

Research in the First Four Service Design and Innovation (ServDes) Conferences

Johan Blomkvist, Tim Overkamp, Stefan Holmlid

johan.blomkvist@liu.se,

Linköpings Universitet, 581 83 Linköping

Abstract

In this paper we take a closer look at the papers published during the first four Service design and innovation (ServDes) conferences and sources that the authors of those papers have referenced. The analysis uses the academic search engine Scopus and the references found in the conferences' Proceedings. In total 206 authors have contributed to the 105 research papers presented at ServDes, and 53% of all ServDes papers have been referenced at a later ServDes. ServDes authors are informed by research published mainly after 1999 (79,2%), primarily within the fields of Business, Computer Science and Engineering. We also look at what authors publish their research at ServDes and the percentage of self-referencing (27%) as well as within-conference referencing (2,4% of references) to examine the progression within the field through the research published at ServDes.

KEYWORDS: field overview, servdes research, reference analysis, meta-research

Introduction

Any field of study needs meta-knowledge. That is, knowledge about what knowledge is being produced, from what perspectives (research backgrounds and approaches including the people that conduct the research), how it builds on and relates to other fields, and how the field accumulates knowledge, progresses and develops. Based on such knowledge it should be possible to e.g. suggest fruitful directions of research within the field (c.f. Biemans,

Griffin, & Moenaert, Forthcoming). The current paper is an initial attempt to describe aspects of the research presented during the first four Service Design and innovation (ServDes) conferences, by looking at the authors of- and references made, in the 105 research papers published so far at ServDes. The study does not look at the content of the produced research, but rather lays the foundation and identifies the context for future studies of research content. Our interest lies in understanding what ServDes researchers read and to some extent, what their backgrounds are. It is also of interest to look at the progression within the field and the extent to which ServDes authors reference other ServDes papers. We have conducted a search in the Scopus (Elsevier, n.d.) database using the papers from ServDes, and made an analysis based on the references in the research papers published in the proceedings¹.

ServDes History

ServDes was initially called the Nordic Conference on Service Design and Service Innovation, and the first conference was held in Oslo, Norway on the 24th – 26th of November 2009. On the ServDes webpage (ServDes, 2015) you can read the following about the history of the conference:

ServDes conference was born on a bridge in Pittsburgh U.S. during the Emergence 2007 Service Design Conference organized by Carnegie Mellon University. Professor Simon Clatworthy (AHO), senior lecturers Virpi Kaartti (Laurea UAS) and Janne-Valtteri Nisula (Laurea UAS) decided to create a scientific multidisciplinary Nordic Service Design & Innovation conference. Soon professor Stefan Holmlid (Linköping University) and professors Nicola Morelli and Christian Tollestrup from Aalborg University joined the initiative. ServDes founding members are: AHO, Laurea UAS, Linköping University, Aalborg University.

The organizing committees of the conferences made some strategic decisions after the first conference, such as making it a bi-annual event on years opposite to the Nordic Design Research Conference (Nordes) and on the same years as the Participatory Design Conference (PDC), but during the first half instead of the second half of the year. This also helped avoid clashes with other possible fora for publishing service design. It was also

¹ The proceedings can be found online.

2009: Simon Clatworthy, Janne-Valtteri Nisula, Stefan Holmlid (2009). Conference Proceedings ServDes.2009; DeThinking Service; ReThinking Design; Oslo Norway 24-26 November 2009 http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=059

2010: Stefan Holmlid, Janne-Valtteri Nisula, Simon Clatworthy (2010). Conference Proceedings; ServDes.2010; Exchanging Knowledge; Linköping; Sweden; 1-3 December 2010 http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=060

2012: Päivi J. Tossavainen, Milla Harjula, Stefan Holmlid (2012). ServDes.2012 Conference Proceedings Co-Creating Services; The 3rd Service Design and Service Innovation Conference; 8-10 February; Espoo; Finland http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=067 and

2014: Daniela Sangiorgi, David Hands, Emma Murphy (2014). ServDes.2014 Service Future; Proceedings of the fourth Service Design and Service Innovation Conference; Lancaster University; United Kingdom; 9-11 April 2014 http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=099

decided to drop the “Nordic” from the title to make it more inclusive and to respond to the large international interest that the conference gained already in Oslo. This is also when the name ServDes was established and when ServDes was emphasized as the premiere research conference about service design, as opposed to an event for networking, or only aimed at industry. This meant adopting a rigorous, double blind peer-review process for the research papers. At the same time, it was the intention of the organizers to keep with the interest of, and contributions from, the practicing service design community. The first conference had a day dedicated to industry cases, and in 2010 in Linköping, the practitioner presentations were mixed in with the other research paper presentations to increase the exchange of knowledge and perspectives, in line with the conference theme that year (ServDes, 2010). After the two first conferences, the amount of contributions (both submitted and accepted) has increased. The conference is described as “the premier research conference for exchanging knowledge within service design and service innovation studies” (ServDes, 2015), making it ideal for studying the early development of the young service design field.

Service design research

In this chapter, we discuss how design and service themes have emerged in different fields. Several authors helped shape early research in service design (Holmlid, 2007; Manzini, 1993; Moritz, 2005; Maffei, Mager, & Sangiorgi, 2005; Pacenti & Sangiorgi, 2010) but the influence and contribution from the do/think tanks RED and Demos (Burns & Winhall, 2006; Burns, Cottam, Vanstone, & Winhall, 2006; Parker & Heapy, 2006; Vanstone & Winhall, 2006) should not be overlooked. The influence from service marketing and management has also been substantial. Shostack (1982) provided an early and simplistic example of service design in *How to design a service*. The special issue *New issues and opportunities in service design* (Verma, Fitzsimmons, Heineke, & Davis, 2002) is an early example of a serious look at service design and its potential value from a management perspective. Examples of how service design was understood in marketing and management fields can be found by looking at the *New service development (NSD)* literature (e.g. Scheuing & Johnson (1989), Edvardsson & Olsson (1996), and Alam & Perry (2002)). It has been suggested by several researchers that the contribution from design can be more than “innovation” or as a specific stage in the NSD process, and that design offers methods, techniques and approaches that makes it useful throughout the development of services (Yu & Sangiorgi, 2014; Wetter-Edman, 2014; Blomkvist, Holmlid, & Segelström, 2010). While the previous role of design in service development was “silent” (Gorb & Dumas, 1987; Ponsignon, Smart, & Maull, 2011), designers are now entering and changing the field (Tether, 2008; Blomkvist, 2015).

Very little empirically based meta-studies of service design research have been reported in academic literature (see Blomkvist, Holmlid, & Segelström (2010) for an exception). Contributions to our understanding of the emergence and role of service design have been made in a number of service design doctoral theses (Segelström, 2013; Wetter-Edman, 2014; Clatworthy, 2013; Singleton, 2012; Secomandi, 2012).

Method

We looked at references made in papers from the ServDes conferences, both in Scopus and by extracting the text from the proceedings, identifying relevant information and analysing it with Microsoft Excel 2013. Searching for research about service design is difficult for several reasons. Both the terms service and design can of course be found in other fields. In some fields the terms have completely different connotations, and sometimes the terms are partially overlapping. Different interpretations can be found also in fields with similarities to service design. The analysis is also made more difficult by the fact that the ServDes proceedings are not part of any big, searchable database with meta-information such as authors, references, keywords etcetera. Instead, the proceedings are stored as PDFs on Linköping University's Electronic Publication website. We describe the analyses of the Scopus search and proceedings, including some limitations, below.

Scopus Analysis

We used the academic search engine Scopus to look at what ServDes authors are referencing. Scopus is “the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature: scientific journals, books and conference proceedings.” (www.scopus.com). 483 out of all (~2499) references made by researchers published at ServDes could be found in Scopus. Limiting the search to only include sources in Scopus means that many potential domains and sources of publication are excluded, such as ServDes itself for instance. Out of the 483 references found in Scopus, 353 mention the word “design” somewhere in the paper/article, and 265 mention “service”.

What makes searches for service design literature difficult is that the words service and design are used frequently, and even the term “service design” often occurs in databases with different meanings. For instance, it is shared with a sub-field of telecommunications (Pang, 2009). In Scopus, a search for “service design” or “design for service” generates 4338 results, but only 44 of those overlap with the references made by authors at ServDes. Hence, searching for the terms “service design” or “design for service” generates a lot of false positives and at the same time fails to include the majority of what service design researchers consider relevant references. The reason why we include the Scopus search, despite its poor

coverage of the conference references is that some meta-data that is not possible to extract manually can be found here. For instance, the subject area can only be found by looking at the meta-data collected and presented within the database.

Proceedings Analysis

No metadata is available for the proceedings of the conference, making analysis of content, authors, references and so forth, difficult. We therefore transferred all text from the proceedings (.pdfs) to .txt format and then used Sublime text 2 (version 2.0.2, 64 bit, www.sublimetext.com) to clean up and structure the text. It is not clear if or how many references were not properly transferred from PDF to Sublime, or how many were lost during the clean-up of the text. We then transferred the text from .txt to .xlsx. Since the same paper template has been used, with minor changes, during all four conferences it was possible to transfer most of the references to Excel. It is not known exactly how many references that were not successfully transferred. Potential mistakes might have occurred when information was extracted from the proceedings (.pdf) to text (.txt), and if the references were not properly documented in the papers in the first place.

In the analysis we only looked at full research papers, since this study is specifically looking at research presented at ServDes. However, the workshops and case-papers have also contributed to the discourse and developments of the field, but there is no way to distinguish between industry and research contributions among cases, workshops, and short papers from some of the years. Due to changes in the scope and focus of the conference, the number of accepted research papers has varied substantially (see Table 3 below).

Distinguishing between journals and conferences among the references is difficult. The citations should contain the word Journal for all journal references and Proceedings for all conferences. However, some references omit these identifiers (e.g. Harvard Business Review, interactions, Design studies) as well as some conference references (e.g. IASDR, Nordes, DIS). To find as many of the journals as possible (without having to count them by hand) we searched the references for the words “journal” and “int. j.”, and for the conferences we searched for the words “conference”, “proceedings” and “proc.” (disregarding upper or lower cases). During the first four ServDes conferences, 2499 references have been made. Some of them are poorly formatted (e.g. the authors have not used the provided template for references) which leads to some problems when analysing and organizing them. There is also a potential risk that the transfer from PDFs to Sublime text, or that processing the text in Sublime led to some omissions. The authors of ServDes research papers were pasted into MS Excel, and placed into individual cells. Some of these references end with “et al.”, meaning that some authors have unfortunately been left out.

Results

Since the search in the ServDes proceedings covered more papers than Scopus, the bulk of the analysis was focused on that search. We start by presenting the Scopus search here, followed by the proceedings search.

Subject area	Number of hits (total 751)		Author	Times cited
Business, management and accounting	215	28,6%	Vargo, S.L.	9
Computer science	154	20,5%	Von Hippel, E.	8
Engineering	95	12,6%	Bitner, M.J.	7
Social Sciences	58	7,7%	Buur, J.	6
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	53	7,1%	Edvardsson, B.	6
Psychology	33	4,4%	Lusch, R.F.	6
Medicine	32	4,3%	Brown, S.W.	5
Decision Sciences	26	3,5%	Robert, G.	5
Arts and Humanities	22	2,9%	Maglio, P.P.	5
Mathematics	18	2,4%	Grönroos, C.	5

Table 2: The most cited authors based in the Scopus search.

Table 1: Subject area and number of references made to articles in each area respectively. Note that references can have more than one subject area due to journals and conferences having multiple classifications.

Scopus results

Service design is a young research field and it needs to import previous research from other fields. In fact, during the ServDes conference, references (that can be found in Scopus) have been made to 20 other subject areas, excluding two hits in “undefined” areas. Table 1 shows the top ten hits. The subject areas in Scopus are imported directly from the journals and conferences included in the database. Within the results from Scopus we can also look at the top referenced researchers, see Table 2. The table shows the top 5 cited authors in the Scopus search. Places 4 and 5 are shared. This result is dominated by service marketing and management (exceptions being von Hippel and Buur) researchers. Many service research journals are included in the Scopus database, while the design journals; Design studies, Design issues and International journal of design, are not.

Proceedings results

The total number of research papers (presented at the first four ServDes conference) included in the analysis was 105, see Table 3. At the first conference in 2009, 17 research papers were presented. In Linköping the year after, only 11 research papers were accepted to give more room for workshops and practitioners. This number had grown in the subsequent conference, in 2012, to 29 accepted research papers, and increased even further in 2014, to 48 research papers. The analysis shows that ServDes papers on average contain 23,8 references.

Year	Research papers	References made	References per paper
2009	17	489	28,8
2010	11	293	26,6
2012	29	535	18,4
2014	48	1182	24,6
Total	105	2499	23,8

Table 3: Papers, references and average number of references for each year.

One or two authors (about 61% of the papers) most often write papers at ServDes (see Table 4). About 17% has more than three authors and a single author writes around one third of the papers. 206 unique authors have written the 105 research papers published at ServDes, out of which six authors have published three or more papers at the conference, see Table 5. There is no official information about the acceptance rate of the conference. Most of the references made during ServDes refer to papers published after 1999 (79,2%). Many papers reference work published after 2007 even (44,7%).

Year	Number of authors										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2009	11	2	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	17
2010	5	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
2012	10	5	6	4	2	1	0	0	0	1	29
2014	10	17	15	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	48
Total	36	28	23	10	5	2	0	0	0	1	105
%	34%	27%	22%	10%	5%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	
Accu.											
%	34%	61%	83%	92%	97%	99%	99%	99%	99%	100%	

Table 4: Percentage of number of authors and papers per year at ServDes.

Publications*	No. of Authors	Authors
1	179	
2	20	
3	3	Clatworthy, S. Følstad, A. Morelli, N.
5	2	Blomkvist, J. Sangiorgi, D.
9	1	Holmlid, S.

Table 5: Publications per author for all conferences.

**No author has published 4 or 6-8 papers at ServDes, yet.*

It is interesting to look at both what is referenced in general (e.g. journals, conferences, books etc.), but also at what, when and who have been referenced and has published at

ServDes. Tabel 6 shows the total number of references to ServDes research made at ServDes, compared to the overall references. 2,4 % of the papers at ServDes cite previous research at the conference, with the highest, 3,4 % being the 2012 conference. Each author that has been referenced at ServDes has been referred to on average 1,8 times. The amount of references within ServDes is indicative of the progression within the field – i.e. are ServDes researchers building on previous research at the conference or mainly building their publications on research published elsewhere? The ratio of references per paper to ServDes has increased each year, with an average of 0,726 during the last three conferences. It is possible that some authors reference many previous ServDes papers, and others none.

Year	Total number of references	References to ServDes papers			Total	Percentage ServDes references	Ratio
		2009	2010	2012			
2009	489	3*	0	0	3	0,6 %*	0,104*
2010	293	5	0	0	5	1,7 %	0,188
2012	535	12	6	0	18	3,4 %	0,976
2014	1182	11	7	7	25	2,1 %	1,015
Total	2499	31	13	7	51	Mean** 2,4 %	0,726

Table 6: References per year and in total, and percentage and ratio of ServDes references.

**There were three references mad during ServDes 2009 to papers accepted to the conference the same year. **The mean does not include 2009 since there were few papers to reference the first year, though see*.*

Out of the 51 references within ServDes, 14 (27%) are self-references divided between 8 authors. This means that 73% are not self-references (no author of the paper is also an author or co-author of the cited ServDes paper). This can be compared to the amount of self-references in the overall material (not only references to previous ServDes publications i.e. all references), where 10,1% reference themselves.

Author	Year	Name of papers	Times Cited
Holmlid, S.	2009	Participative, co-operative, emancipatory: From participatory design to service design.	4
Segelström, F.	2009	Communicating through Visualizations: Service Designers on Visualizing User Research.	3
Wetter Edman, K.	2009	Exploring Overlaps and Differences in Service Dominant Logic and Design Thinking	3
Blomkvist, J.	2010	Service prototyping according to service design practitioners.	3
Holmlid, S.	2012	Embedding service design: the long and the short of it.	3

Table 7: The five ServDes papers most cited at ServDes.

Since people reference the same paper more than once the number of unique papers referenced and published at ServDes is lower than the total number of referenced papers. The number of unique references is 30. Compared to the total number of research papers published 2009, 2010, and 2012 (57), the percentage of referenced papers are 53%. This means that about half of the papers published at ServDes have been cited at a later ServDes

conference. The five most cited papers that are both published and cited within the conference can be seen in Table 7.

Out of the overall 2499 identified references, 11 were not properly identified leaving 2488 more or less well formatted authors, editors, organisations, and other sources. The most commonly cited reference overall at ServDes is the book *This is Service Design Thinking* (2010), with 18 references. However, this is not the whole truth since several authors also cite chapters in the book. The most cited article is *Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing* (14) by Vargo & Lusch (2004). The Demos report *The Journey to the Interface* (Parker and Heapy, 2006) and the book *Design for Services* (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011) were both referenced 14 times. See Table 8 for all sources referenced 10 times or more.

Author	Year	Name	Published in	Times Cited
Stickdorn, M.Schneider, J.eds.	2010	<i>This is Service Design Thinking.</i>	Book	18
Vargo, S L. Lusch, R F.	2004	<i>Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing.</i>	Journal of Marketing	14
Parker, S. Heapy, J.	2006	<i>The Journey to the Interface.</i>	Report	14
Meroni, A. Sangiorgi, D.	2011	<i>Design for Services.</i>	Book	14
Holmlid, S.	2009	<i>Interaction design and service design: Expanding a comparison of design disciplines.</i>	Nordes Conference	12
Shostack, G L.	1984	<i>Designing Services that Deliver.</i>	Harvard Business Review	12
Vargo, S L. Lusch, R F.	2008	<i>Service-dominant logic: Continuing the evolution.</i>	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	11
Sanders, E B N. Stappers, P J.	2008	<i>Co-creation and the new landscapes of design.</i>	CoDesign Journal	10
Buchenau, M. Fulton Suri, J.	2000	<i>Experience Prototyping.</i>	DIS conference	10
Ostrom et al.	2010	<i>Moving Forward and Making a Difference: Research Priorities for the Science of Service.</i>	Journal of Service Research	10
Sangiorgi, D.	2009	<i>Building Up a Framework for Service Design Research.</i>	EAD conference	10

Table 8: Sources cited 10 times or more during ServDes 2009 – 2014.

Looking at the most referenced sources and authors reveals what and who the main influences are for ServDes authors. The list containing the most cited authors at ServDes can be seen in Table 9. A search for journal and conference publications showed 419 journal results and 323 conferences among the total of 2496 instances. Due to incongruent format of referencing, the margin of error in this search is believed to be high. The actual number of journal and conference references are believed to be significantly higher, but the ratio, 4:3, might be an indication. Searching for any source with either “www” or “http” indicates that the number of web sources is 233.

Author	Citations
Stefan Holmlid	92
Daniela Sangiorgi	71
Lucy Kimbell	44
Ezio Manzini	40
Mary Jo Bitner	38

Table 9: The five most cited authors at ServDes and number of references.

Journal	Founded	References
Design Issues	1984	32
International Journal of Design	2007	30
Design Studies	1979	21
The Design Journal	1997	5

Table 10: Number of references to specific design journals.

References to design-specific journals were not possible to search for in the Scopus search. Instead, the references found in the proceedings were searched for occurrences of the words Design Studies, Design Issues, International Journal of Design, and The Design Journal. This revealed that Design Issues is the most referenced design journal at ServDes, see Table 10.

Concluding discussion

At this point in time, after four editions of ServDes and while service design as a field is maturing, it should be possible to say something about the progression of the research at the conference. About half of the papers published at ServDes so far have also been referenced at ServDes (53%), which is a high number considering that this is not the only source of service-related research. Self-referencing is partly behind this number since 27% are self-references within ServDes. This can be compared to the overall number of self-references, 10%. Hence, ServDes authors reference their previous work at ServDes to a larger extent than their work published elsewhere. This is part of a cumulative research approach: "Given the cumulative nature of the production of new knowledge, self-citations constitute a natural part of the communication process." (Costas et al., 2010). Many of the self-citing authors are (naturally) returning authors, and have published on 3 or 4 of the first 4 conferences. The average percentage of references to ServDes at ServDes are 2,4% of all references. The ratio of references to ServDes papers per conference has increased, and the average ratio for the last three years is 0,726. These numbers serve as baselines for future discussions about the progression of service design research at ServDes.

Looking at Scopus indicates where the main journal influences for ServDes research comes from. 28,6% of the journals referenced at ServDes have been categorised as Business, Management and Accounting. We can also see that many of the most referenced authors have a background in these fields, e.g. Vargo, Bitner, Edvardsson, and Lusch. The second most common categorisation is Computer science (20,5%).

Widening the search to include all references made at ServDes shows that Holmlid and Sangiorgi are the most referenced authors overall. They both have a background in interaction design, which together with participatory design (through e.g. Jacob Buur) is the strongest design influence on ServDes research. The most cited work at ServDes is the book *This is Service Design Thinking* (2010), edited by Stickdorn and Schneider. Many also reference *Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing* (2004) by Vargo & Lusch, *The Journey to the Interface* (2006) by Parker & Heapy, and *Design for Services* (2011) by Meroni & Sangiorgi. The most cited references are both specifically about service design and some from other domains.

If ServDes is the premiere research conference about service design, it serves as a bi-annual snapshot of the progression, themes, directions and discussions of the field. As such, ServDes should consider moving the proceedings to a searchable database with metadata to make searches easier. This will provide greater insight into the research conducted at the conference and by its participants. The idea is not that a ServDes repository (searchable database) should coagulate and ultimately fix the body of literature that each service design researcher should read, but it could show what has been read, and what has laid the foundation for the current state of the field. This means that it can also work as a natural way into the field for anyone who considers contributing, and it can help identify the current research streams, thus illuminating future orientations in service design and inspiring new research.

This research should be seen as a snapshot of the current state of ServDes research that can be used as a baseline and reference for future studies. Conducting studies about the research presented at future conferences will also substantiate and contextualise the results presented in this paper. Considering the total amount of research papers published thus far at the conference it would also be possible to do a literature study aimed at clarifying and categorising the papers, to follow up previous studies looking at the published content within the field (Blomkvist, Holmid, Segelström, 2010).

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