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# User centered methodologies in design for social improvement: The case study of Prishtina

Key words / Social Innovation, Design for Social Improvement, Design for communities, User Centered Design, Design Methodologies

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## Abstract

*User Centered Design, also known as UCD, allows designing solutions that are able to satisfy the requirements expressed by the users, intended as people that have to do with the product in every stage of its life. This specific approach can be also useful in the design of services and processes that need to consider the user experience as a fundamental stage of the project. UCD was therefore considered a proper method to be applied to public administrations' work, to provide inclusive and effective services and facilities to citizens, in order to improve their wellbeing.*

*The city of Prishtina, the new capital of Kosova, was considered an interesting example of a city with unsolved issues that could get a great advantage applying a User Centered approach to the design of public services, because of its social and multicultural identity that makes UCD suitable to answer to users' needs.*

*In this chapter the author proposes some topics on which it would be necessary to design and apply new innovative development strategies.*

## Introduction

The world is changing very fast, people are discovering new needs, technologies are developing faster and faster, the Internet of Things and smart devices are opening new scenarios for the design of new ways of living and managing people's wellbeing. This condition makes it necessary to question about traditional design methodologies and to think of new ways of designing services, strategies and processes besides products.

This chapter aims to investigate the possible ways of applying User Centered Design methodologies to bring social innovation in new communities.

An analysis will be made on how this kind of approach is successfully applicable to the design of innovative

public services for communities with unsolved issues: in particular, the city of Prishtina, in Kosova will be analyzed as a case study.

## Social innovation in complex systems

Nowadays, the word "innovation" is used so frequently and in so many different fields, that it is quite difficult to associate it with something practical. We can try to define it in the specific field of social issues, in order to define "social innovation" in a way that makes it easier to figure out how to make this innovation tangible. Obviously, there is not a correct definition, but we can quote the European Commission describing social innovation as "something that concerns social problems, and how to create effective tools and solutions to

issues that can impact on a significant part of the population, enhancing their quality of life" (Caulier-Grice, Davies, Patrick, Norman, 2012). Another definition is the one that describes social innovation as the circumstance where new ideas simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations; in other words, "there is innovation when there are both something good for the society and an enhancement of society's ability to act" (Murray, Caulier-Grice, Mulgan, 2010).

Social problems that we can try to solve using a design approach are various, but the ones we are interested in are related to dynamics between different groups of people, with different necessities and different aims, sometimes in conflict. Furthermore, social problems are a natural consequence of the complexity of our society; the context we are analyzing concerns social innovation within complex systems, mainly characterized by two important features (Westley, Zimmerman, Patton, 2006): the first one is that there are so many variables in the system just like citizens, regulations, resources... with peculiarities that are so different that is hard to describe them in a common scheme; the second feature generating a huge amount of consequences, more significant than the previous one, is that those elements are interacting with each other so much and in so many different ways and perspectives that the system's complexity goes out of control.

However, it's important to point out that, at the end, every system has order in its structure: sometimes, we are able to understand fragments of its pillars, other times to recognize patterns, but we are never able to interpret and describe the relationships between causes and effects in a complex system: one cause may have many effects, maybe in different fields that don't seem to be related; and one effect may have been generated by a

concurrency of causes that makes it difficult to define which ones have the most effective impact on the whole system.

There are some methodologies, belonging to the design field, that can help us to interpret more effectively the system we are referring to, to guess part of its hidden structure and create a connection with people belonging to that community.

### **User centered design (UCD), Approach and inclusive Administrations**

The User Centered Design approach allows developing solutions focused on people's needs and requirements (ISO 13407, 1999): the user of the service is no longer intended only as a final user, but more generally as a person who is in contact with the product or service during one or more phases of its life cycle (Mincoelli, 2008). Based on this perspective, the output of the process also changes: it will not consider only final products or services anymore, but the total experience that the user enjoys at each stage of the project's life cycle will be designed, from ideation to realization, use and disposal.

The added value in applying User Centered Design is that it facilitates users not requiring them to adapt their attitudes and behaviors in order to learn how to use the service, but the service itself is conceived to support and encourage the user to accomplish tasks, giving him a more efficient, satisfying and user-friendly experience (Goodman, Langdon, Clarkson, 2007).

The European Union set to its countries a strategic goal for the year 2020: all administrations and public institutions in the European Union will need to be inclusive in an efficient way, and provide end-to-end digital public services, personalized and intuitive for all citizens and businesses<sup>1</sup>.

The use of innovative design approaches makes it possible to

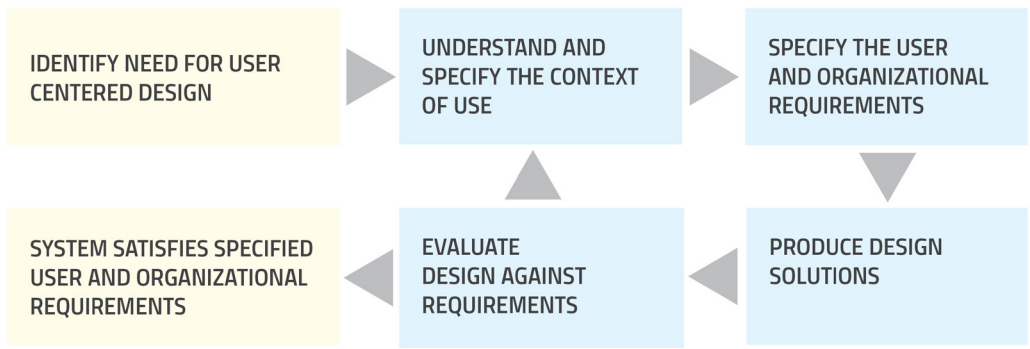


Fig1 / The different stages of the User Centered Design process. Source / author

provide better services, in line with the needs of citizens. Public administrations can take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new digital environment, to interact easily with the actors involved in the process. Some European countries already begun to design public services applying this approach, and applications are demonstrating how effective can be this multidisciplinary way of working, to develop shared solutions with a significant impact on communities (Agenzia per l'Italia Digitale, 2018).

The public service offered to the citizen must concern the fulfillment of real needs, which can improve people's life and the relationship with institutions, to avoid unnecessary and repetitive interactions preserving and collecting the information provided in a safe and transparent way. The strategy that the European Union has currently adopted for the public administration, aims to provide accessible and inclusive services, so simple and intuitive services that citizens get to prefer them to traditional ones.

### Case study: Prishtina

Designing efficient public services considering users' requirements and feedbacks, using the UCD approach,

can be even more effective if adopted by countries with unsolved issues that need over all to create a sense of belonging and a sense of community between citizens.

A good example of country that could take a great advantage from this approach is Kosova, which gained its independence only 10 years ago after a long troubled period of uncertainties and disorders.

On 17th of February 2008, the assembly of Kosova announced the independence of the country publishing the Declaration of Independence of Kosova and formalizing the new flag<sup>2</sup>. The flag has a blue background on which the shape of the state in yellow is represented, and there are six white stars that represent the different ethnic main groups that live in the country: Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Roma, Bosnians and Gorans<sup>3</sup>. At present the self-proclaimed independence of Kosova, after various events, is recognized by several UN member states.

The city of Prishtina, as a young capital of the new independent country of Kosova, needs to create its development strategies, apply effective tools, reinvent its identity as a Capital City and discover its own

<sup>1</sup> / The European Digital Agenda, signed by all Member States and endorsed by the European Commission in 2010, sets out the objectives for developing the digital economy and culture in Europe under the EU 2020 strategy. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuld=FTU\\_2.4.3.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuld=FTU_2.4.3.html)

<sup>2</sup> / The Declaration of Independence of Kosova was promoted and signed by the members of the Assembly of Kosova, the 17th of February 2008.

<sup>3</sup> / The history of the Kosovar flag is described by Kosova Unity Team in the Competition for the Flag and Emblem of Kosova, Prishtina, 2007.





Fig2 / Installation in the city center of Prishtina for the 10th anniversary of Independence of Kosova .  
Source / author



Fig3 / Installation in the city center of Prizren for the 10th anniversary of Independence of Kosova .  
Source / author

potentials towards the creation of an inclusive and sustainable future perspective, becoming a competitive capital of the Balkans region. Indeed, Prishtina has a great underdeveloped potential, which shall be identified and used as the base for cultural, social, urban and economic development (Archis, 2010). Some of the potentials identified by the author are:

### 1. Young population

Nowadays, the average age of Kosova people is 23: it means that this country has the youngest population all over Europe. It's easy to understand how deeply the future of this country is related to the viable opportunities that it will be able to offer to the population, and how this huge amount of youths is a priceless resource for a sound right growth of the country, establishing a

new identity of Kosova as an innovative European country.

## 2. Cultural facilities

The improvement of the cultural tangible and digital network is actually essential and indispensable for a capital city. Prishtina needs to focus on the peculiarities that can distinguish it from the other Kosova cities, developing the cultural aspects that are part of its tradition and folklore, in order to gain two objectives: to encourage inhabitants to identify themselves as Kosova citizens, and to transmit people out of the country that Kosova is reborn with a new interesting personality, that deserves to be known all around Europe, with the aims of attracting tourism related to cultural events and enhancing the academic training network thanks to agreements and relationships with foreign institutes and relevant personalities.

## 3. Architectural heritage

The architectural heritage in Kosova is another extremely important resource, both to build the identity mentioned before, and to empower tourism to give it an economic relevance. Historical and archeological sites need to be preserved and to be available for Kosova and foreign visitors, in Prishtina there are several interesting modern architectures that need to be valorized because they have a significant role in the process of independence of Kosova. There are even several buildings used for sports and winter sports activities that are very popular in that region and can represent another attractive pole in Prishtina hosting international events.

These potentials are great opportunities to be developed and supported by sharing with the population the ideation of development guidelines for the country, to choose how to invest in order to have the best impact on overall future development.

## Designing Prishtina

User Centered Design would be useful to identify the first needs to be satisfied to improve citizens' quality of life; a set of main topics could be established on which it is possible to apply design methods to find concrete shared solutions to apply.

These topics could be:

### Environment:

The numerous young people living in Prishtina, and more generally in Kosova, identifiable as the new Kosovar generation, deserve a better and healthier environment where to live. The most important problem is related to water pollution, especially in rivers and basins, and air pollution is mainly concentrated in urban areas; it's generated largely by industries and now there's a lack of regulation applicable to avoid this situation.

### Local Development

The Kosova territory is unique and needs to be preserved from the uncontrolled growth of infrastructures of poor quality of design and realization, and unplanned buildings. It's absolutely necessary to invest on urban planning and landscape to catch the opportunity to drive the development in the best direction. Also, local economy needs to be encouraged and promoted to raise employment rates and give to people the chance to have a satisfying employment in their own country.

### Public Facilities

The government of Kosova has a lot of work to carry out in the next future to manage the growth of the state planning strategies and development; it's important to define priorities and then to focus on strategies of application.

Firstly, it's necessary to improve the existing education network in order to increase programs and education facilities at every level of the education system. Children need to enjoy stimulating school programs





Fig4 / First suburbs of Prishtina, the city is expanding without an effective urban planning.  
Source / author



Fig5 / The public library of Prishtina. Source / author

to be encouraged in continuing studies; young students need to have international experiences at high levels and university needs more space, funds, facilities and professors to make Prishtina an important center for research and academic education. Even the healthcare system needs to be improved to face problems related to pollution and to give a better living to the population.

### Urban improvement

In Kosovo, cities are growing in a fast and uncontrolled way: especially in Prishtina lots of people are moving from the countryside

to the urban area, generating a request of accommodations that is currently satisfied by the unplanned construction of entire neighborhoods like dormitory districts. The city needs to be planned wisely before it will be too late, providing a solution for a long term development and preserving the relevant architectural heritage.

### Inclusive social growth

Young generations are the first users of the product "new state of Kosovo". It's necessary to improve their user experience in growing there and becoming smart citizens of Europe, aware of their cultural origin and able to



Fig6 / Palace of Youth and Sports, Prishtina, Kosova . Source / author

enrich the cultural heritage of Kosova . Other categories of users that need a special support are elderly, disabled persons, and all people needing special assistance; the public administration has to provide them appropriate services, facilities and public spaces.

### International relationships

For Kosova being part of the international scene is significant, it really has many points of interest maybe not valorized properly. There is a lack of international exchange programs for students and professionals, although there are people visiting Prishtina for personal interest, research purposes... this needs to be institutionalized and promoted for a significant international growth of the country.

### Skilled professionals

Everything said before, to be feasible, needs to be designed by multidisciplinary teams of skilled and experienced professionals, with capabilities in team working methods. These groups will share the project with the community, to be sure that the final services, or development guidelines, or social initiatives will really fit the requirements of the biggest part of the community. For all the ideated solutions it will be possible to use the User Center Design methodology,

focusing on the single solution that is going to be analyzed, designed, prototyped, tested with people, and then repeating the iterative process again and again until the result is satisfying.

### Conclusions

The UCD methodology is supposed to involve citizens and operators in every moment of the design process, in order to understand their needs, generate ideas and validate design choices during construction; modeling digital services based on concrete needs and existing resources; designing and developing clear interaction flows, which effectively respond to the needs of different users, generating a positive user experience; structuring the contents in a simple way, with a coherent communication style and a sustainable editorial strategy over time.

The city of Prishtina in Kosova is a young capital that has many potentials and resources but has not yet the strategies to drive effectively the growth of the country. This city would be a positive case study of applying UCD to involve the community in the design of regulations, plans, guidelines and strategies for the strategic development of the country.

Some topics related to social



development have been described, just to provide a useful basis for reflection on future solutions. Kosovo is facing a great challenge for its future and this could be a unique opportunity to experiment new design methodologies and new ways of applying smart technologies to public services, with the aim of creating a united community, and provide to citizens worthy services for their best

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