Competencies for Social Impact (C4): @Aalto

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Erasmus+ project DoCS4Design (Doctoral Courses System for Design)

Participants: 28 PhD candidates from partner institutions; the part that was integrated with the EAD conference had an international design research audience of approximately 50 people in person and online presence (between 10 and 30 people, depending on the session).

Time: 16-20 October 2023

This training event made use of the findings from the study 'Survey of Doctoral Students' and the 'Case Studies Analysis' (see report)

Location: in-person @ Aalto University, online at the EADresearch.org website

Citation:

Nader Sayún, M. (2024) Competencies for Social Impact (C4): @Aalto. Training Event Report. DoCS4Design project. Available at http://DoCS4Design.eu

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Topic & Need

The Aalto University workshops in Espoo and Helsinki were formulated to surface and analyse how doctoral training in design interacted with societal needs. The latter was interpreted broadly, including, but not limited to, research that addressed design for social need, for example through public sector collaborations or working with NGOs. Nonetheless, it was also recognised that all design is social in that it engages with end-users and stakeholders. Thus, research collaborations with highly commercial stakeholders routinely involve investigation of social impact questions.

That said, it was determined that finer-grained research and discussion of what specific competencies are generated through doctoral training in design that address social impact is important in order to provide finer-tuning for doctoral programmes. Presently, these competencies are expressed in broad terms such as 'empathy' or 'user-centredness'. Given the variety of doctoral research in design, it is perhaps understandable that such expressions emerge. However, how these play out through design research and how they also produce benefits for society and industry can be better articulated.

Competencies can be defined as "knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours that contribute to individual and organisational performance. Knowledge is information developed or learned through experience, study or investigation. We can argue that the purpose of a doctorate degree in design is to develop competencies related to design research and practice. In design, "acquiring or achieving competency is more than simply amassing heuristics, patterns, or catalogues of

techniques. Competency is the translation of knowledge, aggregation of skills, and integration of practice. This is an important distinction, as many of the competencies required to be effective in design are tacit in nature" (Weil & Mayfield, 2020).

Participants & Goal

This research engaged 40 Survey respondents from across the Consortium, Faculty and Student representatives of the Consortium for the Workshop element and participants in the final Multiplier Event.

The training event focused on developing capabilities for social impact of design researchers beyond academia. Design doctoral research and education are increasingly tackling bigger societal problems in the public and private sectors and within other organisations capable of social innovation, such as NGOs, think tanks, research institutes, social enterprises, citizen action, and community organisations. It is a concern to understand the social impacts of design research in today's world and evaluate the implications of applying it in diverse contexts. Furthermore, the value of design research is not often understood by organisations that could benefit from it, including those in the public and private sectors.

More specifically, in the training, participants had the opportunity to:

- reflect on how the competencies they acquire during their doctoral studies can be applied in different contexts outside of academia.

- network and interact with professionals from different contexts and sectors.

- develop their understanding of impact as a capability of design researchers.

The training was divided into three parts: Foundations, Transitions and Futures, which will include activities such as lectures, a speculative CV writing workshop, among others.

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Format (how we worked)

The 4-day in-person Training Event 'What Got Us Here Won't Get Us There' for PhD candidates, including the Conference Day, part of the European Academy of Design. Training Event activities are summarised in Table 1, the Conference was organised in Table 2.

Table 1: Schedule of the training events

Foundations	Introductory presentations	Introduction to the Wunderlibrary: A tool for PhD researchers. Survey and Case Studies presentation:
	Workshop 1	Principles for PhD practices Moderated by Professor Sampsa Hyysalo
Transitions	Workshop 2	Designing for social impact through critical inclusion. Moderated by Annukka Svanda
	Workshop 3	Best practices in research Moderated by Professor Turkka Keinonen
Futures	Workshop 4	Speculative CV writing and elevator pitch Moderated by Professor Guy Julier
	Workshop 5	Implications for PhD education: Employers x D4D roundtable. Moderator: Annemiek van Boeijen
	Panel discussion	Niall Sakeshaft: Design Research in VTT - Olga Silfver: Highly Educated Migrants in Espoo
	Roundtable	Several guests

Table 2: Speakers and facilitators of the EAD conference day

Keynote 1	Harri Paananen: The value of highly educated designers in the public sector
Keynote 2	Lucy Kimbell: Design for social change?
Panel 1:	Environments (Chair: Kaisu Savola)
Panel 2:	Potentials (Chair: Annukka Svanda)
Training Event Presentation	Designing for social impact through critical inclusion
Keynote 3:	Sampsa Hyysalo: Engaging with social challenges and design doctorates (confirmed)

Panel 3:	Value (Chair: Kaisa Savolainen)
Panel 4:	Social impact (Chair: Nils Ehrenberg)
Training Event Presentation	Speculative elevator pitch for social impact jobs

Resource materials developed

Nader Sayun, M., Hodson, E. and Emrecan, G. (2023) 'Faint Traces of Social Impact in Design Ph.D.', 15th International Conference of the European Academy of Design published in Conference Proceedings.

Outcomes and Implications

The learnings from the Training Event broadly aligned with findings of the preliminary research (see above). A word cluster of the skills that are generated and that have relevance for the social impact of research is given in FIgure 1.

Fig. 1: skills for social impact of research mentioned during the event

Since this constituted the final Work Package of D4D, it is impossible to determine any impacts as yet. The research suggests that scope remains for exploring this topic of competencies further. According to graduates, specific skills, such as communication and project management skills, have significant roles in the quality and reach of social impact outside of academia. It is therefore worth considering how they might be supported within doctoral programmes. These results also suggest that the generalist nature of doctoral programmes in design allows for broad social impact in diverse fields, which gives design research a unique position to work on improving well-being and tackling complex social and environmental challenges.

Evaluation

Some quotes from students and participants:

- A Politecnico di Milano student wrote to say: *"I am writing to express my gratitude for giving me the opportunity to join the DocS4Design Training in Finland. I have gained valuable knowledge not only from the lectures and conferences but also from the connections I have made with other PhD peers. The training has provided me with a platform to engage in meaningful conversations with other PhDs, practitioners, and professors."*
- An international researcher who attended wrote: *"It was indeed a remarkable experience, filled with inspiring conversations and the opportunity to meet wonderful individuals. As my first time presenting my PhD work in front of such a great audience, I felt extremely happy and grateful to hear all the feedback. Your warm words are greatly appreciated, and I'm thrilled to have been a part of such a successful event. The opportunity of assistance for any future plans to visit Espoo is incredibly kind, and I will keep that in mind as I consider future endeavours in the region. And I will certainly take your recommendation to heart and explore the promising collaboration opportunities with businesses, industries, and Aalto University in Espoo."*
- A student from Imperial College London wrote: *"Thank you very much for having us in Aalto and everything! It has truly been a great experience learning a lot from the sessions, and meeting you and all other brilliant people! Really look forward to seeing you again in the future and do please let me know if you find yourself in London so that we can catch up!"*

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Credits

Various partners contributed to the output (see also the report on the roundtable E2, and on research O5 and O6). The training event and supporting research was coordinated by Aalto: Michel Nader (social impact research), Elise Hodson (survey), Guy Julier (supervision), Sampsa Hyysalo (supervision), Emrecan Gulay (survey).

The report was edited by: Michel Nader.

All partners contributed to the output:

Aalto University	Elise Hodson, Guy Julier, Michel Nader, Sampsa Hyysalo
Carnegie Mellon University	Jonathan Chapman
Illinois Institute of Technology	Carlos Teixeira
Imperial College London	Rafael Calvo, Weston Baxter
Politecnico di Milano	Annalinda De Rosa, Fabio Figoli, Francesca Mattioli, Lucia Rampino, Paola Bertola
TU Delft	Annemiek van Boeijen, Erika Hajdu, Pieter Jan Stappers, Wilfred F. van der Vegte

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Appendix - call for participants

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What Got Us Here Won't Get Us There

DocS4Design + EAD: Invitation to training event and to the European Academy of Design Conference

Are you a PhD candidate interested in the future and the impact of your research? Do you ask yourself about the value of your capabilities outside of academia?

If you are from one of the DoCS4Design institutions (Aalto University, Carnegie Mellon University, Illinois Institute of Technology, Imperial College, Politecnico di Milano or TU Delft), we are looking forward to meeting you at this **4-day in-person training event plus one day of the European Academy of Design Conference** that will be held at Aalto University, Finland, from the 16th to the 20th of October 2023. Partner members of the DoCS4Design team and special guests from outside of academia will share their expertise with the participants and will workshop together with the students to think of the impact of design research outside of academia over an engaging cross-institution activity.

All participants will receive the DoCS4Design informative material and tools in order to best start the training. **Participation in the training event is free of charge**, registered participants will receive a training certificate and free access to the European Academy of Design Conference What Got Us Here Won't Get Us There (eadresearch.org). A number of ECTS for PhD candidates might be issued by your own institution; please refer to your PhD programme Coordinator in this regard. The ECTS will be issued to students who have attended more than 75% of the training event.

For students not residing in Finland, **travel and accommodation expenses are covered according to EU funding of the DoCS4Design project.** Please, refer to your PhD programme Coordinator in this regard.

What is the training about?

The training event focuses on **developing capabilities for social impact of design researchers beyond academia**. Design doctoral research and education are increasingly tackling bigger societal problems in the public and private sectors and within other organisations capable of social innovation, such as NGOs, think tanks, research institutes,

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