

# Individual UX Portfolio (DDM150)

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## INTRODUCTION

The exact definition of user experience (UX) is still unclear, which is quite remarkable considering the growing interest and importance of UX in design. A UX designer has become more involved in the entire integration of design, and can therefore be considered as having an indispensable role in the design process.

This portfolio explores the overall definition of UX. I will present new insights and perspectives on UX and demonstrate what I have learned in the first 3 weeks of the course ‘‘User Experience and Practice’’. I will describe my own position towards UX, which is shaped by the definitions of others in the literature. The material I have learned is shared in a weekly logbook. Then, I review my previous project and integrate new insights, while picturing my personal UX proposition for my future career. This portfolio helps to develop my own idea of what UX means as part of my vision and identity. Moreover, it helps to connect my personal values with UX theories, approaches, and methods.

## MY POSITIONING TOWARDS UX

To me, the notion of user experience is still a bit of a mystery. As a designer I am interested in public contexts; how interaction facilitates and contributes to the meaning, perception, and behaviour of humans. Thereby, I want to explore how interaction can be brought into the wider context; where the relationship between the practice, the

user, and the direct environment is considered a symbiotic whole. To complement my approach towards future design practices of user experiences in public space, I dug into the social side of UX.

## UX DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

UX design has many different definitions; I have selected three definitions I believe are in line with my position towards user experience. The definitions are discussed below.

The first definition is by Hassenzahl & Tractinsky (2006): *‘‘A consequence of a user’s internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.), the characteristics of the designed system (e.g. complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.) and the context (or the environment) within which the interaction occurs (e.g. organisational/social setting, meaningfulness of the activity, voluntariness of use, etc.)’’*

Hassenzahl & Tractinsky emphasize that we as designers need to face a complex reality of the nature of humans when designing interactive systems at all levels; experience, usability, functionality. Otherwise put, the definition implies that the user’s experience is not fixed and is something that requires a level of contextual understanding and empathy.

The second definition is from Alben (1996): *‘‘All the aspects of how people use an interactive product: the way it feels in their hands, how well they understand how it works, how they feel about it while they’re using it, how well it serves their purposes, and how well it fits into the entire context in which they are using it.’’*

This definition is in line with the previous definition, but more framed. It defines experience from a more holistic and embodied point of view, by delving into the ‘‘why’’ and including the user’s motivation. Alben describes the emotions and how they relate to the entire context. The definition is less focused on the functionality and more on the person as a whole.

The final definition is from the Sward & MaxArthur (2007): *‘‘The value derived from interaction(s) [or anticipated interaction(s)] with a product or service and the supporting cast in the context of use (e.g., time, location, and user disposition).’’*

What makes this definition good in addition to the other two is the situatedness and temporality aspect of UX. The word ‘‘anticipation’’ shows that UX can begin before the actual interaction and emphasizes that UX can be continuous and grows over time; demonstrating the dynamic aspect of UX. These three definitions present the dynamic, holistic, and meaningful properties as well as the situatedness of UX. Lastly, defining UX shows that

there is no clear formula. Rather, it emphasizes that it is a combination of everything; like pathways that investigate the people you are designing for.

### REFLECTION ON WEEKLY LOGBOOK/ACTIVITIES

The first three weeks of this course consisted of reading papers about UX. During the lectures, the papers were discussed in more depth by lecturers and reflected on by the students through interactive workshops consisting of dialogue, review, and feedback. During the process, I tried to recognize new UX opportunities and to map out what UX means to me as a designer. These insights allowed me to draw parallels between the theory and my identity and vision, and helped me to develop a more converted and critical view on UX.

The first lecture was about the fundamentals of UX: what does the concept of user experience design mean? The first piece of literature I read was a UX whitepaper by Roto et al. (2011). This paper introduced me to the core concepts of UX and clarified different perspectives: UX as a phenomenon, a field of study, and practice. The literature that followed was a chapter from Marc Hassenzahl's (2011) encyclopaedia, which is about experiences created and shaped through technology. The chapter taught me how to deliberately design and introduced a simple model when dealing with technology-mediate experiences. During the lecture's workshop, I was asked to reflect on what I already know and understand about UX and to what extent I am familiar with UX in practice. I reconsidered my early designs and realized they acted more on principles and values of the user experience than on UX measurement and valuation.

The second lecture focused on the role of empathy in UX design. The paper from Zaki (2014) introduced me to different components of empathy, and taught me how empathy is powerfully context-dependent. I then read the thesis of Smeenk (2019), which introduced multiple definitions of the three basic perspectives in design and how these can be mixed, clustered, and transitioned into

one another. Despite the fact that I did use empathetic design tools in the past (Personas and storyboards), I was not quite familiar with these three basic perspectives. Therefore, I think it would be a valuable step to explore these perspectives in my future projects. Additionally, the thesis introduced me to the 'Empathic Handover' method (Smeenk, 2019). As well as UX, the word empathy has many definitions. I found empathy a very intriguing subject of UX because I believe it is a fundamental aspect of what constitutes the personality of a designer on a personal and professional level. I experienced this myself during the second workshop, where we got the task to contribute to empathy in co-design by applying an empathic handover method on the sensitive topics of loneliness and dementia. This session showed that dialogue and empathy can strengthen each other and can provoke quite personal conversations, leading to valuable insights.

The third week was seen through a more holistic lens, with the focus on behaviour, attention, social awareness and translucence and decision making. This approach introduced better understanding of the differences between stage theories and other decision-oriented health behaviour theories. Chapter 6 of Montaña & Kasprzyk's (2008) book introduced me to the Precaution Adoption Process Model (PAPM), different stage theories and how these can be tested. After this, I studied a paper about The Interaction-Attention Continuum of Bakker & Niemantsverdriet (2016). This paper learned me how you can shift between different interaction types. Given my interest in social contexts, I found this paper very inspirational because it shows that contextual considerations seem to be the key to fitting interfaces. I then read about social translucence in the paper of Erickson & Kellogg (2000). The paper introduced me how to work with information concerning other people, that is communicated via a system. I believe this method could be really helpful to find the future project's interaction- and coordination-style in shared places and systems. Additionally, I learned how people make

choices after reading a paper about maximizing versus satisficing, that was written by Schwartz et al. (2002).

### UNDERSTANDING UX

The first week challenged me to zoom in on the fundamentals of UX design. During this exploration, it was confirmed once again UX has no fixed definition. For this reason, I approached my understanding of UX from the perspective that fits my design space. In the last year, my vision and identity have changed a lot and my interest for shared spaces and systems has grown. These personal transformations have a great impact on how I approach my designs and shift my perspectives on design, including such things as UX. Personally, this also emphasizes the strength of UX; the ability to change parallel to the designer's perspective. Previously, I envisioned UX as a design practice of observing and studying human behaviour when experiencing a product or system. However, the UX white paper showed a deeper meaning and also described UX as a phenomenon; a phenomenon that is not driven by technology, but is focused on humans and rooted in social and cultural context (Roto et al., 2011). Having these different meanings I will give an in-depth description of my key aspects of designing for UX.

As described by Hassenzahl (2011) there are no experiences that are exactly alike. This means each experience is situated and always depends on the context. Additionally, UX is subjective, holistic, meaningful and a continuous stream (Hassenzahl, 2011). Bringing this all together makes UX a complex thing to get a grip on and to design for. Hassenzahl simplifies this by introducing a method that relates three levels: from the *why* to the *what* and the *how* (Hassenzahl, 2011). He states that experience design starts with the *why*. This "*Why*" aims to clarify the needs and emotions involved in an activity and adds meaning to the interaction. Considering public spaces, it is interesting to specify why people go to open spaces. Some involve immediate needs, like getting a drink. Others are long-range purposes and may be less obvious,

for example the need for a change of scenery (Carr & Francis, 2017). The why sets the tone for the process and can therefore be considered as a valuable part of the design. In other words, it invites you as a designer to be creative, sensitive and to find the essence of the user experience you design for. This is in line with the method 'Value Sensitive Design' proposed by Friedman et al. (2013). This method emphasizes human values that contain ethical importance, such as environmental sustainability or trust. These values are held by stakeholders and can be retrieved through stakeholder value and impact analysis (Friedman et al., 2013). Simply put, designers are challenged to rethink and prioritize the values that meet the multi-stakeholder environment. It becomes an even more difficult challenge due to the fact the societal landscape is transformative and changes over time along with people's values. Leading companies act on this by responding over time to a so-called 'Zeitgeist', which defines people's mindset in a particular period of history as shown by certain trends or beliefs of that time. Exploring these changing world views and systemic patterns (paradigms) will fundamentally transform the development and delivery of values that are more real and sustainable (Brand & Rocchi, 2011). These new paradigms inspire me to delve into and adopt different design processes, methods, and tools. Currently, we are living in a knowledge economy with some experience economy influences from the past and a glimpse of the future, namely transformation economy. Taking my vision of designing for public spaces, I believe it is necessary to understand how to approach my design process from a more systemic level and socio-cultural level (Norman & Vergenti, 2014). For example, I think the purpose of public spaces and realizing how these are used by people is essential to any speculation about their qualities. Additionally, I really stand by the philosophy of "do good by acting local" (Brand & Rocchi, 2011, p. 24). Issues are often interconnected and therefore require the designer to stretch their design space by adopting global ambitions while acting on a local level.

This brings us to the Hill climbing paradigm from Norman & Vergenti (2014). The image shows a hill-climbing procedure containing hills with limits presenting the peak level of product quality. Designers want to reach these limits but do not know what hills the design space has to offer, which can make them get trapped in the "local maxima". I think this is also happening when designing for cities and the public. I am currently designing for the innovation agency Six Fingers. I think their radical approach to innovation suits the model of hill-climbing very well. They are taking a step back from incremental innovation by rethinking smart cities; "be a smart city by being a happy city" (Six Fingers, 2022, p.1). This example shows that radical product innovation can also be driven by a change of meaning of the product. At the same time, Six Fingers wants to innovate cities that revolve around people rather than adopting a tech focus with the citizen being subjected to it. Such an approach implies human-centered design HCD philosophy, which seems incompatible with radical innovation change (Norman & Vergenti, 2014). Thereby I still believe HCD is a big part of this act and necessary to improve technology, which fits the exchange in the user's needs and values. However, the question is: how to achieve this as a UX designer?

This brings us to the word empathy. Empathy is necessary in order to get a better understanding of the user. I have always perceived empathy as a trait. However, even though it is very common for designers to base design decisions on their own experiences, the validity of this first-person perspective in design is not always sufficiently understood and recognized (Smeenk, 2019). Additionally, Zaki states: "People often experience empathy as unavoidable and automatic, but empathy is also powerfully context-dependent, waxing and waning as a function of both personal and situational factors." (Zaki, 2014, p. 1634). To me, this quote emphasizes that a designer can shape the structure of empathic responding and improve or train their understanding of empathy in UX design. This can be clarified and approached by using

the theory of mixed perspectives in empathic design (Smeenk et al., 2019). Such an approach enables designers to be more committed and receptive towards the users and to employ personal experiences in a more credible way. I am used to shifting from a third-person perspective; doing research on the work of others, to a second-person perspective; being more inspired by the user in context. In reality, these perspectives are related to each other, are combined and overlap. This dynamic relationship between the perspectives has been outlined in the so-called Empathic Formation Compass (EFC), which identifies four intersecting dimensions that empathy consists of in the design and their dynamic relation (Smeenk et al., 2019). This meta-level concept helps you as a designer to understand what kind of elements and key dimensions influence empathic formation in co-design. EFC aids in making the unconscious activity more conscious. Consequently, EFC makes it easier to include your own feelings and experiences and invites you to be a part of the design context; referring to a first-person perspective.

On the other hand, it is important in UX to know how to take a step back from the user's emotions and focus more on the user's behaviour. Striving for behaviour change in the area of UX design requires the designer to take a more holistic point of view and to focus on the context. The Integrated behaviour model includes these contextual factors (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). When a context supports the development of habits, it provides a supportive environment for performance, which also makes future behaviour predictions more conceivable. On the other hand, making the context unstable might cause new challenges and thereby change habits and practices of the intentions of users. A UX designer could design a product or service that differs from the 'old' context of the user, which leads to an unstable context that might let the user change their practices.

Considering my interest in UX in relation to shared spaces, understanding how to work with such contexts

and social information is key. This is in line with the paper of Erickson & Kellog (2000) about social translucence. The paper divides social interaction into three building blocks: first, you need to understand how to make information *visible*, then you can build up *awareness* to eventually become *accountable* for your actions. To have a better understanding of these shared systems and what information is needed in their interaction, Karin Niemantsverdriet (2018) developed an interactive tool: the exploration-action model. This model combines all sorts of elements and takes the point of view of an individual actor that interacts with a shared system. The model eventually leads to an interplay between people's awareness and their considerations, resulting in decisions that direct actions. This model could be a relevant method to investigate particular design characteristics and their influence on shared spaces. This will be further analysed in the next chapter.

#### **INTEGRATION OF NEW INSIGHTS IN EARLIER PROJECT WORK**

During my FBP project, I have worked on a design process of a product envisioning optimization of passenger experience, as an integral part of the new TX5 terminal of the Heathrow Airport. The UX goal was to reduce passenger stress, enhance passenger comfort and provide an iconic passenger experience. The proposed final design was a canopy structure (see appendix 1) that aims to alleviate stress on passengers and to create a sense of orientation/wayfinding, while also providing a sense of intimacy. Because I was designing for the passenger, I was designer for "everyone". Thereupon, I copied the practices of others that designed for terminals and zoomed in on the human natural instincts. However, after delving into the literature of UX the methods and design choices made during this project could receive a fair amount of criticism.

Regarding the context of the design, I used landscape architect's practices leading me to the theory of "prospect and refuge". This theory describes why certain environments feel secure and thereby meet human needs

(Dosen & Ostwald, 2013). I think this is in line with the approach of Erickson & Kellog (2000) about social translucence. They show me that intertwining theories from different disciplines could really strengthen the UX design: "Like urban designers, we are concerned with creating contexts that support various forms of human-human interaction. What architecture and urbanism have to offer is long experience in exploring the interrelationship between physical spaces and social interaction" (Erickson & Kellog, 2000, p. 61).

If I would redo the project, I would try to be part of the context myself and start with a first-person perspective (Smeenk, 2019). The inspiration to this approach is Alain de Botton: an author who stayed at Heathrow as a writer-in-residence, exploring the personal and collective experiences and interactions of travellers (de Botton, 2009). In terms of designing for the social context, I believe this could be a valuable gateway to own relevant experiences and feelings. Passengers have to wait a fair amount of time in the terminal; I would take advantage of this waiting time and use it to switch to the second-person perspective through co-design with the passenger. All in all, my UX process would be a combination of all perspectives, rather than sticking to the third-person. Thereby, I did not really focus on the passenger's considerations and thoughts during interaction, which showed to be crucial to understand. The action-exploration model would have been extremely helpful (Niemantsverdriet, 2018). I would fill in the different components of the model and use this structured overview as a tool to explore what interaction style and coordination style of the canopy design could improve the passenger's experience. Additionally, the action-exploration model helped me to perceive co-design differently. By co-designing with the actor/passenger about their needs, you are already changing how the passenger will interact with the system/terminal you are designing for. In other words, I would include co-design as a part of the design outcome.

#### **UX PROPOSITION**

I am drawn by social settings and creating interactive experiences and sensitivity in public contexts due to the following reason: given the state of our planet, I believe we cannot hold onto our definition. We must take a step back and rethink our relationship with the environment. We have to take a new and more sustainable path and be more space-efficient. Consequently, I envision designing new symbiotic dimensions for public and non-public experiences, targeting both user and environment. In addition, I believe there is always a tension between the individual and what society needs. The ambiguous and transformative character of this field attracts me to see UX through different lenses, and to switch between macro and micro perspectives.

In the future I see myself working on concepts and innovative projects, rather than managing and scaling products that are market-ready. In order to do this, I want to further explore the UX themes of social and shared systems, and how to relate and apply these to innovative and conceptual contexts. I will start my future projects with empathy by exploring the fundamental question of "why" and closely work with the user through participatory methods in social contexts. Additionally, I want to keep expanding my perspective on the interrelationship between physical spaces and social interaction. Therefore, I am ambitious to further my future career within an international interdisciplinary design environment, while trying to complement my UX design with the theories of other disciplines.

All in all, I believe that UX design can transform and better the user experience of shared systems by identifying and rethinking the user experience in a sensitive and critical manner.

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Appendix 1: FBP: LANDSCAPE-PODS



