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a conversation tool for designing people-led public services

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The Stakeholder map: a conversation tool for designing people-led public services

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the introduction of a service design approach inside public administration offices can help public servants to be more citizen-centred. In particular, the stakeholder map, a well-known tool in the service design community, has been investigated as a means to trigger conversation about roles and power distribution at key moments of a project while also paving the way for public institutions to adopt a people-centred approach. The argument draws on a case study in Geneva where a public institution dealing with migrants employed a design team in order to improve their service offering.

KEYWORDS: stakeholder map, conversation tool, public sector, social innovation

Introduction

A gap exists between what citizens expect from the public sector and how public services are in reality. While technologies evolve at fast pace and new hyper customizable, friendly, multi-channel services are flourishing every day in the private sector (Mager, 2016), public institutions are trying to catch up, but with serious handicaps. Law, regulations, financial pressure, norms, bureaucracy are powerful conditions that the people leading public institutions have to deal with, before thinking to innovate (Bason, 2017). Meanwhile, wicked problems with high social implications are becoming disproportionate in respect to the quantity and quality of services that address them. This is for instance, the case of services that respond to the emergency caused by large migration flows. Yet two very inspiring directions are emerging.

The first one is that people are organising themselves to create sustainable solutions aimed at solving urgent issues. This happens through cooperative initiatives, peer-to-peer networks, solidarity groups, which are self-organised and use their own problem solving capabilities. (Thackara, 2015). As an example, while the Danish government imposed border controls, the voluntary based community *Venligboerne* has proposed hospitality initiatives to tackle the migration issue in a completely novel way. The informal groups have spread in more than hundred cities in Denmark and have even started to flourish in other European countries as well ("Venligboerne", 2017).

The second emerging direction is that globally, an increasing number of public organizations are starting to look for new approaches to rethink their relationship with citizens and to design better their service offering (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). Furthermore, a number of new public organisations are emerging, which have the specific mission to improve the quality of services offered in the public sector, such as MindLab[1] (Denmark), Innovationshuset[2], (Denmark), Experio Lab[3] (Sweden), La 27e Région[4] (France), Laboratorio del Gobierno[5] (Chile).

At the same time designers are proposing new ways to build the relationships between people and public authorities through what Manzini and Staszowski (2013) identified as two approaches:

- *people-centred approach — more intensive involvement of end-users in research, prototyping, testing, and implementation of services to be delivered by public agencies.*
- *people-led services — engagement of agencies and citizens in a co-production process, whereby users design and implement their own service programs, enabled and supported by public agencies. (Manzini and Staszowski, 2013)*

In both cases the designer is encouraged to facilitate a dialogue between very different stakeholders, empower the voices that are usually more silent and enable a process for these voices to be heard by 'the more powerful ones'.

These two approaches require designers:

- to be able to easily access end-users which can be difficult due to public administrations' rules and regulations or in the case where design is not embedded into the organisation;
- to involve equally and democratically public authorities and citizens in a bottom up co-production process which is even more challenging as it demands a shift in the power distribution/positions/structure.

How can designers make sure these conditions of accessibility and positioning are fulfilled? Since the success of their work might depend on their position in relation to the organisation and the power distribution, what tools could support them in discussing these conditions?

In this paper, the authors discuss the use of stakeholder map, a well-known tool in the service design and management communities, as a means to trigger and support challenging conversations about roles and power distribution/positions/structure. After a brief literature review on tools for conversations focusing on stakeholder maps, a design experimentation will be presented and the use of the stakeholder map by designers with public managers will be discussed.

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[1] Mindlab: https://www.mind-lab.dk , accessed January 2018

[2] Innovationshuset: https://innovationshuset.kk.dk , accessed January 2018

[3] Experio Lab: https://experiolab.com , accessed January 2018

[4] La 27e Région: https://www.la27eregion.fr , accessed January 2018

[5] Laboratorio del Gobierno: https://www.lab.gob.cl , accessed January 2018

Tools for conversation

A number of service design tools (user journey, service blueprint, stakeholder map, prototypes) are useful for designers to represent a given context, a concept, a system, a service experience, etc. (reference here). By using visual representations, designers can understand, analyse and furthermore imagine and design new solutions. However, the purpose of these tools is not limited to representing or communicating, these visualisation tools can also work as "conversation facilitators", they can be used collaboratively to trigger discussion in a design process. In this way, they may support the collaboration of different people in multiple ways (Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti, 1999; Eriksen et al., 2014; Sangiorgi, Patricio and Fisk, 2017).

In Malmö Living Labs[6] for example, prototypes were considered "as vehicles able to raise questions as well as highlighting controversies and dilemmas" (Hillgren, Seravalli and Emilson, 2011). In other words, prototypes were not only made to make an idea tangible, but also to allow for multiple, sometimes contradictory, perspectives to emerge. This coexistence of divergent opinions is qualified as "agonistic" and can blossom into "agonistic spaces" (Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014). These spaces are not necessarily physical but can also be mental ones, where respect is shown for the opinions of others and where mutual learning is facilitated.

Manzini, Jégou and Meroni (2004) refer to "design orienting scenarios as a way to constitute "thinking material" to orient the strategic conversations between actors". They explain how for instance polarity diagrams, system maps or stakeholder motivation matrices can be brought into creative workshops to facilitate the dialogue between actors who have different cultures and divergent visions relating to specific challenges. The point of departure of their study is an established network of actors, equally involved in a design process that will ensure a democratic participation. As such, their challenge is how to involve all the actors if the dialogue started with a privileged one that has more power in the negotiation of the intervention to be done?

The stakeholder map in particular, is one of the fundamental service design tools which gives an overview of network relations (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2010). When doing a stakeholder map, the usual steps are the following: identifying who all the involved stakeholders are or which stakeholders might be involved, mapping them visually and finally analysing their relationships (ibid, 2010). Sometimes called "actor network mapping", the tool "gives an overall picture of the network of actors and components in the system" (Morelli and Tollestrup, 2007). The stakeholder map is a tool for visualisation, or a "diagrammatic representation [...] as a way to understand the service and identify potential issues and challenges" (Altuna and Jun, 2014). In recent management literature, the activity of mapping stakeholders or "key connectors" is not only used to identify stakeholders but also to measure or predict their potential of influence and impact (Bourne and Walker, 2005; Walker, Bourne and Shelley, 2008).

When used as a tool for conversation, the stakeholder map can be "used in co-design workshops where multiple actors from different organisations gather, to help them express their perspectives and gain a mutual understanding of each other" (Hyvärinen, Lee and Mattelmäki, 2014; Rygh, 2017).

Although many ways of visualising a stakeholder map exist, two main dominant styles can be identified, either writing down the stakeholders in a table (figure 1) or by drawing concentric circles and placing the actors organically (figure 2).

Stakeholder Map: Queensbridge Connected

Who are all the different people we should talk to about broadband service at Queensbridge Houses?

Providers or CBOs	City of New York	Queensbridge Residents
Queens Library	Community Programs & Development	Tenant Association president
Queens Library at LIC	NYCHA Communications	Tenant Association sub-committee
Mayor's Office of Operations	NYCHA Resident Engagement	Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement's senior group
Community Mediation Services	DCA OFE	Community Mediation Services youth group
Citi Community Development	NYCHA REES	
Urban Upbound	NYCHA Research & Analytics	
OATS	NYCHA Public Private Partnerships	
Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement	NYCHA IT	
	Digital Vans Mgmt.	
	Digital Vans	
	Mayor's Action Plan	
	Community Affairs Unit	

Figure 1 – Stakeholder map example, table style (Service Design Studio at the NYC Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, 2017)
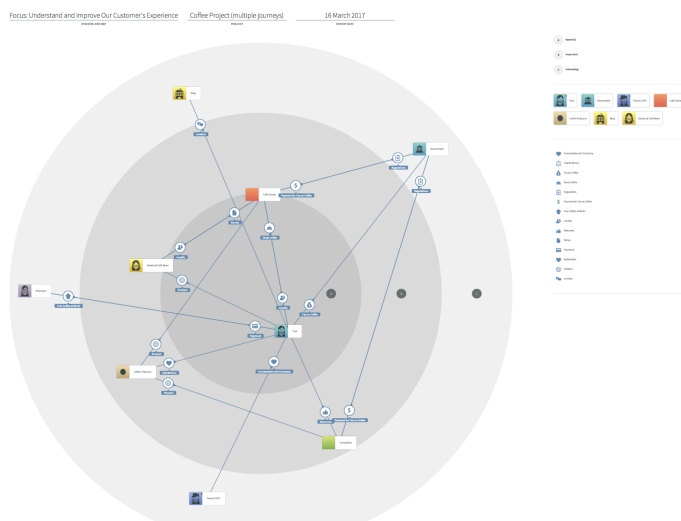

Figure 2 – Stakeholder map example, circle style (Stickdorn, 2017)

In the case presented in this paper, a design team needed to open a discussion about roles, and distribution of power. The designers wanted to motivate public servants to create enabling conditions for stakeholder's participation into the project. The various roles had to be clarified to the public servant in a playful way, through some actionable tool, that could easily show how the value proposition and the service itself would change when different stakeholders are invited into the scene. With this main aim, an experimentation with the stakeholder map as an actionable conversation tool was designed and conducted in the setting of a mini workshop.

Case study: designing integration

The case is a project in Geneva, Switzerland, where a public institution dealing with migrants employed a design team to help improve their service offering. This paper focuses on one workshop in particular, where the stakeholder map was used as a tool to open a new kind of dialog with the public institution. The workshop happened at a key moment in the project development (figure 3), meaning at the end of a first phase (*phase 1*) and before the beginning of a new one (*phase 2*). As the first phase was characterised by difficulties for designers to access and involve end-users, the workshop was meant for designers to engage with the public servants in discussing this issue, inviting them to understand what a more people/citizen-centred perspective might add to the provision of their service - creating better value. The workshop was designed and driven by a design team composed of a PhD student (first author), trained as a service designer in close collaboration with an activist (second author), trained as a graphic/web designer working for NGOs defending human rights of asylum seekers. It involved two public servants, the head of the department of communication and the project manager.
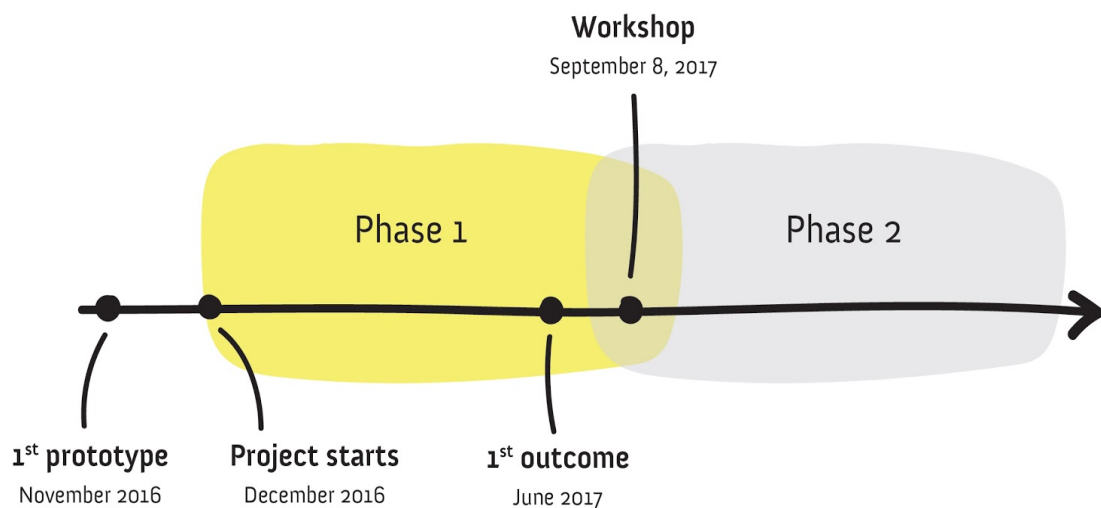

Figure 3 – Timeline and phases of the project

Initial approach (Phase 1)

The public institution, that was our case holder, has a long history (existed since 1535) and provides social care to the weakest social groups in Geneva, Switzerland. In the year 2017, about 20% of their recipients were migrants. For this reason, one out of their three main missions, is to facilitate integration of migrants into the local community. The public institution operates from the moment in which the asylum seekers register to get a resident permit (the public institution call them "recipient") by providing numerous services / forms of help such as social care, financial support and education, giving access to healthcare and housing as well as organising events and leisure activities. Since the demand has been growing due to the so-called "refugee crisis" and the public institution has been more and more under financial pressure, they were interested in new solutions that could ease the integration process of migrants by improving their service delivery.

In December 2016, the design team approached the public institution with an interactive prototype which consisted of an app connecting newcomers with the local life of Geneva. The concept had two parts:

- The first is information based: information useful to migrants in Geneva are gathered and displayed in an accessible and comprehensible way. This means translating long administrative jargon into a simpler, condensed and visual language.

- The second is community based (people-led service): migrants, local citizens, volunteers and other local actors can connect and create synergies by proposing activities to do together, such as playing guitar or knitting, just to give a few examples.

The director of the public institution decided to start a collaboration to further develop and implement the information part (*Phase 1*) of the concept to begin with. Seven months later, the first version of the proposed concept was developed and launched: a user-friendly website that collected all the useful information and available services for migrants provided by the municipality of Geneva. One of the key characteristics of the website is the catchy, inviting and self-explanatory visual representation of its content: the website had to be inviting for migrants with language challenges.

Reflecting back on the design process of this first phase that lead to this first outcome, it can be questioned whether this was truly a people-centred approach or, in other words, to what extent migrants and other stakeholders had in fact been able to participate and to influence the design of this new service. Within seven months three participatory interventions were carried out: one 3h long workshop, one 2h long feedback-meeting and finally one 3h user-testing session. These involved a total number of 21 recipients and 3 employees of the public institution. The interventions were fruitful and helped considerably to challenge the public servants' and the design team's assumptions and to change the perception of recipients, from a problem for the public authorities to a source of information to create better solutions for the whole community. However, referring to "the ladder of citizen involvement in decision making" (Arnstein, 1969; Bason, 2017), the role of the recipients in this case was closer to a "subordinate" than an "empowered" one. The decisions were made either "for" the recipients or "with" them but very little decisions were made "by" them. In other words, the power had stayed in the hands of the design team and the public institution and had not been delegated to the recipients.

The fact that the design team had worked remotely most of the time is one of the limitations that might explain why the process turned out in the way described above. Another aspect can be discussed through the analysis of the dominating approach of the project (institution-centred) and the design team position in respect to the other stakeholders. The design team was too external and had several "gatekeepers" between them and the recipients. In other words, there was a complex structure that made the process of contacting or involving recipients difficult and time consuming. There was a great need for clarifying and possibly defining a clearer structure as the project evolved.

Nevertheless, the public institution was proud of the accomplishment and was willing to continue the collaboration to develop the project further. The design team wanted to pursue the work as well and set the challenge for this second phase to push for more and better involvement of the recipients as well as other relevant stakeholders such as other migrants, local citizens and other organisations, building on the acquired experience, knowledge of the context and the relationships the design team established in the first phase of the project.

Stakeholder map as a tool for conversation (Workshop)

Before moving to the second phase (*Phase 2*) of the project, the design team needed to clarify the organisational structure around the designed service and to open a different dialog with the public institution about stakeholders' involvement. To achieve this, the design team took the coming scheduled meeting with the two leaders of the project (the project manager and the head of the communication department) as an opportunity to bring in this challenging conversation. The meeting was going to take place at the office of the project leaders within the public institution, it had 1h duration and was supposed to conclude the past phase of work and start the planning of the future tasks. The design team designed a mini workshop that could fit in this short time frame using the stakeholder map as central tool. The hypothesis was that the stakeholder map tool could be useful in this short meeting to:

- create a common understanding all along the conversation by making the subject of conversation visual and tangible;
- provoke reflections on what had been each other's roles in the past phase 1;
- suggest a new common vision for how to approach the future phase 2;
- discuss the possible modalities of involvement of recipients and other stakeholders in the phase 2.

The designer's vision was to get closer to the highest level of the ladder of citizen involvement in decision making for the future phases of the work (Arnstein, 1969; Bason, 2017). In other words, the aim was to use the stakeholder map as a conversation tool to suggest more meaningful citizen participation and other stakeholder's involvement (recipients, other migrants, local citizens, other organisations providing services to migrants as well). The mini workshop was not meant to be a co-design activity in itself. Instead, the activity was framed as a productive conversation with the projects' leaders, who could effectively enable later in the process co-design activities with wider range of stakeholders.

The design team prepared a set of cards with the stakeholders' figures hand-drawn on them. Only the actors who had been playing or could possibly play a major role in the project were chosen. A few cards were left blank in case it would make sense to add other stakeholders during the conversation. A particular attention was given to the way the different actors are labelled, using the public institution's vocabulary. For instance, "recipient" was preferred over "migrant". In addition, there were two sheets of papers. One titled "present" for reflecting on phase 1 and one titled "future" for envisioning the phase 2. Dotted circles were drawn to represent different layers. In the centre are the most powerful stakeholders with most responsibilities, in the outskirt are the least powerful ones. The tool was made low tech from re-used material on purpose so that it could be easily modifiable and possibly reproduced by the public servants themselves (figure 4). For the sake of readability, the different maps generated during the workshop were re-drawn in a graphical format. See the overview of the stakeholders (figure 5).
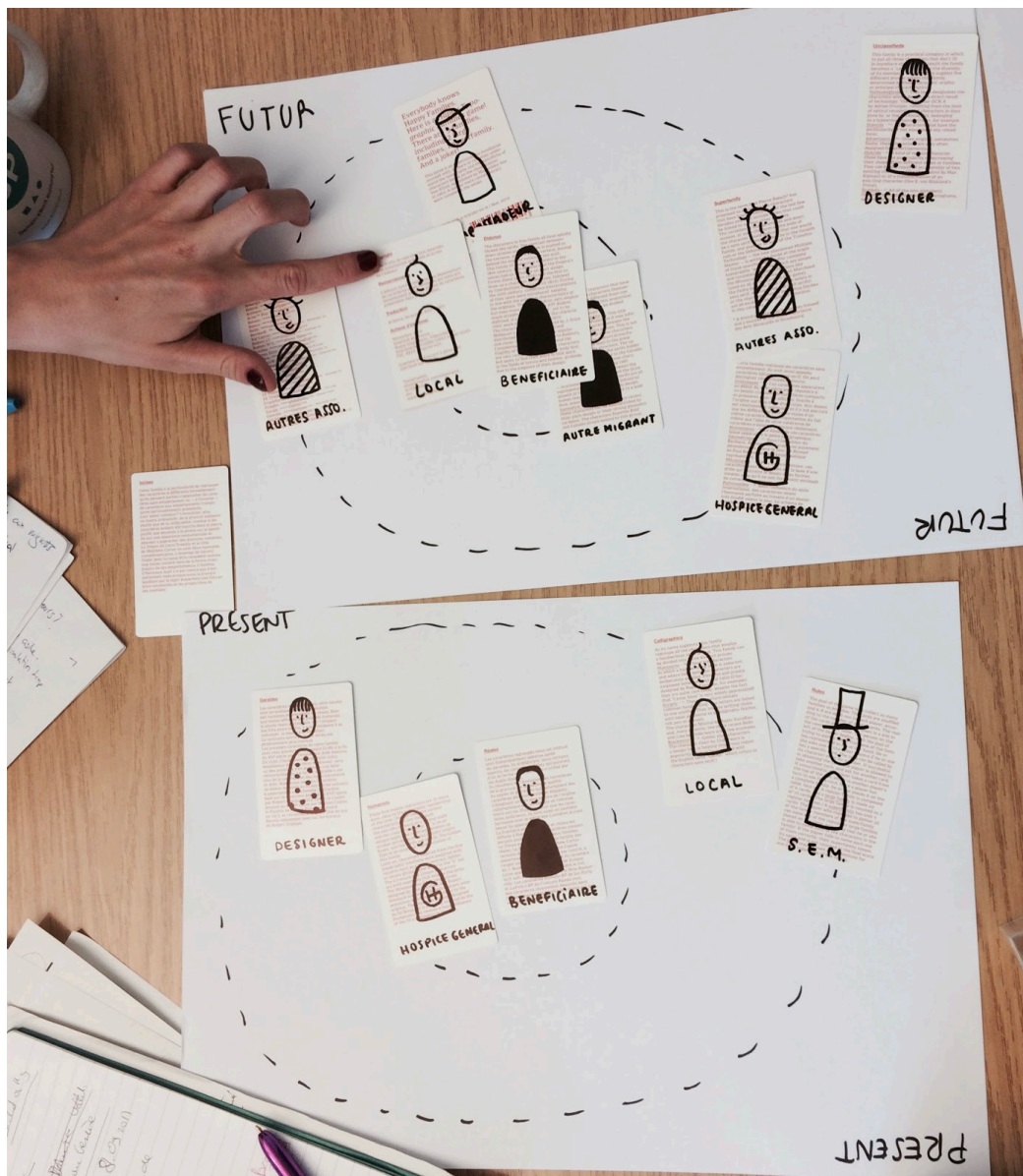
Figure 4 – Actionable stakeholder map used during the workshop

STAKEHOLDERS' OVERVIEW

DESIGNER

Or "design team",
advocates a participatory
design approach.

**PUBLIC
INSTITUTION**

Client of the designer. Funded
by the State of Geneva and
main organisation offering
services to migrants.

**OTHER
ORGANISATION**

Other smaller non-profit
organisations in Geneva
that provide services or
help to migrants.

RECIPIENT

Migrant receiving help
from the public
institution.

OTHER MIGRANT

Migrant not receiving
help from the public
institution.

LOCAL CITIZEN

Citizen living in Geneva,
already volunteering or
eager to meet new people.

AMBASSADOR

Potential new role for an
active migrant or local
citizen who could mediate
the community.

MAYOR

Mayor of Geneva. Aware
of the project but no
implication in the
project so far.

**MINISTER OF
IMMIGRATION**

Highest public authority
for migration matters.
Aware of the project but
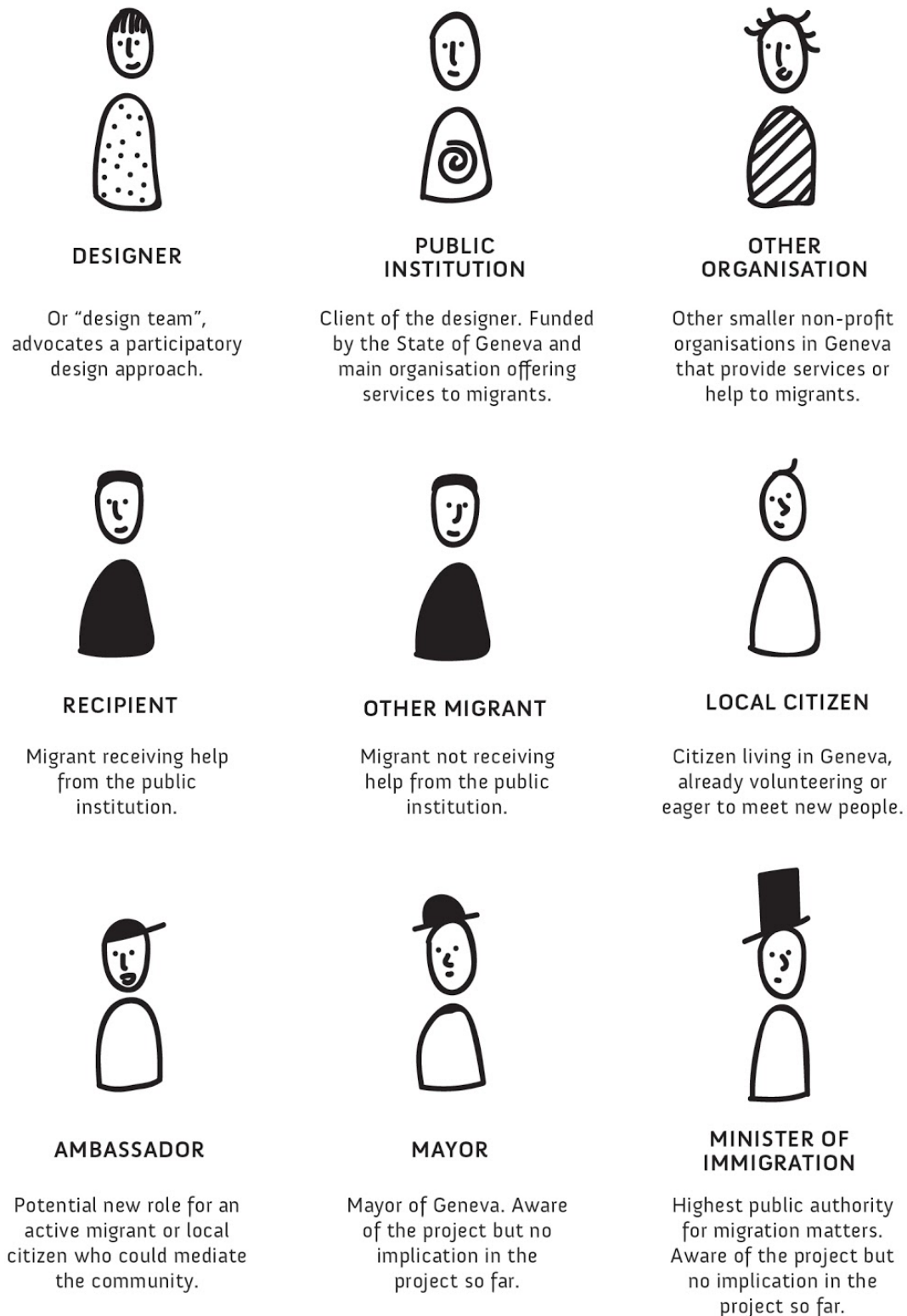no implication in the
project so far.

Figure 5 – Overview of the stakeholders

Before the workshop, the tool was used to align both members of the design team on the vision they wanted to bring in the conversation (figure 6). They envisioned an ecosystem with a user/people/citizen-centred perspective where all newcomers - recipient of the public institution and others - would have the most central role together with local citizens. Small other organisations providing already lots of services and activities would play an important role in making bridges between recipients and local citizens, communicating information, organizing activities to bring both groups together. The position of the designers would be close to the centre even though already in the second circle, when building the service, testing, working together with recipients and local citizens. The institution card is placed at the same level as the designer card to suggest a more supportive role than a leader one, letting as well designers to get direct access to the users/citizens. This is a way of positioning actors that, designers believe, could facilitate the practice of a people-centred approach and design people-led services.
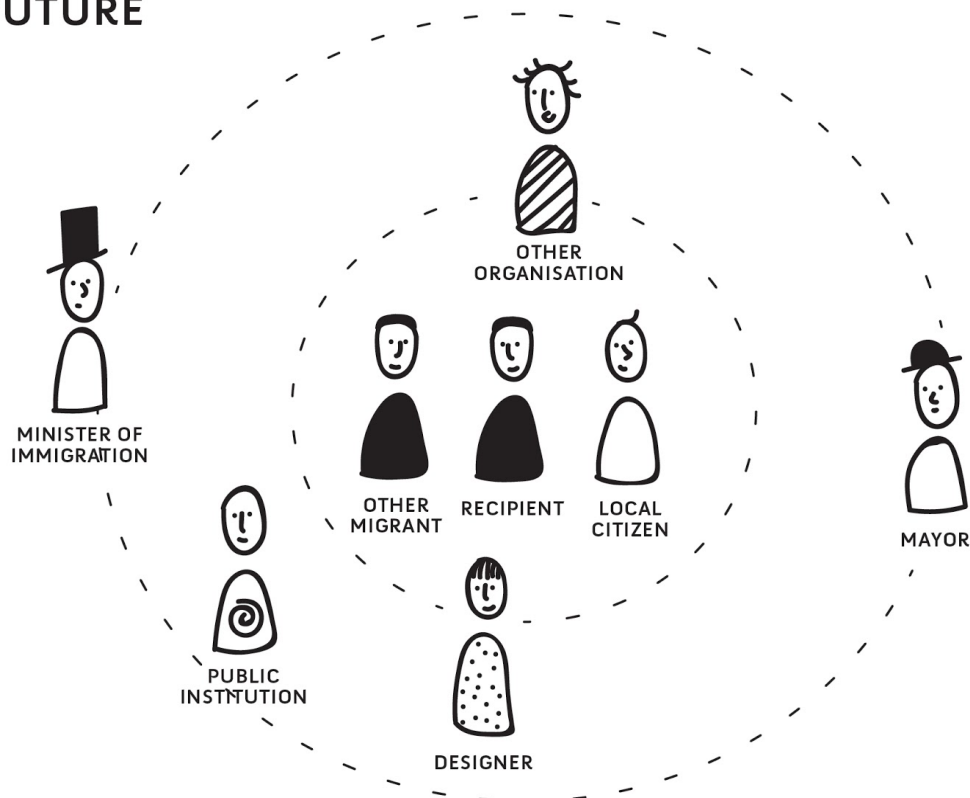
FUTURE

Figure 6 – Stakeholder map of a future vision done by the design team before the workshop

At the beginning of the workshop, the design team introduced the tool to the public servants as a "service design tool consisting of cards we can play with to map everybody's role in the project". The stakeholders on the cards were presented, mentioning that everyone could add more of them if needed. The functions of the two "present" and "future" templates were made explicit as well. The public servants were asked to be the first to place the cards so that the design team could minimize their own influence. The present situation was mapped first, followed by the future vision.

As first action on the "present" map (figure 7), public servants (the head of the communication department) placed the card which represents the institution and put it in the centre. The project manager quickly added the recipient card as well in the middle. By placing their own card in the centre, it showed that they considered themselves as an

essential stakeholder with most important role. Having put both cards on the same level could also demonstrate that they tend to mix up who should actually benefit the project with who funded and facilitated it. Moreover, public servant's interest of being seen as innovative in the way they help migrants might have influenced them in placing the cards thus.

On the first version of a "future" map (figure 8), the public servants expressed their wish for having more solidarity, exchanges and equal roles, placing everybody, but the local people, at the same level. The project manager kept his position by considering the role of the institution as important as the role of the recipients.

After the design team gave new inputs into the discussion, the roles of each stakeholder were re-discussed and the central focus shifted from the public institution to the people using the service, meaning the recipients, migrants and local citizens (figure 9). The institution has been placed in the outskirt circle, together with other organisations. A new role grew out of the discussion and the "ambassador" card was created as to represent a mixed group of migrants and local citizens who would mediate the future community. This showed that public servants were willing to open the project to people outside of the public institution, letting the ambassador moderate communication between recipients, other migrants and local people. The stakeholder map helped public servants to understand better the goal and where focus could be put on.
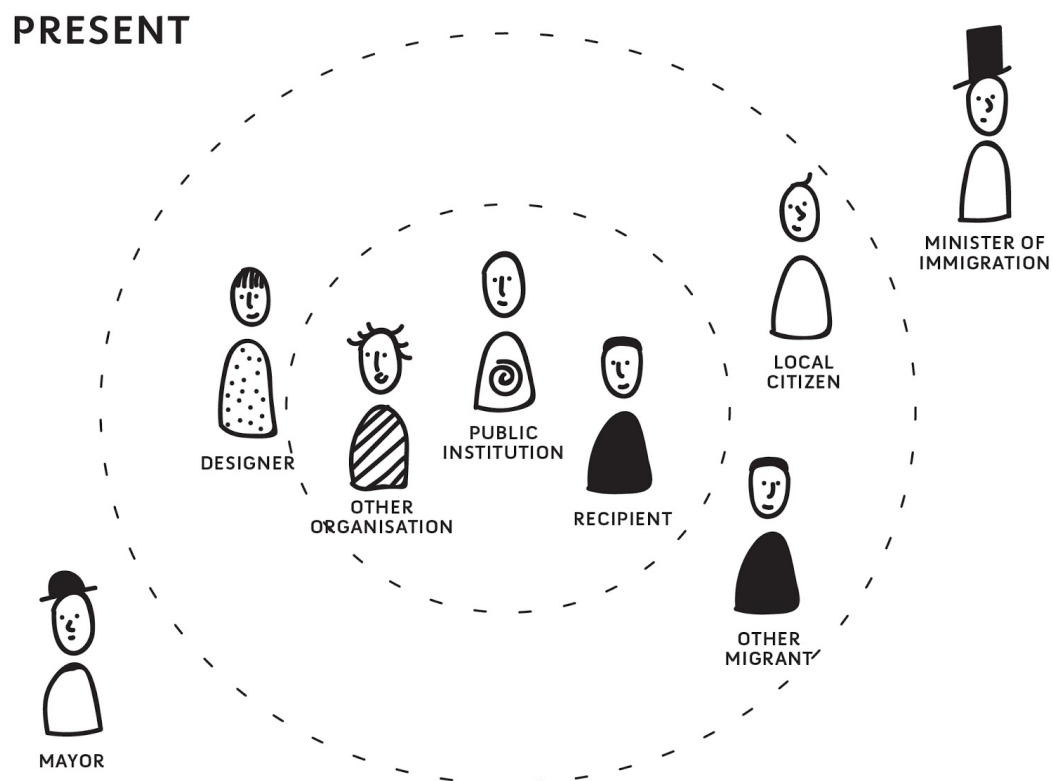

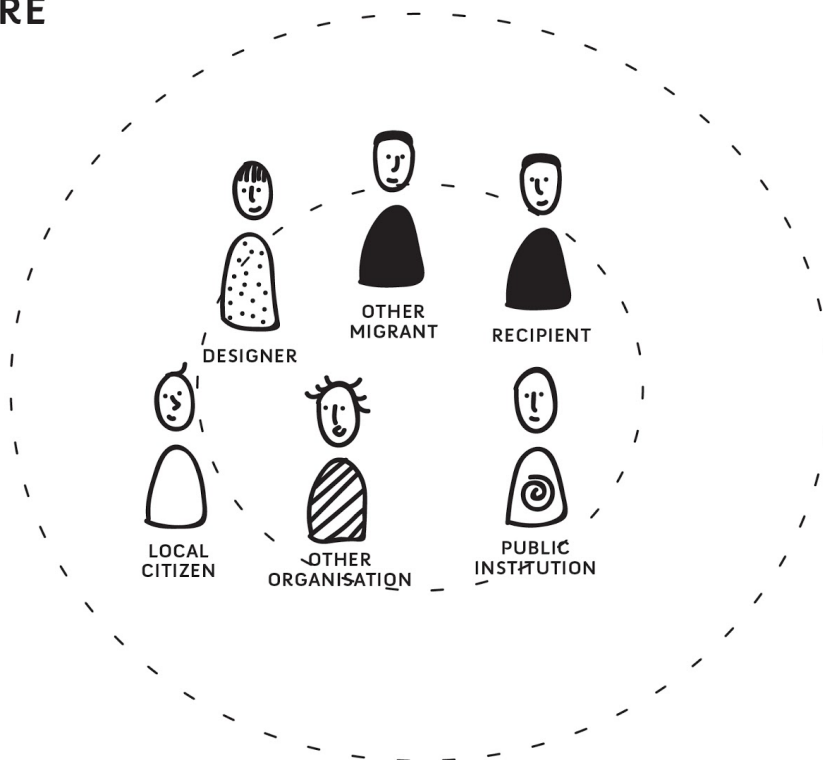Figure 7 – Present situation done by public servants alone

FUTURE

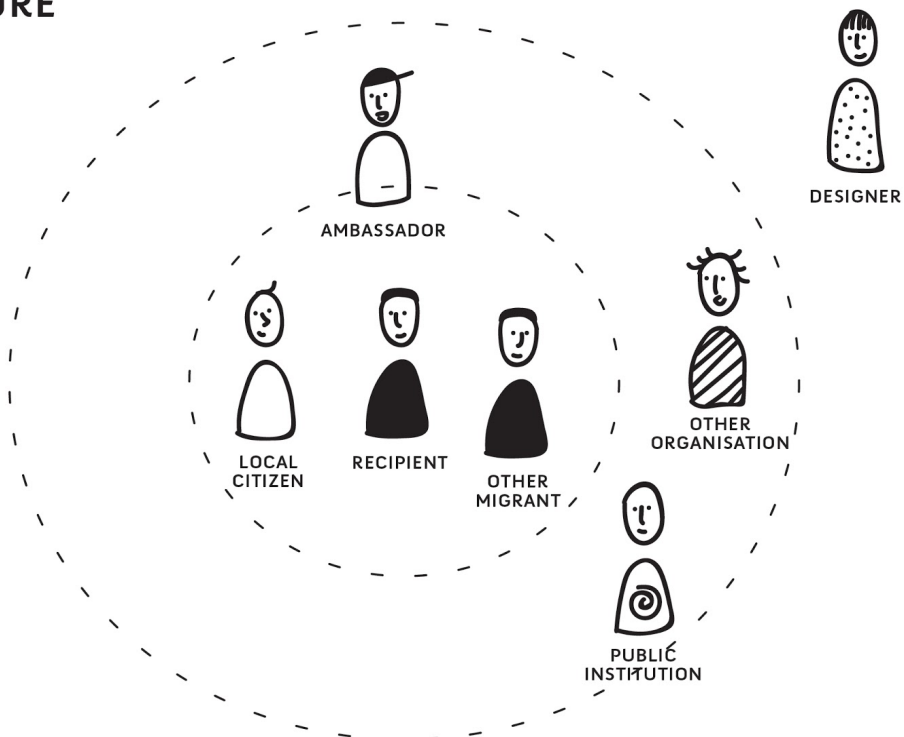Figure 8 – Future vision done by project manager

FUTURE

Figure 9 – Final future vision done by public servants together with design team

Discussion

The activity made clear that the different actors involved in the project had very different perspectives: the head of the communication department was mostly focused on the public institution's interests and on other organisations as well as on public authorities in general. On the other side the project manager was concerned by the recipients, other migrants and local citizens. As a matter of fact, the project manager is the one who had been more collaborative during the project and had played an important role in the participatory interventions, whereas the head of the communication department had followed the project from a certain distance. One way to understand this difference, might be rooted in the different job descriptions of the involved employees. The project manager was in charge of logistics, collecting all necessary info for website's content, contacting external organisations and presenting the project. While the head of communication set up meetings, worked together with the HR to complete the team, and communicated with the director's institution, and with the office integration of the State. Also, the project manager had been the one most actively involved in the dialogue with the design team and the organisation of the participatory workshops - and had therefore been more influenced by the designer's perspective which is a more people/citizen-centred one.

Nonetheless, the manipulation of the cards triggered a constructive conversation about the roles of each stakeholder. Bringing this particular service design tool to the table gave the design team an excuse to suggest the public institution to give a more central role to recipients, local citizens and other migrants in the future.

Moreover, mapping the stakeholders helped to build and discuss a common possible vision for the future of the project. When the head of the communication department said "we will always be seen as the "mean one" but this project can help us to get closer to other organisations", the design team understood that the public institution was ready to have less of a monopoly on providing services to migrants and wanted to build more and stronger partnerships with external smaller organisations.

Another positive aspect is that by moving the cards the public servants expressed things that were new to the design team. They mentioned lots of other similar initiatives to the one discussed and shared their doubt concerning whether the community based service would work or not in a long-term perspective. This made us aware that both the public servants were very up to date with what is happening outside of the public institution. The head of the communication department stressed that "we should not forget that migrants are one category among lots of other social applicants". They were obviously balancing a fear that too much effort and resources would be put in projects for migrants compared to other kinds of people the public institution is taking care of. Reflecting on this, it is interesting that this way of shifting perspectives on who to offer the service to could also be scaled to include other groups of social applicants.

Finally, little was discussed about the specific conditions that could facilitate the process of involving stakeholders. Instead the discussion shifted to a conversation about how the future community could be built. The public servants and the design team were eager to bounce ideas since new potentialities had been uncovered during the conversation.

If the experiment was to be repeated though, the tool could be more inspired by management theory. Looking at the *stakeholder circle* for instance, developed by Bourne and Walker (date), there could be greater emphasis put on showing stakeholder's influences and impact on the project, which could trigger questions such as what is the current impact of recipients on the design process? What could be their wanted impact in the future?

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed how the stakeholder map, a well-known tool in the service design community, could be useful when wanting to design people-led public services. The case study served as playground to experiment with the stakeholder map not only as a representation tool but as an actionable, conversational tool that allowed for opening a dialogue about roles and power positions. This is a difficult but useful discussion that can pave the way for public institutions to adopt a people-centred approach, enabling meaningful and active involvement of a variety of stakeholders (especially end users) in the process of designing a public service. Referring to Manzini (2015), the stakeholder map in this case was used as a "conversation prompts. Meaning a communication artefacts, that may be intended to illustrate the state of things and viable alternatives in a more accessible way [...]". A quite simple setting had helped to clarify and to reflect on a fuzzy and complex network of people and had allowed for divergent interests to coexist in the conversation.

The specific benefit for designers to use stakeholder map as a conversation tool with public servants is to open up discussion about the designer's role and position within the complex context they are designing in. From there, by moving the stakeholders around in a metaphorical way, designers can challenge the perspective of the public institution. Using the tangibility of the tool designers can suggest easily to give a more central role to the citizens the public institution is serving. In this way, inviting stakeholders to participate in a project may be more easily accepted and facilitated by the public institution. In addition, the use of this tool can uncover potential stakeholders that might otherwise risk being overlooked, which can lead to better design opportunities.

Doing the exercise of mapping stakeholders and discussing positions and roles together with a design team can help especially public servants to understand what it entails to be people/user/citizen-centred. They can see more clearly who to prioritize their focus on and how they can position a design team and other players in relation to themselves: enabling the involvement of both citizens and external stakeholders. Public servants are also given the opportunity to express specific context related constraints or conditions for the designers to be aware of and knowledgeable about.

Considering that mapping stakeholders provides knowledge about the *who* (who has power?) and the *where* (where is one positioned in relation to others?), this activity can be the input for using other tools such as motivation matrix (Morelli, Tollestrup, 2007) which is particularly helpful to understand the *why* (why should one share power?).

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Figures

All the figures were produced by the authors expect figure 1 and 2:

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