
ServDes2018 - Service Design Proof of Concept
Politecnico di Milano
18th-19th-20th, June 2018

The Designers Italia project - building the community of public services designers

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Abstract

Service Design is entering the Public Sector in several ways. A year of experimentation of human-centered design for the Italian Government Digital Transformation Team is discussed here. Design has been seen as a contagious agent to inoculate Digital Transformation into complex organizations, and has attempted to reverse the design perspective: transferring power to the user and making projects more important than organizations.

The Designers Italia project was therefore born to provide guidelines, tools and a distinctive design-centred approach to the Digital Transformation Team, with the vision of building a nation-wide team of Service Designers, to develop projects in a participated, open-source way.

KEYWORDS: digital transformation, government, guidelines, tools

The Digital Transformation Team and Designers Italia

Italy needs a new generation of better public services that are inclusive, easy to use and effective. The Digital Transformation Team - Italian Government - was born to build the "operating system" of the country, a series of fundamental components on top of which we can build simpler and more efficient services for the citizens, the Public Administration and businesses, through innovative digital products. The team of the Commissioner Diego Piacentini (former VP at Amazon.com in Seattle) has been created on September 16, 2016

In the design perspective, to achieve this goal and design better services, we use design system, or systemic design. This is the approach that all big companies and large

organisations use to develop services nowadays. Design is seen as a contagious agent to inoculate the digital transformation into complex organisations, transferring power to the user and making projects more important than organisations. For these reasons, the Digital Transformation Team created Designers Italia, the design system of the Italian Public Administration and a community of designers focussed on public services. A year of experimentation of human-centred design for the Italian Government Digital Transformation Team is discussed here.

The project: disseminating a culture of design in digital services

The Designers Italia project is one of the pillars of the digital transformation strategy. The project was born to provide guidelines, tools and a distinctive design-centred approach, with the vision of building a nation-wide team of Service Designers, to develop projects in a participated, open-source way and create a bridge between digital technologies and people. The objective of Designers Italia is to disseminate a culture of design in digital services that makes the citizen the focal point, in order to save time and money for the public administration and to improve the quality of the services. The Designers Italia project creates guidelines, examples and development kits that can help all administrations in offering digital services that are easy to use for the citizens.

Furthermore, each administration can use our collaboration tools and feed the design system, providing user interface components, code and case studies. A central team coordinates the development of the design system and the creation of standards in a human-centred perspective. The platform constitutes a competence centre and a meeting point between the world of design and the public administration, spreading the design culture at all levels and helping Public Administration to engage freelance designers and design agencies in their projects.

The design kits are the best way to start using the resources of Designers Italia. Every kit provides the tools to solve a specific design problem in a way that complements the other kits and is coherent with the design guidelines of the community. The discussions on Forum Italia and the blog posts on Medium help spreading the use of the kits within the Public Administration. The kits are organised according to the purpose they serve: understanding, envisioning, and building.

The first step in the design process requires an understanding of how the users interact with the service and who are the players involved. For example, the kit includes some tools for Usability tests, that help finding how the users interact with a system. Ecosystem maps and User interview tools identify the stakeholders and their connections and analyse the users' needs. The Web analytics kit is useful in observing usage data about the service.

In a second step, the kits can help to envision the new service concept and its requirements. In particular, the Personas and User journeys tools are useful in describing the users and their needs, together with their experience with the service and the ways to improve it. User stories help describing how the service will be used in order to identify needs and features. An Information architecture kit gives all the necessary tools to create a content map, design a card sorting activity and organise content. Finally, the Co-design workshop offers some ideas on how to organize a design session.

After this preparatory work, it is possible to use the kits in the Build area to start creating the service. In particular, the UI kit can be used to create a user interface with a simple and consistent style. The Content kit contains a set of tools that streamline the creation of content through language style guides, writing templates, and suggestions for revisions. The Web toolkit simplifies the creation of websites by providing building blocks ready to use. The Wireframe kit defines an interaction model and the ways to organise the information and the content. Finally, the SEO kit allows for the creation of the website content according to the actual user needs and priorities, established from the data collected during the web searches.

The design kits are the result of a multi-disciplinary approach to design that takes advantage of the various skills available within the Digital Transformation Team. These tools have been created with a collaborative approach that is possible through digital collaboration tools like GitHub, Trello, Sketch, and Slack..

More importantly, these kits are aimed at outcomes, that is creating, redesigning and optimizing services, in a way that is scalable and efficient. The use of open formats allows everyone to easily access and contribute to the kits, encouraging the entire community to enrich the materials. Versionable systems offer a method to do this in a secure and consistent way, keeping track of all the changes. All the decisions are based on data and on tools that help ground the decisions on real needs and existing behaviours

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