Editorial

Design processes in service innovation

Service design is now well established as a field in design research with its own distinct relevance. A strong community advances the discipline, supported by specialised journals, conferences and educational programmes, and with some of the largest industries in the world under its purview. We posit that service design, after about 20 years as a new discipline, now shows quite a few signals typical of early adulthood — it is 'coming of age'. On the one hand, there is a proud sense of autonomy as service designers have developed their own competences to address questions born out of a service mindset. On the other hand, there is a continued dependence on service design's main parent disciplines: design theory and service research.

We saw this special issue as an opportunity to affirm service design's young maturity. In this effort, we wanted to avoid overstating the impact of the new discipline as a revolution without precedent. Some of our own past work can be read as reflecting this same intent; we sought to secure a place for service design within service research by giving the discipline new objectives and relating these to various traditions in design. At the time, it was our opinion that the popularisation of design thinking in non-academic circles, the entry of many design consultancies into service sectors, and the eagerness of academics to build careers around this emerging topic had created a hype around service design. This hype has now subsided, and our ambition with this special issue is to continue to create solid foundations for design research within studies on service innovation, in the broadest sense of the term.

Service design as a research topic clearly predates service design as a discipline. Academic discussions about design in the service literature can be traced back to the late 1970s, the early 80s, and the mid-90s, mainly in the disciplines of marketing and operations management, where design-relevant concerns first emerged about processes of invention, development and commercialisation of new services. Later, research on service design expanded as the 'awakening' to services was experienced by other design-focused disciplines, including engineering and industrial design. The latter's advancements in theories and methodologies on strategic, user-centred and sustainable design often intersected with related topics in innovation studies, thus greatly contributing to the birth of a separate discipline of service design.

Today, service design is still approached from multiple perspectives and embedded in different disciplinary discourses. For this reason, our editorial treatment of this special issue was attuned to how each work could find its positioning within a highly diversified literature. This seemed appropriate given the breadth of the concept of service, as well as a recently developed tendency of researchers to have an inflated sense of it, seeing services where others in the past saw products. This desire for a sharper positioning of service design research within the literature formed the basis for most of our editorial decisions regarding the submissions for this special issue. Based on our

reading of the literature and all submissions, we therefore propose a threefold classification for locating research on service design within the service innovation literature.

Our classification distinguishes three classes of service design research. In class 1, the unit of analysis for studying design in services is defined as *participants* or *technologies* involved in the creation and experience of services. This class brings together much of what service design research has produced so far. Depending on the disciplinary perspective that is adopted, design research of this class focuses on either the interfacing or the infrastructural domain of service production. The disciplines of marketing and industrial design seem interested mostly in the service interface, and have explored such themes as customer-oriented models of new service 'products', people's interactions with service artifacts and systems, and methods and tools for the creation of services. Disciplines that privilege the design of service infrastructures include engineering, operations management and, more recently, computer science, which examine design issues such as process design options, systematic specification of sub-processes, and computational modelling and simulation of service systems.

In class 2, the unit of analysis for studying service design is defined as *functions* or *phases* in the development of new services. Service design studies of this class are typically characterised by a managerial orientation, researching descriptive or prescriptive models for new service development (NSD), the diversity of roles design plays in improving NSD performance, and the management of design capabilities and user experiences.

In class 3, the least extensive of the three classes, the unit of analysis is defined as *firms* or *sectors* of the economic activity of service provision. These studies typically advance economic or social-geographic perspectives on services and explore themes such as knowledge-intensive contributions of design in manufacturing and service industries, outsourcing/insourcing of design services, and spatial distribution of creative expertise and firms.

While classifying the service design literature, it suited us best to identify the unit of analysis of each of the three classes with two terms rather than one. After some reflection, we think that this is because general theories on service innovation tend to depart — explicitly, implicitly, and at times unknowingly — either from a social economic ('Lancasterian') perspective or a more business economic ('Schumpeterian') perspective on innovation. From the social economic side, service innovation is defined as an institutional change related to user activities. In contrast, the business economic perspective defines service innovation as a change in constitutive operations related to production. Thus, the terms 'participants', 'functions' and 'firms' can be seen as expressive of a more social, user-oriented view on innovation, whereas 'technologies', 'phases' and 'sectors' express a stronger business- and production-oriented view on innovation.

In the end, however, the choice of terms may be of little consequence. Much of today's design literature describes design as the discipline that creates the connection between changes in both user and production activities. Therefore, the use of two terms instead of one in each class of our proposed scheme is not meant to establish a separate dimension in the threefold model. Rather, it is an indication that each class can accommodate more than just a single perspective on service innovation.

1 Introduction to the articles

In the first article, 'Staging aesthetic disruption through design methods for service innovation', Katarina Wetter-Edman, Josina Vink, and Johan Blomkvist focus on the *functions* of design methods in service innovation. They argue against the portrayal of design methods solely in