

SDnext - Moving towards the creation of a PhD network in service design

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1 Case background

During the past 15 years, service design has gone from being a vision for a new area of interest for designers (Erlhoff, Mager, & Manzini, 1997) to an established design field in its own right (Kimbell, 2011; Pinhanez, 2009). Although the first PhD on the topic was published already back in 1998 (Pacenti, 1998), and a number of PhD's have been presented on the topic thereafter (Sangiorgi, 2004; Morelli, 2005 (see Pacenti & Sangiorgi, 2010) and Han, 2010), it is not until now there is a mass of PhD students working on their respective thesis's in parallel.

Informal networks between PhD candidates around the world have emerged over the last years, but as the number of new PhD students has increased a need for a more formalised network has been raised in various discussions among peers. In response to this, an initial PhD gathering was held in conjunction with the Service Design Network conference in October 2011. The topics discussed were based on an e-mail survey among service design PhD candidates.

The meeting was attended by 12 PhD students from all over the world; representing 8 countries and 4 continents. The full day workshop had three distinct sections; getting to know each other and the current state of service design PhD research, discussing what a future PhD network should do and an inspiration session with a number of service design researchers. The most wished for offerings of a future network were:

- Connecting service design PhD students from around the world
- Connecting PhD students with businesses and agencies for their research
- Setting up a mentoring system
- In depth information about universities offering service design PhD positions

The participants suggested that a web platform would be the best way to set up a network. This platform would be the basis for the exchange within the PhD network, to which members can contribute according to current needs and possibilities all throughout their PhD journeys. Finally the PhD group created an initial timeline for the creation of the network as seen in Figure 1 below:

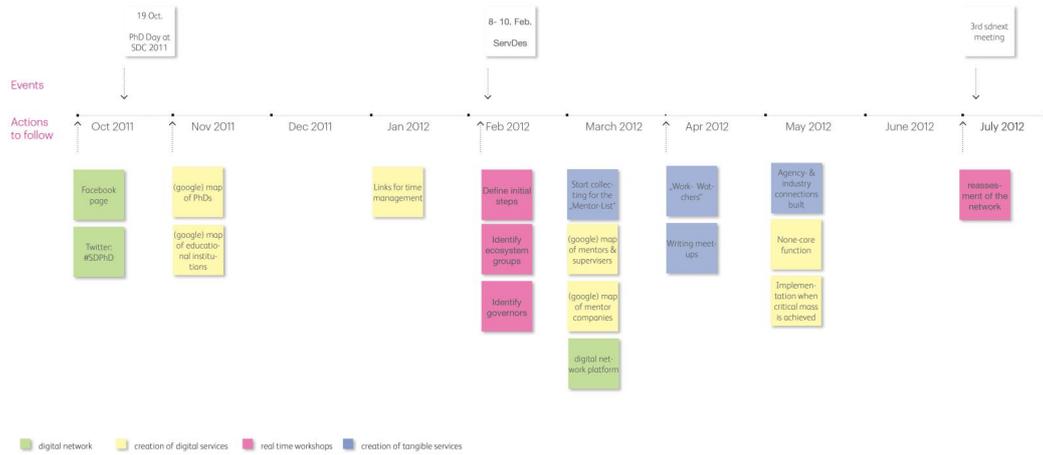


Figure 1: Preliminary timeline for creation of a network. Larger version in Appendix 1.

The attendees of the PhD day at the Service Design Network conference agreed that a follow-up workshop at the ServDes conference would be the next logical step in building the PhD network. Such a workshop would have three main goals:

- 1) To give those interested in the creation of a service design PhD network, but not able to attend the SDN conference a chance to have their say.
- 2) To take further steps towards the creation of a formal network (if attendees are in agreement that this is a good idea).
- 3) Promoting the platform – dubbed SDnext - and create awareness amongst potential future mentors and companies interested in research.

2 Take home

Our hope is that the participants jointly take steps towards building a sustainable network, structured in such a way that it doesn't depend on large efforts by a small number of people. The goal is to create as an open platform where everyone who is willing to invest time and effort can contribute and collaborate in building this initiative.

In terms of immediate benefits for the participants we believe that the workshop will provide a good platform for making connections with peers, to be further developed throughout the ServDes conference.

References

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Appendix 1

Large version of the timeline suggested for the creation of a PhD network within service design.

