingly comment and track their experiences online. Apart from also being an approach that can expands the ability of designers to interpret wider phenomena for design reasons, what is important in this paper is the proposal of hybrid methods that aim to systematically combine quantitative and more automatic approaches to data analysis with the more qualitative and abductive ones that we are more familiar with. The ability to reinvent the processes and toolset of service designers in relation to the digital sphere, is a fundamental path that is changing the nature of service design as a field. Partly related to this discussion, is also the proposal to use automated text analysis to review service design narratives, also here combining more qualitative data with an automated process of data processing (Manhaes, 2018).

The advent of the digitalisation of processes and experiences, also affects the object of service design as in the case of AI-based services or digital industrial processes interpreted through a service lens. On one side, (Gasparini, Mohammed, & Oropallo, 2018) articulate the need to consider AI-based services as "a new type of stakeholder", one that can have some autonomy and therefore should be evaluated in its "live" interactions with people and processes, keeping a holistic perspective. Similarly, (Attoma Pepe & Livaudais, 2018) with their project reinforce the implications that the introduction of Industrial Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Automation have on industrial processes, requiring a user-experience focused approach that service design can bring.

Finally, we bring the attention to the ambition of (Ballantyne-Brodie, 2018) in suggesting modes and strategies for designers to face systemic changes in very institutionalised and resistant but un-sustainable complex service systems, such as industrial food systems. Here, the call for a holistic view of these systems is much appreciated, with its potential for a gradual substitution that builds on an emergent parallel food paradigm "slowly evolving from the grassroots": the "convivial food service systems". Here, designers and activists can operate at all interrelated levels of the system, interpreted as a "living system" through an ecological metaphor. This recalls the paper by (Prestes Joly, Teixeira, Patrício, & Sangiorgi, 2018) that considers the potential roles service design can play at all the levels of a service ecosystem.

This understanding of service systems as dynamic entities can be related to the practical effort of Logotel (Favini, 2018) to reflect on the implications of bringing service "to life"; the service design agency considers services as relationships that need to be nurtured and maintained and it is in the execution phase, where the relation between the brand and people come to life, that the distinguishing value of service design can actually be measured.

Conclusions

The papers in the Evolving and Envisioning track and the two industrial cases provide rich advances of the fundamentals of service design as a multidisciplinary field; the development of new methods; and service design applications that highlight the relevance and impact of service design in different contexts.

However, these ServDes papers represent only selected contributions from a landscape of ongoing research in service design, such as special issues in the Design Studies and Journal of Service Research, new books such as Sangiorgi and Prediville (2017) and Penin (2018), or the Service Design for Innovation Network. Together. These initiatives portray a vibrant

field, with a growing community of Service Design researchers and practitioners.

These efforts towards evolving Service Design into a more mature field do not mean it should become 'established' and stabilized. Instead, this evolution aims at fostering a fruitful dialogue among different Service Design perspectives, developing a common foundation for the different perspectives to work together and contaminate each other to obtain better fruits. This shared ground is also important to explore the roles of service designers, e.g. as interpreters and facilitators, to question the disciplines development and implications, and to leverage the role of Service Design as a key driver of service innovation.

Overall, the goal is not to reach a destination, but to strengthen the foundations for the journey of Service Design and to explore its developing streams.

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