

Exploring the landscape of service design education: A preliminary review of current programmes in higher education

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Service design is a relatively young multidisciplinary field and in the past two decades has gained more attention in both the service industry and academia. Even though service design programmes are still not evenly widespread around the world, they are growing and expanding (mostly in Europe). These programmes are provided by different institutions - ranging from design faculties, all the way up to business and management schools - and differ as regards their curricula. This short paper explores this diversity by looking into a curated selection of master's degrees in service design and their curricula, by discussing the initial findings and by hinting at possibilities for future studies.

Keywords: *service design; design education; service design education*

1 Service design: The shift from a new discipline to an established field

The term service design was introduced in marketing studies by Lynn Shostack (Shostack, 1982, 1984) and got codified as a distinct field through the work of a group of design researchers (Hollins & Hollins, 1991; Morello, 1991; Manzini, 1993; Erlhoff, Mager, & Manzini, 1997) and service industry consultancies (Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2014). All these developments prompted some universities - the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, followed by the Politecnico di Milano, Carnegie Mellon University and Linköping University - to establish service design courses (Mager, 2008, 2009). The first academic conference dedicated to service design (ServDes)¹ was held in 2009 in Oslo. The first master's degree in Service Design was started at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences in 2009 (Ojasalo, 2012). Since then, there has been a continuous growth in the number of higher education programmes dedicated to service design (Polaine, 2011; White & Holmlid, 2012). Although today service design has reached a certain credibility in practice, research and education (Mager, 2008) and can no longer be considered as an

¹ <http://www.servdes.org/about-servdes/>

emerging discipline, the discipline still seems to have “no clear home in academia” (Polaine, 2011, p. 50). Varied programmes are taught across as diverse schools as arts, design, business and engineering - to name a few. To date, this proliferation of curricula has not been systematically examined and reviewed. This short paper aims to present the preliminary results of a study that goes in this direction and tries to explore the landscape of service design education more closely.

2 Previous studies in service design education

Existing studies tend to focus on the establishment of a particular educational programme (Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2009; Al-Yassini, Kim, & Selzer, 2011; Blomkvist, Holmlid, & Segelström, 2011; Ojasalo, 2012; Pacenti, 2011; Penin, 2011; de Götzen, Morelli, & Grani, 2014; Morelli & de Götzen, 2014). Other studies discuss more general aspects, e.g. the required knowledge and skills for tomorrow's service designers (White & Holmlid, 2012), or the opportunities and challenges facing service design education (Polaine, 2011). Further research focuses on in-class teaching (Guersenzvaig, 2011; Howard, 2011; Ali, Grimaldi, & Biagioli, 2017; de Götzen, Simeone, Morelli, & Kun, 2018), or on how to use service design education to improve university services (Faust, 2011). Although these publications offer valuable contributions to understand specific aspects of service design education, none of these studies provides a comprehensive analysis of the current education in service design.

An article that goes in this direction is a comparative study on service design education, which attempts to provide a holistic view of various programmes (Ferruzca, Tossavainen, Kaartti, & Santonen, 2016). However, the researchers chose to look into the top 50 universities according to the ranking of the Times Higher Education² and to analyse the educational programmes that are more similar to service design - even though these programmes do not specifically contain the words "service design" in their titles. As such, their analysis also focuses on programmes that are not directly service design-centred. The research presented in this paper intends to complement these studies by narrowing the focus of analysis as to only include those higher education programmes specifically and explicitly geared toward service design.

3 Research methods

The data collection was mostly based on a desk-based research (Neale, 2008) carried out between September 2018 and March 2019. This desk-based research was articulated into two distinct phases: an initial data gathering period in which the authors looked into two existing databases hosted by the Service Design Network³ and the Politecnico di Milano (Service Design Landscape⁴) and performed some searches in Google and Google Scholar (using the keywords "service design

² <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings>

³ <https://www.service-design-network.org/organisations>

⁴ <https://www.servicedesignmap.polimi.it/>

education", "master's in service design" and synonyms) and a subsequent data analysis.

After gathering data from these two databases and integrating it with additional searches through search engines, the data was analysed as to more strictly focus on those master's degrees specifically geared at service design. It is worth noting that a large number of master's degrees currently offer design and design thinking courses that can be broadly used to design services; however, oftentimes, the curricula of these master's degrees are not centred around service design. Rather, service design is taught in single courses alongside other design specialisations. This study deliberately narrows its scope by targeting only those programmes that put service design as the core element of their offering. For each programme, the curricula were collected, compared and further analysed.

An important limitation of this study is that it only reviewed master's programmes whose curricula were available in English.

4 Key findings

The authors analysed 24 different selected master's degrees that are specialised in service design (see Table 1). Among these master's degrees, 20 of them contain the label "service design" as the main descriptor in their official title (e.g., "Master's Programme in Service Design"), whereas 4 of them offers a service design specialisation (see #b, #h, #m and #q). Out of these 24 programmes, 13 offer a two-year education. The programmes are located in Europe (22, with 6 of them in the United Kingdom), the US (1) and Asia (1).

The name of the master's degrees vary, and also the faculties that offer these programmes, which range from Master of Design (M.Des.), up to Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.), Master of Science (M.Sc.) and Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.). The curricula and given courses mostly differ according to which faculty provides the education rather than other factors (e.g., the country offering the programme).

Table 1 The 24 master's degrees analysed in this study.

	Country	University	Duration	Credits
#a	Denmark	Aalborg University Copenhagen M.Sc. in Service Systems Design	2 years	120 ECTS
#b	Denmark	IT University of Copenhagen M.Sc. in Digital Innovation & Management * (<i>specialisation in service design</i>)	2 years	120 ECTS
#c	Estonia	The University of Tartu M.A. in Service Design and Management (M.A. in Service Design (in Estonian)) M.A. in Wellness and Spa Service Design and Management (in English)	2 years	120 ECTS
#d	France	Lisaa - School of Art & Design Master in Interior Architecture & Service Design	2 years	120 ECTS

#e	Finland	Laurea University of Applied Sciences M.B.A. in Service Innovation and Design	1,5 years	90 ECTS
#f	Finland	Novia University of Applied Sciences The Master's degree programme in Leadership and Service Design	Master of Culture and Arts, Leadership and Service Design: 1,5 years 60 credits Master of Business Administration, Leadership and Service Design: 2 years 90 credits Master of Hospitality Management, Leadership and Service Design: 2 years 90 credits	60-90 ECTS
#g	Finland	Turku University of Applied Sciences M.B.A. in Leadership and Service Design	2 years	90 ECTS
#h	Germany	Köln International School of Design Master of Integrated Design* (specialisation in service design)	3 semesters	90 ECTS
#i	Italy	Domus Academy Master in Service Design	1 year	60 ECTS
#j	Italy	Politecnico di Milano Master in Product-Service System Design	2 years	120 ECTS
#k	Italy	Politecnico di Milano Master in Service Design	1 year	60 ECTS
#l	Ireland	The National College of Art and Design M.A. in Service Design	1 year	90 ECTS
#m	Norway	The Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) Master of Design* (specialisation in service design)	2 years	120 ECTS
#n	South Korea	Hongik University Master in Service Design	2 years	120 ECTS
#o	Spain	Mondragon University Master's Degree in Strategic Design of Products and Services	2 years	120 ECTS
#p	Sweden	Halmstad University M.Sc. in Digital Service Innovation	2 years	120 ECTS
#q	Sweden	Linköping University Master's Programme in Design* (track in service design)	2 years	120 ECTS
#r	The United Kingdom	Brunel University London M.Sc. in Digital Service Design	1 year	90 ECTS
#s	The United Kingdom	London College of Communication M.A. in Service Design	1 year 3 months	90 ECTS
#t	The United Kingdom	Ravensbourne University London M.Des. in Service Design Innovation	1 year	90 ECTS

#u	The United Kingdom	Royal College of Art M.A. in Service Design	2 years	120 ECTS
#v	The United Kingdom	The Glasgow School of Art M.Des. in Design Innovation & Service Design	1 year	90 ECTS
#w	The United Kingdom	The University of Warwick M.Sc. Service Management and Design	1 year	90 ECTS
#x	The United States of America	The Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) M.F.A in Service Design	2 years	90 hours*

Common educational threads

A common characteristic of these master's degrees is that they tend to combine 'hands-on' project work with lectures/seminars. This is often also accompanied by collaborations with external organisations and companies. The idea is to expose the students to a design thinking approach and make them practice their ability to develop a service design project from research and analysis, up to problem definition, ideation and concept development, prototyping, and testing. Identifying user/stakeholder needs and improving their experience is one of the core principles of service design (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2010) that most of these master's programmes acknowledge. Gaining the mastery of service design tools and methods is the essential educational aims of all these programmes and programmes tend to offer supporting courses such as user-centred design for services, user experience design for service interaction, deep customer insights through ethnographic research. The business and management aspects of services and the creation of new value propositions are other common topics even though the intensity of focus on these aspects differs among the programmes.

Differences in educational approaches

Most of the master's degrees aim to create T-shaped people (Kelley & Littman, 2005), i.e. professional designers that combine design expertise with a broad understanding of other disciplines so that their capabilities can be applied in different sectors within multidisciplinary teams (Raijmakers, Thompson, & van de Garde-Perik, 2012). However, there are two master's degrees - Master of Hospitality Management, Leadership and Service Design (#f) and M.A. in Wellness and Spa Service Design and Management (#c) - that aim to teach service design thinking as anchored to a specific sector of application.

Depending on the faculty that hosts the education, there are certain differences among various typologies of degrees. M.B.A programmes put more emphasis on the business aspect of services and propose courses such as: introduction to leadership and service design, managing organisations, new service development and innovative business models, service logic-based strategic management, and also elective courses of service marketing and selling, management accounting and control in services, pricing in service business, change leadership and service culture, capital investment analysis, entrepreneurship in services. Some M.Sc.

programmes tend to focus on the technological aspects of services, for example offering courses such as digital innovation, digital service applications, service support technologies, computing infrastructure management, programming for services, intelligent services, services in the digital society. In some cases, programmes combine the business and management aspects with an attention toward technologies by offering courses such as leading change, business model generation, reputation and relationship management, service support technologies, financial analysis and control systems. The third category is a cluster of M.Des., M.F.A., and M.A. programmes. These programmes occur within design and art schools and offer curricula that more strictly focus on design practice and methods and tools for creative arts (e.g., offering courses such as visualisation, storytelling and storyboarding, visual communication, and graphic design).

Recurrent areas of focus

In addition to the faculty or the school in which they are located, some of the curricula of the master's programmes are also informed by broad and recurrent areas of focus. One of them is social innovation, which is often directly mentioned as one of the key aspects of the education in the main study website or is taught through dedicated courses such as social innovation and user participation or social innovation and social responsibility. Since the value of services is co-produced with other service systems (Spohrer, Maglio, Bailey, & Gruhl, 2007), "system" is yet another term emphasised in a substantial amount of these educations. Two of the analysed master's degrees contain the term systems in their title (#a and #j) and offer courses such as systems project management, systems design, general system theory, services as systems and product service system design studio.

Less common topics

A few programmes propose courses or specialisations that are not consistently offered in service design education. Examples are:

- Social aspect: policy innovation (#u), circular economy (#u), ethics and sustainability in digital service innovation (#p)
- Business aspect in consulting: professional practice in management and consulting (#t), design facilitation and leadership (#n)
- Business aspect in finance: pricing in service business (#e), financial analysis and control systems (#w), management accounting and control in services (#e)
- Technological aspect: programming for service design (#a)

5 Final remarks

This preliminary review of current master's degrees in service design raises some questions that are worth further exploration.

Why is service design education so scattered around different faculties and schools? Service design as a multidisciplinary field aims to break silos and approach the problems holistically (Moritz, 2009; Stickdorn & Schneider, 2010), whereas the

majority of academic institutions still tend to be structured and organised in silos of faculties and departments. These silos lead to the variation of the master's degrees in M.Des., M.Sc. M.B.A, M.A., M.F.A, and the consequent differentiation on their curricula. Depending on the faculty, the majority of the programmes are either design-led or management-led educations. This differentiation is not problematic per se and can possibly enrich the field. However, the lack of standards makes it also difficult to compare and assess service design programmes and raises the question of how to assure the quality of the master's degrees in service design.

Do the current curricula cover the skills required from service designers?

Our analysis shows that two sets of skills could be better developed by the current education in service design. First, when designing services, the active participation of multiple stakeholders is essential across all phases. As such, service designers should be trained to lead and facilitate the engagement of diverse stakeholders (Han, 2009). However, although communication and facilitation skills play such a crucial role in the service design practice, only a few programmes offer dedicated courses on these topics. Second, a particularly challenging aspect of service design is the implementation and evaluation phase (Raun, 2017; Ewerman & Persson, 2018). Most of the programmes here analysed offer hands-on project work that generally ends with testing some concept ideas, but there is little focus on the phases of service implementation and assessment. All these aspects - facilitation, communication, service implementation and evaluation - seem to be not fully covered by current education.

These questions remain here only outlined as to possibly inform future research. Hopefully, the (partial, limited and biased) snapshot of the current state of service design programmes provided by this paper can be a building block for further and more focused analyses.

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