

Survey for Doctoral Students (O5)

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Erasmus+ project DoCS4Design (Doctoral Courses System for Design)

A paper based on part of this report has been as

Nader Sayún, M., Hodson, E., & Gulay, E. (2023) Faint Traces of Social Impact in Design Ph.D. Proceedings of the 15th International Conference of the European Academy of Design. Espoo, 19 October 2023. Blücher, p 748-758.

Insights from this study were applied in training event C4 'Competencies for Social Impact' (see training report)

Citation:

Nader Sayún, M., & Hodson, E. (2023). Survey for Doctoral Students. Project Report. DoCS4Design project. Available at <http://DoCS4Design.eu>

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DoCS4Design

Doctoral Courses System for Design

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Topic & Need

Doctoral research and education in design 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 groups, and community organisations. However, the design community lacks the resources, processes, and activities to support and situate doctoral design activity that demonstrably addresses stakeholder needs (Hnatkova et al., 2022). Furthermore, the value of design research is not often understood by organisations that could benefit from it and in some cases, there is no clear consensus on what design research means (Davis, 2008). It is important to understand the social impact of design research in today's world and evaluate the implications of applying it in diverse contexts.

There is growing pressure on universities offering doctorates in design to produce research projects and graduates who can monitor, evaluate, and plan for positive social impact as part of social and sustainability commitments. This pressure is felt across cultures and disciplines; for example, when talking about a university's social impact, Ibarra Uribe et. al. state that, "the university, because of its nature, must be an institution with a higher level of social responsibility" (Ibarra Uribe et al., 2020). This is explicitly outlined for example, in Aalto University's strategy 2023-2026: "Aalto University's purpose is to shape a sustainable future"(2023) and in Carnegie Mellon University's 2025 vision: "...developing solutions to problems of societal significance"(n.d.). Similar examples exist in each of the universities considered in this research project.

As the number of graduates from doctoral programmes in design grows, there is a need to clearly communicate the competencies of design researchers outside of academia, their potential to support a transition to a more socially and environmentally sustainable future, and to improve doctoral programmes to prepare graduates better for today's challenges. The career paths of graduates of doctoral students in design can provide insights into what is needed from doctoral programmes, where design is going and what opportunities there are for universities to support their students. Furthermore, the DocS4Design network provides a pool of around 300 graduates from 6 universities, who are currently practitioners of design research.

Survey respondents were contacted through the official alumni mailing lists of each university. It was anonymous and consisted of 36 questions and took about 30 minutes for participants to answer. It was divided in four parts: A - Career path, B - Impact, C - Social design and D - Future of design research. The first two parts of the survey consisted mostly of quantitative questions, while the second part included open questions.

We obtained 40 responses to the survey from four of the participating universities. The percentage of the responses by university are the following: 60% Politecnico di Milano, 18% TU Delft, 12% Aalto University, 10% Illinois Institute of Technology. The percentages by university are representative considering the population of PhD graduates from each university. The response rate was 7.6% of people contacted. Because of the anonymous nature of the survey, we are unable to know how representative it is in terms of demographics (age, gender, etc.).

Goal

The aims of this research component are to map the career paths of design researchers and their interests before and after a doctoral programme in design, to understand how their competencies are developed, and to describe the social impacts of the profession outside of academia. We also want to understand, from the perspective of the graduates, which competencies developed in their doctoral programme have been useful in their professional life and which other competencies could be useful for future design researchers.

Method (how we worked)

The Survey An anonymous survey consisted of 36 questions and took about 30 minutes for participants to answer. It was divided in four parts: A - Career path, B - Impact, C - Social design and D - Future of design research. The first two parts of the survey consisted mostly of quantitative questions.

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Outcomes

The preliminary analysis of this survey was used to write **a conference paper for the 15th European Academy of Design 2023 (Nader Sayuna et al, 2023)**, which was published in the conference proceedings. Furthermore, the insights from the survey were shared and discussed with the 28 PhD students who participated in the training event hosted in Helsinki, together with faculty from DocS4Design. This served as the opening session for the training event and set the stage for the reflection on the future of PhD research in design the following days.

References

Nader Sayún, M., Hodson, E., & Gulay, E (2023) Faint Traces of Social Impact in Design Ph.D. Proceedings of the 15th International Conference of the European Academy of Design. Espoo, 19 October 2023. Blücher, p748-758.

Stappers, P.J. & van Boeijen, A.G.C. (editors, 2022) PhD in Design – A Map & Glossary. Docs4Design project.

Credits

The Survey for Doctoral Students was conducted by Aalto University.

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