

RESEARCH THEME

Title of the doctoral research To design with care and actual people's behaviors.
Product design implications for the daily needs of elderly and vulnerable users: the case of self care and medication compliance

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Abstract

Unlike the strictly formal, functional, and technical-productive factors that designers prescribe in product design, factors related to product use can be largely co-determined by people, who often may routinely apply the art of decoding the practice of use. People may also contribute to the phenomenon of non-intentional or alternative use of products, or conversely ineffective and incorrect behaviors.

The use prescribed by designers may happen not to correspond to the actual use that will be made by users: the deviation between product "designed" use and its "actual" use is very frequent. We are mainly referring to certain cases in which users happen to "interpret" the use of objects, generating unusual use, sometimes appreciable and inventive, more often totally wrong or inadequate.

At the center of the expected field of investigation we identify the primary needs and behaviors of the elderly as a privileged user category for investigation.

The complex of everyday objects that can constitute the elective research area concerns the primary functions of practices of people self-care, in its double meaning of taking care of oneself and taking pharmaceuticals (or using medicines).

As recently stated by *The Lancaster Care Charter*, "Design can bring care to presence. To design-with-care may mean that, in addition to privileging the newest and most novel, we expand our values to truly acknowledge what exists already and steward these resources" (Rodgers, Innella, Bremner et al. 2019).

The thematic proposal has the overall objective of pursuing knowledge as well as offering and spreading skills in the field of product design culture, with an extension from user-centered to use-oriented design practices, emphasizing the centrality of people needs and behaviors in daily life.

Along perspectives opened by the emerging study field of user studies, the proposed research is embedded in the *status* and perspectives of an in progress improvement of design action caring about people-centred products.

Possible research questions may sound as: could we move towards better grounded as well as up-to-date revised interpretations of caring for product *use, shape, function* with people needs at the centre? Could we further proceed towards emerging critical reflections on product use, shape, functions, as

resulting from the interplay between product properties and actual people behaviours?

The proposed *multi-foci* research issue has the overarching objective to pursue and consolidate areas of improved knowledge for critical interpretations as well as applied research in daily product use, while emphasizing the centrality of products tailored for vulnerable users.

Based on the multifaceted study interests – either theoretical and critical and applied – of the group of proposers, this research direction looks for crossdisciplinary trajectories at different levels:

- investigations directed to critical approaches to designed care policies for elderly and vulnerables,
- investigations reflecting the current and prospective *status* of user studies in relation to emerging product use/shape/function grounded on people needs specifically related to elderly and vulnerable user practices of self care and self medication,
- investigations turning into critical strands for people-centred product design approaches and trajectories,
- investigations directed to the development of research methods for user studies to be integrated into product design studies for self care.

Keywords

product design, user studies, people-centredness