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Nicola Morelli, Marc Aguilar, Grazia Concilio, Amalia De Götzen, Ingrid Mulder, Janice Pedersen & Louise Klitgaard Torntoft

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Framing Design to support Social Innovation: The Open4Citizens Project

Morelli, Nicola*; Aguilar, Marc; Concilio, Grazia; De Götzen, Amalia; Mulder, Ingrid; Pedersen, Janice; Klitgaard Torntoft, Louise;

Organisation(s):  Aalborg University, Denmark; I2Cat, Barcelona, Spain; Politecnico di Milano Italy; Aalborg University, Denmark; TUD Delft, The Netherlands; Antropologerne Aps, Denmark; Aalborg University, Denmark

*Corresponding author e-mail: nmor@create.aau.dk

Abstract: In the recent years, new forms of organization have emerged, that have a disruptive power over the existing social and economic system. This phenomenon is challenging the traditional design approach, based on the idea that designers could design services for citizens and public administrations. In the new processes designers and service provider are simply mediating the process of co-creation and supporting the ecosystem for the value creation process. This paper will propose a logical framework for the design action, according to a multi-level structure that includes the value-creation level, in which design is a prerogative of the stakeholders participating in the value-creation action; the level of infrastructuring in which designers use their expert knowledge to support the interaction in the value-creation phase; and the level of governance, in which designers must figure out the structure of the ecosystem in which the value-creation process can be adequately organized and possibly scaled-up.

Keywords: Design for Services, Service Dominant Logic, Open4Citizen, open data.

1. Introduction

New emerging phenomena in the last few decades are posing new challenges in the way we live, use technology and organise our society. The balance between the various components of our society are challenging, new forms of inequality, large migration flows, new ways of organising our cities, new ways of managing our healthcare systems are the emerging results of the rapid change brought together by the convergence of different political social and technological occurrences.

The different directions that can be observed when looking at future perspectives of the present situation are often the result of unplanned interactions between different components of our society: local communities are finding new ways to use existing online social networking systems to create offline local communities, as in the case of the Social Streets (http://www.socialstreet.it/).
This type of initiatives enables citizens to organise new forms of value creation in a very independent way, in order to solve everyday problems or to find new forms of social cohesion in a context of growing atomisation of society. Citizens’ problem solving attitude has been recognised as a form of diffuse design (Manzini 2015) that has always existed, but is now becoming highly visible because of the emergence of new tools to communicate, collaborate, interact, exchange and co-create value along peer to peer social structures.

This means that both focus and direction of the value creation process for solving several everyday problems are changing; this in turn is challenging the existing value creation mechanisms.

From a designer’s perspective this shift is critical, because it questions the essence of the designer’s professional profile: why should designers have a role in those mechanisms of change, and how can they best play that role?

The first question could be addressed with the consideration that a large part of the new forms of social interaction and innovation are using technologies, which are the result of a design action. Beside few cases of innovation in limited local contexts, the activation of new mechanisms of social innovation is often based on remote interaction and require citizens’ engagement to understand the technical or service mechanisms they are going to use or change. Several new social initiatives are based on citizens’ capability to use an aggregation of technical resources and infrastructure, which are not necessarily designed for the aims they are used for. Such resources need to be adapted to new forms of interaction, or new platforms and infrastructure could be generated, that support this emerging phenomenon. Hence the need for a design activity or design tools to address this new demand.

The second question, concerning the modalities of design interventions in such a context, requires a perspective change from a logic inspired by the industrialisation mechanisms of the last century to a new logic. The industrial logic was based on a linear sequence of value creation actions that ended at the point of sale. The consumer was using (consuming) the value created until the point of sale (Ramirez 1999). The consumer was therefore external to the value creation process.

The new logic is instead moving the value creation process towards the user, by giving him/her a role and clear responsibility in value co-production. The perspective shift is therefore from the value chain of the industrial logic to the value constellation (Normann and Ramirez 1994). Goods, which were the end result of a process of value production fully controlled by the producer, are now replaced by a bundle of material and immaterial components that support users to define and co-create the value. In an economic and social system in which the exchange of material goods is becoming less relevant than the exchange of information, knowledge and social value, enterprises can no longer deliver value independently. They can rather offer an aggregation of resources for collaboratively and interactively creating value (Vargo and Lusch 2008). This changes the framework for design action, which is no longer focused on the final good, but rather on the interaction in a value production process.

Together with the shift of the locus of value creation towards the user (or customer or citizen), the role of design and production are also shifting. This is particularly evident in the most recent services, such as Uber, Airbnb or even social networks. In those services the basic unit of value is produced by users: Uber’s trips are operated by the drivers as well as Airbnb accommodations are provided by the platform customers; finally, the content of the most diffuse social networks (information, text, videos, photographs) are provided and exchanged among users.

The control of the value production process is shifted from producers to users through the creation of infrastructures, that support the users’ interaction (Figure 1).
Although the value creation depends on the users’ problem solving and design capabilities, expert design does not become irrelevant, but it is rather articulated into different levels: designers can become the trigger of facilitators of the interaction in the value creation process, but they are also responsible for the creation of the infrastructure that would support and trigger interaction. The platforms on which the interaction is happening needs indeed to be accurately designed, in order to make sure that the right process, the most adequate methods, the right people and the right technological infrastructures are provided to support the value creation process. Moreover, for the value creation process to be scalable and reproducible in different and larger contexts, the design of the infrastructure must be configured as an ecosystem in which relevant roles, actors and competences are aggregated and identified.

The case proposed in this paper gives a good overview of the articulation of the design action over the different levels of the framework outlined in this section. The following sections will therefore outline the project and propose a clearer framework for design action.

2. A Case: Open4Citizens

The Open4Citizens (O4C) project is a valuable ground for exploring this new approach to design. O4C is a project funded by the EU under the H2020 program. The starting point for this project is the increasing availability of large amounts of open data; the project’s aim is to ensure broad citizens recognition of the potential of this type of data as a resource, thus enabling citizens to make meaningful use of open data.

In order to achieve this aim, the project is articulated in a number of hackathons, that are open not just to programmers, but also to citizens, interest groups, organisation and public authorities.

The O4C team include partners with different competences, including IT expert, anthropologists, Service Designers, Urban Designers, Researchers and Public Servants. Although not all of them would
define themselves as designers, their activity in the project can be considered as a design activity, therefore the paper will refer to them as the designers or the design team.

The design activity in this project is organised around hackathons, i.e. co-design sessions in which citizens can co-design new services, together with IT experts and any other relevant stakeholders. The design team is working to support this co-creation process, by framing the hackathon event in a cycle, including also pre-hackathon meetings, and post-hackathon development and test phases (Figure 2).

Figure 2 The O4C hackathon cycle

The activity of each of the OpenDataLab is articulated around a cycle of hackathons on specific The thematic focus for the O4C hackathon activities is chosen on the basis of three dimensions: a) the most relevant challenges in the local context, b) the possibility to aggregate an ecosystem of relevant people and c) the availability of data.

Starting from the pre-hackathon phase the challenges are explored in detail, the relevant actors are identified and invited to participate and the most relevant datasets are collected, to be used in the hackathon event.

While the pre- and post-hack phases consist of different activities, including meetings, workshops, interviews, service jams, coaching and facilitation, the hackathon event in itself is a 2-3 days long co-creation workshop, including citizens, coders, data owners, representatives of interest groups and public institutions.

2.1. The Pilots and the OpenDataLabs

The hackathons are organised in 5 different EU pilot locations: Barcelona, Copenhagen, Karlstad, Milan and Rotterdam. The activities in these 5 cities are focusing on different challenges. In Copenhagen team works on how services could better integrate newcomers into the Danish society.
The team in Rotterdam works closely with communities around the self-management of urban park areas. Karlstad zooms-in on healthcare services. In Barcelona the team works to improve the cultural opportunities in the city, and the Milan team is working on transparency in public works in the city.

The project vision is that that the activities in the project result in the establishment of a network of OpenDataLabs; i.e. physical and digital meeting places for joint exploration of the value of data and how this makes up an actual resource for residents and interest groups.

Ideally the OpenDataLab-platform will enable connections between bottom-up initiatives and top-down policies: Supporting various parties to make better use of open data, through dialogue and co-creation. The primary focus for the various OpenDataLabs, is to raise awareness of data and increasing data literacy, as well as organizing the wider support for innovative ideas and for joint implementation. The scope of OpenDataLabs will not be only about developing apps, but might have a wider scope of economic and social value, contributing to new initiatives, public services, and to new businesses.

At the time of the submission of this paper the first hackathon cycle has been hosted in almost all the cities. This gives us the opportunity for some considerations, concerning the process of co-design with data, the organisation of the hackathon cycle, with the tools and methods proposed and the strategic definition of the function of the OpenDataLab.

2.2. Co-designing with data

The hackathons of the O4C project are different from most common hackathons. The latter are quite unstructured events in which a group of technical experts with a very high coding capability work together in a full-immersion 2-3 days’ event, to generate new applications. The solutions resulting from such events might be interesting, but most often a large part of the resulting ideas are not implemented, because of the scarce relevance on social contexts they refer to. The O4C hackathon instead, brings together a broader and more varied group of include other participants, such as citizens, interest groups or public authorities and all those who could be seen as the problem holders. Therefore, most of the participants are not familiar with coding, but may instead have a deep knowledge of specific problems or needs. A more structured hackathon process has also been developed, in order to enable full and fruitful participation of such varied and diverse groups of participants. The new process consists of co-design a sequence of phases, from the need definition to the data validation. The Hackathon Starter Kit includes tools to apply in each phase.
As outlined in Figure 3 the O4C hackathon process is articulated in three main phases: Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation.

In the initial phase inspiration cards are used to illustrate well known cases based on open data. This phase, together with the need definition phase have been developed in pre-hack meetings or in service jams, in order to gather information about the datasets that could be used during the hackathon event.

Hackathon events are co-design session organised along a sequence of phases, from the need definition to the data validation, in some cases the participants have been able to develop initial prototype to be tested in a post-hackathon phases. The hackathon event should be supported by an online platform including relevant datasets, links to other external datasets and tools to analyse, represent and manage data.

The ideation phase included a session of brainstorming and a data validation phase, in which the participants could look into the platform or search for external data sources.

Another specific feature of the O4C hackathon concerns the access and use of open data. Although a large number of open datasets is now available, the retrieval of relevant data for the proposed challenges is not an easy exercise, due to the lack of specific data and the different formats used for the publication of the available data. The O4C team is developing and experimenting with an online platform including processual and digital tools to integrate data into the design activity. The platform as such includes links to relevant datasets, links to other external datasets and various selected tools to analyse, represent, visualize and manage data.

Depending on the quality and quantity of datasets available in each pilot, the participants were able to work in the implementation phase of the hackathon by developing concepts (Figure 4), graphical interface prototypes or even partly functioning apps.
2.3. Design in the co-production phase

In the hackathon event the value creation activity was in the hands of the participants, who worked in groups that included people with different competences. The results of this activity depended very much on the composition of the design group and the competences of the participants. The presence of public authority representative in Rotterdam, for instance, opened a dialogue between the various city-makers and enabled better ways of articulating data requests, which seem to be crucial to ensure meaningful reuse of open data. The presence of the data owners in the Barcelona, instead was determinant to orient the outcome towards challenges that could better use the available datasets.

The role of designers in this process was to support, stimulate, inspire and trigger interaction and co-creation in the group. The inspiration cards (Figure 5), used in the early phase, were useful to introduce the discussion about open data. The cards included description of commonly used services, such as public transport apps, which opened the citizens’ eyes about the potential of open data as a new resource.
2.4. Infrastructuring the co-design process

Although the design team did not have direct control in the value co-production process, they had a critical role in the creation of the infrastructure that facilitated co-production. Beside the above mentioned hackathon starter kit, the preparation of the hackathon also consisted in the definition of an online repository of data and the aggregation of a relevant ecosystem of stakeholders in the pre-hack phase and the facilitation of prototype development in the post-hack phase.

The digital OpenDataLab platform includes relevant datasets, links to external datasets, digital collaboration tools, or app development tools, that facilitate data visualisation and coding (Figure 6).

The process of infrastructuring innovation in the O4C process consisted in aggregating resources to support the co-production process, including: a) relevant technological infrastructures, such as data, visualisation tools, links to relevant design tools, b) an ecosystem of relevant stakeholders, who are able to contribute to the co-design process from different perspectives, with different competences.
2.5. Setting the framework for innovation

The role of the design team in the O4C project is not limited to the facilitation of innovation along the hackathon process, it also defines the framework for a permanent physical or virtual infrastructure that will provide knowledge and services to facilitate innovation and design with open data.

The OpenDataLab (ODL) is the most tangible instance of this framework. The vision of it is inspired to the concept of FabLabs, which are physical places where materials are turned into products. Fablabs are the places where common citizens, usually unfamiliar with the coding language of 3D printers, can meet IT experts and exchange knowledge, create partnerships and co-create new solutions. Like Fablabs, the ODL will represent an opportunity for citizens to concretely develop their ideas on new services based on open data. It is envisioned to be places where different stakeholders, knowledges and motivations come together to design and develop new services - making meaningful use of data.

A key activity of the ODL platform will be to work as a local advocate to push the demand for new datasets that could be created either by opening existing sources, or by transforming existing data into more suitable format or by collecting new crowdsourced data.

An ODL consists of a) a physical location, that represents a point of reference for innovation based on open data, b) the body of expert knowledge capable of bringing citizens, coders and other relevant stakeholders together, supporting the design process, the organisation and facilitation of events and assisting start-ups with funding opportunities, c) an online platform that includes links to existing datasets, a repository of open datasets generated for previous projects, as well as a curated/recommended collection of tools to support data-driven design.

Overall, the physical and online instances of the ODLs are supporting different scenarios of interaction between their users (Figure 7):
The online ODL platform will work as a repository of available datasets (lower-left quadrant), or a portal to access to other external datasets; in this case the online ODL platform will support more conventional hackathons, i.e. hackathons in which coders and citizens will be able to develop new apps. The ODL platform is possibly providing plug’n play tools that facilitate visualisation and data elaboration.

The online ODL platform will transform existing datasets that have been published in unsuitable format and will also support and organise the collection of crowdsourced data related to specific themes (higher-left quadrant).

The physical instance of the OpenDataLab will be a place where design activities are organised, for creating new service solutions based on open data; such activities include Open Data jams, organisation of data crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. In this sense the ODL will work as an incubator of new ideas and will reinforce citizens’ awareness of the potential of open data (upper-right quadrant).

Finally, the ODL will be a physical place where citizens, hackers and other relevant stakeholders can meet to develop ideas based on existing datasets. In this sense the physical ODL will have the same function of hub for innovation as the Fablabs (lower-right quadrant).

When setting up the ODL as an innovation framework, the design team contributes by providing strategic design knowledge, to suggest concrete perspectives, to represent a map of possibilities and to aggregate an ecosystem of relevant stakeholders.

3. Discussion

The role of designers in facilitating participatory processes and social innovation has been discussed for a long time and in several occasions. Sanders and Stappers (2008) provide a complete overview of the way the inclusion of users has been discussed for several decades, in the discipline of design software design, in participatory processes and Co-design. Sanders and Stappers observe how the
maturation of this approach from a user centred approach to a more active involvement of users into
the design process has challenged both the ‘expert’ mindset and the power structures of companies,
by relinquishing control to potential customers, users and consumers.

This is clearly a hard challenge, which has often focused the discussion on how to capture and
integrate users’ knowledge into the design process (von Hippel 1994, von Hippel 1998), how to
trigger and support users’ design capability (Kimbell 2013) and how to provoke users’ own design
capabilities with different forms of prototyping (Hillgren, Seravalli et al. 2011).

Inspired by Vargo and Lush (2004), Kimbell (2011) observes that in a new service dominant logic the
value production activity, and consequently the control of the design process, is passed on to users,
and the designer can no longer design services but rather design for services, that means aggregating
resources to support value creation in use. This perspective has also animated the debate on design
for social innovation.

Manzini (2015) reflects on the role of designers, when the activity of design is no longer fully in
control of the designers but is passed on to users. When new solutions come from the spontaneous
initiatives of citizens and from a diffuse design capability, the role of the ‘expert’ designer need to be
more clearly defined.

At the same time Bjorgvinsson et al. (2010) and Hillgren et al. (2011) are looking beyond the
traditional project based approach, towards an activity of infrastructuring, to build framework
conditions, such as mutual trust relationships, that could extend the design action over time and
consolidate social innovation processes.

The lesson learned in the O4C project may cast more light on this debate, as it represents a design
action distributed on three logical levels, a) the value co-production level, b) the level of
‘infrastructuring’ the value co-production and c) the level of governance of the ecosystem (Morelli
and De Götzen 2016).

a) A first, visible level is the value co-production process, during the hackathon. This is
the process of interaction among citizens, IT experts, public authorities and other
stakeholders for the creation of new solutions. The interaction at this level is
depends on the stakeholders’ diffuse design capability, generated by the negotiation
among different problem solving attitudes and strategies of the participants. The
designers’ problem solving capabilities are just one of the components of this
negotiation. At this level the designers’ contribution consists in the use of inspiration
cards, prototypes, visual representations and any other tool that can support the
design process. The outcome of the collaborative design activity at this level are the
design solutions generated by the heterogeneous competences involved in the
project.

b) The second logical level includes the generation of the infrastructure to support
diffuse design, that includes the definition of blueprints, templates, modular
structures and working frameworks (such as the hackathons themselves). This level
makes large use of expert design, that means the various competences included in
the design team, from the technical expert to the anthropologist, and, of course, the
designers. The outcome of the design activity at this level consists in the organisation
of the hackathon cycle and the body of knowledge for a systematic application of
models, tools and IT infrastructures (the O4C online platform) that can be used in the
hackathon.
c) The third level consists of the definition of the ecosystem of actors, technical infrastructures and conditions to make the design action scalable and reproducible in different contexts. In the O4C project this logical level includes the definition of the OpenDataLab, its scenarios, conditions of use and the stakeholders that are crucial for its definition (Figure 7). The design knowledge needed at this level refers to the capability to understand the socio-technical implications of the proposed transformations into the ecosystem around the OpenDataLab: Therefore it implies a wider, transdisciplinary and systemic perspective of a specific problem area and the relevant ecosystem. Beside the OpenDataLab, the outcome of the design activity at this level are frameworks for action and policies (Table 1).

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<th>Table 1 The levels of design activities in O4C</th>
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<td><strong>Who designs?</strong></td>
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4. Conclusions

The present socio-technical systems are bringing about radical changes in the mechanisms of value production and call for a substantial revision of the role of the stakeholders in the production system. Users are no longer passive receivers of the offerings of enterprises. Enterprises are no longer in full control of the value production process and the emerging design practices are no longer aimed at designing well defined outcomes (products or services) but rather at designing for a purpose, i.e. designing for services or for supporting value production.

In the debate about this new direction of design practice it is certainly important to develop tools and new practices that activate, empower and support users in the process of value production.

Several contributions already focus on how to ensure the interaction of the user in processes of value co-production. At the same time several authors have also invited reflection about a broader view of the nature and role of design activities and their capability to support, codify, organise the value co-production process and possibly to scale it up beyond the single interaction instance.

The case illustrated in this paper is a contribution to the broader view, providing a logical framework for the interpretation and qualification of design practices at different levels and related to different
design knowledges: diffuse design, expert design and strategic design. Such framework can be a valuable starting point for refining and making explicit the possible impact offered by design and designers in shaping the next society.

**Bibliography**


About the Authors:

Nicola Morelli Professor with specific responsibilities at Aalborg University. He collaborates to the master in Service Systems Design at Aalborg University Copenhagen. His teaching and research work focus on service design methods and strategies. He coordinates the O4C project.

Marc Aguillar is Researcher and head of European projects at the Living Labs & Digital Social Innovation Unit of the i2CAT Foundation. His current work is focused on open innovation models, citizen laboratories, and co-creation methodologies for open data.

Grazia Concilio is an Associate Professor in Urban Planning at Politecnico di Milano and has (Italy) and has been involved in several European Projects integrating Smart Cities and Participatory Service Design approaches in a Living Lab perspective.

Amalia de Götzen Associate Professor at Aalborg University Copenhagen, where she coordinates the master in Service Systems Design. Her research and teaching focus are on Service Design and Interaction Design.

Ingrid Mulder, PhD is an Associate Professor of Design Techniques, Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering, Delft University of Technology. Her expertise is in transformative and social design, using strategic design and co-creation to empower people driving social change.

Janice S. Pedersen is an anthropologist and project leader at Antropologerne Aps, a design-anthropological consultancy in Copenhagen, Denmark. Janice is interested in improving the evaluation of complex, innovative interventions, in mediating capacity-building across societal sectors, and in evidence-based policymaking.

Louise Klitgaard Torntoft, is a research assistant at the Department of Architecture, Design & Media Technology, Aalborg University/Copenhagen. Louise has undertaken both ethnographic research and design-anthropological consultancy work on various instances of technological innovation.

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