Service Design Empowering Autonomy of Citizens in Public Policy

Reflecting on the implication of service design in public policy to

raise citizens' autonomy.

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Abstract

Public policy significantly influences every facet of society, shaping the daily lives of all citizens both directly and indirectly. One pivotal element within this broad scenario is the autonomy of citizens, which is crucial to the implementation of public policy. Service design has systemic, cross-domain and co-create characteristics, as well as its human-centered design philosophy. These advantages make it have great potential in helping with the raise of citizens' autonomy and dignity towards public policy.

This paper aims to explore how service design can promote the autonomy of citizens in public policy, and explicate different perspectives and influences fulfilled by service design. Literature reviews, design examples and expert interviews will be conducted to analyze the application of service design in promoting citizens' autonomy from different perspectives.

The key findings suggest that service design can enhance citizens' autonomy through facilitating inclusivity, encouraging active participation, and fostering inter-organizational collaboration. However, challenges such as unpredictable outcomes and barriers to replicability and dissemination were also identified. The expected output is the application summarization of service design in promoting the autonomy of citizens in public policy from different perspectives. This will help policymakers better understand and apply service design in public policy for a raise of citizens' autonomy, and enhance the value dissemination of service design.

Keywords

Introduction

Public policy serves as a critical instrument in governmental organizations, building a direct connection between citizens and the government. This important role brings an undoubted influence over citizens' lives. In the midst of this, the autonomy of citizens emerges as a significant factor, shaping the effectiveness and relevance of public policies.

In recent years, service design has begun to gain recognition amongst governmental organizations globally, which is being treated as a methodology and leveraged in the public policy-making process. The integration of this design thinking approach introduces a promising potential to shape citizens' autonomy in public policy.

This paper aims to explore how service design, as a transformative methodology, empowers the autonomy of citizens in the design and implementation of public policies. The paper explores how this approach, while enhancing citizen-government interaction, can offer a more transparent, collaborative, and democratic process of creating public policy. Furthermore, it investigates the potential limitation of such a shift, suggesting new directions for the future of public policy-making.

To ensure the robustness of the findings, a mixed methods approach was applied. This involved conducting literature reviews, examining design examples, and carrying out expert interviews. In the literature review, research was conducted into academic and industry sources to understand the existing body of knowledge surrounding the role of service design in empowering the autonomy of citizens within the context of public policy, which helped set the theoretical foundation for the study. Two 40-minute expert interviews were conducted with service design professionals with experience in public policy, which provided practical insights

from the application of service design principles in policy-making and were used to inform and validate the key themes that emerged from the literature review. Finally, design examples were analyzed to illustrate real-world applications of service design in public policy and demonstrate its transformative potential in promoting citizens' autonomy, which served as tangible evidence of the theory and expert insights presented, helping to solidify the arguments made. These methods allowed for the examination of the role of service design in promoting citizens' autonomy from both a theoretical and practical perspective.

Background

Defining the Autonomy of Citizens

In recent years, the autonomy of citizens has been more often referred to in relation to their own physical, mental and social development. Citizens' autonomy can be understood in two ways: the condition of competence and the condition of authenticity. From the perspective of competence, civic autonomy can be understood as the ability of citizens to manage their own lives. From the perspective of authenticity, civic autonomy can be defined as the understanding that citizens' preferences are their own real preferences and are not coerced or controlled by others [1].

Just as humans are social animals, although the interpretation of autonomy is based on individual citizens, this does not mean that the autonomy of citizens is independent. Rather, civic autonomy is dependent on social relationships between people. Autonomy can be defined as a multifaceted outcome of human relationships that enhances interaction and fosters opportunities [2].

Autonomy in Public Policy

When viewed through the lens of public policy, the autonomy of citizens acquires a specific interpretation. In many welfare states, the ultimate choice of the individual citizen is often seen as the primary objective of most public policies. Such policies are liberal, giving citizens unrestricted choice in matters relating to policy [11].

In contrast, the term "autonomy" is perceived as an elevated form of liberal choice, frequently driven by the citizens' internal motivation. This kind of choice is considered wider in scope, superior in quality, and unobstructed by oppression [3]. In the expert interview that I conducted with Alexander, who is currently employed as a service designer for World Food Programme and also previously worked as a service designer for the government of Ontario in Canada, citizens' autonomy is defined from both sides. One is their choice. Citizens are being able to choose different types of services or choose in terms of how they want to proceed with certain aspects of their life. They are ensured comprehensive access to information regarding public policy, coupled with an adequate level of accessibility to these policies. The second is the ease of interacting with the government. Citizens are entitled to actively take part in public policy formulation. This proactive right empowers them to exert influence on the policy landscape in a manner that aligns harmoniously with their individual desires and visions. And all this need to work well under the complex structure system of government.

Development

Choice - Human-centred inclusion

To begin with, Service design influences citizen autonomy through its inclusiveness, from the perspective of citizen choice. One of the significant attributes of service design is its adherence to human-centered design principles, which brings the capacity for inclusivity, meeting varying

needs within an intricate and extensive system. In an expert interview with Betty, who is a service designer from the UK employed by a provider of public services to the local public administration, it was elucidated that service design fosters a mindset that is conscious of the requirements of the weakest groups and the most extreme pain points. If they can achieve this goal, then probably they are covering more people, thereby enabling the satisfaction of a broader user base.

Also in their work 'Design for People Autonomy', Valentina, Francesc and Michaela assert that the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is crucial in the domain of public services [2]. By curating services to be user-centered and adaptable to the needs of diverse users, public services can achieve greater universal accessibility for citizens. This implies enhancing their proactivity with regard to accessibility. To illustrate, the Koos service design agency utilized service design in the CoronaCheck project to devise multiple novel pneumonia certificate solutions, thus making public policies more inclusive for the 17 million residents of the Netherlands [4]. For instance, access to the CoronaCheck certificate is facilitated both electronically and in print, permitting users to print a QR code on paper, thereby rendering these public services accessible to groups that do not utilize smartphones. This innovation is not attributable to the integration of technology at a singular point of contact, but to the systematic application of service design, which has rendered the entire public services system more adaptable.

This adaptability is particularly conspicuous in relation to individuals with disabilities. Most of the population will experience temporary or permanent disabilities at various stages of their lives [5]. So ensuring that citizens overcome these barriers and providing universal access to public services is important. During the interview with Betty, suggesting physical alternatives, and analogical alternatives to digital solutions are more being considered by the design team.

Easy interaction - Co-creation, Self-direction and Non-coercion

The second aspect of service design that impacts autonomy is its ability to position citizens proactively through its co-create characteristics. This is based on a certain degree of participatory rights of the citizens, which are fundamentally built on inner self-drive rather than coercion. For instance, in the project "The School of the Neighbourhoods" led by Polimi Desis Lab [6], service design can assist policymakers in formulating public policy through a bottom-up process. This is achieved by co-creating activities based on the innovative ideas of citizens, thereby putting them in a more active position in the establishment of public services. This not only enhances citizen-government interaction, but also promotes citizen autonomy and indirectly increases the sensitivity of policy towards citizens' needs.

Citizens are part of the service, and while organizations design services, citizens' autonomy is constrained within the supervisory power of the service organization. Inviting citizens to participate in part of the service production is considered a method to liberate autonomy [7]. Taking the UK as an example, the design and provision of public services are transitioning from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. Due to factors such as government funding cutbacks and the devolution of power, the government is increasingly engaging with citizens to conduct more open testing of public policies [8]. This transition facilitates a more transparent and cooperative mode of public policy development.

Cross-disciplinary Nature - Inter-organizational Collaboration

Service design also promotes citizen autonomy from the perspective of the government internal structures. Whether it's citizens' choices or their interactions with the government, all these are embedded within complex governmental systems. The implementation of a public policy

requires a collective effort, and thanks to the cross-disciplinary nature of service design, it provides a universal language for teams and departments across different fields within an organization, thereby promoting better cooperation. For instance, the use of service design tools, such as service blueprints, allows teams other than the design team - like legal team - to have a clearer understanding of the design concept of public services during the ideation phase. Consequently, they can express their perspectives on the concept more effectively from a legal perspective.
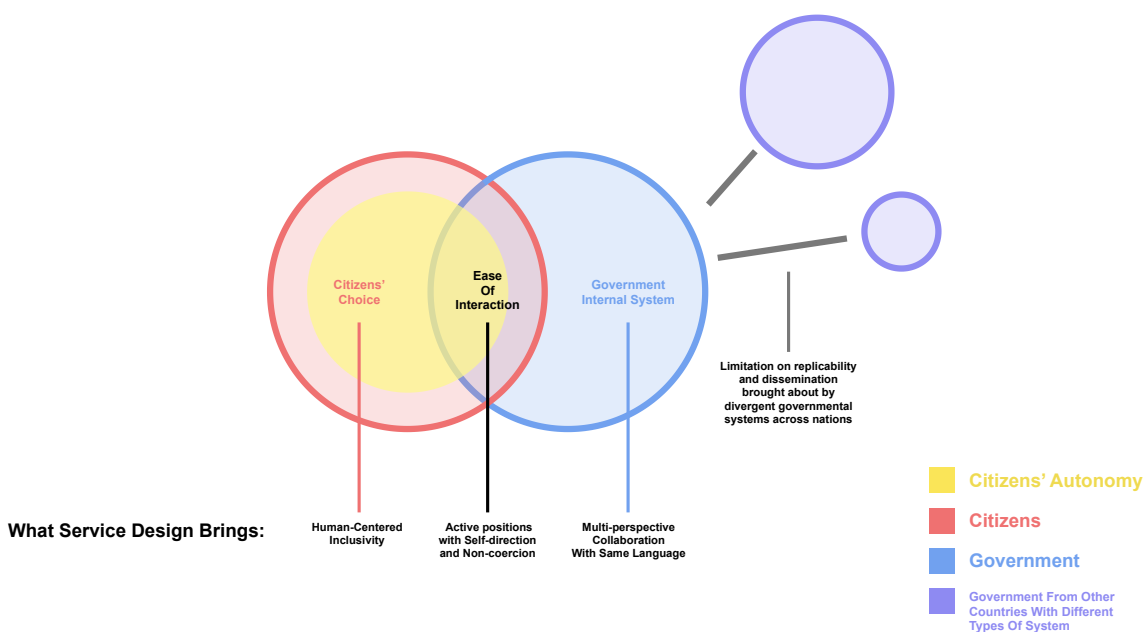
Limitation

While service design can promote citizens' autonomy in public policy from various perspectives, it has inherent limitations in the context of public policy. The limitations are mainly in terms of the intangible value prediction and the constraints on replicability and dissemination brought about by divergent governmental systems across nations. Today, an increasing number of organizations are recognizing the role of service design in public policy. However, limitations such as unpredictable outcomes of user co-creation service models, the outputs and values of service design are often invisible in the initial stages of implementation. Consequently, many service designers within government organizations resort to case studies from organizations similar to their own to illustrate the value and expected outcomes of service design to other members of their organization, thereby advocating for the implementation of service design.

Yet, owing to the existence of differing policy systems across countries, many organizations cannot draw upon each other's case studies for reference. For instance, a Canadian government organization may use service design case studies from the UK government as a reference due to their similar policy systems. However, it cannot refer to service design case studies from the

US government due to their vastly different policy systems. This to a certain extent limits the replicability and dissemination of service design in the field of public policy and indirectly hinders the autonomy of citizens in some countries where service design is not widely disseminated.

Conclusions

In summary, service design has a profound influence on the autonomy of citizens within public policy through its inherent characteristics of human-centered design and its systemic, cross-domain and co-create traits. Through human-centered inclusivity, service design empowers citizens' choice in their autonomy. By allowing citizens to take an active part in the public policy-making process with enhanced self-direction and decreased coercion, service design improves citizens' ease of interaction with the government in their autonomy. From an organizational perspective, the inter-organizational and multi-perspective collaboration facilitated by service design enables more effective communication and cooperation through the government's internal system, which indirectly benefits citizen autonomy.

However, it is important to note the limitations of service design in the realm of public policy, which includes the invisibility of value realization and the challenges of replicability and dissemination across different governmental systems. These challenges call for further research and practical exploration to optimize the use of service design in public policy.

Despite these findings, the research was limited by a small sample size for expert interviews and the focus on design examples from a limited number of countries. Future research could expand the sample size and include examples from a more diverse set of countries.

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