The service design studio: putting it all together

Abstract
This paper presents an overview of the methodology developed for the Service Design studio course of the Department of Product and Systems Design Engineering. The goal of this methodology is the design of new services. In order to achieve the pedagogical goals and produce a presentable result within a four-month time frame, emphasis is given to streamlining and synthesizing the design of the touchpoints; the user experience; the branding; and the value propositions.

Design is shifting towards the strategic level and creating a new language. Tools and methodologies that address these complexities is necessary. Another shift evident in service design is summarized in the phrase "access rather than ownership." With user experience becoming more dominant, the activities of designing, communicating, and delivering this experience has moved to the forefront of the design praxis. Leveraging the synergies between existing tools is a first step in re-imagining the process of holistically designing a service.

Author Keywords
Service Design; Design Studio; Branding; User Experience
Introduction
The aim of this contribution is to present and critique a design methodology developed for the service studio course developed for the Department of Product and Systems Design Engineering of the University of the Aegean. We believe that Design processes for service innovation can be linked to curricular design and learning. This is because to design a course, it is necessary to have distilled lessons from actual practice: it is the “instrumented environment where the master designer can set in motion well-proven processes to obtain novel results.” (Binder & Brandt, 2008) In addition, the studio acts as a proving ground where all of the different disciplines taught in the previous academic semesters have to be synthesized and applied in real life scenarios.

Studio Pillars
The course provided an interesting opportunity for the application of novel ways of designing for services in the form of the design studio, a staple in the pedagogy of design. The aim of a studio course is to act as a bridge between theory and practice through project-based learning. (Kolmoss, 2004) For the students, the studio is a simulation that obliges them to step back and reflect on the design process across the entirety of the project. A well they must use different tools in a synthetic manner, and consider how the produced outputs act as inputs further down the road.

In our view, contemporary service design is less of a standalone discipline but a new way of putting together existing tools of design. The process undertaken in this studio is structured around three pillars, user experience, service design and branding.

The first is the shift in the way designers perceive and propose value, moving away from the model of “value in exchange” and towards the concept of “value in use”, which is supported by new technologies that enable a more robust and efficient use of resources as well as the adoption of sustainability within our system of values. This type of value proposition is central to the creation of services holistically. It offers a framework that poses questions that foster the creation of new models covering the needs of stakeholders through the co-creation of value-in-use. The value-in-use systems also underline the importance of the phenomenological aspects of services. Services are intangible and perishable, they can only be witnessed and felt (Zeithaml et al., 1985). This underlines the need to focus on designing the user experience as the value of services stems from their performative and experiential value in use.

The second pillar is the widening of the scope of design to include the strategic level (van Erp, 2011) and the move towards designing the total experience in order to create a coherent product service system (PSS) where the product is the means to a service within a system of value co-creation (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2003). This is especially true in the context of service design where value is co-created between different social actors including the end-user actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011).
democratization of both design and use affects all aspects of the design process. From engaging in co-design with the end users to better understanding the channels that users want to use to interact with the service provider. Three routes towards innovation have been identified: the radical, the incremental (Norman & Verganti, 2013) and social innovation. Given that the goal is to produce new service models, our students were encouraged to design new services rather than redesigning or optimising an existing service.

The core of this process is Participatory Action Research methodology (Meroni et al., 2014) and a number of different lenses is placed around this methodology. The main lenses are: design ethnography; multimodal user experience design (de Gotzen et al., 2014); systems thinking; co-design; branding; user research; business modeling and, of course, service design. These lenses provide different perspectives on the project and lead to a more holistic design process. This can be exemplified with systems thinking. It offers the tools and methodologies that enable designers to manage the ever-expanding complexity of the problem space (Darzentas & Darzentas, 2014). The holistic approach of the service studio is not contained only in the way it is taught to the students, but is also important in the structure of the modules. Following the understanding that the interaction of the parts is just as important as the parts themselves in the context of a systems approach. This is reflected in synergies, such as the qualitative ethnographic methods that support the user research process, needed in beginning of the design process, being used later on as the basis of the co-design process. Similarly, commonalities are welcomed with the synthesis of the design of the user experience and the branding of the service. The students are encouraged to use the characteristics of the macro-experience selected as the values of the brand they will need to create to communicate their service. This not only saves time and effort, but puts together a more informed brand and a better illustrated UX. In the next section we will discuss how different tools of the aforementioned disciplines are brought together resulting in a rich picture of the designed service.

Combining the three

In the context of designing the user experience the micro – macro UX approach (von Saucken et al., 2013) has been adopted in the context of the design studio. In this approach students, based on their research findings, decide the macro experience the service aims for and use three adjectives to describe it. This macro experience is used in tandem with the touchpoint analysis, a process that maps all of the service touchpoints the user can interact with the service. The macro experience is structured around the micro experience with each touchpoint the user comes across.

The approach to the branding of the proposed service shares a common foundation with the proposed macro-experience. Creating value-based strategies (Urde, 2003) start with the selection of values to be communicated by the brand, these values will be used to create visual worlds that will provide guidelines on what the look and feel of the brand will be. Given that the finished product of the studio is more conceptual, the students have the opportunity to design the brand of the service provider in the studio. By connecting the core values of the brand with the desired user experience we get to ‘kill two birds with one stone’. On the one hand we create the basis for a more genuine brand as the promises made by the communication
strategies employed stem from the desired user experience. On the other hand, this creates a leaner, more streamlined design process that addresses all facets of the designed system holistically, designing the whole system together instead of putting together different modules at the end.

The third synergy we leveraged in the design studio in this process of designing the whole service is the juxtaposition between channel and touchpoint. As previously mentioned, touchpoints are central in the process of designing a service as it is through them that the user experiences the service. At the same time, the said touchpoints act as channels where the user interacts with the brand. Designing these interactions on three levels: the practical: making sure the goals of the user are met, the experiential: making sure the interaction creates a positive experience, and the symbolic: making sure the service providers communicates their values in a concise manner across multiple channels, enables the creation of a robust multi-touchpoint experience.

Conclusions
Each aspect of the designed project is undertaken using different tool, data research finding etc. However, in order for the team and the studio facilitators to have a better overview of the project a broad methodology with weekly deliverables was adopted. The result of this process was a conjunction of the customer journey map, the touchpoint analysis and the user-experience. The service design methods used during the course of are highly visual (Segelström & Holmlid, 2009) and support the communication between different stakeholders by creating a common language between them. In this context, the customer journey map was
designed in a way that incorporates all different use scenarios and includes information traditionally found on the service blueprint. This helped us reach a deeper understanding of the problem situation and address the issue holistically. We believe that this “extended customer journey map” (Kapralos & Bofylatos 2015) can be used to foster a more holistic service design process. Looking to its application in different fields of service design could be a promising direction for research. The conjoint use of the customer journey map and the service blueprint creates a rich picture that simultaneously allows the designers to understand different perspectives of the service system as well as providing them with a more effective tool of communication.

Given that design utilises “quasi-subject matter” (Buchanan, 1992) no one tool or approach has the capacity to cover all aspects, however with the service economy becoming the new mainstream, design has to adapt. Lean thinking and the emergence of the ‘service start-up’ (Ries, 2012), e.g. start-ups that leverage the idea of the sharing economy, combined with the new uses of technologies, particularly the idea of platforms can be applied to innovate new solutions to everyday problems and scale up into enterprise (Telalbasic 2015). In this lean approach to new service development using the synergies between different disciplines of design is necessary for streamlining this process. On the other hand, researchers need to go deeper into their field of study and develop new ideas for thinking and new tools. Finding this balance between research and enterprise is essential in the evolution of the field.

This methodology has been applied in the context of the service design studio for the past two years allowing us to better understand its shortcomings and enable its evolution. The main negative of the “extended customer map” is that it is better applied in linear services that demand that the user passes through different touchpoints in a predetermined way. This, however does not reflect the underlying notion of bringing different modules of the service design process closer and combine deliverables of each step of the process. Creating new tools to support this multi-pronged approach is the next step in this process.

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