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Exploring global and local design initiatives

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Published in:
Service Design Proof of Concept. Proceedings of the ServDes.2018 Conference

Publication date:
2018

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (APA):
Frølunde, L., Pillan, M., & Piredda, F. (2018). New paradigms related to community building and identity in service design: Exploring global and local design initiatives. In A. Meroni, A. M. O. Medina, & B. Villari (Eds.), *Service Design Proof of Concept. Proceedings of the ServDes.2018 Conference : Proof of Concept* (pp. 885-895). [75] Linköping University Electronic Press. Linköping Electronic Conference Proceedings No. 150

New paradigms related to community building and identity in service design: Exploring global and local design initiatives

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Abstract

The paper concerns how service design is developing as a field, and calls for new paradigms for social organization as well as new models for human-to-human interaction. The authors present and discuss the key themes and contributions presented at the conference ServDes 2018 concerning the role of community building in service design (track 7). We reflect on expectations for the call in light of the contributions received. The paper provides an overview of different perspectives in the contributions, including case studies on local and global design experiences and theoretical issues. A main concern is the changing role of the designer in terms of fostering community and identities through meaning-making in service design practice. In conclusion, there is a review of the challenges facing community-oriented designers, along with discussion on the changing paradigms for service design and human-to-human models of interaction.

KEYWORDS: community building, identity building, meaning-making, human interaction, social organization

Introduction

Service design as a field, a discipline and as a professional activity has achieved maturity. An ample variety of case studies demonstrates the effectiveness of design theories, methodologies, and practices in several different application fields and contexts. The conference ServDes 2018 explores, through its eight branches, the role of service design as a

source of innovation for economic and industrial systems, and as an opportunity to experiment and enact new forms of dialogues between private and public actors.

Focusing on Track 7 - Community and Relationship Building, we are aware that the term community has been adopted in service design in ways that are not always consistent. Community is somehow adrift, volatile, boundless. This may be due to the common roots of words like community, common, communion and communication, stemming back to Latin *communicare* "to share, divide out; communicate, impart, inform; join, unite, participate in," and related to *communis* "common, public, general". It is always true that community refers to engagement in social contexts and participation in social life through a process of active dynamic negotiations of meanings, which combines individual and collective aspects, and produces physical and conceptual artefacts reflecting the shared experience. As far as service design uses and develops words, tools, concepts, methods, stories, documents, it links to resources and other forms of *reification* (Wenger, 2010), it can be associated both with craft production and soft organizations, at the local or global dimension. In fact, web-enabled systems have introduced communities and networks as two types of structuring processes: community emphasizes identity and commitment to a partnership, highlighting the social dimension of the interactions; whereas network emphasizes connectivity, which is able to open up the boundaries of the community itself because of enabling technologies. Connectivity shakes up community, providing unexpected inspirations because of the brand-new, incoming profiles and competences, and inducing groupthink.

In this paper we refer to community as characterized by self-governance, voluntary participation, personal and collective meaning, identity, boundary crossing, peer-to-peer connections. We discuss participatory culture by introducing the contribution of interaction design and discussing the contribution of design as a meaning-making process rather than a solution provider (Manzini, 2015; Bertolotti, Daam, Piredda, Tassinari, 2016).

Defining the paradigms of social organization and human-to-human interaction

In service design, we consider defining the paradigm of social organization and human-to-human interaction as a primary issue, one that provides the implicit or explicit bearing axis of a service structure. No service exists without a model that defines the goals and modalities of human-to-human interaction giving origin to the service. Even the simplest definition of the service must be capable of identifying a recipient – user, customer or member of the peer community, depending on the specifics of the service paradigm – who can be described or identified by his/her needs, potential or motivation, whatever these may be, as part of the system enacting the service. More often than not, the creation of a service implies the definition of at least two different social identities, which relate in complex ways. One social identity is the *service-provider* (or a network of stakeholders acting as providers). The other social identity is the *service-user*; and the prefiguration of the optimal conditions for value exchange between providers and users during service delivery is one of the main activities in service design (Kalbach, 2016; Newberry 2013). A service designer often aligns with and crosses between these identities.

A paradigm of social organization and interaction always lies at the base of service creation, but in various ways. Interaction is always there, whether explicit or not, whether low or high tech. Even when the delivery of performances and value is carried out through a technological solution that filters the direct human to human interaction, through automation or indirect content and function exchange.

Indeed, each service can be framed as either the adaptation of an existing paradigm of social interaction or as the creation of a new one, and for this reason service design could be conceptualized as a discipline aimed at fostering different forms of social cooperation, trading or value exchange.

Actually, the historical role of some services should be evaluated in terms of their contribution to the understanding and spreading of novel forms of social organization, of cooperation and/or negotiation between stakeholders, together with the real contribution to

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the solution of problems and the satisfaction of needs. In fact, we should point out that some important case studies in the realm of new services appearing in recent decades - such as those aimed at the sharing of material goods and properties, to the collective creation of contents, or to the autonomous solution of local problems by the citizens living in those quarters - have produced effective outcomes in terms of cultural change, contributing to make explicit the potentials of new forms of self-organization, of participation, and of collectively searching for innovative solutions to shared problems.

The contributions to track 7 reflect two main perspectives: most of the papers refer to the creation and management of processes and tools for enhancing the participation of the community, on the one hand, by the means of digital interfaces and digital platforms; on the other hand, by leading in-field participatory actions.

For these reasons, investigating the variety of processes and purposes that lead to the definition of a community or of a social group, with its particular attributes and identity characteristics, should be considered as a main topic in service design research.

Our expectations regarding the call: the role of service design as a social catalyst

When we wrote the call for track 7, our main idea was to trigger a conversation about the role of service design practice in shaping new forms of organization in society. Indeed, the flourish of new services as a way to create solutions for people's needs and to exploit the creative potential of local contexts, is one of the most significant phenomena of our time, a framework capable of orienting policies for the development of economic and education programs, and a privileged paradigm for improving the wellbeing of citizens. We focused on service design as a social catalyst, as a means of creating new occupations and professions, and a way of mapping emergent skills and abilities, as well as new forms for value exchange between different groups of citizens. For a new service to be born, it is necessary that a group of people become aware of a condition, their own or someone else's, and of the possibility of inventing new scenarios through the implementation of new activities or of new modalities for relationship and aggregation. In other words, the creation of an innovative service is closely related to the capability of defining a system of human entities, and to imagining a game based on roles, activities and interaction; a scenario aptitude to be convenient or, in the best case, desirable and tantalizing for all the involved parts.

So, while writing a call on *service design and community building* we were expecting to collect stories about service design experiences in local and global contexts, in which the implementation of a new service could also be an opportunity to foster the emergence of new social actors or, at least, to make some social actor find new ways of aggregating peers, and new forms of belonging. Our expectations emerged from our preoccupation with key questions regarding design as potentially having impact on communities, also on a political level.

How can design impact on a community?

Designers may make their contribution as newcomers entering an existent community and offering their competence, which may or may not be embraced by the community, or they may take part in the very first stage of community building. Design contributes from the outside to shape or support community practices leading to a process of realignment between socially defined competence and personal experience, providing language and tools to open up dialogue and enact meanings. We should also add that a community of practice may sometimes be dysfunctional and appear counterproductive. Even though service designers can facilitate a dialogic process there is still an improvisational logic of engagement and sense-making in action in any community. Even when institutions, management or research activities structure design processes and provide tools, design is never simply a matter of output or implementation: the design impact is a dynamic response to a community - based on active negotiation of meaning.

How can design play a political role?

Design potentially plays a political role by fostering the meaning-making process of communities: it is a matter of accountability. It is about power. The accountability and the identification that form the basis for power in communities is horizontal, mutual, negotiated, often tacit and informal. There is nothing that says that communities of practice are egalitarian or harmonious. Conflict can be a central part of the practice that claims competence and creates an *economy of meaning* (Wegner, 2010). Over time, this kind of economy gives rise to a community as participants define a "regime of competence", a set of criteria and expectations by which they recognize membership. In order to nurture this kind of informal and dynamic social structure among participants, enabling and managing platforms are provided reclaiming participation, which can in some way contribute to sustain the institutions themselves and their power. Many traditionally hierarchical organizations in many contexts show interest in fostering horizontal communities and networks: the obsession with participation favours business models based on the economic exploitation of user data. In an ecosystem where social media and other platforms can operate whenever digital interactions take place and where people use these platforms to create and feed political and consumer opinions, these platforms become gatekeepers (Srnicek, 2017). Media studies extend their fields of analysis and research so that designing a service means designing media and the other way around.

The response to the call: contributions explore a variety of themes

As sometimes happens, our expectations were only partially fulfilled by the contributions of the several authors responding to the call – and we learned a great deal about the breadth of design service. The themes in the contributions were broad and less political than we expected. We did not receive any report on service design related to gender issues or to ethnic communities; neither did we find any case discussing the issues of power management and decision-making in participatory services, which was also a topic proposed in our call. On the whole, the contributions to track 7 provide a rich basket with food for thought. We find it worthwhile to highlight some topics while we also want to emphasize their variety. Below, we summarize the overall topics in the following statements.
- Service design is now carried out in an ample variety of different contexts, and faces goals and application fields of growing importance, being also recognized as a main leverage for urban development and re-development. A designer working towards the creation of a new service is a political actor, i.e. a subject who, in order to carry out his/her mandate, must clearly communicate the project goals and the specific complexity of the reference context.
- Flexibility seems to be one mandatory professional characteristic for designers, in the sense that a service designer must be capable of communicating with different stakeholders so as to be able to contribute to the definition of the organization and technological system supporting the final service. However, since designing services is a collaborative activity, always involving different actors, designers need a clear (if not final) definition of their specific professional skills and capabilities in order to upgrade them beyond the mere value of being able to adapt to different situations.
- Designers still play an important role in the project making process mainly in terms of producing meanings; they also act as social mediators thanks to their sensibility and knowledge about languages and, notably, about non-verbal languages, being capable of coding and decoding the symbolic dimensions of artefacts and signs. **Service designers have not yet found a satisfactory definition of their specific area of skill and expertise and must find the most appropriate way of making them clearly evident. Thus they need to clarify the specific role played in the development of new solutions.** The capability of design to create new meanings, and shape both material and non-material spaces, objects and communications is needed.
- Designers learn by analysing case studies, and apply their learning to change or evolve existing services, with the participation of customers and users. Through the critical

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analysis of case studies, designers contribute to the progress of service design theories, as well as to the development of a social awareness of the consequences of innovation.
- As service design is potentially a catalyst for change, discussions about the real impact of changes on communities and context is a mandatory activity for our times.

Three clusters in the contributions

We suggest three overall clusters for the contributions that demonstrate how service design offers various effective approaches to fostering local efforts for economic and cultural local growth.

Cluster 1: Place-based model
This cluster refers to the "place-based" community model defined by Carroll (2012), which is divided into three main aspects: "community identity", meaning the sense of belonging deriving from the sharing of values, traditions and experiences; "Participation and awareness", i.e. the perception that each member has an impact on community decisions and initiatives; finally, "social support networks", meaning the different roles and relationships that can be activated among the members of the community, who interact with the purpose of supporting each other.
The creation of convenient forms of independent, sustainable growth in underdeveloped environments requires a preliminary analysis of the different subjects and communities living and acting in the territory, so as to recognize the potentials of the local context, and the actors capable of acting as protagonists of social and economic innovations. Furthermore, in the creation of collaborative and community-based solutions, the exploitation of explicit and implicit elements contributing to the definition of the identity of local actors and social groups is an important, strategic activity. It may lead to an awareness of common interests and motivations, and thus facilitate the engagement of local people in the co-design process, in the implementation of experimental initiatives, and in the follow-up activities of refinement and improvement.
In this respect, the case study presented by Priscilla Ramalho Lepre (2018) and set in Porto de Pedras, Brazil, is a very moving testimony of how a local community is engaged in the construction of a sustainable future. The community is tackling the complex task of developing new and more convenient ways of organizing old activities, such as those aimed at developing the tourism economy, while ensuring economic dignity for low-income citizens. The paper maps the role of different service design tools in the co-design process, and highlights the close interconnection between the possibility of creating innovative services in local territories, and the ability to help communities to grow toward the construction of more structured associations and clusters, provided with an **enhanced identity**, sense of belonging, and self-awareness.

Self-awareness, engagement and the ability to adopting an active and collaborative attitude are also the main issues discussed by the paper written by Fabrizio Maria Pierandrei, Silvia Remotti, Tang Tang, Shilumbe Chivuno Kuria, Stefano Anfossi (2018), which presents a case study of an EU funded project in Southern Africa. The paper deals with the deep and radical social changes experienced by some local environments, also producing effects of marginalization and disorientation especially in young generations. In this case, service design activities reveal their potential for becoming part of innovative **education** processes, and local human resources are enabled through actions aimed at supporting young people in developing the awareness of their personal potential, and in offering practical and conceptual tools that help them to **become active protagonists of their own future and agents of transformation** in the contexts they live in. The project focuses on a tool-book supporting local communities in actions such as organize meetings and discussions, jams, brainstorming sessions. The project also aims to create empathy and build an ethic of reciprocal respect as preliminaries that prepare the ground for creative engagement. Storytelling, sharing dreams and aspirations, discussions about behaviour and feelings are part of a process that leads to self-awareness, to fertile knowledge of the local conditions, and to creative interpretation of

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local potential, and works toward the involvement of individuals in the identification of problems, and their taking a responsible and active role in the definition of solutions to those problems.

The contribution by Geertje Slingerland, Ingrid Mulder and Tomasz Jaskiewicz (2018) provides an insight into engaging citizens within a shared territory, such as a neighborhood park, through digital and physical activities. It proposes the application of digital technologies and, in particular, of social media like matchmaking with peculiar characteristics in terms of connecting people with mutual interests. The research goal was to increase participation and foster community engagement after the initial start-up enthusiasm.

"Interestingly, park users are oftentimes open to participate more actively in the community, but are unaware of how to get involved. This lack of awareness is omnipresent, despite the efforts of park initiatives to attract new park users by actively organising various activities to recruit new volunteers." (Slingerland, Mulder and Jaskiewicz, 2018).

The outcomes delivered are a service design and guidelines for using matchmaking for further applications. In this case, service design was a practice of de-materialization, using the term materialization as it was defined by Mosconi et al. (2017), or to put it better, a practice based on establishing a relationship between the real-world activities located and rooted in the park which the intangible digital environment refers to. In fact, the evaluation phase highlighted that the main interests of the park users do not match the actual offer, so that the community might be better understood as a networked public (Mosconi, Korn, Reuter, Tolmie, Teli, & Pipek, 2017; De Lange & de Waal, 2013), in which activities and engagement are heterogeneous. Personal motivations then represent a key issue for the design of the service, which is not oriented to provide support for the negotiation of meanings, but to supply the lack of offering. It is configured as a personalisation-oriented community service, which sounds like an oxymoron, but it is representative of networks where the commitment to shared values is not the main collective goal. Identification with the community is not the core issue and engagement in practice implies some degree of alignment (Wenger, 2010). The social media matchmaking platform was useful for getting data from and about the park users and tailoring promotion of the activities.

Cluster 2: The issue of identity and of participation in global services
From a completely different point of view, we can develop an analysis of the role of community building and on personal identity in service design, discussing these topics in relation to service facilities provided on a global scale by international providers. In countries that have a more developed, mature industrial and economical infrastructure, large scale services play an important role in the definition of the evolving social and economic assets, and any discussion on the effects of their progressive growth and diffusion is a complex task, not free from controversy. For instance, we can refer to the paper presented by Miso Kim (2018), who discusses Airbnb as a case study. The author focuses on this service, discussing the principles of participatory economy, its cost-effectiveness and the related opportunities for new diffused entrepreneurship initiatives. We would particularly point out the significant analysis of the role played by the emergence of the personal identities of the subjects acting as service providers, in creating fascinating representations of local environments, and in eliciting interest in the choice of hosting. Nevertheless, the optimistic analysis of the author is debatable. Moreover, we consider the development of critical sense in global services to be of increasing importance: on one hand it is appropriate to have consideration for the communities that are the representatives of the service, but on the other hand designers should be aware about those that are defined by exclusion. Even when born from a bottom-up innovation process, when a service becomes a global platform, it becomes itself the mainstream at the edge of which we need to find the emerging forces and creativity to enact new sustainable solutions.

The second cluster of contributions also tackles some theoretical key issues in the realm of service design, such as the concept of relationship.

Jan Koenders, Dirk Snelders, Maaike Kleinsmann and Jürgen Tanghe (2018) provide a customer relationship experience (CRX) framework and guidelines that bring together marketing theory and design practice to assist larger service organisations in designing for relationships between the company and its customers, as well as among customers themselves. In this case, the global dimension of the service refers to customers defined by the market of reference and the topic of identity is much more consistent with the idea of brand loyalty because of the product service system provided. The following contribution, instead, addresses a global community, developing specific skills and practices in the field of design due to the design contribution. In fact, Massimo Menichinelli (2018) applies his reflections to the specific context of the Maker movement, where communities of experts and non-experts collaboratively design and produce artefacts. Within the wider field of ICT technologies supporting and shaping new forms of working and assessing projects, from research to manufacturing and distribution, Menichelli proposes a meta-design platform to foster community building and management by providing concepts and visualizations that help users in the mindful and reflective design of the activities of their community-based collaborative design processes.

Cluster 3: The unique role of professional designers when everybody designs
Designers have been dealing with services for decades now (Pillan, 2003; Meroni, 2011), thus forcing their competence and their activities out of the realm of material objects and spaces. This change has imposed an evolution and upgrade of design skills and capabilities. As service design has evolved, the questions about the social and professional role of designers have again become topical, both from the point of view of defining professional potential and awareness, and with respect to education issues.
The collection of papers presented at the ServDes conference in the track about community building is quite rich, and it contains, in its complexity, a significant contribution to the investigation of the different directions that the profession is taking.
In this respect, the paper presented by Laura Warwick, Paola Pierri, Claire Bradnam and Emma Field (2018) is an interesting reference, as it represents a case study of an initiative for the diffusion of service design culture based on local activities oriented toward a large-scale experiment. The project reported by the authors was developed in cooperation with a federated charity organization named Mind assisting citizens with mental health problems through 135 local institutes. Within Mind, a community of practice focuses on the capitalization of service design approaches and methodologies so as to involve non-designers in the creative generation of effective and efficient new solutions. The paper demonstrates how service design knowledge seems to offer a very appropriate approach to a systematic renewal of the policies adopted in the solution of cogent and complex social problems, and a promising way to develop an inclusive conversation about the sustainable and yet effective use of economic resources, even when they are scarce. Due to the extent and dimensions of the Mind institutions, and to the extreme delicacy and social importance of the content of their activities, we consider the research reported in the paper as very interesting and significant. It demonstrates that, in some contexts, service design is now accepted as one of the main leverages for the generation of new approaches to the quest for new solutions to social needs that, in the past, were considered to be exclusively the responsibility of specialists in the care field. The paper also demonstrates the importance of creating suitable conditions – in terms of time and space – for the appropriate preliminary research that is sometimes required to prepare effective interventions in specific, complex situations.

The paper presented by Alla Pihalskaya (2018) is also an interesting demonstration of the evolution of designer roles in project processes for service design. The case study is located in Visaginas, a city in Lithuania originally created to be the location of a nuclear plant, and now seeking new prospects for economic and social development. The project aims to map the urban environment, in search of new opportunities for the formerly mono-functional town. The activity of designers within the project deals with the multiple identities of the local citizens, at a point where the primitive technocratic vocation of the city and the still dominant influence of Soviet Union culture, meet the new vocation towards a national Lithuanian identity that unfortunately has no local traditions, and is caught in the grip of

economic and industrial crisis. The paper reports firstly, the specific role of designers in mapping the territory, with its social and cultural complexity and contradictions; and secondly, the importance and originality of the contributions offered by designers in the interdisciplinary research team, which relies on its members ability to gather hints and clues expressed in visual ways, and on their skill in acting as mediators and enablers in multi-cultural environments.

The contribution by Matteo Colombo, Elena Enrica Giunta and Paola Papetti (2018) proposes branding as a powerful tool to help the creation and delivery of new forms of welfare services, just as new dynamic forms of public-private networks are emerging. The paper refers to branding without mentioning the strategies commonly developed in the field of brand communication and marketing. In fact, the outcomes and the processes developed during the in-field activities mostly focus on logo design and naming. The authors focused on co-creation, understanding how it could be applied in building the graphic identity with and for welfare organisations. They started from the assumption that if brands, and the values they underpin, are not only passively received, but also co-created, a continuous extension, re-appropriation and re-socialisation of these values can be achieved, contributing to the sense of belonging that collaborative processes can foster. Comparing the structure of the three co-design workshops with the ones we are already familiar with in the field of service design, they used tools that focus far more on the expression and collection of concepts, and their translation into images. Colombo, Giunta and Papetti suggest that the solutions "… are not always visually refined, but rather are meant to foster engagement and create ownership within an organization". One of the tasks for professional designers involved in the process is the evaluation of communication impact. It is interesting how this kind of co-design activity deals with representation, shaping and translating shared imagery. It is for certain a good example of self-reflective process, nevertheless as White mentions, it would be useful to adopt the same process of horizontal (within the peer community) and vertical (among the community and other stakeholders) reflective feedbacks from participatory video processes (White, 2003).

Conclusions

To summarize, we review some of the main abilities and roles that designers of service appear to have nowadays across various contexts. Thereafter, we close the paper with perspectives on changing paradigms and models regarding design service practice.
-        An overall ability for service designers today concerns context analysis. Preliminary research into the potentials and needs of a given environment is the starting point for all service design processes. A context analysis typically includes the main actors and the institutions that are or could be involved, the material and cultural resources available, together with their problems, needs and potentials; for each one of the social parts acting in a context, the preliminary analysis must provide a model for their engagement, including values, motivations and goals beyond mere awareness of and direct statements about them.
-        Designers participate in preliminary design research, and use their expertise in understanding and creating meanings, in order to gather clues and hints and thus provide a unique contribution to the representation of a context. By using different communication and representation approaches, designers can provide innovative envisioning of environments and of the social dynamics that take place in a context; this contribution is very important to elicit new awareness and to produce the evolution of mental frames and shared schemes toward innovation. In the tradition of design (Cross, 2011), an assigned project brief can be dismantled and re-framed if the analysis of the context in a design-approach reveals new and more promising creative potentials.
-        Designers are innately optimistic since in an explorative "designerly" approach every non-predicted context is analysed with positive expectations of finding unexpected potentials. This attitude can be fostered to create the suitable ground for innovation in

problematic contexts, i.e. when one or more stakeholders actually has a sceptical position toward the project.

-        Designers can give very important support to the further development of complex service design processes. They are unique candidates in providing a suitable evaluation of the resources needed, even including those dedicated to non-material activities, and in managing a sustainable time schedule and planning.

Changing paradigms for service design

Service design has a range of paradigms for the relationship between customers and designers – from the more traditional division of service provider/user to collaborative practices, including co-design in a complementary collaboration. Service designers therefore deal with a variety of models for the organization and management of power and decision making. There is a lack of clear conceptual tools to deal with the different degrees of freedom when designing new services such as social interaction between stakeholders. Service designers inherit the traditional knowledge and expertise of industrial design, and acquire new skills when designing experiences. The traditional capabilities (such as crafting) still play a very important role in the design of a service, where designers are asked to invent credible and desirable scenarios. However, it is one thing to envision the dialogue with stakeholders to create consensus, but it is much more challenging to involve real people. Whether called participants, co-designers, partners or collaborators, working with stakeholders who are actively involved in new solutions gets messy.
Service design is growing and developing a specific corpus of knowledge that is showing its effectiveness far beyond the issues relating to the design of material objects and spaces. Yet service design seems to be deeply rooted in the tradition of industrial design and in its ample variety of reference knowledge, including art, communication, drawing and creative thinking. The changing paradigms for service design indicate that explicit and implicit knowledge about collaboration are increasingly important for designers in the creation of services.

Changing human-to-human models of interaction in relation to identity

As far as the specific topic of track 7 on "community and relationship building" is concerned, we would like to underline in particular the contribution of design on identity building. Identity creates a focus on building relations and establishing communication models that are not based on a division between service provider/user. Understanding identity can guide design practices so that a design fits with ongoing human everyday experience. Identity adds a dimension of dynamism and unpredictability to practices and production processes, as each member struggles to find a place in the community. It adds a human dimension to the notion of practice: it is not just about techniques. It is also about enabling "becoming": becoming expert, becoming accountable, becoming agent of meaning, which even the most effective power cannot fully subsume. When design contributes to identity building and to the reification of values of fluid communities (Manzini, 2018) practicing and producing artefacts and intangible relations may not be a revolution, but it does have a transformative potential.

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Linköping University Electronic Press

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