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Participation & Co-Design in Public Services

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PARTICIPATION & CO-DESIGN IN PUBLIC SERVICES

THEME: CONTROLS, RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This poster is part of an early investigation of a PhD-study in Service Design that started in February 2017. The poster identifies challenges and opportunities emerging from a gap between citizen's needs and public offering to address such needs. Citizens often organize themselves when public administrations are unable to provide valid answers to emerging everyday problems. These opportunities and challenges are related to the role designers could take to help generating new kinds of public services. Services that are sustainable, that take into account the technological innovations but most importantly that are informed by the real needs of their users (citizens). How design may contribute to build capacity and bridge relations between citizens and public service providers?

ISSUES

UNFULFILLED CITIZENS' NEEDS

In Denmark, since 2015 all the official documents from public administration can only be retrieved online (Digst.dk, 2017). This has caused big troubles for the categories of citizens that were not familiar with IT and needed special training to access to simple functions, such as their tax return. This is one example out of many that describes the kind of problems citizens face today in their everyday use of public services.

TECH-CENTERED PUBLIC SERVICES

Governments tend to propose technological accelerations as the perspective and approach to change in pu-

blic administration is often inspired by criteria of internal organization and optimization of human and financial resources, rather than taking into account citizens' perspective (Bason, 2016). This has resulted in increasing the gap between citizens' needs and public offering to address such needs.

EMERGING DIRECTIONS

CITIZENS ORGANIZING THEMSELVES

It is not so difficult to see emerging citizens initiatives aimed at solving urgent issues. People are organizing themselves, often finding innovative solutions. This happens through cooperative initiatives, peer-to-peer network, solidarity groups, which are self organized and use their own problem solving capabilities (Thackara, 2015).

ENLIGHTENED POLICY MAKERS

A growing number of public organizations in the world are starting to look for new approaches to design public services (Bason, 2016). For instance, initiatives to re-do democracy collaboratively with citizens have been taken in Taiwan, Iceland and Brazil (Simon, Bass, Boelman and Mulgan, 2017).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DESIGNERS

SUPPORTING CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

The citizens attitude to find autonomous forms of organization requires what Ezio Manzini calls «diffuse design», i.e. a form of design that happens by itself, without the need for designers, generated by somebody who spontaneously create something that was not expected for the sake of tackling the everyday problems that they face (Manzini, 2015). The challenge for trained designers here is to verify the relevance of their role even in the context of diffuse design, where they are not supposed to control the design process. Are “expert designers” competence needed in this context? What new co-design tools could be made to support these processes?

INFRASTRUCTURING PARTICIPATION

A considerable body of research related to participatory design and co-design has been built since the 70's (Halskov and Hansen, 2015). Even though we can identify successful stories, it appears that the theory is not embraced enough to provoke a large scale impact. Furthermore, new factors are coming in the equation, both challenging democratic ideals and opening new areas of research exploration. E.g., the centralization of internet, large scale infrastructuring, open data. This is the opportunity for (service) designers to contribute to a new generation of public services. How might we design these new platforms that could support interactions between citizens and public organizations on a large scale?

EMBEDDING DESIGN IN GOVERNMENTS

Regarding the public administrations themselves and their capabilities to innovate or support innovation, designers can have a very important role. They should build professional capabilities and skills to create or influence an innovation framework that facilitates innovation in public administration. This means being able to work at the governance / policy level. In this case, what are these professional capabilities and skills designers need to acquire? How might designers build innovation / design / creative capacity into public organizations? How to make sure that the innovation emerging from participatory actions is supported by a policy / cultural framework that supports its adoption or scalability?

CONCLUSION

In this poster, the interpretation of power was addressed through the lens of participation, co-design and governance. In my understanding, this contribution covers the thematic *Controls* in the sense that the research proposes a new balance and distribution of power and control when it comes to designing public services. Both designers and public organizations are called to recognize citizens' innovative initiatives and empower them to create tomorrow's public services. The relation government-citizen and designer-user are challenged.

As a reason it could also equally cover the thematic *Relation*. See the poster (Figure 1) on page 3.

EXPECTATION FROM NORDES.2017

I would expect from other participants in the PhD Consortium to challenge my approach, to discuss design research methodologies and to hear inspiring experiences of co-design in public services or other contexts. I would also like to use the poster as trigger to find other researchers in Scandinavia and beyond who explore the same theme as me.

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COLUMNS ON THE FINAL PAGE SHOULD BE OF EQUAL LENGTH



Figure 1: Poster