The PhD Special Seminar on service design: unfolding a proof of concept

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Abstract

The PhD Special Seminar of “ServDes.2018 Proof of Concept” Conference (June 18-20, 2018, Politecnico di Milano) was a unique space dedicated to PhD candidates and Early Career Researchers within the Conference. It aimed to be an occasion of reflection on the different nuances that guide service design research to further discussion on the topics launched by the conference, conceived with the ambition to build a connection with the contents and the structure of the conference itself and, especially, with the ambition to strengthen the growing international community around the Service Design discipline. It was curated and managed by a team of PhD candidates and young doctors from the PhD programme in Design in the Politecnico di Milano - Design Department, with the support of the ServDes.2018 management and organization team.

KEYWORDS: service design scenario, community building, PhD community, PhD seminar

Unfolding a proof of concept

Scope of the seminar

As the ServDes 2018 Conference Call states, Service Design (SD) is no longer considered an emerging discipline. The conference presents itself as a proof of concept:

“it is time to validate and review the models, processes and practices developed and used in the service design ecosystem, from its academic community to practitioners, companies and organizations at large”. (“ServDes.2018 Proof of Concept” theme, call for papers).

Therefore, discussions around contributions and reflections that advance the knowledge of a field in constant evolution became the primary resources of the doctoral and young
researcher. PhD candidates and Early Career Researchers from across the Service Design discipline who are interested in open discussion around this evolution in the field were invited to participate in a three-hour debate and warm-up the conference.

As stated above, the main purpose of the seminar was:

- to strengthen the growing international community around the SD discipline,
- to build a link with the conference topics and structure, and
- to create a space to reflect on the different nuances that guide SD research, with research questions (defined in this paper as “incoming”) from the participants as a starting point.

In fact, the seminar acted as a bridge: it took place on June 18th, just before the grand opening of the conference, and it “unfolded the proof of concept” by warming-up participant reflection and transforming it into shared questions (defined in this paper as “outgoing”) to be launched in the conference sessions.

Building dialogues with the conference

The core aim and primary interest of the event was to create a network and community of researchers interested in SD, giving them the chance to discuss and exchange ideas, research questions and interests, and expose them to the visibility offered by a conference like ServDes. After a fruitful discussion inside each cluster, each team generated other more robust “outgoing” questions enabling further discussions around the conference tracks through the Ambassadors.

The Ambassadors were representatives of each cluster selected to bring into the ServDes Conference sessions a series of open questions developed during the three hours of the PhD Special Seminar activities. These representatives worked as a bridge between the results of the event and the core of the conference.

Each of the participants brought their reflections around service and SD research to share with others and enable discussions. The discussions provided all participants with new, valuable reflections for their research, as well as for their knowledge and view of the SD discipline.

Having an active voice inside the conference not only creates a younger research community but also gives it an active role in the service design proof of concept. The event was not developed for participants to present their research and explain it, but rather to highlight their research in an international peer environment, enabling a coordinated questioning from the PhD and young researcher community to the conference debates around the field of SD. These open questions (outgoing) stimulated the track chairs to spark discussions inside the conference sessions with fresh topics. (Fig.1)
A growing international community

The PhD Special Seminar was curated and managed by a team of six PhD candidates and 2 young doctors from the PhD programme in Design in the Politecnico di Milano - Design Department. During the seminar, we defined ourselves as “navigators”, in line with the metaphor of the event as illustrated below.

The Seminar call summoned 22 participants out of 25 applications. Among them, 19 were PhD candidates and 3 held senior positions: one Adjunct Professor, one Assistant Professor and one Associate Professor, all interested in SD as a contributor to their career and thus in the seminar to get useful insights.

Participants were from 17 universities in 11 countries (Fig.2):

- Europe (18): Italy (Politecnico di Milano, Università La Sapienza - Rome, Università di Bologna), Portugal (Universidade do Porto, Universidade de Aveiro), Germany (KISD - Köln, University of Wuppertal), Switzerland (Università della Svizzera Italiana - Lugano), Finland (University of Lapland - Rovaniemi), UK (Loughborough University, University of Hertfordshire, Royal College of Art - London), Denmark (Aalborg University), and Turkey (Istanbul Technical University);
- North America (2): Texas (Texas A&M University - College Station);
- South America (1): Brazil (Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora);
- Australia (1): Western Australia (Edith Cowan University, Joondalup).

Additional participants to the conference who were interested in the seminar and joined, were from: the Art Academy of Latvia, the RMIT - Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the Tokyo University of Technology and a consultancy agency in Taiwan.
The clusters: a possible scenario

Together with a short description of their research, applicants were required to send research questions they wish to explore by attending the ServDes conference (What research question would you like the ServDes conference to contribute to answering?), to guide the PhD Special Seminar organization and activities. Since these incoming questions summarised an aspect of their research, in order to make them more relevant to the discussion during the seminar, it was a necessary step to turn their focus to the theoretical reflection underlying them and around the cluster.

Initially, the incoming questions were analysed and matched with one or more of the 8 conference tracks, and then mapped (Fig.3) to highlight the relevance of the theme and topics investigated by ServDes.2018 within them.

The conference tracks were:

- 1. Learning and practicing
- 2. Sharing and collaborating
- 3. Measuring and evaluating
- 4. Governing and evidencing
- 5. Producing, distributing, and organising
- 6. Experiencing and shaping
- 7. Community and relationship building
- 8. Envisioning and evolving

This action was the first step in the process of building the seminar from the participants’ contribution. Right from the beginning, the primary intention of the curators had been not to generate a top-down event but, instead, to design it according to the panorama identified from the applications. Of course, the mapping process built a “possible” scenario (as illustrated below), since the short descriptions were subject to interpretation by the curators. However, it tried to sketch a quantitative interpretation of qualitative data, as a starting point for clusterisation. The outgoing questions developed through the seminar operated as a preliminary act, prior to the “proof of concept” - meaning the conference - that the seminar aimed to trigger among its participants.

The 8 tracks of the conference were meant to be extensive areas of discussion to frame the multifaceted action field of the SD discipline and, within them, to reflect on its evolution and impact in academia, in consultancies, in labs and innovation units, and in organizations at large.¹ Tracks explore SD as a back and forth knowledge transfer: both in building the service designer profile, investigating the cross-disciplinary nature of the discipline (and of design as a whole) and its renewed relationship with universities, business and corporations and design practices (Muratovski, 2016), and in a co-design and human-centred perspective within diffuse design (Manzini, 2015). They explore the transformational role of service designer on collective levels when engaging multiple stakeholders and when involved in public sector innovation, going beyond user-centred design and towards a renewed attention to design and democracy (Bonsiepe, 2006) - (Margolin, 2012), to agonism in co-design (DiSalvo, 2010) - (Munthe-Kaas, 2015) - (Hillgren, Seravalli, & Eriksen, 2016) and to design for policymaking (Boyer, Cook, & Steinberg, 2011) - (Manzini & Staszowski, 2013) - (Munthe-Kaas, 2015) - (Manzini & Staszowski, 2013) - (Mulgan, 2014) - (Avelino et al., 2015) - (Selloni & Manzini, 2016). The conference also investigates theoretical frameworks for service evaluation (Drew, 2017) - (Foglieni, Villari, & Maffei, 2018), and data use for policy making. It pointed out the key qualities of SD and how complements from other disciplines may strengthen its analytical components: in its evolutionary path within the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (Costa, Patrício, Morelli, & Magee, 2017) - (Morra, Arman, & Mousa, 2017), in its relationship with the physical realm, going across the spatial design discipline (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) - (Felix, 2011) - (Fuad-Luke, 2012) - (Blomqvist, Clatworthy, & Holmlid, 2016), and the human-to-human and human-to-digital interactions. The conference was a moment for establishing a step

¹ Here follows an overview of the topics explored in the conferences’ tracks, with brief reference lists to frame the concepts.
further in these reflections – since the constant evolution of the object of SD is affecting SD practice and identity, methods and approaches – to foster a participatory mind-set and a behavioural change in organisations and complex service systems.

By organizing the applicants’ profiles around the 8 tracks, the curators attempt to identify a wide range to address the unfolding of the proof of concept around the discipline. Which are the main geographies in which the doctoral and the post-doctoral research is moving in? What diversity of interpretation do the current reflections have around the positioning of the discipline in design education, in practices, in institutional and organizational levels, in global and local social/economic/political environments and design research as a whole?

The academic community around SD assumes the multi-faceted subject matter of the design discipline since it deals with continuously evolving, expanding contexts and with possible worlds, and is shifting away from fixed and defined entities – technology-centred – to processes and complex living entities – human-centred (Buchanan, 1992), (Krippendorff, 2005), (Brown, 2009), (Manzini, 2015). However, how is this conscious complexity and its effects on such a variety of settings nowadays understood, embedded and explored? How can we take advantage of the plurality of voices within a seminar addressed worldwide and turn these resonant backgrounds into valuable areas of interest for discussion?

By mapping the applications with the track topics, the following indicators emerged:

- Attention towards the transformational role of service design and service designers within a diffuse design perspective;
- A predominance of this attention within public sector innovation and supporting the democratic challenges that co-design entails;
- Interest in the tangibility/intangibility labels of the discipline and its relationship with enabling technologies and, more widely, to interaction design with and without digital material (Holmlid, 2009);
- A feeble focus on cutting-edge topics such as service evaluation, and the discipline entailment within the Fourth Industrial Revolution and within physical and virtual environments;
A non-specifically framed debate on the future evolution of the discipline within more theoretical research.

These indicators turned the curators’ attention to the discipline itself, away from specific research areas and towards an evaluation of its positioning in levels of complexity settings, crossing academic research, practice, and education:

- How does it enter small-medium-large scale systems?
- How is it enabled?
- How is it recognised and integrated?
- How is it critically explored?
- How does it intersect with other disciplines?

By crossing these layers in various settings and the complexity of human, social and technological systems, four clusters emerged identifying common approaches and reflections:

- Enabling situated services
- Enhancing service systems
- Organizational integration & recognition
- Investigating service design theories

The clusters have been visualized with a metaphor evoking a type of iceberg (Fig.4) representing a possible service design action field. Three clusters compose the iceberg surface: one is above the “line of visibility” – above the water – and two are below. These two clusters are under the surface of the iceberg; they tend to have less visible impact and recognition, but the situation could reverse in the near future. The fourth cluster is the core of the iceberg.

![Fig.4: The Iceberg metaphor mapping the participants’ applications: a possible scenario for the discipline action field.](image)

The four clusters identify the wide areas of exploration in which participants are researching, and incoming questions are positioned and attempt to frame themselves within a possible scenario for the discipline action field.

By grouping the different submissions into these four clusters (Fig.5), it was possible to divide the participants into a homogeneous team to enable discussions around the discipline’s wider scenario and not around particular research practices.
The first cluster, "Enabling situated services" - *when service design enables situated services*, is the one which appears above the line of visibility in the SD action field. All the issues included in this cluster are exploring the discipline when embedded in specific fields of application or investigating particular approaches. Indeed, situated learning theories connect processes of knowledge with contextual approaches (Lave, Wenger, & Wenger, 1991) and contextual design, thus including relational and environmental components. This steers our attention towards social anthropology, community psychology and education science, which - in the context of this seminar - leads to reflections on product-user interactions as a precursor to developing a design solution and to its context as a container of ideas, lives, culture, nature, society, and technology (Aranda Jan, Jagtap, & Moultrie, 2016), approached within a holistic and diffuse design perspective.

The second and the third clusters are below the line of visibility and they are not so easy to read as they explore when service design merges into systems, with the system as a focal point, how it can incorporate an SD approach, methods, and tools. It explores opportunities, challenges, and the meaning of approaching complex sociotechnical arenas when necessarily addressed with the added value of design thinking and human-centred design perspective (Norman & Stappers, 2015). In this sense, diffused design and expert design (Manzini, 2015) discourse came into play, questioning the effectiveness and limits of community engagement, thus including participatory action research and participatory design methodologies and tools, grounded theory as qualitative strategies and co-creation/co-design/co-production perspectives.

The "Enhancing service systems" cluster explores when service design enters into complex dynamics; through this integration, regulatory systems, public services and the societal dynamics of the socio-technical systems are questioned. In this cluster, emerging technologies, Artificial Intelligence and Data appear to play a considerable role in redefining how service systems could be designed and enhanced.

The "Organizational integration & recognition" cluster raises the bar of complexity by questioning big infrastructures and organizational complexity. The research in this area investigates organisational changes and, nowadays, acts in a context already favourable to a systemic approach, since infrastructural changes are taking place. These two clusters focus on the perception of complex systems as permeable platforms favourable to (and in need of) organizational and infrastructural changes. They both pay attention to settings characterized...
by physical proximity – linked by a geographical, political and/or administrative system – or without it – where typological similarities link transnational communities and identities (Sassen, 2011).

The fourth cluster, "Investigating service design theories", is related to the disciplinary implications of service design, and all submissions inside this cluster express interest in contributing to the theory building of the field, also starting from delimited areas of exploration. Its purpose is to explore the current landscape of design which SD is moving in and dealing with: the alignment and interdependency of local and global processes, the shifts towards multidisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity in design research, practice and education, and the impact of collaborative models on the regulatory system. This cluster aims to add a diverse perspective or, better, to frame possible reflections on the future evolution of the discipline around more theoretical discussions.

Development

The structure of the seminar

In this section, the structure of the seminar is described highlighting the subdivision into steps, their specific aims, the activities planned and the tools designed.

The seminar took place in three significant steps. The first one - “Cluster shared interpretation” (duration: 45 min) - established as an icebreaker, focused on the initial discussion around the interpretation of the cluster. The second step - “Outgoing questions” (duration: 1 hour) - went on to develop the outgoing questions, while the third - “Matching questions/sessions/ambassadors (duration: 30 min) - aimed to combine these questions with the corresponding tracks’ session and the tuning of the ambassador’s role. (Figure 6). After the kick-off, each cluster worked separately from the others in different rooms. Then, at the end of the seminar, they met together again for the wrap-up and final discussion.

Specific tools, e.g., question cards, posters, and canvas, were designed to facilitate the activities and are described in the following sections. A poster was designed with the aim of summarizing and communicating the outcomes of each step, to be read from the bottom (first step) to the top (final step).
Step One: Mapping Knowledge and Shared Cluster Interpretation

The first step aimed to map participants’ knowledge about the cluster topic and produce an interpretation of it shared by all its participants. As explained above, grouping participant's submissions into similar areas and not dedicating time to each research topic was vital for the step to produce immediate results. Right from the beginning discussion developed around the cluster's name and the possible relationship between participants. First, using keywords and short sentences, each participant in the clusters identified and presented their relationship with, and knowledge of, the cluster topic according to their experience and research topic. This activity helped to build a shared background among the participants in the cluster. A board with the cluster's name, description, and position in the “iceberg” model was provided. The participants were also provided with sticky notes (post-its) to write down keywords and sentences and a board to arrange them on. Then, in the second activity, the name proposed for the cluster was discussed collectively, aiming either to confirm its name or rename it. In this first part, a collective agreement on the name of the cluster was of great importance. Therefore, the output of the activity was the shared interpretation of the cluster declared with an adaptation of the original title or a new title in the form of a short sentence.

Step Two: Identification of Connections and Shared Questions

Step two aimed, firstly, to identify connections between the shared interpretation of the cluster and the individual incoming research questions and, secondly, to produce outgoing questions from each cluster that would enrich and target the discussions inside the different tracks of the ServDes conference. This step began with a screening of the incoming questions proposed by the participants in their seminar application forms. This was followed by the identification of connections between these incoming questions and the cluster to which the team belongs, and finally the production of outgoing questions. Cards presenting
the individual incoming questions were provided, together with sticky notes (post-its) on which to write them down and arrange on the poster. There was also a blank space on the poster to fill in with the resulting outgoing questions. The second was probably the most crucial step, as it was necessary to understand the relevance of the PhD event to the possible discussions that could spark within the different tracks. The role of the navigators in this part was also of extreme importance, as they were asked not only to facilitate the team activities but also to avoid dispersion, which is a common risk when researchers of such complex topics try to find an agreement. The focus was to produce a minimum of two outgoing questions for each team, but all of them exceeded this requirement.

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Step Three: Outgoing Questions positioning

The aim of the third step was to assign the outgoing questions to the ambassadors and to place them in suitable sessions of the conference. With all questions set and with heated discussion in the rooms, the third step started by analysing the 8 conference tracks. We deliberately decided to reveal the track information only at this stage, as it was essential to create a discussion free from pressure regarding the conference topics. Leaving the tracks visible during the first two steps might have led the teams to force the questions to match their desired tracks of attendance, or would probably have made any ambassador push for a particular topic to gain control over the following task inside the conference. Instead, by leaving the description of the tracks for the last part, when the questions had already been developed, made for a very smooth closure of the event. In general, the teams were focused on matching the questions to the possible tracks, as it was agreed that one question could be formulated in two or more tracks. As we will see in the conclusions, the different answers to the same question in different tracks were able to assure proofs of concepts. Papers with track descriptions and the session schedule and details, including the chairs’ names, the authors and titles of the paper presented, were provided. The resulting assignment of the outgoing questions and related ambassadors to the conference sessions was written down in a blank space on the poster.

The Ambassadors were given an Ambassador’s diary to fill in and to take notes during the selected session, to record the session’s discussion. Ambassadors were responsible for bringing the outgoing questions into the ServDes Conference sessions. They worked as a bridge between the results of the event and the core of the conference. Some advice was provided, e.g., for each presentation, they were asked to focus on finding relationships to the question. The question/s were proposed in the session in different ways according to the structure intended for the session, in collaboration with the session chairs,. The questions were expected to stimulate the track chairs to spark discussions inside the conference sessions with fresh topics. In every moment of debate or Q&A, they were asked to focus on how the speakers are indirectly answering the question/s. Both in the presentations and discussions, they were asked to try to link the different answers and perspectives given by the
speakers. The ambassadors were advised that at this level of complexity and uncertainty, one can confirm, reinforce, complete or refute the others. After the conference, diaries were sent to the moderators and were used to draw up the final results of the seminar.

In the next sections, the intermediate results from the seminar and the final results retrieved from the diaries are illustrated.

Fig. 10: PhD Special Seminar: clusters discussion at Appartamento Lago, June 18th, 2018.

Intermediate results: insights from the shared discussions

The process set up enabled participants to progressively move away from their personal research areas towards a discussion in a broader scenario, where their more theoretical reflections, assumptions, and hypotheses around the discipline could nurture, and be nurtured by, the conversation. Due to few last-minute delays and nonattendance, the curators had to suppress cluster n.4 “Investigating service design theories”, the more theoretical one. Insights relevant to the topic were pinpointed within the discussions in the other three clusters.

In Cluster 1 “Enabling situated services”, the discussion first focused around the word "situated", as all participants agreed the word does not represent services since they are more dynamic than static and stuck in a situation. Even when referring to situated learning and contextual approaches, the word in itself was not felt to be representative of services seen as living organisms, since they change continuously in shape and in their relations with actors and design elements in what was defined as a “flux”. As a result, the name of the group was changed to “Nurturing existing services”. This nurturing occurs at all steps and touch points. Cluster 1 went on to produce three outgoing questions grounded in the discussion on how SD nurtures existing systems. The first question emerged when a discussion about considering elements of the system as spaces or places was on the table. The different research topics and the incoming questions of the participants stressed the importance of places inside systems; it was crucial to consider how interventions within them could lead to nourishment and improvement of the whole service experience. The question emerging from this discussion was: How can the value of physical spaces as a service design element be communicated to people? This question was positioned in track 6. Experiencing and shaping, the one focusing more on the relationship between spaces and services.

The second and third questions focused on the idea of sharing knowledge in SD, as a way to collaborate and engage with people. Assuming that when working in a situated and specific domain designers actually need to “scale down” (Myerson, 2017), sharing knowledge may create value in service and for designers, creating opportunities to discover, learn, build and discuss. This should be done in a critical way, addressing people's real needs and adopting a grassroots approach even for small entities (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Needs appear to be a complex concept to be considered critically. The questions developed are: How can we critically share knowledge with different actors to shape services and generate value? How can we support the development of grassroots approaches to service design for small entities? These questions were positioned in the track 2. Sharing and collaborating and track 7. Community and relationship building.
Cluster 2, on the other hand, warmed up the discussion by putting a fruitful debate on the table around the role of SD as a strategic tool for service systems. It not only supports the design process inside the system but also enables elements within the service ecosystem. Different tools and a holistic approach make the design contribution a plus. The team added a word to the cluster name leaving it at the end as "Enabling and enhancing service systems", highlighting the connection to Cluster 3 and blurring boundaries. The discussion highlighted the complexity of mapping knowledge around SD conversation and practice into systems, and the main reflections focused on the interrelated connections between actors and resources within it and the need for open, human-centred and holistic approaches to ensure inclusion.

Assuming that, participants were guided into highlighting meaningful connections among the incoming questions. Two main reflections emerged: multidisciplinarity as a turning point for the discipline within the system logic, and the ethical implications of emotional and digital aspects. The first investigated into whether multidisciplinarity is meant as an “in” or “out” aspect of the discipline: does it concern the discipline components from other disciplines, as an “in” of its understanding, or does the discussion focus on what the embedding of SD into complex technological systems generates on multi-levels? As a matter of fact, one strengthens the other and the discipline appears to be a passing point for the transformation and generation of critical understanding of settings through the quality criteria it adopts. A systemic approach made the infrastructure visible by understanding it, by developing it and by building it; through that, it encompasses resilience as well as the shifts towards strategic skills for problem-solving (Muratovski, 2010), towards open collaborative innovation (Baldwin & Von Hippel, 2011) and within an economy of scale (Whitney, 2015). The questions reflected from this discussion entitled: How can SD integrate multidisciplinary contributions - e.g., tools, approaches - address the reachable (e.g., touchpoints) and unreachable (e.g., institutions) in service systems? How do we establish the boundaries of what a reachable or unreachable service design is? They were addressed to track 1. Learning and practicing and to track 8. Envisioning and evolving.

As Fiksel (2003) stated, a system approach is required for sustainable development and that opens the way to the second reflection on ethical implications: the discussion oscillated...
between the concepts of artificial intelligence, technologies and digital, and the concepts of emotional, humanity and environmental awareness. By provoking the conversation on the appearance of what is traditionally seen as positive or negative from a moral point of view (tangibility as human and emotional / intangibility as non-human and un-affecting), it was clear that the emotional connection among key actors in a service ecosystem, and the communication of abstract values in the development of public services are not separated and detached from digital and technological aspects. On the contrary, there is no sense in separating them and it is fundamental to understand how to merge them together in business as well as in social practices through value co-creation within a participatory mind-set. The questions emerging in this discussion were: How can designers set up their design goals in our data-driven world? How can we “instrumentalise” emotions to drive value co-creation between human and non-human through SD? How can technology and human values be brought together through SD in developing AI enabled services? They were addressed to track 8. Envisioning and evolving. A more specific reflection on that and physical spaces produces the question How can we communicate to people the value of physical space as a service design element? addressed to track 6. Experiencing and shaping.

In Cluster 3, the discussion started by considering word integration and recognition as separate entities: the first to understand human organizational change, and the second to embrace complexity. From this observation, the first vital element of the discussion was the relationship between human resources in organizations (Buchanan, 2015): integrating SD into organizations is a way of building capabilities through collaboration between human resources.

Thus, the discussion focused on the implications of relationships between employees with different roles in the company: in particular, the need to explore the relationship between designers and employees other than designers (Deserti & Rizzo, 2014) in order to widen critical understanding of diffused design (Manzini, 2016) within organizations, and the impact of SD in other departments in the companies (Boland Jr, Collopy, Lyytinen, & Yoo, 2008). The question emerging from this discussion was: How do we define and communicate the value of integrating design into organisations (public, private, spectrum)? addressed to track 1 Learning and practicing.

The widest reflection concerned the need for a shift from a Human-centred approach to a Human-centred mind-set, since the infrastructural change that is already growing into place can only be fostered by a participatory mind-set in society, in order to raise awareness about issues of public interest within the democratic nature of processes as well as issues of power relationships and empowerment (Selloni, Corubolo, & Seravalli, 2018). On the other hand, within the complexity of the management of organizations, SD can be considered as a method to provoke changes in the organizations themselves (Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009). The outgoing questions are: How might we (as service design researchers) establish service design as a main mind-set (approach) to be applied in organizational change management? addressed to track 4. Governing and evidencing.

SD becomes a tool not only to reshape organizations and understand the complexity of such large systems, but also allows different stakeholders to be involved in the ecosystem of the public sector and its relationship with private and non-profit organizations, communicating between them and enhancing initiatives (i.e. making results visible and communicating values in the organizations as a measurement of results on "What is good business") between people from different levels.
Fig. 12: Canvas designed to facilitate the activities and with the aim of summarising and communicating the outcomes of each step, to be read from the bottom (first step) to the top (final step).

Fig. 13: The outgoing questions elaborated during the seminar, the tracks and sessions they were addressed to and the related Ambassadors.

Results

The result of the seminar is reflected in the different outgoing questions that emerged during the sessions. However, the result was not only their formulation, but also the way a preliminary event with very little time was able to generate a meaningful contribution to the discussions in some sessions of the conference. The whole team was engaged in producing
questions that were not only able to nurture the conference, but in one way or another the possible answers were also able to nurture participants’ research.

Going through the Ambassadors’ diaries, it is interesting to point out how the indicators that emerged in the map of the applications (see paragraph above “The clusters: a possible scenario”) remained the trend topics of the seminar discussion and then of the insights that emerged from the sessions.

The attention towards the transformational role of service design and service designers within a diffuse design perspective triggered many questions around the issue of sharing knowledge when SD empowers and trains a company and human resources (non-designers). Mainly, the current answer is that a complete knowledge transfer is neither achievable nor needed. In fact, it is important to implement SD strategies to stimulate personal motivation (design as a living agent in communities) towards change and to make room for co-design through their (non-designers) own action. However, the role of service designers within organizations should be more focused on “changing” managers and business people through “practices of learning” (cfr. Nicola Morelli), in order for them to be more eager to understand the value of service design as a practice, and not only as a discipline, and to promote its application in the organization. This application, however, will never replace the presence of professional service designers since any support to other professional roles is ineffective without design capabilities. This is about understanding the limits of SD, as well as its real value, when integrated into any kind of system. In addition, the definition of an “SD mind-set” was called into question, in favour of a “social construction” definition of service design that also includes psychology, social sciences, and philosophy in the design process. The emerging interest in the human and non-human in SD calls for greater attention to the responsibilities and roles of service designers, and an empathic view, a concern with diversity and the consequential design implications came out as fundamental.

The interest in tangibility/intangibility labels in the discipline was explored in relation to the capacity of SD to integrate multidisciplinary contributions, especially in terms of service design objects (strategy, interfaces, technology, and interactions). If SD is the application of resources for the benefit of another party and service designers design to enable new services to happen, then SD objects could range from tangible to intangible things. In this sense, multidisciplinary professionals tend to focus on the objects according to their backgrounds, which in the case of service is helpful when creating and increasing the possibilities for value co-creation. Thus, the focus on cutting-edge topics such as the discipline’s entailment within the Fourth Industrial Revolution were explored in this way during the seminar in response to the ongoing questions and embracing the relationship within physical, virtual environments and human spheres.

**Conclusions**

The Special Seminar developed for the community of researchers interested in SD became a place to discuss and exchange ideas, research, and interests. It was an exciting element connecting young researchers and their work with the actors in the conference. By putting different questions related to SD, this group of researchers was able to highlight proofs of concepts related to the discipline. A continuous questioning of the role of the discipline in the different complex systems where it intervenes is crucial for the subject, and the event proved how vital it is to bridge consolidated research with preliminary research. After all the fruitful discussions in each cluster, and the different questions that emerged in the seminar, the selected ambassadors became representatives of each cluster in the conference. During the ServDes Conference sessions, all the various open questions developed during the seminar sparked fruitful discussions in the conference tracks. As a result, the whole conference was viewed as an active scenario where presenters, track chairs, and ambassadors, enriched the debate about what SD is and will be, by trying to answer questions. The special seminar worked as an additional tool to prove what SD is, and it will be recognized as a
relevant discipline that can intervene in small, medium and complex systems to propose innovation by nurturing the system with creative and analytical approaches.

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Figures 1-5, 13: diagrams by Annalinda De Rosa
Figure 6: diagram by Daniele Bucci
Figure 12: diagram by Carmen Bruno
Figures 7-11: ph. Federico De Luca and Georgia Gkini

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