

# C'è spazio per tutti / There's room for one more

*Davide Fassi, Liat Rogel*

*davide.fassi@polimi.it*

*Politecnico di Milano – School of Design Via Durando 10, Milan, 20158, Italy*

## Abstract

"C'è spazio per tutti/There's room for one more" is an event that took place in November 2011 at the Milano Bovisa Durando campus of Politecnico di Milano, Italy, with the purpose of opening to the inhabitants of that area the public spaces of the university with a series of "toolkit", aiming at understanding, observing and enjoying a public space, with the help of "esterni" and of the European research program "Human Cities". "C'è spazio per tutti/There's room for one more" is the result of a workshop that involved more than 50 people (students, teachers, graduate assistants and tutors). In this paper we will describe the need to open-up hidden public spaces like the Milano Bovisa Durando campus and the idea that by small quick design experiments we can immediately test the efficiency of some tools made to enable people and communities in using the public space.

**KEYWORDS:** Hidden public space, Toolkit, City, University campus

## Introduction

The city and the need for community.

The activity of communities in the public space is a key point towards a more sustainable living in the urban area. It is not surprising that the city is a favorite discussion topic (for bad or good) in the past years, and for a good reason: world population is concentrating in urban areas, consequently, taking care of the city means taking care of many people. The common image of the growing city, however, is far from being ideal. The most frequent words describing urban realities are: social exclusion, alienation, segregation and loneliness. Probably, more than a crisis of the city we should talk about crisis of city life. Cities are actually growing, are changing and are developing. International metropolis shares lots of

features among them more than with the local context (Sassen, 2004). It is clear for some time now that new development strategies are needed, but: where to begin? In the United States for example, many authors criticized urban planning processes and accused them in not considering the resident's needs, some also gave concrete solutions and alternatives. In 1970, Richard Sennet (Sennet, 1970) writes about the crisis of the city. He introduces an idea that diverse from the idea of Jane Jacobs, in "the death and life of great American cities" (Jacobs, 1961). Jacobs, he says, is nostalgic about the past and the relationships between people in small towns; she tends to suggest a restoration of past conditions. Sennet (1970) states we can not think that the past can give us elements to improve our present city problems, as the solutions we want must be adapted to an affluent, technological era. The answer is to be found between these two arguments, or maybe actually they are not so far away from each other to begin with. They are both concluding with a need for community and the will to re-reach some values that are lost in modern urban life, like mutual aid and conviviality. Although written some years ago, these books are still representing important and contemporary critic of today's urban planning. The active people in the city are a clear sign for that: more and more people in the city find creative ways of refilling those lacks. They collaborate in various ways using new and old tools. These creative communities (Meroni, 2007) are producing social innovation. They are a sustainable resource that must not only be recognized but also supported and disseminated. Those communities, often, act in and for the public space; in fact, public space is essential for improving social life in contemporary cities.

### Space for the urban communities

Independent events have started to grow in the city, in those areas where there are particular problems which are thus shown by increasing their consciousness (Bostjan, 2010:22). The city is read as an independent container of public space even if for Rem Koolhaas the distinction between public and private is nowadays too old. We are in front of residual spaces, abandoned and controlled. Giovanna Piccinno in *Space Design* (Piccinno, 2008, p.11) says that "[...]the contemporary designer must listen to new places (without distinction between places and non-places) and new citizens (local o itinerant) and answer in terms of design with the operative tools he has.[...]". The action is generally done in places which are not offered or dedicated, but on the contrary are made available, are lent or temporarily given for a specific use (Haydn and Temel, 2006). And we are not talking only about those places recognised as possibly hospitable for temporary urban solutions (Fassi, 2012)<sup>1</sup> (squares, parks, stadiums), but about those areas at the margins, which have been stolen from a urban un-attentive project planning or infrastructures which do not dialogue with the context (Navarra, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Or still it is the "space of abandonment" as the "Stalker" group defined it (Careri, 2006), that is a space "where complexity survives to the mono-functional colonisation and the city experiments generating a neutral area which gives back a sense of

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<sup>1</sup> "Temporary urban solutions" (TUS) are project answers put in place by professionals in a sector or by groups of people lead by a team of project specialists, which change into devices, set up, collective actions, emergency displays, project strategies which contaminate the single building, an agglomerate of them, a urban interior or an open space or a passage space with a process of functional and perceptive change on the occasion of temporary events linked to hospitality, to sales, to leisure time, to entertainment" in Fassi, Davide, Temporary Urban Solutions, Maggioli, Rimini, 2012, p.12

<sup>2</sup> "Infrastructures compose an articulate vocabulary of shapes which defining the covered spaces with a variable height, interfere with the urban network. Thus there are some special points which form residual spaces, not accessible to cars and separated by houses. In these knots there are the spontaneous and temporary actions which bring to their use with absolutely variable ways and time", Navarra, Marco, (a cura di), *Repairing cities*, Siracusa, LetteraVentidue edizioni, 2008, p.14

concept to public space as a creative space and sharing space" (Romolo, 2005, p.18). Luciano Crespi (Crespi, 2009, p.20) says that the "true act of recognition of the place is only through the presence on the place itself, within the internal and external areas, whose changes need to be foreseen. Where staying means something deeper than stopping for a moment or being there by chance. Staying means the need to understand, to listen to the place, to recognize the soul" in the sense provided by Hillman (Hillman, 2004). The sense of ownership of space reflects reading the city as a "place of self-identification of the individual" which, according to Barcellona (Barcellona, 2006, p.17) "is possible through the personalization of the urban space which is at the same time the structured image of values and community bonds and the place of distinction for the relationship between single and community". Feeling the urban space means perceiving a shape of what is empty and what is full, of high and low spaces, under and over spaces, but also recognizing a system of relationships between people who live in these spaces, the neighborhood, the life in the residential areas, true "centers of affection communication" (Barcellona, 2006, p.17).

As Francesca Zajczyk states, the neighborhood is a portion of urban area, both territorial and social, where we may find plenty of resources, factors and critical situations. It underlines the identification with the local side of the city, able to read the micro-social dynamics and to express the relationship among citizens/social groups and urban areas (Zajczyk, 2008).

## Hidden public spaces

Sometimes public space is not so obvious. When the borders between private and public are blurred, new kind of spaces are born that even if actually of everyone are not visually public. These are public spaces we define hidden. Milan traditional houses and blocks have been designed to have an inner courtyard that most of the time give access to other building inside, but is not seen from the outside. These courtyards have a direct access from the streets that bring the user to a semi-private area. It means that they are open to the public even if they belong to a private property. This feature makes them hidden places, since citizens, tourists or just usual walkers are not directly addressed to them but they could only discover them through an on-purpose access. This courtyard distribution system comes from the farmhouses ("cascina"), a traditional building system now located only in the countryside close to Milan, that includes both residential and work functions. In Milan we may find "a city within a city"<sup>3</sup> made by these hidden places: some of these are just unknown even if located in main urban paths, other are really not visible because located in an urban "backstage". They may be classified in those ones that have a cultural heritage value (material or immaterial) and in those that have a community potential to be explored and valued. Public university campuses are included in this last category. Even if they are used by a specific kind of user (people who study or work there) and are perceived by other people as a private (belonging to university) area, in most cases, however, campuses space is by all means public. This is the case of the Politecnico di Milano campuses in Bovisa district.

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<sup>3</sup> The hidden Milano is now at the centre of a touristic promotion activity by the city council. It is well described at [www.turismo.milano.it](http://www.turismo.milano.it)

## The Milano Bovisa Durando campus

Bovisa is an ex-industrial district. In the second half of the XX century it has been a subject of great change due to the removal of almost all the industries. The district was left with many abandoned areas that were soon to become a problem for the residences as they attracted homeless people, drug dealers etc. The quarter has lost its main reason of existence and did not initially transformed into a suitable residential area with appropriate public spaces. The population has become more and more mixed as immigrants came to the district. Various project of re-construction of the area slowly began and the biggest one was the creation of two university campus for the Politecnico di Milano. Milano Bovisa Durando and Milano Bovisa La Masa are the two main campuses in the Bovisa district. The arrival of Politecnico di Milano in Bovisa area changed the district again, bringing in it young students and commercial activities related to them. The new life of the neighbourhood has indeed brought to an improvement of public transportation and the building of new residential areas, but public spaces like green areas or equipped squares are still missing. The Milano Bovisa Durando campus, hosting the School of Design, was built by the end of the 90s on the grounds of "Ceretti & Tanfani", a historical company producing cable railways and which made Bovisa a working class district. The place is part of this historical memory of the inhabitants. It is today a green space hosting sitting places as well as a cafe. In spring and summer time many students sit outside, enjoy the sun doing outdoor activities. It is a hidden public space since no one beside the university community uses it as such. The campus remains an "island for students" and most of the people who once knew the place as a former industry did not even have the chance to see how it has transformed. The two types of 'users' (university community and the permanent citizens) have very few contact points in common. The potential of improvement the campus could have offered is huge, but unfortunately it did not fulfil. Could this hidden space be opened up by the university community (students/designers/staff) to create extra space for the everyday life of permanent residents?

## Methodology

To answer this question and verify the interest of people in the new space we have chosen to act through a Participatory Action Research (PAR). In the heart of the process is a design student's five days workshop ending in a one-day event for testing ideas immediately. The students were asked to come up with toolkit ideas. The toolkit is made to be used directly by the end users empowering them with the right tools to "occupy" this new space and use it for their needs. The toolkits, tools of social interaction, are applied to experiment new forms of conviviality and to highlight the features and possibilities of using a space that is today consigned to a didactic and scientific use. This kind of fast small design experiments allowed us to come to quick conclusions and continue towards more stabled and organized solutions. Our PAR process was organized in this way:

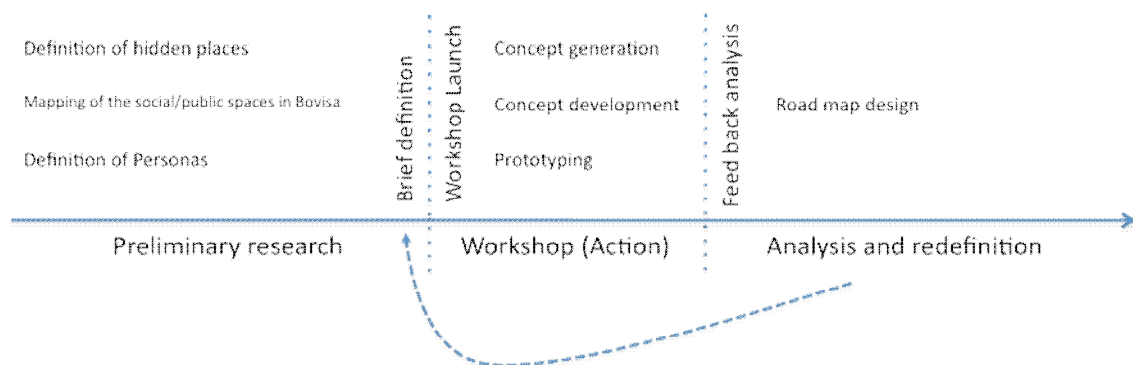


Figure 1 shows the PAR process

The research has begun by a preliminary study of available literature about conventional and non-conventional public spaces. Through this, a definition of hidden public spaces was made available (see above). The Campus Bovisa area was then chosen in order to make an applied action on the topic. The second part of the preliminary research is context-related and included the definition of personas and the mapping of the area's social places.

### Definition of "personas"

The initial research on the area includes an understanding of the population, history and present, the affects the campus has had on it and the active users already present in the area. This was made in part by a literature review (desk research) and in part by talking to people living in the neighborhood (on-site research). User surveys as well as interviews were made in this phase, trying to cover the diversities included in the Bovisa population. They followed a basic and simple scheme including information about gender, age, occupation and which activities are usually and personally done in the neighborhood. Desk research has been adopted to get information about the trends of population in the area, public services, infrastructure, periodical events (fair, local markets etc.). Different kind of users were defined from which, in a second time, we created a series of "Personas" to refer to in the concept phase:

- Paola, 68 years old. Retired, grandmother, she has 3 nephews going both to the nursery and primary schools. She helps her working daughter to take care of them after school and before their parents come back home. She uses to go to weekly local market buying fresh food. She belongs to a local voluntary association where she meets her friends too.
- Marco, 37 years old, co-Houser, he has a wife and two small children with collaborative living life style. He came to live in Bovisa a couple of years ago due to the first co-housing buildings. He likes gardening, jogging and spending time with his daughter Emma (3 years old) and Filippo (1 year old)
- Amir, 30 years old, foreign resident, he was born in Egypt and arrived in Italy when he was 25. He runs a butchery shop in Bovisa where he lives. He just got married 6 month ago.
- Federico, 22 years old, student, he lives close to the university campus in a private apartment shared with 2 classmates. He is at 3rd year BSc Interior Design and spends most of his time in the campus. He usually goes to a gym close to his house.

- Emma, 3 years old, she goes to the local nursery every day till 4pm. She likes drawing and stay outdoor.

These five Personas mirror the local community and has been the starting point of the developing of the ideas and design solutions after the mapping of what are the social/public places of the block.

### Mapping of the social/public places of Bovisa

The second step was understating the present public-social situation. An immersion took place in the social/public places of Bovisa like schools, local associations, public services, libraries, parks etc. From this mapping arises that public areas that involve the whole community are missing and the social places are related to specific communities and are semi-private. From this phase of research some of the hypothesis previously done, were confirmed: the Milano Bovisa Durando campus is not considered a public space for the residences and there is a vast interest in having more space available for age and culture crossing activities. Also, the campus is very intriguing for the people and most of them, especially the retired people, expressed the need and curiosity to see what Politecnico di Milano is and how it is using those areas. Most of the new local shops that were opened after the arrival of Politecnico di Milano are most used by university community and suffer of weekend loss of customers since there are no activities in the campus.

The research and mapping brought to a definition of the brief for the student workshop. The students were asked to:

- develop collaborative services ideas for the neighbours on the campus area
- design toolkit to enable people in participating/initiating the services
- test part of the toolkit or prototyping the service where needed, in the one day event programmed after the workshop.
- let the people do social activities in a "design context" (i.e. School of Design spaces of the campus)

From the first part of the research few more specific topics were discovered: 1) the lack of green spaces and the relationship with nature. 2) the absence of a cultural heritage related to everyday spaces 3) the desire to a sense of community and the need for dedicated space. 4) a constant need to re-vitalize the neighbourhood from a cultural point of view. These results have brought up 4 topics that were presented to the student by the tutors as part of the brief:

- Food: green spaces, contact with nature, cooking
- Places: local cultural heritage valorisation, explanation of Politecnico di Milano facilities
- Free time: public sport facilities or spaces, spaces for group activities
- Entertainment: events, exhibition, open air activities

### The workshop

Concept generation for services, concept development:

42 international students joined the workshop as elective course belonging to MSc Product Service System. Students were asked to split in teams and work on 1 out of 4 topics assigned. One team was focused on Saturday morning event managing, including communication strategy, fund raising to produce toolkits, logistic issues and promotion/advertisement to

guarantee an adequate number of people incoming. On Wednesday the event managing team went to the local market promoting the Saturday event through a flash-mob focused on the idea of offering a chair to come and sit with them to have a chat in a public space. It was a chance to let the local people know that a “hidden place” was asking to be discovered.<sup>4</sup> During the week the same team went to the mapped schools to advertise the event to the child and to their parents/grandparents at the end of the school days so to generate a spread of word. Students small groups worked on concept generation for the first 2 days and then to the development of the project and the production of those “material” output included in the toolkits. As the output of the first 2 days, 5 concepts were presented according to the topics suggested and the identified “personas”. Workshops with kids, gardening, tour of the campus, light sport activities were some of the visions designed by the students that received accurate feedback in a session where both students and tutors were involved so to come out with 5 projects to be developed in the following 3 days and to be presented at “C’è spazio per tutti/There’s room for one more” event. During the second part of the week there was a huge effort by the students to get in contact with local shops for the supply of raw materials, useful to the projects.

5 toolkits were designed for the 5 output of the workshop:

- “C’è giardino per tutti/There’s a garden for one more”: to create a urban garden for the area, in the green spaces of the campus. A community garden inside the Politecnico campus would enable people to create a community, enhancing and trans generational exchange and promoting a sustainable lifestyle (fig.1)



Figure 2 shows the toolkit for “C’è giardino per tutti”

- “Il mio taccuino/My notebook”: to introduce the natural part of the campus to children through collecting leaves, drawing and using the “frottage” technique. (fig.2). The main purpose is to let children understand what is the design process with a series of guided

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<sup>4</sup> Short movie about the flash-mob could be watched at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzyhIXTBhD8>



exercises inspired by our activities. Other than new techniques, kids will learn how discover new places and know more information about specific contexts with a different approach.



Figure 3 shows the toolkit for "Il mio taccuino"

- "Piccoli cuochi/Little cooks": to apply the design process to cooking according to Enzo Mari's theories, involving children. It encourages people to get to know each other and collaborate while being engaged in a cooking process which reflects the design method. The toolkit includes: 20 cards – ingredients, 20 cards - cooking tools, 1 instruction card with rules of the game, 1 method card with recipe.
- "Poli-tour": to discover the past and present of the campus, through some traces left by the ex-factory "Ceretti&Tanfani" and discovering the facilities of Politecnico di Milano. The toolkit is made by 6 elements: a map including clues to find the path of the hunt; the information postcards and the photo panels, providing information about the past history and the present of the campus, the red chair to have a picture in the campus context.
- "Peter e Gisella": to reclaim the public space through light sport activities linked to campus areas (fig. 3). The toolkit includes 7 illustrative boards, which can be printed to create different health corners, magenta spots, to indicate where the activities take place, and moustache stickers for the laughing activity. Users can also add new activities customizing the format.





Figure 4 shows part of the toolkit for “Peter and Gisella”

#### Prototyping of service idea

Some guidelines have been followed to prototype the toolkits to guarantee scientific results. First: the toolkits had to present as a physical output including the rules and tools to be used. Second: the toolkits had to be produced in a series of 15 items (as minimum) to allow an appropriate number of persons involved in testing them. Third: 3 to 4 facilitators had to be present to help users to get in touch with the toolkit and use it. Fourth: the facilitators had to collect feedback directly (through an informal speech with the users) and indirectly (through observation of the interaction between users and toolkits). Fifth: every activity had to be recorded through pictures and/or movies.

When gates opened a reception desk at the main entrance was provided and the event managing team was in charge of welcoming the people and explaining the project. People of the neighbourhood were invited to use the space (often for the first time) as a public space and they were given a map of the campus including where they could have found the toolkit to be tested.

#### Feedback.

200 people entered the campus on that day and the general feedback was positive. Feedback was collected by interviews, surveys and active observation on the day of the event. The surveys/interviews asked mainly:

- if people can see themselves coming more frequently to the campus for using it for their own activities or enjoying offered activities
- their opinion about the one day event and the single activities
- their wishes for future events in the campus

Active observation, including picture taking and filming was important for understanding different behaviours. The students understood immediately if there was something to modify in their project and some of them did it on the same day to have immediate results. Others took note for a future design of the project. <sup>5</sup>

## Analysis and road map design.

The feedback was analyzed into strength and weaknesses points (as described here below). In order to achieve continuity and arrive to a repeatable model we have designed a road map for future steps.

### Results

The overall results of the research have shown:

- Interest by the people to discover the campus as it is today. Many of the visitors have known the place in its former use and during this event had the chance to see it for the first time as a university campus. Elderly people were very keen on seeing the transformation and tell the student about what use to be there before with a deep wish to strengthen the memory.
- Understanding by the people of the new opportunities of the space (how they can use them). Entering the campus and participating in the initiative made people understand how they can normally use the space. Many people showed interest in coming there with children to enjoy the green or ride the bicycle as the space is well protected. Also people involved on local associations were interested in initiating their own activities in the space. A group of neighbours was interested in maintaining the vegetable garden and creating a new green space for the neighbourhood, as they do not own a private one.
- A better understanding of the local context by the university community. The event let the university community know more about the context (and not only the confined places where they have lessons)
- Offering a mixed space for several categories of users. The Bovisa campus space was transformed by the designed toolkits into a multi-user space with very different activities. The people participating noticed this and the feedback was very positive.
- Generating new economic dynamics among local shops, citizens and students. The fund raising made by the students among the local commercial activities allowed them to get acquaintance about economic (and not only social) potential of the event. Those who understood the potential of collaborating with university showed great interest and availability and connections were made also for future projects.

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<sup>5</sup> A short movie about "C'è spazio per tutti/There's room for one more" made by the event managing students team is available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atvk7kw5\\_lc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atvk7kw5_lc&feature=related)

- Limited time of the event. 3.5 hours were a limited time for an event. From one side it allowed us to have a good level of results and tests but it could have been longer and lasted for the whole day so to get in touch not only with the “morning” user of the area but also with the “afternoon/evening” ones.
- Campus boundaries. Politecnico di Milano campus has physical gates that are perceived by citizens as a barrier. It is something that created some difficulties during the event since even if they were open and advertised as entrances they were still perceived as a limit to accessibility.

## Discussion

The need for community and the need of spaces for the community in the city were confirmed by our PAR. According to certain targets set in the goals, the results of the workshops have generated scenarios that could be systematized to give the solutions prototyped a temporal continuity and interaction. Scenarios can also be used to generate new solutions for integration with the space. The time pattern in which the research / action was set, have been effective because there has been an area of direct consciousness of the error or success of the project. The workshop, thanks to the master level students, a good mix of background and skills of the team members, and to rhythm and aims given at the initial phase, was a real research method with a high level of instantaneous experimentation generating ideas to be put on stage. It soon brought results thanks to a rapid phase of development.

The hidden place begun to be discovered by the neighborhood. The spread of mouth and signals left on the campus as a memory of the event would decrease the depth of existing boundaries between the university area and Bovisa. The next step will be to have more initiatives like this that will take the use of public space from a unique event one to a regular and continuous use. It could be done thanks to an accurate choice of those toolkits that were more successful during the test and allowed to both use the space and interact with other people. The role of the designer as facilitator would enable people to live and use the space by their own when the potential of the campus area will be recognized and toolkits will become a way to interact with it. The methodology used is one suitable for many similar campuses and has great potential of becoming a solid, repeatable, scalable model. A hidden public space was indeed discovered for one day, creating a vision for its opening regularly to the surroundings.

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Figures – SDC Heading level 3, Arial 10

Figures must not be more than 14 cm wide and 25.2 cm high. Colour figures are allowed but might need adjustments to look alright if printed in black and white. Figures should be numbered, e.g. "Table 1" or "Figure 2" and the caption should look like in Figure 1. So limit the size of the file, please use image editing tool to resize large images. We recommend a resolution around 300 dpi at most.



Figure 1 shows an example image. The caption format is SDC Caption, Cambria 10 point bold.

## References and citations

Citations as part of a sentence shows authors names in text, and year within parenthesis: e.g. as stated by Holmlid & Evenson (2007). Citations that are not part of a formal sentence, should be placed inside parenthesis: e.g. revealing patterns of human thought (Howard, 2008; Bechmann, 2010; Holmlid & Evenson, 2007) or other phenomena (Participle, 2008). If a reference is authored by one or two individual, give both names. For three or more authors, name only the first one followed by et al.. Try using only sources you have personally read or make sure it is clear that you are referring to a second hand source.

Quotations should be part of the normal text flow and include page numbers when possible; e.g. "... a crucial dimension to use to increase understanding and the role of prototyping is at what stage in the generic service design process a prototyping method is used." (Holmlid & Evenson, 2007, p. 6). For quotations longer than two rows, they should be in a paragraph of their own and use the *SDC quote* style:

*Beveridge was a 20<sup>TH</sup> century giant. The vision and strategy he set out in his first 1942 report were supported by political thinkers on the left and right, and by the general public who wanted a new and fairer Britain. Before Beveridge, Britain can be seen as a place of gross inequality, with health care that few could afford or find, schools which looked like those portrayed in a Dickens' novel, and a society desperately hanging on to its colonial legacy. The post-war welfare state swept all this away in one of the most dramatic social transformations Britain has ever seen. (Participle, 2008, p. 2)*

References should be made like in the examples below. If the sources are in another language than English you should provide a translation of the title and source.

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Example references.

Bechmann, S. (2010). *Servicedesign*. Århus: Academica.

Holmlid, S., & Evenson, S. (2007). Prototyping and enacting services: Lessons learned from human-centered methods. *Proceedings from the 10th Quality in Services conference, QUIS 10*. Orlando, Florida.

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