Is the 'user' term adequate?

A design anthropology perspective on design for social welfare services

Live M. L. Kvelland
Department of Product Design
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

During the last decades, the focus in design has been shifting from being object-centered to focusing on design for human experiences. Moreover, service design is expanding design practice from being a project with a finite material deliverable to becoming a process of ongoing change within a social context. Still, the term 'user' remains widely applied, although service designers are increasingly considering people involved as 'partners' or 'co-producers'. Since the emergence of service design, the business and technology perspective in service design has strongly contributed to the shaping of service design language and techniques. With its focus on context and complexity, the emerging field of design anthropology has the potential to introduce a different perspective on how to re-interpret the 'user' notion. The aim of this article is to explore how the term 'user' fits within the context of design for public services. The question is illustrated with examples from a design project in collaboration with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The literature review and the illustrative case example in this article show that people are actively shaping public welfare services as much as the services have been pre-designed. Thus, the 'user' term in public welfare services could be reconsidered through a design anthropology lens, with the help of concepts such as contextualization, human-centeredness and design as grown. A design anthropology perspective might help designers become more aware of people as actively shaping public services. Designers might then facilitate an infrastructure where design is happening through people's participation in services, rather than services pre-designed for 'consumption'.

KEYWORDS: User, service design, social welfare, design anthropology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Service design is becoming increasingly known within the field of public services as a driver for innovation and organizational transformation grounded in a user-centered approach [1] The notions of "user involvement" and "user-centeredness" are relatively new to most public services, like the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), but have been well known within the design field since the 1980s [2], [3]. However, as the design field takes on more complex challenges, a user-centered approach might not address the high complexity of

relationships between people and technology [2]. Sub-fields such as design thinking and service design contribute with a more holistic perspective on people, and more designers are taking a 'human-centered design' approach with a 'collaborative design' process [4], [5]. This is commonly seen by designers as an appreciated alternative to the more narrow 'user-centered design', which has its origin in an object-centric design perspective [4], [6].

Service design is changing the role of designers from being experts within a finite project frame to increasingly be seen as facilitators and translators

in an ever-lasting iterative process [5]. Designers are moving from designing products to co-creating with people [2], [7]. As a relatively new field emerging in the early 2000s [2], service designers have been critiqued for not having enough competence when it comes to the implementation of the service concepts [8]. Much of the knowledge about services has been appropriated from the business and technology side [9], [10]. As an example, well-known books on service design like the ones by Bechmann and Polaine et al. draw on literature from management and marketing and design research to a greater extent than the fields of humanities, like anthropology, psychology and political science [7], [8]. The dominance of the perspectives from business, technology and product design be reflected in the service design "tribes language", with its use of tools like blue prints, flow charts and touch-point representations [5].

On the other hand, voices from anthropology are stressing the importance of context and complexity in service design. As stated by Akam and Prendiville, we should "re-situate services as an organic, co-created process and see co-designing as a journey and process of transformation in how we design our world, and ourselves, with others" [5]. Blomberg and Darrah are problematizing how service designers often are adopting concepts and strategies from product design, without necessarily questioning whether fundamental assumptions from one field are directly applicable to the other [11]. The user term risk being such a concept. When transferred to design for public services, it leads to several paradoxes.

The aim of this article is to highlight why the 'user' term is problematic in design for public welfare services. The article will look at the background for the 'user' concept in design and in public services, and describe some challenges with the term in both fields. Finally, it will explore how design anthropology might change the perspective on peoples' roles in services, particularly the people commonly referred to as 'users'.

1.1 Structure

The first section focuses on the user concept as it has evolved in design, with the aim of highlighting how service design is different from product design. In the next section, I describe how the user concept has developed in public services, in order to emphasize fundamental differences between public and private services. The third section points to key principles in design anthropology and explores how design anthropology might change the perspective of peoples' roles in services. Finally, I discuss which implications a design anthropology lens has on the 'user role' in design for public welfare services, and consequences for service design practice.

1.2 Definitions

This article adopts an anthropology approach to *services*, seeing them as an entangled "process of doing something for another party", rather than mere economical transactions [11]. Services do only make sense in relation to a social context, are not easily demarcated, and embedded in social institutions. According to Blomberg and Darrah, services are fulfilling a larger social purpose than simply the immediate individual benefit of the recipient or the provider, which resonates well with services in public sector.

Several definitions for *service design* exist. This article stays quite close to the perspective of Oliver King, describing service design as a "collaborative process of researching, envisaging and orchestrating experiences that happen over time and multiple touch points" [1]. A key characteristic of services is that they are *co-produced* by the people involved.

Human experience is defined as the emotional effects of services that impact people's life quality and well-being [7]. Human experience is then a broader concept than *user experience*, which can be defined as an interaction with technologies, typically a task within a shorter time frame than the longer "relationship" to a service.

A wide range of terms are applied to describe the role of people involved in public services and in the design process. *Stakeholders* are groups or individuals who can impact or who is affected by a service [12]. This article will focus on the narrower scope of people directly involved in the service, commonly called *users*. Inspired by Johan Redström, the article takes a design philosophical approach to the *user* as "something designers create", defined in relation to an object [6]. It is first when we start using a product that we become users.

Other terms are often applied as alternatives to 'user', and these are considered throughout the article (see figure 1): *Customer* and *consumer* are often applied in private sector, where somebody is paying for a service; *citizen* refers to our rights and responsibilities in the society [13]; *recipients* point to people as more passively receiving benefit in welfare system, while *actor* emphasize a person's responsibility for her own situation and in decision-making [14]; *partner* and *co-producer* is underlining the mutuality of people in respectively the design process and in the service itself [13], [15].
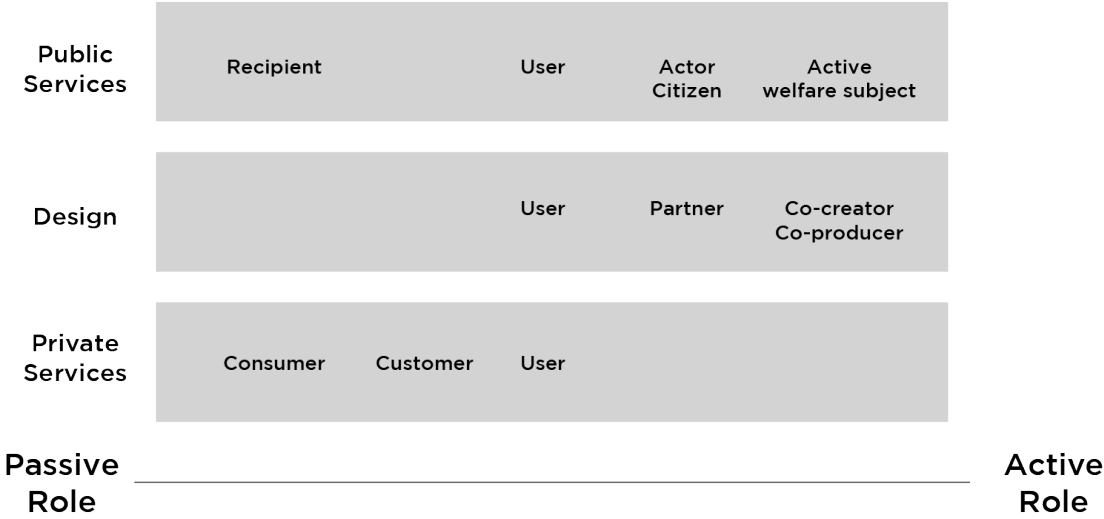

Figure 1: Alternatives to the 'user' term in services.

2. THE 'USER' IN DESIGN

2.1 The appearance of the 'user' in design

To develop useful, intuitive solutions based in real-world challenges, designers turn to potential 'users' of their solutions to come [16]. From an historical perspective, the people making the products and the people using them where closely related with each other, within time and space. The results were meaningful and useful to people when they were direct responses to visible needs, used within the same social context as they were created. For example, a skilled craftsman constructing horse wagons in a village would almost automatically have an understanding of the villagers needs after some time in the profession.

With the industrial revolution and globalized markets, the people using products and the ones producing them became more distanced from one another [16]. Mass production made it possible to fully conceive and plan a design before producing it. Thus, production and use – and design and production – became more separated from each other, leaving a gap of insecurity when trying to understand the 'users'. As a contrast to the

example with the artisan, a car designer would most likely not meet all the people she is designing for and therefore not have an immediate understanding of them. With Modernist movements, the idea of social responsibility became increasingly important in design, as a reaction to decorative traditions [6]. Design became a matter of designing the 'use' of objects.

During the last decades, there has been a shift from a rational, systematic design approach towards a more human-centered one, which has its roots in mainly two directions [2]: The development of a user-centered design approach within the field of human-computer interaction (HCI) in the 1980s [3] and the participatory design movement relating to the democratization of the workplace in the 1970's Scandinavia [17].

2.2 The 'user' in user-centered design

With the emergence of HCI in the 1970s it became more common to focus on human aspects in computer technology [3][2]. These early approaches to human-centered design were linear and logical processes with specific steps to follow, and with a focus on usability [4]. According to Jung-Joo Lee, people were in these steps reduced to *users* of technological systems, where the design goal was to make the interaction between people and systems efficient. Jinwoo Kim has characterized this first period as the *user interface* phase [3]. Here, the approach to involving people was quite narrow, and the research was often based on studying specific computer scenarios with one single 'user'.

The concept of 'user-centered design' became widespread by the 1990s [2], [3]. At this second stage, *user interaction* became increasingly important, exploring how a 'user' could respond to the user interface, and get a meaningful reaction [3]. This more holistic approach was laying the ground for a focus beyond efficiency and strict usability. Although interaction design is said to have moved beyond the mere stage of user-interface design and usability testing, the

field still seems to be limited by a traditional HCI approach, where the questions are how a 'user' use a predesigned technical artefact and how to make the artifact "usable" [10].

Kim describes the third phase of HCI as *design for human experiences*, characterized by a focus on people's perspective, holism and strategy [3]. This stage is opposed to the computer-oriented phase that was centered around what was objective and fragmented. Kim argues that today's design for human experiences goes beyond the mere 'user experience', because experiences are complex and encompass a wide range of products and services, such as physical space and web-based communication. Susan Gasson supports this view, by claiming that user-centered system development methods fail to address the human interests because they focus on solving predetermined problems [10].

2.2 The 'user' in participatory design

With the rise of automated processes, Scandinavian democratization movements in the 1970s were stressing the importance of letting the workers have their say in how their workplace should be shaped by participation and joint decision-making [17]. Compared to the HCI approach based on utility testing, the direction of participatory design has a tradition of seeing the user as a partner, rather than a subject [15].

Elizabeth Sanders has mapped the landscapes of human-centered design (see figure 2 on page 5). She shows how both the tradition of participatory design and user-centered design can be encompassed by human-centered design [2]. The two concepts are mapped on the basis of their approach to design as for, with or by the 'user'. User-centered design is characterized by having an expert mind-set, designing for 'users' [18]. Typically, data is collected and analyzed to guide the design process by specific principles, to meet the "needs" of 'users'. On the other side of the scale, the participatory approach favors design with and by the 'user', and includes concepts such as co-design, co-creation and co-production.

Here, people are actively involved as partners in the design process. Sanders herself argues that a user-centered design approach cannot address the increased complexity of challenges that designers face today. Designers are no longer designing products for "users" but designing for the future experiences of people.

2.3 Paradoxes of the 'user' in service design

As seen in the two previous sections, both the HCI field and the participative tradition are moving towards a mutual emphasis on design for the experience of people. Within the field of service design, people are no longer seen as mere sources of information, but they are increasingly involved in the design process and referred to as stakeholders, actors, participants and partners. But mostly, designers are still talking about 'users',

or 'the user *as* partner', like Sander puts it [15]. There is a risk of transferring the 'user' term directly from product and interaction design to service design without considering how this might lead to a language full of paradoxes. The following section highlights three challenges that follow when speaking of 'users' within the field of service design.

First, user-centered design does not equal human-centered design. Designers tend to mix these two and talk about 'users' although they claim to have a human-centered design approach with participatory methods. But as underlined by Redström, 'humans not users are the ones inhabiting the world' [6]. The 'user' only exists when there is an object to be used, and therefore the object or the thought of an object is prior to
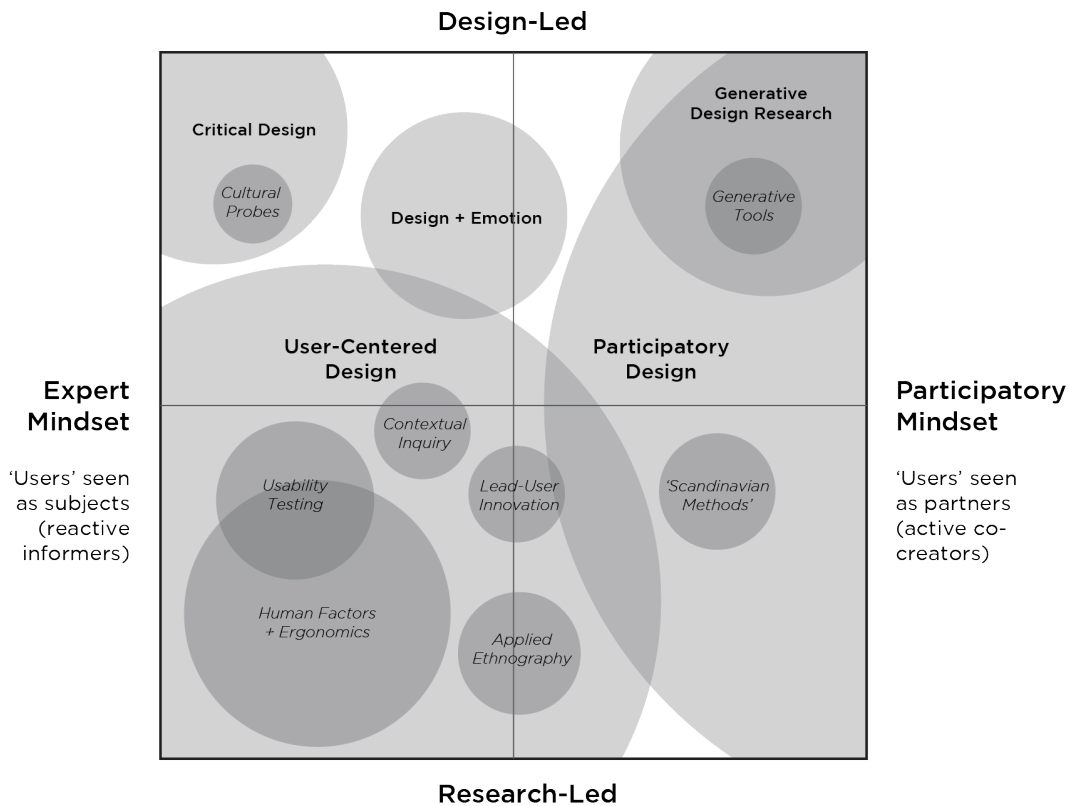

Figure 2: Map of design research and research types by Elizabeth Sanders [18]*.*

the users. A user-centered approach is thus per se an object-centric approach and it is limiting the role of people. This may represent a challenge

when designers want to focus on people and human-centered design.

Second, a service is not an object. The intangible nature of services might be a problem to the object-centric user term. A service is not a singular object in itself, but created in the encounters, interactions and relations between people, objects and systems in time and space [11]. This idea of mutuality and co-production questions whether it is possible to *use* a service.

Third, a service is not a pre-designed entity. However, as services become more complex, there has been a need to align the overall experience that encompasses its different functionalities [3]. The question might therefore be whether an *experience* can be designed. But an experience is subjective, as it depends on personal past and present perceptions. Accordingly, it cannot be designed. What is possible to design are the components of a service and plan the relationship between them so that a service is likely to evoke certain aspects of an experience in people. Service design is in that case closely related to design *for* human experiences, rather than user experience design. The active role of people in creating a service questions whether we can distinguish between 'users' and 'designers' of services.

3. THE 'USER' IN PUBLIC SECTOR

As in the area of design, the understanding of the user concept in public sector has evolved and changed during the last decades. There has been a shift from seeing people as passive receivers of welfare to 'active users' and 'welfare actors'[14], [19]–[21]. The following chapter briefly describes the evolution of the user term in the public sphere. This creates a background for discussing differences between private and the public services, and to what extent the 'user' term is adequate in social welfare services.

3.1 Consumerist and democratic traditions

The concept of user involvement in public sector has evolved from two different angles: the 'consumerist' tradition and the 'democratic'

tradition [13], [14], [21]. The welfare state was object of criticism from both the left and right wing in politics during the 1970s in western countries like the USA and Great Britain [13], [20], [21]. The Right claimed that is was too bureaucratic, inefficient, and that it should be more focused on individual choices, while the political left stressed its power over people, with their lack of possibility to influence it [13], [21].

The consumerist perspective linked to the Right was calling for freedom of choice and the public as a *provider* [13]. It was influenced by the private sector, and saw innovation as a key to develop flexible public services, responsive to the individual needs of the 'user', like customer-centered business [13], [20]. On the other hand, the democratic tradition stressed the importance of letting the users have a say, as it was anchored in the movement of empowerment, both in individual cases and in collective political issues [20].

Although they had different motivations, both the consumerist side and the democratic user movement were breaking with the traditional hierarchical model and were calling for a bottom-up approach [13], [20]. They emphasized the citizens as actors capable of articulating their own needs as active user in stead of passive recipients of welfare services [13], [22].

3.2 Terminology for people in public services

From the different political ideologies, various terms have evolved to designate the roles of people [22]. Fiona Williams describes the development of 'the active welfare subject', putting an emphasize on the shift towards individual differences and personal experiences [20], [21]. Based on the British system, she describes them as active consumers (neo liberalist ideology), active wage earners (New labour) and active citizens and users ('the new social movements'). Luise L. Langergaard has a similar approach, when describing how the role of the citizen in public services has changed. She classifies the approaches into the citizen as

'consumer', 'active user', and 'co-producer', where the responsiveness is exchanged by collaboration [13].

On the whole, people are increasingly seen as autonomic, creative individuals who are capable of being reflective and actively engaged in their own life [21]. This has led to the notion of 'actor' [14], [20], such as exemplified by Williams. Where 'user' describes a person in regard to her relation with a service, actor is applied in a wider sense than 'user', also referring to the person's life outside of the service [14]. However, all terms have their limits, and are applied to underscore different perspectives: 'Client' to underline the relation between the professional and the person seeking help; 'user' to give people more influence; and 'actor ' to show the idea of people as acting individuals [14].

3.3 Traditional and radical user participation

User participation or user involvement in public sector can be divided into two types: the traditional model and the radical one [23]. The following paragraphs take a closer look at the two of them, in order to understand what is meant by user participation in public welfare services.

The traditional model focuses on the *individual* case, stressing that the user should have their say when discussing their own situation [23]. For example, if a long-term unemployed man consults an advisor, the advisor will not just tell him what to do, but let him give his point of view on the alternatives to achieve pre-determined objectives. Although this goes further than the traditional professional-client approach, it is still tinted by a paternalist view where the professional knows what is most efficient.

The radical model, on the other hand, is more concerned with *collective* user participation [23], [24]. Users are seen as people who can influence the political processes to shape the services according to their needs, not only the decision-making in their individual case [13], [23], [24]. In this model, the people working for welfare

services are more like mentors who the users can reflect together with [23]. They do not see themselves as having all the answers, neither as providing a package of predetermined goals. An example would be if an unemployed person is considered capable of planning her own way towards getting a job. A session with an advisor would help her to map out her competence, rather than telling her how many jobs she must apply to.

An even more radical approach would be to include the person in the making of the strategy for how unemployed people should be assisted. This way, more responsibility is put on the user, and there is a true power shift between the parts, as compared to the traditional model [23]. The radical model is criticizing the expert role [23], as the user's own experiences is an equally important source of knowledge [19], [21], [25].

Considering the concept of empowerment, user participation can be described as the degree of control over the following factors [26]:

1. To decide that a problem exists
2. To define what the problem consists of
3. To decide if something should be done with the problem
4. To choose between different types of help
5. To initiate, maintain or stop the contact

When looking at the list, collective user participation in political decisions might be placed between 1 and 3, while the traditional model with its focus on the individual case could be situated between 4 and 5. As for design, involving people in deciding and designing what type of service is needed would typically be more radical than designing a service where the users are encouraged to influence their own case.

3.4 Paradoxes of the 'user' in public sector

As private services often are seen as more responsive, innovative and customer-centered [13], it might be tempting to imitate them when

designing for public services. However, there are some fundamental differences between public and private services. Public services are inherently collective, as opposed to private services, and this influences the role of people and how designers are working with services. For instance, a strong focus on subjective experiences and the state as a provider to cover individual needs, might be in conflict with the view of public sector as an administer of collective interests serving equality [13], [21]. The user-centeredness as understood in private sector should thus be considered more closely before directly applied to public services [13]. The following section highlights three fundamental differences between private and public services.

First, the 'user' is not always right in public sector. Public services might be moving towards an 'active user' approach, but they are still *two-sided services*. Social welfare services are characterized by an asymmetrical power relation between the people working for the services and the other citizens [23], [24]. On the one hand, the aim of welfare services is to help people, making them capable of living a worthy life. On the other hand, people working for these services are managers of power and control, as they are expected to administer the collective resources of the welfare state in an efficient way [27]. This has traditionally led to a paternalist view, making a clear distinction between the helper and the one being helped [21], [23].

As a receiver of help, people then have limited opportunity to influence the nature of the help, which creates a power imbalance. The inequality might lead to 'institutional humiliation', which means the violation of a person's self respect [23]. In private services however, the relation might also be asymmetrical, but the person in theory has more power and influence, as the business' income relies on the customer and the customer can choose another service.

Second, public sector is *not solely a provider* of services covering individual needs [13]. There is a tension between universalism and uniqueness in public services. The welfare system might be experienced as rigid and not open to individual differences. As in the example above, an unemployed resourceful person might feel that his individual needs are not very well met by the social welfare service. Although the lack of flexibility might be seen as a weakness of public sector, there is a reason why bureaucracy has been important. Bureaucracy represents a uniform model that embodies procedures to ensure values like equal treatment, justice and fairness. It does not privilege personal preferences.

User-centeredness breaks with this model, as it encourages personalized services based on subjective experiences [13]. It is therefore important to underline that although 'user' involvement may strengthen the relationship between public sectors and citizens, it also imposes a risk on the democratic values that a bureaucratic system is there to ensure. 'User' influence is therefore not automatically democratic, as it is based on individuals [13]. However, it *can* be democratic, if there are enough individuals consulted who then represent the greater public.

Lastly, public services are *not 'consumable'*, as they rely on expectations about mutual responsibility and engagement [13], [19]. On the one side, the 'welfare actor' is responsible for her own life. This is emphasizing the individual freedom, but equally a duty to actively engage in the service, as highlighted in Langergaard's description of the co-producer role [13]. For the example of the unemployed person, she does not directly pay for the welfare service herself. It is a service paid for by collective resources, and as a citizen she therefore has a responsibility for making the most out of these resources by being a genuine job seeker [28]. This includes an obligation to actively seek jobs and participate in measures initiated by the service. On the other hand, the welfare system is responsible for following her up, which sometimes involves measures that are involuntary from the perspective of the 'welfare actor' [19], [27]. Thus,

there has to be a balance between the respect for a person's autonomy and the responsibility for this person [27].

4. THE 'USER' IN DESIGN ANTHROPOLOGY

We have now seen how concepts from sub-disciplines like product and interaction design cannot be directly transferred to service design, and how public welfare services are different from private services. This chapter aims at explaining how the principles of *contextualization*, *human-centeredness* and *design as grown* in design anthropology may change the perspective of the 'user' term when designing for public welfare services.

Design anthropology is an emerging academic field that combines theories and practice from the two disciplines, with an emphasis on learning from each other [29], [30]. In the formal service sector, there has been given a prominence to the rational, professional and linear approach to the way services function and are developed. Design anthropology offers an alternative lens on service design [11], [31], privileging improvisation and design in collaboration with the 'user-*cum*-producer': the idea that people through processes of enactment become skilled practitioners rather then passive consumers [29].

4.1 Design and anthropology

Design and anthropology can be seen as complimentary disciplines. Generally, the aim of anthropology has been to *describe* reality, to "produce generalizations and theorizations of human societies" [30], while design's purpose has been to *transform* reality. Anthropology is the "comparative study of culture and society, with a focus on "local life", the "native's point of view" and understanding connections [32]. Designers are concerned with creation, innovation and future making [17]. They translate abstract insights into tangible, material solutions [30]. Design can be seen as a process of simplification,

where a rich material is boiled down to a finalized product. As a contrast, the aim of anthropology is to "show how the world is richer and more complex than it is usually assumed to be", as phrased by the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen [32].

4.2 Design anthropology

Traditionally, the major relation between design and anthropology has been through ethnography [16], [30]. The new field of *design anthropology* represents a shift, as anthropology is not just about informing design but about reframing it [29]. An example is the use of ethnography, as it is not seen as just a method, but as a way of engaging *with* people as a source to transformation [33]. Design anthropologists are interested in how people *transform* their lives through everyday activities, and acknowledge people as participants who contribute with valuable knowledge and experience [30]. The focus is shifted away from problem solving and towards engaging with people, where a problem is not always given [29].

Design anthropology is moving back and forth between theory and practice. It brings theory from anthropology into design practice, and design practice into anthropological theory [33]. This way, it is being both constructive and descriptive, as it is drawing people into processes of designing, to make tangible what "allows people to keep on going" [29]. It explores how designers can work towards transformation without sacrificing depth of understanding and empathy [30], and how anthropology can become more directed towards change, not just description[33].

The academic field of design anthropology is concerned with the institutionalization of insights, and how these are made tangible [29]. Design can be defined as the process of conceiving an idea and giving "structure and function to that idea" [34]. But what happens then when the aim of design is no longer simple products but highly complex services that are entangled, ongoing

processes of interactions between people, objects and technologies [11] [5]? Design anthropology gives a framework for working towards transformation without sacrificing depth of understanding and empathy [30].

4.3 Anthropological principles for service design

Design anthropology focuses on central anthropological principles which may help designers gain a deeper understanding of design for public services. The following paragraphs present three key perspectives from design anthropology, with the aim of discussing how they contribute to reconsider the 'user' term in design for public welfare services.

First, design anthropology stresses the importance of *contextualization*. Service are complex as they are intertwined in people's life in a chaotic socio-cultural society [11]. Since design deals with simplification in the translation of insights, there is a risk of what Eriksen describes as fragmentation and *decontextualization* of data. Anthropology might serve as a counterweight to this simplification, as it is concerned with a deep understanding of "how single phenomena are connected to other phenomena and institutions in an integrated whole" [32]. With the focus on local life and the concept of cultural relativism, anthropologists argue that every culture has to be understood on its own terms.

Second, anthropology is about understanding people [32], it is thus inherently *human-centered*. Several authors within the field of design anthropology are concerned about the 'stickiness' of object-centric approaches as designers are starting to work with services. When working with services, designers are not always questioning whether assumptions made about products automatically can be transferred to services [11]. Or as Akama and Prendiville pertinently remark it, "what is holding back service design from making a distinct departure from a product-centered to a socio-material human-centered framework?" [5]. The 'user' term should be discussed before

applied in service design, as the user term continues to presuppose a designed object [11].

Third, design anthropologists see design as *continuously grown*, rather than built [29]. Their field aims at discussing and building closer relations between using and producing, designing and using, and people and things. Services are simultaneously produced and consumed, and people are therefore become co-producers and co-creators of value in services, rather than 'recipients' [11]. This co-creation of services implies an ongoing process of transformation, which means that there is design during planning time but also 'design in use', referring to the active role of people in shaping the service in 'use time' [17]. When breaking the distinctions between designing, using and producing, the user goes from being a passive 'consumer' to a skilled practitioner of systems and products, learning as she goes along – the 'user-*cum*-producer' [29].

The next section will discuss implications from these three perspectives for the 'user' term in design practice.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN PRACTICE

What implications does design anthropology have on designers' understanding of the 'user' in social welfare services? Service design as a human-centered, contextualized and continuously grown process lays the ground for this discussion. The field of design anthropology questions the roles of the 'designer', the 'user' and the service 'provider', aiming at building closer relations between using and producing, designing and using, and people and things [29].

Blomberg and Darrah has called for an anthropology of services that examines "the situated practices of designers and their relation to a broad range of actors who animate the service" [11]. Recognizing services as integrated in everyday-life as a part of our social reality is important, as this social reality is created principally through social relationships between

people and the groups they belong to [32]. It follows from anthropology that a deep understanding of people and context then is central to service design.

5.1 Service design as human-centred

How does design anthropology argue for a human-centered approach to service design, instead of a user-centered approach? Service design is still struggling with the transition from object-centered to human-centered. User-centered design can be included in the concept of human-centered design, but it limits the scope of design. A user-centered focus might favor a traditional usability approach, where humans are reduced to users that interact with products or technological systems [4]. Then, designers are ignoring the wider social context of people in services. They risk to focus on what *can* be designed, instead of taking a human-centered approach which is concerned with what *should* be designed and why [10]. Design therefore needs to be anchored in an understanding of the culture and context of people.

Here, anthropology can contribute, as it is by definition "the comparative study of culture and society, with a focus on local life" [32]. While design has been concerned with the making of new "things" as material objects, design anthropology is interested in "Things" as socio-cultural assemblies [17]: How people relate to the surrounding environment, sense-making and relationships between people.

Today, service design is often conceptualized from the business and information technology perspective. However, this limits the focus of design [11]. At the same time, design itself might limit its own scope if it continues to see services from an object-centric perspective. When transferring the principle of contextualization to service design, it reveals a challenge with design methods. Service design is not a set of fixed steps with predefined outcomes and sequential interactions, but an ongoing transformative process, where we are designing ourselves

together with others [5]. Methods cannot be separated from context and generalized for all service design projects. It might even stand in the way of having a human-centered approach [4], [5]. The chapter about the 'user' in design highlighted three aspects:

1. The 'user' term is by definition object-centric, and user-centered does not equal human-centered. Human-centered design is a wider concept, with roots both in 'usability' and in 'participatory design'.
2. Services are not objects, but created in intangible encounters and interactions between people, objects and systems.
3. Services are not pre-designed entities, because there is a limit to what can be designed and planned out in advance.

All three aspects show clearly that services are dealing with *people* as prior to objects. Methodology in service design is therefore closer to the participative roots of a human-centered design, than the 'usability' approach. Aspect 2 and 3 also highlights people's active role in services. Number 2 points gives basis to the importance of human interaction over objects in services. This leads to the understanding that people themselves are *co-creating* the value of services by *co-producing* them. The unpredictability of people stresses the fact that there is a limit to what can be designed and planned out in advance by designers. This is reflected in service design's emphasis on co-design and co-creation. As a summary, this gives two insights. First, the 'user' term might be problematic because services not are 'used' but 'co-produced'. Second, this implies that services cannot be designed in the traditional way that focuses on material outcomes, but 'co-created' together with people that are involved in the service.

5.2 Service design as contextualized

We have seen how services in public sector are different from services in private sector, and how design anthropology underlines the importance of contextualization to understand every culture on

its own terms. Public welfare services are per se collective and an organization such as NAV can be considered a culture [35]. This has several implications on how designers should understand the concept of 'users' in the context of public welfare services:

1. Public welfare services are *two-sided services*. This leads to an asymmetrical power relation. As an example, NAV's employees are at the same time 'mentoring' job-seekers and 'surveying' that they do what is required to receive unemployment benefit.
2. The role of public welfare services is not primarily to cover individual needs. They are democratic and bureaucratic to ensure uniformity and equal treatment of all citizens, and administration of collective resources. Therefore, they may not be as flexible as private services to meet personal preferences.
3. Public welfare services are not 'consumable'. Considering the example of NAV, the job-seeker is a benefit 'recipient' benefit but equally expected to be an active 'welfare-subject'.

From a design anthropology perspective, the welfare services of NAV therefore must be understood on their own terms. As opposed to most private services, the goal of NAV is to make job-seekers self-reliant so that they *don't* need the service, or at least not the physical meetings [28]. To avoid passive 'consumers', NAV therefore wants people to actively engage in their situation, mostly *outside of* the service. This makes it challenging to speak of 'users' instead of 'co-creators' or 'co-producers'. At the same time, NAV employees have their distinct role as 'managers' of the common welfare budget. From this perspective, it is therefore equally problematic to speak of 'users' or 'co-creators' instead of 'recipients'. There will always be an asymmetrical power relation between the employees of NAV and the people consulting the service.

The two-sidedness of NAV's services where job-seekers are both "controlled" as 'receivers' of benefit and expected to be self-reliant as active 'welfare subjects' reveals a paradox: the 'user' term might be at the same time too radical and not radical enough. When calling job-seekers 'users' of 'user-centered' services, this may hide the asymmetrical power relation, where people can be forced to follow measures involuntarily. At the same time, it may hide the fact that resourceful job-seekers are expected to be active in their own situation and do most of the 'work' on their own.

5.3 Service design as "continuously grown"

The concept of human-centeredness stresses the active role of people in shaping services, while the concept of contextualization underlines the importance of seeing the specificities of a service to understand the roles of people. But what do design anthropologists understand by service design as *continuously grown*?

First, service design is not a fixed set of methods. Akama and Prenidville are concerned about designers' inclination towards seeing service design as a static process of given methods or specific interactions [5]. They equally criticize designers' tendency of detaching insights from enactment with people. Building on the anthropologist Tim Ingold's work, they argue that we must "resituate services as an organic, co-created process and see co-design as a journey and process of transformation in how we design our world, and ourselves, with others". Instead of seeing services from a rational, linear perspective as adopted from business and information technology, Ingold opens up for complexity and improvisation in the design process of services: "The social world as a tangle of threads or life-paths, ever ravelling here or unravelling there, within which the task for any being is to improvise a way through" [36]. In other words, as services are intertwined in our complex social world, service design must not be reduced to a generic methods with fragmented staged workshops [4].

Second, service design is an ever-ending process of learning with people, rather than finalized in material "usable" outcomes. Design anthropology draws attention to the limits to the conceptualization of services as objects [11]. Service design is as much about the transformation and knowledge of people as the objects that enable them. Designers risk to distance themselves from the people in the service when they talk about 'users', as well as if they are too focused on the finalized material outcome [5]. They then miss seeing the potential of service design as a co-creative process of transformation together with the people involved in the service. Designers should focus more on engaging with people, and less on the 'users' and the objects as separated from their social context.

Lastly, with the perspective on people as co-creators, co-producers of services comes the discussion about the limits of designers' *intentionality*, as humans are unpredictable [37]. Blomberg and Darrah questions to what extent designers have the ability to control the outcome, and equally how much they *should* control the outcome [11]. Designers lives in a world that is largely designed and constructed by others. They should therefore have respect for other people's knowledge about their local context and re-consider what 'unintended' outcomes actually means. They should rather be concerned with how they can align their desires and intentions with the dreams and desires of "those who will be engaging with the outputs of designing" [29].

From the previous paragraphs, we can extract three characteristics about service design as continuously grown that affect the adequacy of the 'user' term:

1. Service design is not a fixed set of methods, but a co-creative process where there is not a clear demarcation between 'provider', 'designer' and 'user'. Calling people 'users' might favor a more linear approach to design instead of encouraging improvisation with people. It might also conceal that 'providers' often

are *using* their own systems, that 'users' are co-*producing* the value of services, and that designers should be co-designing with people rather than distance themselves from them.

2. Service design is a continuous process of learning, rather than finalized in material outcome. Focusing on 'users' might make designers unaware of their role of engaging with people at all stages in the process, because the process has to be anchored in people.

3. Service designers' role is to orchestrate peoples' intentions, rather than projecting their own intentions onto the service. A user-centered mind-set breaks with this view, as it is more concerned about designing *for* specific use.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The article has shown how design anthropology can reframe the understanding of the 'user' term in design for public welfare services. Three implications follows:

1. Design anthropology argues that services are inherently *human-centred*, and thus not object-centric. Service designers should therefore have a holistic focus on people rather than limiting themselves to 'users'.

2. Design anthropology focuses on *contextualisation* as in *complexity*. The emphasis on complexity might serve as a counterweight to a rational, linear process. This suggests that service designers should be open to improvisation and adopt a participatory mind-set, rather than a 'usability' approach with 'users'.

3. Design anthropology focuses on *contextualization* as in *local life*. The importance of "local life" stresses that every service is unique and highlights that its culture therefore should be understood on its own premises. The

complex roles of people within a given service context should not be oversimplified by calling all people 'users'.

4. Design is seen as *grown* rather than built. This portraits service design as an ongoing process of transformation, where the aim is as much designing ourselves, others and the world around us, as creating final material outcomes. The 'user' term does not sufficiently cover the roles of people as 'co-creators', 'co-designers' or 'co-producers' of services.

Designers might argue that their understanding of people in services is holistic and not in conflict with referring to them as 'users'. But if they claim having a holistic, human-centered approach, it can be questioned whether the object-centric 'user' term is the adequate word for designating the role of people. It might be misleading and should be considered carefully when applied. For example, it might make sense to talk about 'users' of a specific 'object' of the service, like a website. As a contrast, applying the word 'user' in the beginning of the design process, might limit the scope and make designers forget that services are integrated in people's life, and not easily demarcated systems. It is not always obvious whether an activity is situated inside a service system or outside. Consider the example of the unemployed job-seeker: designers must have an understanding of her life situation and not just how she interacts with the existing web-based service system.

Words shape designer's understanding of reality and their role in design. Thus, terminology should be reviewed and changed if necessary as the understanding of service design evolves. The 'user' term is not inadequate by default. However, it is simplifying the world of services, and a variety of other terms might be more adequate and specific, depending on the specific context.

To conclude with a final example from 'user-interviews' in the project with NAV: it just doesn't make sense calling an unemployed job-seeker a 'user', when he hasn't yet consulted NAV's services. He might be a potential 'user'. But when the interview centers around his personal experience of loosing the job, independently of NAV's services, he should rather be called a 'job-seeker'. Or just a person.

REFERENCES

[1]   O. King and B. Mager, "Methods and Processes of Service Design," *Touchpoint*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2009.

[2]   E. B.-N. Sanders and P. J. Stappers, "Co-creation and the new landscapes of design," *CoDesign*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 5–18, 2008.

[3]   J. Kim, *Design for experience: Where Technology meets Design and Strategy*. Springer International Publishing, 2014.

[4]   J.-J. Lee, *Against Method: The Portability of Method in Human- Centered Design*. Helsinki: Aalto University publication, 2012.

[5]   Y. Akama and A. Prendiville, "a phenomenological view to co-designing services Embodying , enacting and entangling design," *Swedish Des. Res. J.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 29–40, 2013.

[6]   J. Redström, "Towards user design? on the shift from object to user as the subject of design," *Des. Stud.*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 123–139, 2006.

[7]   A. Polaine, L. Løvlie, and B. Reason¨, *Service Design : From Insight to Implementation*. New York: Rosenfeld Media, 2013.

[8]   S. Bechmann, *Servicedesign*. Århus: Academica, 2010.

[9]   Y. Akama, "Warts-and-all: the real practice of service design," *First Nord. Conf. Serv. Des. Serv. Innov. Oslo 24th-26th Nov 2009*, vol. 61, no. 0, pp. 1–11, 2009.

[10]   S. Gasson, "Human-Centered vs. User-Centered Approaches to Information System Design," *J. Inf. Technol. Theory Appl.*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 29–46, 2003.

[11]   J. Blomberg and C. Darrah, "Toward an Anthropology of Services," 2014.

[12]   R. E. Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Marshfield: Pitman Publishing, 1984.

[13]   L. L. Langergaard, "Innovating the publicness of the public sector: A critical, philosophical discussion of public sector innovation: Institute for Communication, Business and Information Technologies," no. August, pp.

108–129, 2011.

[14] M. Sandbæk, "Fra mottaker til aktør. Brukernes plass i praktisk sosial arbeid og forskning," in *Fra mottaker til aktør; Brukernes plass i praktisk sosial arbeid og forskning*, 1st ed., M. Sandbæk, Ed. Oslo: Forlag, Gyldendal Norsk.

[15] E. B.-N. Sanders and P. J. Stappers, "Co-creation and the new landscapes of design," *CoDesign*, vol. 4, no. 1. pp. 5–18, 2008.

[16] R. J. F. M. Van Veggel, "Where the Two Sides of Ethnography Collide," *Des. Issues*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 3–16, 2005.

[17] E. Bjögvinsson, P. Ehn, and P.-A. Hillgren, "Design Things and Design Thinking: Contemporary Participatory Design Challenges," *Des. Issues*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 101–116, 2012.

[18] E. B. Sanders, "ON MODELING An evolving map of design practice and design research," *Interactions*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 13–17, 2008.

[19] J. Storø, "Det problematiske brukerperspektivet," *Embla*, no. 3, 2003.

[20] F. Williams, "Posisjonering av velferdsbrukeren innen forskning: Fra passive mottaker til velferdsaktør," in *Fra mottaker til aktør; Brukernes plass i praktisk sosial arbeid og forskning*, 1st ed., M. Sandbæk, Ed. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2001.

[21] F. Williams, J. Popay, and A. Oakley, "Changing Paradigms of Welfare," in *Welfare Research: A Critical Review*, 1st ed., London: UCL Press, 1999.

[22] E. O. Eriksen, *Den offentlige dimensjon: verdier og styring i offentlig sektor*. Oslo: Tano, 1993.

[23] L. J. Solheim, "Sosialhjelp, sjølvrespekt og meistring," in *Fra mottaker til aktør; Brukernes plass i praktisk sosial arbeid og forskning*, 1st ed., M. Sandbæk, Ed. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2001.

[24] T. Slettebø and S. Seim, "Barnevernet, Brukermedvirkningens kår under nye rammebetingelser i," in *Fra mottaker til aktør; Brukernes plass i praktisk sosial arbeid og forskning*, 1st ed., M. Sandbæk, Ed. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2001.

[25] I. Aamodt, "Den nødvendige uroa – en kritikk av brukerbegrepets uutholdelige letthet," *Nord. Sos. Arb.*, no. 4, 2006.

[26] R. Rønning and L. J. Solheim, *Hjelp på egne premisser? : om brukermedvirkning i velferdssektoren*, 1st ed. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1998.

[27] M. Sandbæk, "Kan barnevernstjenesten forholde seg til barn som både brukere og aktører?," in *Fra mottaker til aktør; Brukernes plass i praktisk sosial arbeid og forskning*, 1st ed., M. Sandbæk, Ed. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2001.

[28] S. Vågeng, H. R. Eriksen, I. Ihme, S. Markussen, N. Pedersen, E. Stene, and I. Sæther, "Et NAV med muligheter. Bedre brukermøter, større handlingsrom og tettere på arbeidsmarkedet," 2015.

[29] W. Gunn and J. Donovan, "Design Anthropology : An Introduction," in *Design and Anthropology*, Ashgate, 2012, pp. 1–13.

[30] T. Otto and R. C. Smith, "Design Anthropology: A Distinct Style of Knowing," in *Design Anthropology: Theory and Practice*, W. Gunn, T. Otto, and R. C. Smith, Eds. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

[31] A. Prendiville, J. Jung, and E. U. N. Yu, "Design for Service Innovation & Development Final Report," 2014.

[32] T. H. Eriksen, *What is Anthropology?*, 1st ed. London: Pluto Press, 2004.

[33] W. Gunn, T. Otto, and R. C. Smith, *Design Anthropology: Theory and Practice*, 1st ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

[34] E. Stolterman and H. G. Nelson, *The Design Way: Intentional Change in an Unpredictable World*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 2003.

[35] S. Wright, *The Anthropology of Organizations*, 1st ed. Oxford: Routledge, 1994.

[36] T. Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

[37] J. Halse, "Design Anthropology: Borderland Experiments with Participation, Performance and Situated Intervention," no. March, 2008.