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Design craft in Government

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Abstract

Current challenges in the ideation, decision-making and implementation of public policy have recently highlighted the gap between the traditional roles and processes adopted by public decision makers and their ability to solve large and undefined issues, pushing policy makers to examine whether/how to incorporate new sets of Pragmatic tools and approaches. Service design practice is becoming increasingly involved in public sector innovation; however, the growth of many practical examples worldwide is not always coupled by a consistent and systematic reflection – whether academic or practical – that can support the evolution of Government in practice, and the advancement of research.

In this positioning paper, we reflect on how track papers contribute to advance reflection on these topics; we draw a larger picture to illustrate how design practice in Government is contributing to experimentation and advocacy; and we propose a research agenda to advance both practice and research for Service Design in Government.

KEYWORDS: service design, design for policy, governing, evidencing

Introduction

Current challenges in the ideation, decision-making and implementation of public policy have recently highlighted the gap between the traditional roles and processes adopted by public decision makers and their ability to solve large and undefined issues, pushing policy makers to examine whether/how to incorporate new sets of Pragmatic tools and approaches. Service design practice is becoming increasingly involved in public sector innovation: for example, helping to translate strategic governmental plans into concrete actions for public governance and new systems of public services; supporting the establishment of a new

connection with civil society to allow bottom-up initiatives and service opportunities to emerge; helping to make public services more transparent and accessible to citizens and stakeholders. However, the growth of many practical examples worldwide is not currently coupled by a consistent and systematic reflection – whether academic or practical – that can help support both the evolution of Government in practice, and the advancement of research. Proposing this track therefore, we have had as first intent the will to position Service Design research in this area, understanding who and how is working and reflecting on these topics.

The lessons that emerged confirm the need to work on creating a more mature research community to reflect on the many examples coming from the field that are extremely valuable to be shared, replicated, and scaled. These suggest that applying design to rethinking and transforming governmental procedures and structures is not a standard recipe, but rather a way of approaching daily practices over time. It is both an attitude and a mindset, as well as a diverse and dynamic set of techniques, tactics, and mental models. Building on this, we are calling it a craft – something you have to learn and embody over time through practice and renew through heuristic interpretations of the unpredictable and changing environments in which you work.

Reflecting on this landscape, the ‘governing and evidencing’ track of “ServDes.2018 Proof of Concept” Conference has aimed at illustrating how Service Design is helping policy making to become more experimental, project-based and citizen-centric, thus investigating:

- **Resources and complexity**, exploring the way service design is influencing the transformation of the public sector (i.e. the use and origin of resources, ways of dealing with public problems, etc.);
- **Evidence and visualization**, understanding how data can be used effectively in policy making and how it can provide new kinds of accountabilities;
- **Competencies and skills**, looking at a different role for the public officer that incorporates a service design approach;
- **Awareness and participation**, understanding new public legitimacy as well as the effectiveness and limits of citizens' involvement and contribution in designing services and taking public decisions.

In this positioning paper, we reflect on how selected papers have contributed to advance reflection on these topics. We also draw a larger picture to illustrate how design practice in Government is contributing to experimentation and advocacy. Finally, we reflect on a research agenda to advance both practice and research for Service Design in Government.

Current challenges of design in Government: reflections on theory

Part of the most relevant challenges for the future of our society concern public sector innovation. Tensions in this field are stressing the existing model, because of recent societal transformations requiring public administrations to tackle new complex challenges such as demographic change, employment, productivity (i.e. overload of administrative processes), mobility challenges, etc.

There is general agreement (Mulgan and Albury, 2003; Mulgan, 2007; HM Government, 2012) that this changed nature in public problems is increasingly in contrast with the rigidity of public sector structures inherited from the past: it is no longer possible to answer clear public needs through standard approaches; it is rather necessary to adapt to the complex nature of new and interdependent challenges by experimenting approaches capable of stimulating and activating methods for the creation of resilient systems.

This scenario is the object of many studies, reports and projects, seeking to propose new approaches, among which notable is the concept of mission-oriented innovation policy in

connection with a Networked Entrepreneurial State proposed by Mariana Mazzucato (2014), sustaining that the contemporary State should have a role not only in fixing markets, but also in co-creating and shaping them by taking risks and investing/partnering up across different types of sectors (private, public, third sector, civil society).

To contribute a way forward to this scenario, design research and practice are dedicating significant attention to experimenting on innovation in governmental processes and public administration structures and tools, with a special emphasis on the processes of policy design and implementation. However, although recently there has been an increase in examples of design practice in government notably referred to the global emergence of Innovation Teams and Policy Labs (Puttick et al., 2014; Tiesinga, 2014), the introduction and inclusion of design approaches in the public sector has often remained connected to new forms of citizen engagement and collaborative and bottom-up innovations (Ansell & Torfing, 2014), which have often had the limit of missing out on investigating a larger potential contribution to changing governance structures and policymaking processes. This is instead what we have found to be more interesting and promising in our experience and for the future evolution of design in Government as both academics and practitioners, hence it is also what we have proposed as area of investigation for this conference. In particular, we are interested in contributing more largely to rethinking how the *res publica* is developed, managed, and used by proposing a long-term vision to renovate the organization of the State, thus reflecting collectively on the workings of the public administration to make it more Pragmatic. Using Latour's words (2007), a Pragmatic State is one that learns through experimentation, uses wisely the collective intelligence of citizens, and understands public challenges on the field. It seems to us that such a vision could meaningfully take advantage of the experimental approach proposed by design, thus making the connection between design and public policy almost unavoidable.

To reach this, much work still remains to be done. Considering for example the explicit recognition of design skills, methods, and approaches in government, one can notice how this is the result of quite recent experimentations, where systematic research and academic reflection – as well as careful recording and dissemination of methods and approaches – is often missing. Hoping to help fill this gap, we have articulated the reflection proposed by the track into four main points that we describe in the following by extracting the contribution that authors have made to this collective reflection.

Resources and complexity

How is service design influencing the transformation of the public sector (i.e. the use and origin of resources, ways of dealing with public problems, etc.)?

Inbo Kang and Alison Prendiville (2018) aim at presenting the different journeys towards embedding design in a public organisation and identify the connected challenges and barriers using case studies of three local councils in the UK. Focusing on the provision of better services with lower costs by public sector organisations, they describe and apply four types of design intervention models: (1) Non-designer model - team is made up of internal public servants and deploys design without the help of professional designers; (2) External designer model - consultancy from an independent design practice on a project-by-project basis is used; (3) Internal/external designer model - a temporary design unit is organised with dispatched external designers and selected public servants, and is strategically established in an organisation; (4) Embedded designer model – a service design team is created including full-time service designers hired by the organisation for developing design capacity. The result of the analysis identifies a journey to mainly embedding design as capability in government and identifies the following main barriers to achieving this: propagating design mindset, maintaining momentum for behavioural and cultural change, mobilising resources, shortcoming of skills.

Cristobal Tello, Carola Zurob, Sol Pacheco and Sebastian Negrete (2018) note the rapid growth of the aging population, and the paucity of public policies designed to accommodate an aging but active community. This phenomenon has wide reaching implications for a number of public policy areas and is a valuable context in which to explore the integration of service design with policy making processes. Specifically, authors examine these issues in connection with Redactiva, an initiative based on the principles of service design and intended to foster elders' independence. They discuss the intervention methodology and emphasise the importance of ethnographic and other qualitative methods both for framing policy challenges and engaging citizens through service design, thus reaching a way to challenge the traditional public policy model aimed at the elderly. Finally, they recognise the value of flexible implementation, which allows learning from the pilot process to be integrated into the plan of delivery and improve the resulting service.

Service design approach is discussed in the paper as an advantageous approach for answering public complex questions on the basis of qualitative research, prototype and testing, as well as a useful method for involving policy makers early in the process and influencing decision making to explore new approaches for public policy design and implementation.

Adedapo Adebajo (2018) sets out to conceptually reveal the role of service design consultants in the public sector by drawing inferences from the synthesis of service innovation and the KIBS perspective of service firms. The author claims the significance of the paper lies in its introduction of synthesis between service innovation and KIBS perspectives into the discourse on the role of service design consultancy in the public sector. Using KIBS's innovation-related literature, service design consultants are suggested to play the role of co-producers of innovation due to their co-creative practices and user-centred methods.

Evidence and visualization

How can data be used effectively in policymaking and how can it provide new kinds of accountabilities?

Fanny Giordano, Nicola Morelli, Amalia De Gotzen and Judith Hunziker (2018) present a study that, starting from the current gap between citizens' expectation and public sector service offering, identifies two main ways in which designers are proposing modes to build the relationship between people and public authorities: people-centred approaches, and people-led services. Specifically, they argue that the role for designers is 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. Designers' tools for conversation are particularly relevant in this function; therefore, the authors examine and experiment stakeholder mapping as a relevant tool to facilitate better understanding of citizen centric public service development by public authorities directly. This is achieved through making stakeholder mapping an "infrastructuring" tool or an activity to help multiple players engage in a continuous attempt to align divergent agendas, thus enhancing negotiation about the design of a complex service.

Competencies and skills

What is the new role for public officers that incorporates also a service design approach?

Matilda Legeby, Pia McAleenan, Hanna Andersson and Stefan Holmlid (2018) touch on the application of design to policymaking in the context of Policy Labs, describing a case study of how design approaches have been applied to a complex societal/policy challenge. Starting from the need of modernizing the social welfare sector in Sweden acknowledged by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs also including a training for their employees to use co-creation tools and methods, Förnyelselabbet was initiated as a lab by SALAR (The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions). Through this experience, the authors suggest the need for a shift in mindset within the public sector especially within management functions, linked to the figure of a future civil servant that is able to orientate him/herself in

a different landscape, being less of an expert and more of a facilitator, finding failure a learning experience, seeing it as an opportunity not to have the right answers at the beginning of a process but in co-creative processes that explore and test hypothesis together with people.

Awareness and participation

What is new public legitimacy, and to what extent is citizen engagement effective?

Gillian Mulvale, Glenn Robert, Ashleigh Miatello, Michael Larkin, Victoria Palmer, Sandra Moll and Chelsea Gable (2018) examine seven practitioner-led case studies that draw upon service design thinking and approaches to work with vulnerable and disadvantaged populations and explore the experiences of participating in projects across a range of critical social service sectors in three countries. Comparing cases, they identify key challenges related to engagement, power differentials, health concerns, funding and other economic and social circumstances that affected meaningful and sustained participation of the stakeholder groups. Their findings suggest that engagement and power differentials need particular attention when designing public services for vulnerable populations. They also point to the need for greater emphasis on implementation and evaluation of co-designed public services to demonstrate effectiveness.

Towards design craft in Government: reflections on practice

Further complementing the reflections made from the theoretical side, understanding the current practice of doing design in Government is crucial – and not least the potential and challenges of embedding it as a new way of working. The section is divided into four sub-sections: potential, challenge, practice and patterns, that help articulate the different elements in the discourse.

Potential: changing the art of public strategy

The premise of dealing with increased complexity, uncertainty and rapidity in decision-making environments has only further actualised the point made by Geoff Mulgan (2009) in the ‘Art of Public Strategy’: public organisations cannot merely adopt a strategy of survival by adapting to their environment; rather, the purpose of public servants should be to shape the environment. Consequently, these professionals are increasingly forced to act (and identify as) ‘change agents’ (not solely administrators or analysts) responsible for enabling and processing political intentions and ideas in creative and outcomes-focused ways. For them, the challenge is therefore not only how to become an effective and legitimate ‘shaper’ of the environment, but also – more importantly – how to effectively exercise a professional role as public servant when taking seriously the accountability of this role to the public. What characterises the role and practice of public decision-makers in the continuous search to close the gap between people and systems and build public legitimacy?

This development is interesting when taking into account the notion of the mandate for change. Oxforddictionaries.com states that mandate indicates the authority to carry out policies after an election; a decisive win gives the elected official the ‘mandate’ to push through their proposed reforms. This mandate supposedly comes from the people and is the essence of current representative democracy. This is – in our view – why design has become such a prominent (and in some contexts also hyped) concept in relation to public policy and decision-making. Around the world, public organisations are attempting to embrace and embed design approaches, methodologies and attitudes to support this shift at all levels of government – with mixed practical success so far. The language used is varied, but when it comes to its connection to design it is often linked to policy or policy-making, and “designing for policy” which seems to be an increasingly recognised field in and for itself.

What “designing for policy” seems to be questioning is how the mandate for change is created and sustained, as well as how a better relationship between policy and practice could increase the likelihood of successful state interventions and build public legitimacy.

This is also substantiated by the personal experience of one of the authors: in his previous work at MindLab, Christiansen has found that a large portion of his focus went into challenging the consensus that the job for public servants was finished once a policy was formulated, a law was passed, or a decision had been made. Work was developed to reverse this logic and see decisions, laws, and regulations as merely the beginning of an explorative learning process about what might work in people’s lives, thus aiming at creating a better dynamic between political envisioning, technical appropriation and implementation.

Ultimately, for most policies to be successful, they have to be owned by the implementers: by the people charged with carrying out that policy, and with the citizens who now have to act differently. By introducing citizen-centred and learning-oriented processes of exploration of public value, design is contributing to reshaping how the mandate for change is continuously created and reproduced – and therefore also rethinking the art of public strategy.

Challenge: more craft than method

With this overall potential in mind, the frequent underestimation of what it takes to enable a useful uptake of innovation approaches and methods – including design – is concerning. When public organisations have been given a mandate to do something new, they have often emphasised cognitive learning about methods rather than immersive and experiential learning of the craft of solving problems. This has represented an important constraint in our view, therefore leading us to ask: how to apply, embed and extend design approaches in government as well as manage the decision-making and governance environments in which the new approach has to be embedded?

In a slightly crude simplification, design-led innovation craft can be seen to effectively and simultaneously navigate and deal with the areas illustrated in the figure below (see figure 1).

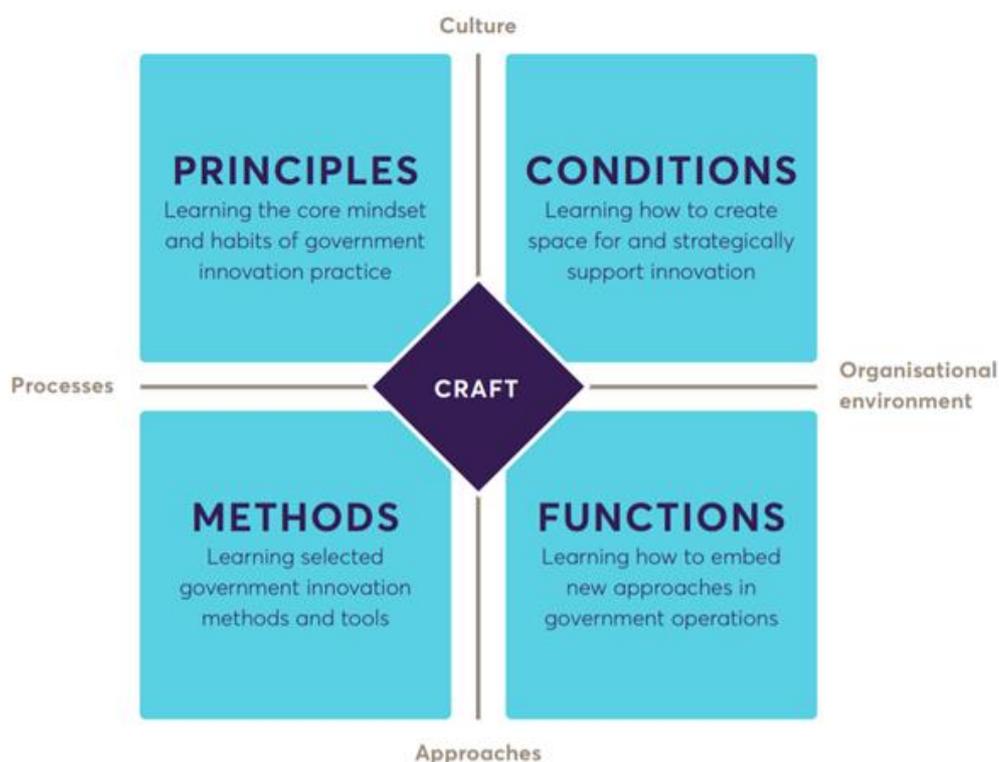


Figure 1: States of Change Curriculum, Jesper Christiansen, Nesta, 2017.

The four dimensions are:

- **Methods.** This refers to the technical ability to learn, take up and apply design as a new kind of approach and process in public development practice (most used terms in government are still human-centred design, user-centred design, service design, systems design or co-design).
- **Principles.** For a new method to be strategically applied and sustained over time as a new way of working (going beyond single projects or pilots), there has to be continuous focus on how design changes the culture of the organisation. This includes learning and rehearsing what kinds of mindsets and habits follow from doing design-led work in government and allowing for public officials to explore the meaning and value of design.
- **Conditions.** Any successful application of design in government is dependent on the ability to create the appropriate conditions and enabling environment to strategically support the process. Consequently, there is a need to have a systematic focus on how to lead, organise for, manage, support, incentivise and sustain design-led innovation in public organisations.
- **Functions.** To make the most of design, there is a need to systematically explore how to embed design approaches in core government operations, structures and roles - for example in public policy, procurement, HR, or regulation practice (going beyond setting up dedicated design labs and teams).

The experience in applying on the field this model recently developed by Nesta, underlines how much the lack of focus on the craft of design-led innovation is concerning. This is not only leaving design-led innovation projects and programmes as small islands in the larger landscape of government development practice, but also failing to develop new change capacity at the core of government operations that could potentially result in new governance models, innovative ways of developing and implementing policies and a better intelligence for public decision-making.

Practice: leveraging new mechanisms for supporting design-led innovation

Design is part of a larger range of methods and approaches that expand on the processes and instruments currently used by government when it comes to creating public impact. It is encouraging that there is a need for a shift in focus in government environments around the world toward these practices: increasingly, there have been different attempts to build new practice-oriented mechanisms for embedding design and transforming the ways that governments operate.

Here follow seven trends for building and supporting the capacity and craft of design-led innovation in practice:

- **Labs.** Much of the previous and current practice of embedding design and other innovation approaches in government is done through labs or teams. They are leading by example – building government capacity by creating change narratives and enabling collaborative processes that showcase and rehearse how things could be done differently. The examples are numerous and widespread (with organisations like UK Policy Lab, MindLab (DEN), TACSI (AUS), Public Policy Lab (USA), MaRS Solutions Lab (CAN), Lab de la Ciudad (MEX) and others being on the forefront early). Recent studies have estimated that there are over 100 labs in Australia and New Zealand government organisations alone, while there are over 25 labs in the Federal Government of Canada.
- **Strategies.** More and more governments are launching strategic (branded) innovation agendas that initiate a large range of activities under an overall heading. These are examples of attempting to embed design-led innovation capacity from the top down. Recent innovation strategies in New Zealand, Victoria (AUS), Colombia, Canada and several other countries, regions and local authorities demonstrate this

strategic intent. In South Korea, under headings of ‘Sharing City’, ‘listening’ and ‘citizen engagement’, the government is leading a large portfolio of initiatives to enable more citizen-centred and collaborative design of services and systems. In the digital realm, Estonia probably has one of the world’s most ambitious digital design strategies ‘E-Estonia’. This has enabled a large project portfolio focused mainly on the easy access and application of online services. The Finnish government’s experimental initiative has created different policy and democratic innovations enabling better design of processes for citizen engagement and people-driven legislation.

- **Spaces.** An increasing range of initiatives are specifically dedicated to creating space for people inside government organisations to work with their own ideas in design-led innovation processes. Initiatives like ChangeSA in South Australia is an ambitious attempt to create a culture that speeds up development and decision-making through design-led processes by focusing on linking pressing challenges with staff creativity. Similarly, in Singapore, PS21 is tapping into and rewarding the knowledge and creative potential of public officials. In the UAE government, accelerator-type models are being used to integrate design and technology-led start-ups into being a part of developing service solutions. In British Columbia, Canada, with the support of inWithForward, social service organisations are developing a ‘fifth space’ to free up time for public staff to do cross-organisational collaboration and capacity-building focused on design-led innovation and R&D.
- **Communities.** An interesting and growing type of initiative is focusing on creating communities of practice that mobilise and learn collectively around how best to apply and embed design-led approaches in government organisations. In Chile, the Experimenta programme, initiated by the Laboratorio del Gobierno, facilitates a government-wide capacity-building process to embed new design capabilities among a distributed group of public servant teams working on pressing challenges. A similar focus and intent can be seen in La Transfo in France, initiated by La 27e Region, where design labs are being set up around the country to become part of an orchestrated learning process focused on how best to leverage design in government supported by a community of peers. On a global scale, Nesta’s States of Change initiative is attempting to foster and support learning collectives focused on developing and supporting design-led innovation craft.
- **Networks.** Several governments around the world have been attempting to mobilise and generate new design-led innovation practice by creating formal and informal networks between practitioners. These networks can focus on anything from informal experience exchanges, advocacy activities, and challenge-focused working groups. In places like Victoria, Australia and Chile, the innovation networks are both significant in size and rigour and are becoming a source of useful inspiration and support, helping to build legitimacy for a new way of working. On an international level, the Government Digital Service in the UK is leading a growing network of design practitioners sharing lessons on how to leverage design-led innovation across country borders.
- **Roles.** There is an emerging trend to focus on creating and institutionalising new dedicated problem-solving roles within government ecosystems. They are often organised in network structures and emphasise particular mindset, skillsets, ways of working and collaborating with the wider organisation – many of which draw heavily on design-driven innovation. In Canada, initiatives like Free Agents and GC Entrepreneurs are attempting to mobilise and organise new roles in cross-government teams working on pressing challenges. In the UK, Futuregov is working with national agencies and local councils to develop new professional roles for digital and service designers with the explicit aim to change existing workforce priorities and incentivise new skills and methods.
- **Functions.** Design approaches and tools are increasingly becoming a part of transforming core functions of governments and international institutions – for example the redesign of public policy-making, procurement procedures, planning processes and programme cycles. In Denmark, several ministries have been

redesigning their policy approach based on human-centred design principles. Finland and Colombia are redesigning planning practices with experimental design. UNDP has been “hacking” the programme cycle with the help of human-centred design tools. And a wide range of city governments are redesigning procurement procedures with design-based tools.

While this range of ways to embed design are receiving much attention currently, their sustained value depends on the ability to become embedded in and transform the wider institutional capacity of governments. Whether they are actually successful in reframing, reshaping and remaking the logics and tasks of government is still to be seen. But they do provide a unique opportunity to explore, learn about and codify what the ‘next practice’ of embedding design in government should be.

Patterns: towards a new craft of government?

Building on the cases, practices, and methods described so far, it is possible to underline (at least) five overall agendas to be aware of in terms of what design is contributing to civil servants’ practice:

- **Changing knowledge management processes.** Design creates the need to reshape knowledge management by introducing a learning-oriented and iterative approach to explore public value with a citizen-centred outcomes-focus to deal with the causes of problems and the practical consequences that the new initiatives bring with them.
- **Reinventing problem-solving activities.** Design reframes and reshapes how governments research, imagine, synthesise, experiment with, refine, rehearse, operationalise and implement new concepts, ideas and/or intentions.
- **Creating institutional resilience.** Design insists on the need for reshaping the governance, capabilities and management systems to increase the ability to learn and adapt from every policy and intervention to deal with the practical consequences that the new initiatives bring with them.
- **Transforming governance relationships.** Design insists on the need for reshaping the dynamic between policy and practice and creates a shared ownership between national and local government to increase the likelihood of successful policy implementation.
- **Shifting from transactional development to collaborative design?** Design indicates the need for reshaping the relationship between the administrative and political to foster more outcomes-focused collaboration and experiment with new interdependencies between the public and political and bureaucratic systems.

Proposing a research agenda for Service Design in Government

The bigger question when we talk about embedding design in Government is really an issue of what creates the legitimacy of governments and the state. The approaches described above (both in theory and practice) clash significantly and in different ways with the current paradigm of governance largely based on 1970s New Public Management (NPM) models. These were built on a contractual relationship between administration and politics and saw politicians as buyers of results from civil servants, that is to say: politicians set out directions and goals and public servants build the policies that deliver on them. NPM also introduced an epistemology of the state that valued specifications of products and services rather than a more anticipatory way of dealing with and addressing complex public problems. While we might say that the introduction of design is helping to introduce a new set of approaches and tools to overcome this attitude, we are also implicitly opening up a conversation about the

culture of planning, decision-making, public management and public value – that could be called a new craft of Government and public governance by design.

The path to achieving this and proving its effectiveness is undoubtedly long and will require much more commitment both in practice and theoretical reflection. On the practice side, many new experimentations will need to be developed and reflected upon in structural and interconnected ways to aid learning and avoid useless replication of projects and programmes that are finally left as small islands in the larger landscape of government development, while failing to develop real change capacity, new governance models, innovative ways of developing and implementing policies and a better intelligence for public decision-making. On the theoretical side, few main areas of reflection could support the development of an international research agenda, crucially and critically looking at the value generated by the potential that design abilities have to become embedded in and transform the wider institutional capacity of governments.

In this area, research opportunities can be opened up looking at the areas of investigation proposed for this track, which might help set a significant research agenda:

- **Resources and complexity**, to explore the ways design craft is influencing or could influence the transformation of the public sector also in connection with other approaches and disciplines (i.e. complexity theory), in order to study and test alternative ways to use resources and transform public management approaches towards anticipation of public problems;
- **Evidence and visualization**, to inquire the effectiveness of the introduction and use of new types of data (i.e. open data, big data, public data, etc.) for governance as well as the most appropriate tools and channels to stimulate a more profound democratic discussion around public value, and to wonder whether this could effectively generate more legitimacy of governmental actions or if this is only a false myth;
- **Competencies and skills**, to investigate new capacities and roles for public officers that can complement traditional skills with the new craft linking to iterative, digital, and hybrid policy and governance solutions;
- **Awareness and participation**, understanding and inquiring new public legitimacy, the new contract that should be created between State and citizens, but also the effectiveness and limits of citizens' involvement and contribution in co-owning public goods and services and their ability to become co-decision makers.

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