Exhibiting Service Design: designing the immaterial to communicate to a gallery audience.

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Abstract

This paper describes the creation of a service design exhibition, from two different points of view, that of the service designer, and that of the exhibition designer. The outputs of service design projects are often immaterial, consisting of plans, maps, reports and blueprints that explain complex systems of interventions. Often the design process is highlighted in the traditional presentation methods used to present service design projects, such as conference posters and presentations, while the physical outputs, which could be any number of products, graphics, interfaces, spaces, conversation guidelines, etc. take on a secondary role. Exhibiting service design in a gallery setting requires therefore a redesign not only of the exhibition space, but also of the outputs to be exhibited, so that the exhibition speaks to the viewer in an immediate and meaningful way.

In this paper we discuss three case studies of different service design projects, each requiring different interventions to create a single exhibition that would communicate to a non specialist audience during the London Design Festival.

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Preface

This paper describes the creation of a service design exhibition, from two different points of view, that of the service designer, and that of the exhibition designer. Each point of view is embodied by one of the paper's authors. Silvia Grimaldi is the course leader for Master of Arts Service Design at London College of Communication, and invited and curated the content that would be part of the exhibition. Irene Martin is a spatial designer and lecturer at London College of Communication, and designed the exhibition. Throughout the paper, these two points of view come to the forefront and background as the two authors' voices are more or less prominent. This conversation is very similar to the type of conversations we had when creating the exhibition.

Introduction

Service Design is a design-based, human centred discipline, which concerns itself with designing services in the public or private sector, working in a participative, iterative and qualitative manner with all stakeholders, and considering the wider systems at play.
Service design is a relatively new design discipline, putting in relation the typical outputs, methods and methodologies of design, to practices that come from business and organisational management, as well as participatory art and design, anthropology, business, planning, and more. While it has overlap and relationship with other design disciplines in terms of what the designed artefacts are, such as products, spaces, graphics, interactions and interfaces, these are only ever a part of a larger system of interventions. As such, service design has always been difficult to exhibit, and traditionally service design exhibitions have existed only in the context of taught programmes in art schools, for which an exhibitable output is expected for a degree show, or as part of poster presentations at academic or professional conferences. In each of these settings, the exhibition tends to consist of posters, which explain the process, and the parts of the service design system through visualisation tools such as service maps, blueprints, storyboards. Occasionally some touchpoints will be prototyped as physical objects and displayed as well. As a discipline, service design tends to lend itself to being presented or written about, as opposed to being exhibited in a gallery setting, because the output is complex and immaterial.

Clive Dilnot in the foreword to Designing the Invisible (Penin, L. 2018, p. 10) writes that because services dictate a range of experiences, these are mainly immaterial, even though they emerge through the interaction with material touchpoints.

> "While experiences are propelled by the material qualities of the thing, it takes place in the mind. [...] the tangible *induces* the intangible. [...] In designing a service, the aim is often all but intangible: the felt quality of the experience offered. Yet the paradox of this intangibility is that this experience is very largely delivered through material means (even if the "material" here might be the actions of, or encounters with, other human beings)."

Jeanette Blomberg and Lucy Kimbell write about the object of service design, and how it might be more productive to contextualise service design in terms of outcomes to be achieved than outputs. "Attending to what it would take to realize particular outcomes

broadens the design brief to include such things as the user interface and application design of enabling technologies; the socio-technical infrastructures upon which services are delivered; the physical spaces in which services are enacted; the business models that connect partners, define revenue streams, and delineate recipient groups; and the governmental policies that support or compel the provision of certain services" (in Sangiorgi et al 2016, p.17). This implies both an ethical and political dimension to the work of service designers, as well as a focus on the temporal aspect of a service, and how this is recreated each time the service is used.

In addition, service design operates within and touches upon complex networks of actors, organisations, relationships and interactions, and as such any artefacts that derive from a service design, for example designed touchpoints, are not easily read to stand in as parts of a whole ecosystem.

Because of this, Dilnot talks about services as "choreographed ensembles of places, things, communications, scripted encounters and so on" (Penin, L. 2018, p. 10). As such, it is difficult to render these choreographies in a gallery setting. Plans for the choreography and props for the experience can be easily displayed, but is service design missing a trick by not exploring ways in which it could sit next to other disciplines, such as interaction design, speculative and critical design, in a gallery?

When looking at speculative, critical design, and design fiction practices, exhibition artefacts have a very particular role to play, as a way to communicate with viewers on a deeper level. The display itself embeds the story behind the artefact, with less need for explicit explanation. So in speculative design and design fiction, the artefact you encounter in a gallery will provide enough to allow the viewer to see themselves in a possible or probable future, and empathise with a future version of themselves. In critical design, the gallery artefact itself engenders reflection about wider societal issues such as technology. This is usually achieved without the need for lengthy explanations, diagrams of larger systems or even much discussion of what the design process was behind the artefact. These disciplines rely on diegetic objects, objects that open up conversations, as a way to communicate wider systems and values (Dunne and Raby, 2013; Grimaldi, 2018; Malpass, 2017).

While it is important to acknowledge that the object of service design is different, there is something to be learned from how these other design disciplines communicate themselves to a wider public. Can we create a tradition of displaying service design that is at least partially communicable in a gallery environment? Do only certain aspects of the service design belong in a gallery? Are we communicating different aspects to different people through different means and settings? Is it possible to create diegetic objects to stand in for complex systems?

We were asking ourselves these questions when we were invited to exhibit the work that Service Designers do at London College of Communication, at different levels, from the Master programme in Service Design to PhD students researching in the area and large research projects that are being carried out at the college. For this we were given a large and prominent gallery space within the college, to exhibit as part of the London Design Festival programme, and as a celebration of 10 years of Service Design at the college. As a course team we assembled the projects that we wanted to exhibit, and we enrolled an exhibition designer to help us make sense of this material for a gallery context.

Designing this exhibition for LDF

"Exhibitions are strategically located at the nexus where artists, their work, the art institution and many different publics intersect [...] they function as the prime transmitter through which the continually shifting meaning of art and its relationship to the world is brought into temporary focus and offered to the viewer for contemplation, education, and not the least, pleasure" (Marincola, P. 2010, p. 9). As the epicentre where all stakeholders meet, Service Design exhibitions require the sensitivity of understanding the audience's needs and be able to empathise with the visitor.

The need of reconceptualising Service Design exhibitions and shifting the perspective to a more human centred approach is required since the meaning of Service Design in society is also changing. Our interest in changing the exhibition approach arose from our need to fully understand the meaning of Service Design from a more visual perspective - what was needed was a Service Design exhibition appealing to everyone, pleasing, stimulating and carrying the message about the nature of Service Design, a user-centred practice. This had to communicate to a general public audience, typical design gallery audiences, as well as the project stakeholders themselves: citizens, local government workers and charity groups, service users, family members, and anyone else who participated in the projects.

As a challenging discipline to exhibit for its intangible nature, the focus needed to shift to the visual and tangible aspects of the projects exhibited, while still communicating the complexity and approach of the projects. Moreover, interpretatives strategies were needed in order to construct specific narratives and use display technologies with an array of mediums that would help with audience's engagement. Hooper-Greenhill in her article on Changing Values in the Art Museum: rethinking communication and learning (2010, p. 24) talks about the need of further research to investigate how far the interpretive strategies of art curators in selecting specific works, constructing specific narratives and using specific display technologies influence the interpretative processes and strategies of individual visitors. The interpretive approach to the development of this exhibition explored storytelling and interactivity as the two main techniques that put the focus on the audience. The creative process and all the media chosen to realise the exhibition was also used for their interpretive potential and therefore design was approached as a means of interpretation.

The idea of a new approach was also driven by the fact that we could not assume existing knowledge of the visitor to a Service Design exhibition, because it is a fairly new discipline. Unfamiliarity with a field or a subject for some can become intimidating and diverse audiences react differently, feeling afraid of the embarrassment of lack of understanding, so it was important that the exhibition was designed to be inviting and engaging. On the other hand, Marincola (2010, p. 24) argues that the reason people come to a museum or exhibition is to expose themselves in measured doses to just this sensation of not knowing for sure what things are, or what they think of them. The exhibition designer's role is to bridge the encounter between the visitor and the experience that will benefit and extend the audience's imaginative and intellectual resources by providing them with stimulating environments where "interpretation is [...] an active process of making meaning" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2010, p. 24).

We looked at new communicative approaches to Service Design exhibitions as a form of action research. We questioned how to move away from the conventional way of exhibiting Service Design through large format word-dense posters and instead we looked at how to develop a coherent and more appealing approach to communication, detaching from a linear communication process, in which a direct path is used to create the connection between the piece and the audience (Baldwin, J. and Roberts, L., 2006, p. 20) and therefore forging a

passive relationship between both. New emphasis was placed on the relationship between the exhibition and the audience, to engage with the surroundings and become therefore active audiences.

The system of the exhibition was organised to best utilise all representations, from the architectural aspects of the given space, to the use of wall and design elements, colour, and the application of the existing lighting.

In designing an exhibition, space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased (Marincola, P. 2010, p. 23). We are sensitive to our surroundings and to the content within the space we inhabit. Adding to the space an array of meticulously chosen clues can lead the visitor through the space, who sometimes consciously, other times unconsciously, visually picks and reads into them in order to navigate and immerse herself in the space.

To create this immersion we used a strong focal point to draw the eye to a point in the space: the main logo of the design as a set of concentric circles. This focal point was strengthened by adding suspended circles along the entire space from the ceiling. These circles became the points of convergence where the meaning of Service Design practice and its representation within the space consolidated. A myriad of focal points are revealed as the viewer moves through the exhibition, through the circles on the ceiling, visible from the top and from the bottom, and the shadows of the circles projected on the walls.

The gallery space is below circulation level, open on top to span two floors, and is first seen from a bridge that cuts the space in two. The viewer then descends into the gallery through a staircase, and the bridge dissects the gallery into two spaces connected by a tunnel. The architectural features of the space - high ceilings, natural and existing light, bridge-divided spaces - were utilised to emphasise the myriad of focal points strategically positioned across the exhibition, creating a visual unity between the two spaces.

The exhibition

The exhibition was displaying three main projects, plus two PhD projects, and each project will be described individually, because each one related differently to the exhibition; while some projects explicitly asked in the brief for diegetic objects, others had to be taken apart and reconfigured as exhibition material, and one was specifically designed for this exhibition setting. The two PhD projects will not be discussed because they used a more traditional poster display format that is common at conferences.

**Figure 1. The main logo of the design as a set of concentric circles.
(photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)**

**Figure 2. First space: Suspended circles from the ceiling and their shadows projected onto
walls working as focal points. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)**

Figure 3. Second space: Focal points, circles, strategically positioned across the exhibition, creating a visual unity between the two spaces. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Figure 4. Focal points have become the elements to immerse the visitor in the experience (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Case study 1: Developing Strength-Based Screening Tools for Lambeth Adult Social Care

This project was part of an ongoing collaboration between Lambeth Council and students from the Master of Arts Service Experience Design and Innovation (now known as Master of Arts Service Design), working with Age UK Lambeth. Using a service design approach, students worked with stakeholders, service users, and service providers in Lambeth to find ways in which a strength based screening tool might work. Students created posters, reports and physical prototypes to show and test in a workshop hosted at Lambeth Council for council workers and charities working in this space. (video here: https://vimeo.com/282116337)

This project was a traditional service design project that the students on the Master of Arts course engage with, with multiple stakeholders, on the topic of a wicked problem. The outputs from this project were also within the space of a more traditional service design project, and because of this they needed a lot of work to communicate in a gallery space.

This was a concrete example of what we wanted to move away from; for the workshop students had designed text-dense A0 posters with a consistent layout and varying in colour. The question was how might we visually represent this information in a more engaging way in order to capture visitors' attention and attract an array of interpretive communities? Marincola describes installation as both presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation (Marincola, P. 2010, p. 23). It was important to keep this balance in the designed exhibition.

We approached this by deconstructing the original poster format and introducing a variety of mediums to represent the content. This offered a chance to design new definitions of Service Design curatorial practice that allowed to bridge the gap between exhibition-audience relationship and form an innovative Service Design exhibition identity.

High ceilings directed the way we approached this project. Deconstructing the original posters meant we needed the space to expand and apply the mix media we wanted to introduce. Photography, laser cutting, engraving, wall painting and vinyls as well as screens were used as the array of mediums to communicate and represent the old poster format.
Enlargement of the photograph of the persona with a big personal statement and short description of the character, in vinyl under it, would likely create empathy with the audience and engage in conversation, and also be seen from the bridge level in the gallery.

Figure 5. The architectural features of the space are used to emphasise the focal points. (Photo credit: Flickr)

The entire surface of the wall, 4 metres tall, was covered by the elements of the projects. From the top, large titles showed the name and age of the personas, as well as the stages of the design process (How Might We, Service Concept and Service Map). These were laser cut into six millimeters plywood painted in black and with the void created by the lasercuting, the white wall in the background was used to create contrast and legibility.

In the middle of the deconstructed new format, How Might We and Service Concept were displayed in a portrait rectangle which was painted directed on to the wall and resembled the shape of the photograph above, vinyl lettering in the rectangles describe the content. At the bottom and at eye level for the audience we placed a Service Map engraved on black painted plywood, showing the process and experience of the user. Next to it, a screen showed the interactive element for the audience to actively engage with.

Plinths with black painted surfaces in circular shapes on top were also introduced to hold three-dimensional or printed prototypes that audience could also manipulate and engaged with.

As Lisa Roberts states in *From Knowledge to narrative* (1997) 'exhibition can now be viewed as an eminently interpretive endeavour: not just the information exhibits present is subject to multiple interpretations, but the very act of presentation is fundamentally interpretive'. Communication design plays an important role on the accessibility, interaction of the audience and how this interprets the exhibition message.

Figure 6. Focal points can be seen from above, creating the connection between the piece and the audience before entering the space. (Photo credit: Flickr)
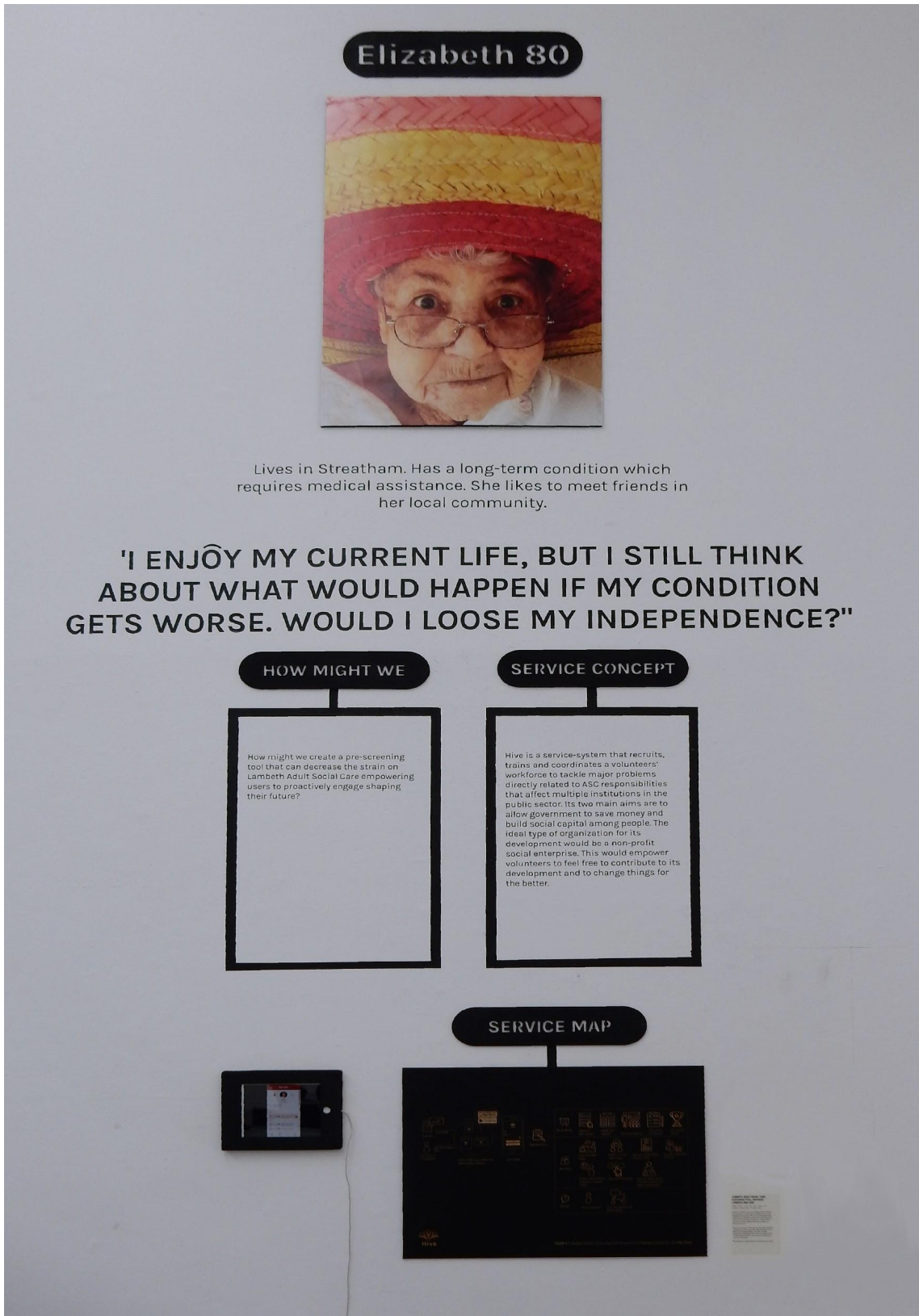
Figure 7. Deconstruction of A0 poster using an array of media and expanding over the architectural features of the space - high ceilings. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)
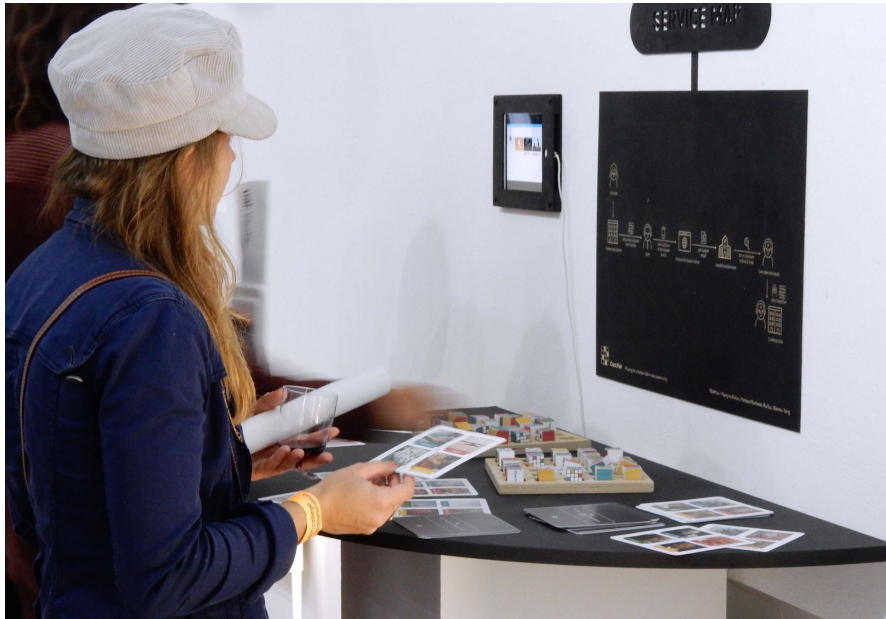
**Figure 8. Audience engage with three-dimensional prototypes.
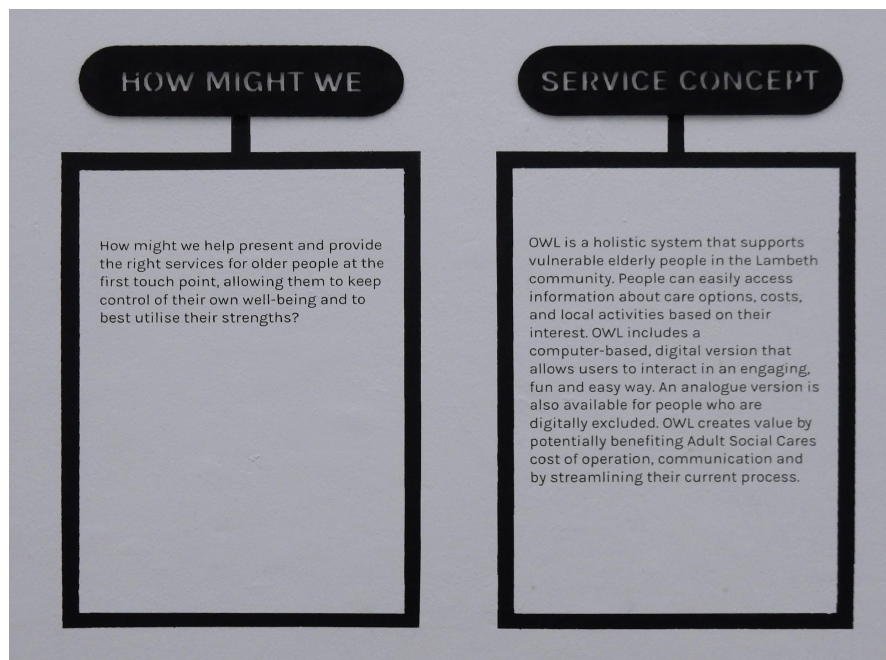(Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)**

**Figure 9. Laser cut, vinyls and paint as part of the media used.
(Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)**

Figure 10 & 11. Titles are laser cut into six millimeters plywood and painted in black, creating contrast with the white wall. (11) Engraving technique is used to design and communicate the service map.
(Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Case study 2 - The Future of Government 2030+: A Citizen Centric Perspective on New Governance Models

This was a project led by the EU Policy Lab of the Joint Research Commission in collaboration with DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT). The overall aim of the project was to better understand the changing relationships among citizens, businesses and governments and to envision and discuss alternative scenarios and government models with a wider group of stakeholders.

The JRC EU POLICY LAB ran a series of citizens' workshops in six European Member States plus a workshop with international civil society organizations, trade unions and think tanks to understand societal actors' future relationships and future needs on government in 2030+. This research was reported as three future scenarios and personas, featuring (1) grassroots co-production communities, (2) the AI driven surveillance state and (3) citizen centric Hyper E-Government.

JRC EU POLICY LAB reached out to six design schools to enable creative speculations and out of the box thinking on possible alternative models of government. In the United Kingdom, the challenge was taken forward by the Public Collaboration Lab (University of the Arts London) in collaboration with the London Borough of Camden, and the MA Service Experience Design and Innovation team, led by Dr. Lara Salinas.

Students on the Master of Arts course used speculative design methods to address themes that the London Borough of Camden had identified as strategic priorities for 2025: (1) homes and housing, (2) strong growth and access to jobs, (3) healthy, independent lives, (4) safe, strong and open communities and (5) clean, vibrant and sustainable places. Each of the student proposals was grounded in a future scenario and proposed either a future model of 'open democracy' or future models of service delivery that were applied to meeting Camden's aspirations for the future.

In the brief there was a requirement for producing diegetic objects that could then be exhibited across Europe and open dialogues about future models of governance, citizen engagement and service delivery.

(video here: https://vimeo.com/282474232)

Because this project was already grounded in speculative design practices, and had the specific requirement to provide diegetic objects for gallery settings, the outputs were already closer to the final version that went in the exhibition.

The look of the project was determined by the selection of three-dimensional elements and videos already given. By arranging these exhibits and information in a communicative contextual setting, the design of this project provided a framework for the artefacts that assisted the audience in learning about them. This framework extended along a storyline that synced with the rest of the exhibition. Screens and headphones were provided for audience to engage with each project. Three-dimensional elements were placed alongside the walls on plinths with circular shapes on their tops painted in black that resembled the rings suspended from the ceiling.

This feature played an important role in this case study. As the outcomes had already been established, some restriction in the way this project was to be designed had become apparent and required attention. "A sound understanding of the limits and opportunities of a particular space can help match the context..." (Lake-Hammond, A and Waite, N. 2010, p.91) to the artifacts in situ.

High ceilings, long white walls could potentially undermine and reduce the impact of a small-scale exhibition. For this reason, the use of light and shadows projected onto the walls became the narrative to the exhibition, allowing the audience to make sense of the displayed objects in relation to one another and their surrounding contexts. The use of light and shadows created continuity in the space and allowed audience to "physically move through its narrative space, becoming then active participant in the exhibition narrative" (Lake-Hammond, A and Waite, N. 2010, p.92). As Mayrand explains, '[t]he exhibition designer's job is to reveal – not conceal – the content, to enhance and not to overwhelm it, to create a stage for its performance' (2002). The strategically placement of the rings suspended from the ceiling was one of the main clues for the audience to immerse actively in the exhibition narrative.

Figure 12. Exhibits are arranged in a communicative contextual setting to engage the audience. The use of shadows as clues create narrative to the exhibition. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)
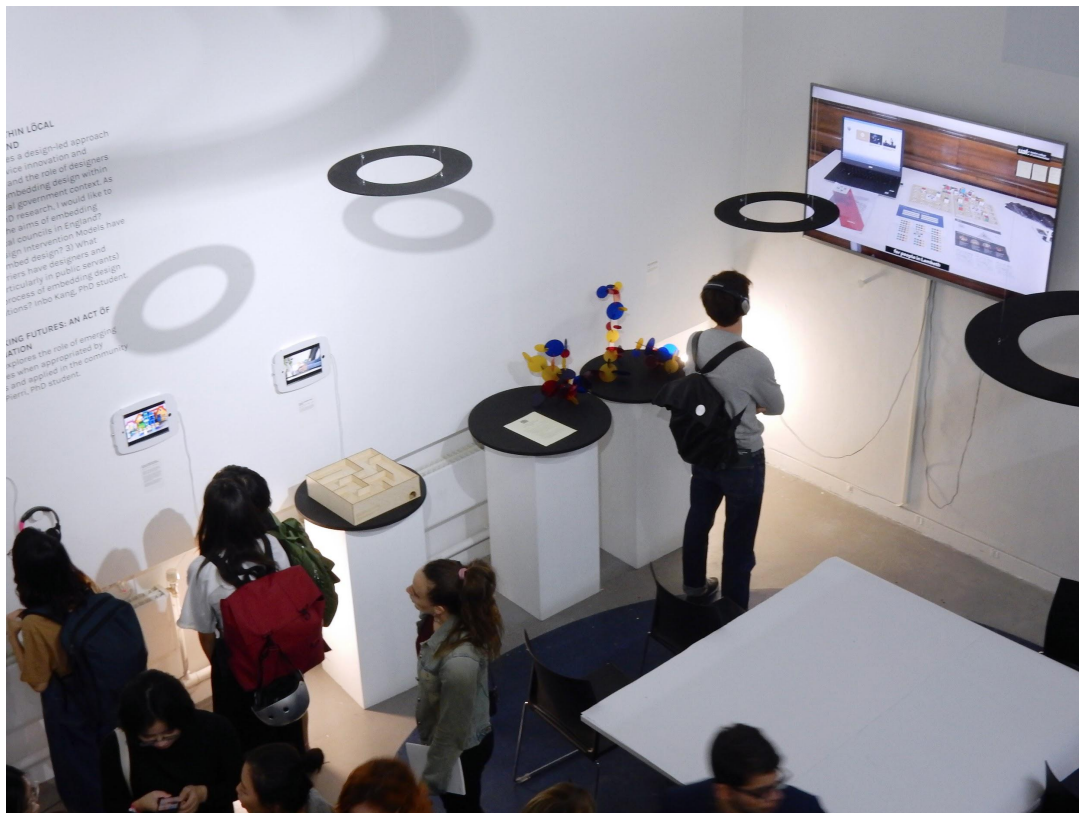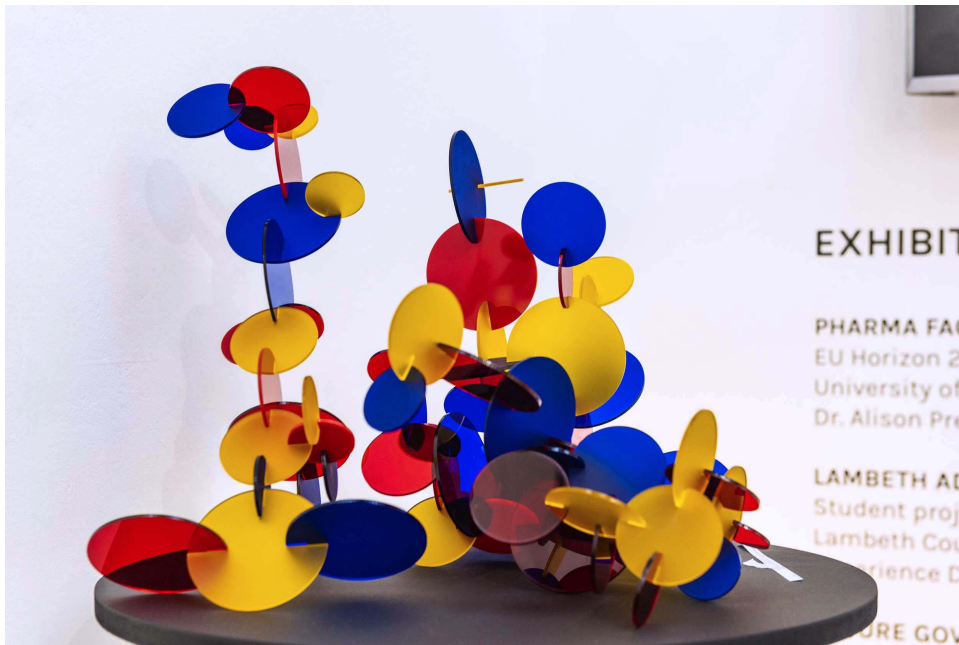

Figure 13. Objects are placed on plinths with circular shapes on their tops painted in black that resembled the rings suspended from the ceiling. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

**Figure 14. Screens and headphones were provided for audience to engage with each project.
(Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)**

**Figure 15. Diegetic object exhibited on black circular shelf resembling suspended rings.
(Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)**

Figure 16. Audience engaged with projects. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Figure 17. Audience engaged with projects. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Figure 18. The use of lights and shadows creates continuity, allowing the audience to move through a narrative space. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Case study 3 - Pharma Factory

The Pharma Factory project is an EU H2020 project carried out by a consortium of European Universities and Small Medium Enterprises working on innovative drug production through new Plant Molecular Farming biotechnologies. Researchers at London College of Communication, led by Dr. Alison Prendiville, are working on aspects of public engagement with these technological developments, in order to identify the values of these technologies to a wider public. (https://pharmafactory.org/UAL)

Two students took this project up as a Major Project: Clara Llamas and Carlos Canali from MA Service Experience Design and Innovation worked with Michael Sedbon (student on MA Interaction Design Communication) to produce an installation that would probe people's reactions to the question: What if you could grow your own insulin at home?

As opposed to the previous two projects, this was a site specific installation that took as a starting point the research project but designed this to be viewed and interacted with in a gallery setting, with the aim to engage the public in conversations about the possibilities of biotechnologies in the future, and the relationship between these technologies and wider social and political developments.

The approach this time was to replicate a familiar environment which would recall that of any visitor in their homes. Students wanted to create a kitchen setting where they could exhibit their project outcomes by implying the lab-like environment to grow your own insulin. The question was how to simply and effectively create a familiar environment that instigates engagement and creates empathy with the audience?

The idea was to project three-dimensional familiar elements onto a two-dimensional planes by drawing these on flat surfaces. Sink, taps, cupboards, drawers and electrical appliances easily found in a domestic environment were drawn in a kitchen-like built surface. Real dimensions made the look of the final outcome appear in real scale. The result was a fun and

approachable installation that, through the use of social objects, instigated engaging conversations. Social objects in this particular setting have the capacity to engender empathy in exhibition spaces. As Simon describes in The Participatory Museum (2010) 'they spark conversation, trigger memory or enable cooperation'.

An open kitchen cabinet was designed to introduce playfulness into the installation, which added a real feel to the overall look of the kitchen. Visitors were invited to open and close the cabinet and interact with the elements inside on the shelves. Conversation usually started as soon as the visitor was in contact with the social objects placed in the installation. These were familiar to the audience, triggering empathy and active engagement.

The installation was located strategically at the entrance of the exhibition, initiating the circulation route for the audience's journey. The first things to see coming into the space were the rings suspended from the ceiling. Approaching the staircase to the exhibition, the visitor would face the logo with the hashtag *#beyondhumancentric*, in which an intrinsic clue was added on top of the last letter C and would repeat discreetly along the text in all three projects - a semicircle representing the theme of human-centric design in graphic form which added a subtle visual unity between all projects.

The second element to notice while coming down into the space was the question located on top of the designed kitchen installation. Still from an elevated entrance on the staircase, the visitor could read the stimulating question *What if you could grow your own insulin at home?,* purposely positioned at a high level to start introducing the audience to the subject. The intrinsic graphic clue was introduced on top of the O, linking the text to the previously seen hashtag. From this point onwards, the social objects would play the role of interaction between the subject and the audience, encouraging participation and immersion and therefore bridging the gap between the visitor and the experience.

#BeyondHumanCentric

Figure 19. The design of a familiar environment to instigate engagement and create empathy with the audience. An intrinsic graphic clue is introduced in the text throughout the exhibition in all three projects; a semicircle on top of a letter, representing the theme of human-centric design in graphic form, adding a subtle visual unity between all projects. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Figure 20. The installation was located strategically at the entrance of the exhibition, initiating the circulation route for the audience's journey.
(Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Figure 21, 22 & 23. Projected three-dimensional familiar elements drawn onto a two-dimensional flat surfaces. Social objects are familiar to the audience which trigger empathy and active engagement.
(Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Figure 24 & 25. Insulin kit is placed next to familiar objects to emphasise the main question above the installation. (25) An open cabinet introduces playfulness and adds real feel to the kitchen. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Figure 26. Audience interact and conversation is instigated. (Photo credit: Paola Pierri / Silvia Grimaldi)

Conclusions

Service Design is a user centred practice, involving stakeholders, service users, and service delivery at all stages of the design process, through co-discovery, ethnographic practice, observation, user research, codesign, testing and feedback sessions. However, we don't tend to present Service Design outputs in an easily accessible way; these get buried in reports full of jargon and complex visualisations, or time limited presentations, and are rarely presented to a wider audience.

Through thinking of how service design outputs can be displayed in a gallery setting, we can start to apply the user centred approach that service design takes throughout its process, also to the way in which we present the service design outputs.

As Ferguson states (1996) "Exhibitions can be understood as the *medium* of contemporary art in the sense of being its main agency of communication, [...] they are a process of information transmission. A strategic system of representations."

As a process of information transmission, Service Design exhibitions should incorporate and deliver the message about the nature of Service Design as a user-centred practice. The intangible nature of Service Design practice makes the realisation of the exhibition challenging. At the same time, this becomes an opportunity for the exhibition designer to build the focus on exhibition-audience relationship and bring these two fundamental constituents much closer together in a space that attracts and engages the audience's attention through new contextual narratives that help the audience make sense of the exhibits and the relationship to one another. Moreover, new narratives demand new ways of thinking about integrating different audiences and content together in a dynamic and meaningful way to enable a wider and more inclusive approach to a more inclusive society. Alice Lake-Hammond and Noel Waite state that "the beauty of an implicit narrative structure is its ability to reach a wide audience". The reconceptualisation of Service Design exhibition can develop its communicative function and make tangible its natural essence towards a broader inclusive society. Through the use of storytelling and interactivity as main interpretive strategies as well as using design as a means of interpretation, Service Design exhibitions can develop towards a more inclusive and user-centred physical representation of the practice.

Maybe we can use higher education service design courses, especially those that are embedded into art and design schools, to experiment with new and more democratic forms of communication of service design outcomes.

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