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## Behind the Scenes of Service Design Education: A Process-Centric Analysis

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► **To cite this version:**

Marianne Abramovici, Sylvie Mercier, Frédérique Simon, Cécile Moline. Behind the Scenes of Service Design Education: A Process-Centric Analysis. 34th RESER International Conference: Co-creating sustainable solutions for Future-proof Societies, VTT Technical Research Center of Finland, Oct 2024, Helsinki, Finland. hal-04753107

**HAL Id: hal-04753107**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04753107v1>**

Submitted on 25 Oct 2024

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**Paper proposal for**  
**XXXIV International RESER Conference.**  
**Helsinki 2024**

**TITLE: Behind the Scenes of Service Design Education: A Process-Centric Analysis**

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

**OBJECTIVES:**

The growing popularity of design thinking in both corporate and administrative sectors has revealed the potential of user-centric approaches to drive societal transformation. However, the application of this expertise to socio-technical transitions remains in its early stages. Previous work (Abramovici et al., 2023; 2022) has lighted the challenges of mobilizing citizen participation in urban projects, demonstrating the limitations of existing frameworks.

Our research emphasizes the critical role education plays in preparing design experts to empower individuals and communities, enabling them to contribute to problem-solving and decision-making processes within urban development.

In the early 2010 's, the French government funded an ambitious research project aimed at fostering creative competencies in Universities and Engineering schools. This initiative was part of a broader effort to drive innovation in higher education. One key player in this movement was the École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées and Université Gustave Eiffel, who responded to this call by integrating design thinking into as many academic programs as possible.

Spearheaded by Véronique Hillen, who was trained at Stanford's D.School and founded the Paris-Est D.School, this initiative sought to improve higher education through the widespread adoption of design thinking methodologies.

Hillen's approach, rooted in Pedagogical Action Research, emphasized the importance of educators being trained to critically analyze their own teaching methods. In her 2016 publication, she advocated for a narrative approach, allowing educators to continuously improve their teaching of service design while preserving effective practices.

One of us, Marianne Abramovici, had the privilege of being part of the only cohort to receive "intermediate-level " certification in Design Thinking under Hillen's guidance in

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2015-2016.

It was during this period that the first comprehensive analysis of service design pedagogy was conducted under Véronique Hillen supervision. This initiative stressed the importance of documenting the context, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and continuously improving pedagogical approaches through a "test and learn" methodology.

In France, training in design is provided partly by schools of Applied Arts, partly by engineers and business schools . A reform aimed at integrating the training offered by Applied Arts schools into the LMD system led the authors of this article to highlight the reflection on the pedagogical method of teaching design of services .

In this context, the authors have undertaken an analysis of ten years of pedagogical practices to identify and highlight best practices in the development of service design teaching sequences.

#### **Objectives of this Communication**

1. **Documenting Teaching Sequences and Deriving Best Practices:** We stress the need for documenting teaching sequences throughout their design and application phases. Based on elements of formalization, we will present two analytical frameworks to aid in the documentation and analysis of pedagogical sequences: the Hillen model (Hillen,2014) and the framework developed by Abramovici et al. (2024, 2018).
2. **Identifying Key Stages of a Service Design Training Sequence:** We aim to outline the key phases of a service design course, contributing valuable insights to the pedagogical engineering of such courses.

These findings will help educators design more effective and engaging learning experiences for their students.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

Service design education is an evolutive field, wich relies on innovative teaching methods and tools to train students in the needed skills to imagine, design , create and develop relevant and useful services prototypes on a real or academic customer.

Our methodology is based on an exploratory case study approach, focusing on crowdsourcing as a tool for teaching service design. We will analyze the design process of a service design course, identifying key challenges and milestones:

1. Deconstructing beliefs:

One of the first challenges in teaching service design is to overcome students' self-doubt regarding their creative abilities. We propose several strategies to foster creativity, including creative profile questionnaires and engaging activities that allow students to discover their talents and creative potential. Once they recognize it ,IT fulfills an emotion and they become more invested in their projects.. It is then time to approach the field observation phase. As part of the service design, the observation of the existing situation is essential. The service design courses that the authors offer is constantly going back and forth between creation, prototyping, and returning to the field of research for testing. The

method is based on the observation of places in different situations, inspired by G Perec in the Tentative of exhaustion of a Parisian Place (Perec, 1982; Abramovici, Mercier 2023). The authors have developed a method for decoding participant's descriptions highlighting the real, emotional and sensory factors of observation (Abramovici, Mercier 2023).

## **2. Combining Guided Learning with Hands-On Experience (learning by doing) :**

Service design education requires a balance between formal frameworks (e.g., empathy maps, blueprints) and creative facilitation techniques (e.g., crazy eight, literary-based exercises inspired by G. Perec's works). This approach ensures that students not only grasp the theoretical aspects of service design but can also apply them in practice.

Design programs offered within the National Diplomas in Applied Arts and Design are based on an active, project-centered pedagogy. While the diploma is structured around specific competencies, it is through guiding students in the execution of projects—first individual to make understand themselves better then collaborative (such as competitions, workshops, or partnered projects)—that instructors help students acquire these skills. This mentor-learner relationship closely resembles the traditional companionship model.

The teaching of service management relies heavily on formalization and models that, while simplifying reality, enable students to grasp the specificities of service activities. These tools provide a structured framework for analyzing and understanding the essential characteristics of service operations. Our active learning approach focuses on equipping students with the ability to use these analytical frameworks, ensuring they not only comprehend them but can also apply them effectively to assess any service-related situation. Throughout service design projects, we use tools to support the convergence phases, while during the divergence phases, we rely more on facilitation techniques and playful learning methods to encourage creativity and exploration.

## **3. Empowering Student Autonomy through projects**

Projects play a central role in service design education, allowing students to apply concepts and tools in real-world scenarios. We propose a phased approach where students begin with guided projects and gradually move to more autonomous, self-directed work. Diverse creative profiles within teams foster collaboration enhance the learning experience (Paris and alii, 2019). The projects are guided by the instructors throughout the process to ensure they remain engaging and productive for the students..The rhythm of the alternation between creation, prototyping and the field takes on its full scope here. The authors propose a phased approach that starts with simple, guided projects and then evolves into more complex and self-contained projects. (Paris and alii, 2019)

## **4. Evaluating and Valuing Skills:**

Assessing creativity and interpersonal skills is a challenge. We advocate for a combination of self-assessment, reflective practices, and peer evaluations,

supported by a comprehensive skills lexicon. This allows students to map their progress and link their achievements to concrete skills.

Assessing the skills acquired in service design education presents a significant challenge, as creativity and interpersonal skills—key components of service design—are difficult to measure objectively. One effective approach involves participants' self-assessment at both the beginning and end of the course, allowing for a graphical representation of their skill development. However, a crucial missing element in this process was the lexicon associated with the evaluation grid. The task of defining these skills was essential in bridging the gap between innovation education and self-assessment.

Service design inherently involves reflective practice (Schön, 1987), which leads to the development of a personal lexicon. Without this lexicon, the list of creative skills may seem overly broad or self-evident to individuals. It is through the precise definition of these terms that reflective practice gains structure, allowing students to connect their accomplishments, experiences, and skills.

At the conclusion of the service design course, the authors emphasize the importance of acknowledging students' achievements and their ability to apply what they have learned. Symbolic recognition, such as presenting a physical "reward" to each participant, reinforces this acknowledgment. The article also presents several tools and methods for assessing the skills acquired by students, including oral

## **EXPECTED RESULTS:**

### **Towards a Standardized Service Design Course?**

This article aims to develop a conceptual framework for the formalization and supervision of crowdsourcing projects within service design education. While the authors recognize that each service design seminar is unique and must be tailored to the specific needs of students and clients, they also identify certain common elements that can serve as a foundation for a typical workflow.

A typical service design course generally begins with an introductory phase where key concepts of service design are presented. This is followed by a stage where students explore various design tools and methodologies. Students then engage in a hands-on project, often in collaboration with a real client. The final phase involves presenting and evaluating the project, during which students receive feedback on their skills and performance, structured around a skills grid and an accompanying lexicon.

Teaching service design is a complex and multifaceted endeavor, requiring thoughtful consideration of both pedagogical methods and instructional tools. This article provides an analysis of the service design teaching process, identifying key steps and challenges faced in delivering effective service design education.

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