

Workshop

“Service design for social innovation: a strategic approach to strengths and weaknesses”

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Abstract

The workshop will focus on the challenges of service design for social innovation. Starting from the participants experience in research, practice/action research and education, the workshop will be aimed at brainstorming about which *skills, methods* and *role* could respond to the weaknesses of design pointed out by different actors working within the field of social innovation.

Case background

Around the world there is a strong movement where design is used for developing social innovation. In Europe this movement is mainly driven by service design studios like live|work, Engine, Think public and Participle in the UK but also the Desis network lead by Ezio Manzini as well as IDEO in the USA¹. There is also strong forces promoting that design should be used for social innovation, for example the Design Council (Burns, C. Cottam, H. Vanstone, C. Winhall, J. 2006) in the UK. Service design is considered to be a useful tool for social innovation for reasons like:

- *holistic approach*, both services and social innovation are complex systems formed by different stakeholders. Service design is a useful method to bring together different views to build a common perspective as a base for new robust solutions.
- *people based*, as Sophia Parker says: “...*Services are intangible, their value being created only in the moment of interaction between a person and a service. It is only deep immersion in this experience that service designers can capture the latent and tacit dimensions of the experience, as well as its more visible aspects...*” (Parker, 2009). This knowledge that service design brings can be used to develop social innovation since it is also dependent on peoples behavior and interactions.

But now voices are also heard that points at the weaknesses in using design for social innovation. Geoff Mulgan (2009), the director of the Young Foundation, listed strengths and weaknesses in a working paper for a SIX Telepresence conference which was highlighted in a blog by Stéphane Vincent (2009), the director of the French social innovation organization La 27e Région that uses service design for social innovation. These weaknesses are concerning with, for example, lack of skills in implementation (regarding economics and organization) and “reinventing the wheel” by ignoring evidence and field experiences. Mulgan recently repeated this critique at the DMI conference in London (DMI, 2010 and McCullagh, 2010).

In addition to this, Sophia Parker, who before working for the Design Council in the UK was a civil servant, has highlighted shortcomings in design education for students that want to get involved in social issues. Design education is not giving students: “...*the language and techniques to enable them to operate effectively in context where not all solutions come in the form of 3D-products, or packages that can be bought, sold and delivered to passive customers...*” (Parker, 2009).

Workshop

In the frame of the general theme of the conference “Exchanging knowledge” we are proposing to discuss the challenges of service design for social innovation, with the aim of exploring strategies to overcome the critiques recently raised against the use of design in social innovation. Starting from the participants experience in research, practice/action research and education, the workshop will be aimed at brainstorming about which *skills, methods* and *role* (designer’s responsibilities in a project) could respond to the weaknesses pointed out by different actors working within the field of social innovation.

The workshop will be organized in these phases:

- 1) Workshop introduction. The facilitators will present a short summary of the strengths and weaknesses that have been pointed out in different articles. After, according to the number of participants, working groups (4-5 people) will be created in relation to their main professional interests (researcher, practitioners/action researchers, educators/teachers) (15 minutes)
- 2) Responding to the weaknesses. The groups will receive the workshop material which consists of a set of large sheets, each of them with a quote about a particular weakness. In addition they will also get three different types of empty cards (one for the skills, one for the methods and one for the role) where, starting from their own experience, they can write possible strategies that could help overcome the issue. (10 minutes x 6)
- 3) Final discussion. The large sheets will be hanged on the wall and the different strategies proposed will be discussed together. The proposed solution would be clustered in groups according to their typologies and if they can be considered long or short term strategies (15 minutes).

Tools: each group will be provided with large sheets with quotes about weaknesses and three different types of empty cards.

Take home

The aim of the workshop is to reflect on the weaknesses of design for social innovation and brainstorm about what kind of strategies could be use to overcome them. This knowledge will be collected in a report that will later be send to the participants and eventually be further developed in a paper.

Notes

1. To learn more about these initiatives visit: <http://www.desis-network.org>. Retrieved 11 15, 2010
http://www.enginegroup.co.uk/projects/public_service_design. Retrieved 11 15, 2010
<http://www.ideo.com/expertise/social-innovation>. Retrieved 11 15, 2010. <http://www.livework.co.uk/our-work>. Retrieved 11 15, 2010. <http://www.participle.net>. Retrieved 11 15, 2010. <http://thinkpublic.com>. Retrieved 11 15, 2010

References

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- McCullagh, K. (2010, 9 24). *Is it time to rethink the t-shaped designer?* Retrieved 11 15, 2010, from Core 77: http://www.core77.com/blog/columns/is_it_time_to_rethink_the_t-shaped_designer_17426.asp
- Mulgan, G. (2009, 12 09). *Strengths, weaknesses and a way forward?* Retrieved 11 14, 2010, from Social innovation exchange: <http://www.socialinnovationexchange.org/designforsi/blog?page=1>
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Vincent, S. (2009, 12 25). *Les designers sont-ils forcément de bons innovateurs sociaux ?* Retrieved 11 14, 2010, from La 27e Region: <http://la27eregion.fr/Les-designers-sont-ils-forcement>, (english version: <http://www.socialinnovationexchange.org/designforsi/blog>)