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ENTRY POINTS FOR DESIGN FOR POLICY: A FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL TO EMBRACE THE CONTEMPORARY DESIGN CULTURE IN POLICY DESIGN

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ABSTRACT | Policy design, design for policy, and 'policy design thinking' have influenced policymaking with interdisciplinary and heterogeneous perspectives from design and other disciplines. Whilst public sector policymakers seek creative, design-led methods and tools to enhance policy-making through a design thinking approach, design researchers and practitioners seek a recognised role within these processes. Even though these strands show blurred boundaries, a significant aspect is that they help to define a space of interaction between design and policy-making. Moreover, we see an opportunity to identify lenses that can help interpret, scale, and replicate various experiences within the broad context of policy design, encompassing different perspectives. We believe this is especially crucial for design practitioners and researchers in contexts where this field is not yet recognised and/or explored. Based on this assumption, the research question that this contribution tries to answer is: What framework can define ways to recognise or pursue experiences of design for policy? Methodologically, the authors defined a framework proposal through inductive reasoning, relying on ten years of academic research in design for policy, social innovation, and civic design to select cases. Qualitatively analysed, the selected cases drew our attention to three recurring patterns: (i) the transfer of design culture and expertise to policymakers and public sector actors, empowering non-design-experts to adopt a design-led approach in policy-making independently; (ii) the co-creation of knowledge within policy processes, epistemologically grounded in

co-design, through the Research Through Co-Design model; (iii) the transformation of a context by non-expert designers, intended as active citizens and policymakers who systematically design for policy. Translated into 'entry points' to the design for policy arena, also by means of comparison and connection to other cases taken outside the authors' research groups, such patterns are defined as follows: (i) transferring design knowledge to non-designers for policy-making processes, (ii) fostering knowledge co-creation among the involved actors in policy design, and (iii) recognising existing policy design processes led by non-designers through a design perspective. The framework is discussed with regard to its use as an analytical and strategic tool for positioning design possibilities of intervention within policy processes.

KEYWORDS | DESIGN FOR POLICY, DESIGN KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER, RESEARCH THROUGH CO-DESIGN, NON-EXPERT DESIGN

1. Introduction

1.1 Design and policy-making: an overview of an emerging and plural field

The connection between design and policymaking - in terms of design methods and approaches contributing to the development of public policies - is a subject of current scientific interest for researchers in the field of Design, as well as in Policy Studies, Public Administration and Management ones (Kimbell et al., 2023; Mortati et al., 2022; Van Buuren et al., 2020).

The first hints of this interaction date back to the 50s, when the term 'policy design' was coined in Policy Studies to express the idea of systematic calculation of policy problems, practices, and outcomes (Colebatch, 2018) and, three decades after, an innovative approach for effective policy-making (Peters et al., 2018). Henceforth intended "as a form of design" (Carlsson, 2004), policy-making began to be approached with design thinking as a rational guide for effective policy solutions, especially when tackling 'wicked problems' (Howlett, 2019). Practitioners and academics in the area of Design, on the other side, started exploring the policy field at the beginning of our century (Burns et al., 2006), experimenting collaborations with policymakers and civil servants in order to make better public policies and services - i.e. more capable of understanding public problems and addressing people's needs. In the last fifteen years, the concrete idea of a new area for design practice and research within this field emerged, being explored in various policy domains and through a diverse range of implications of design expertise and different roles for designers (Bason, 2014a; Kimbell et al. 2022; La 27e Région, 2010; Lewis et al. 2020; Mortati, 2019).

Within policy processes, design thus has gained recognition as a strategic lever to address the challenges policymakers are increasingly facing nowadays, characterised by high levels of complexity and uncertainty, and exacerbated by limited resources available to governments (Bason, 2014b; Kimbell et al., 2022). The contribution of design fundamentally lies in the introduction of human-centered and collaborative approaches, a systemic and transformative vision, and an openness to inquiry, experimentation and

prototyping (Bason, 2014b; Blomkamp, 2021; Kimbell, 2016; Kimbell & Bailey, 2017; Lewis et al. 2020; McNabola et al., 2013; Villa Alvarez et al., 2022). Cases in this field have appeared in all continents and at all administrative scales - ranging from local to national and supranational policies - and have concerned several policy domains and policy problems, mainly regarding social issues. Designers' intervention in these experiences varies in terms of contextual situations and policy stages, proving the possibility to take part in all phases of the policy cycle. Moreover, these cases show different degrees of institutionalisation: designers may collaborate with policymakers - for example, inside pluridisciplinary units as policy and public sector innovation labs - but also support grassroots-led policy processes or influencing policy outcomes through forms of design activism (Selloni, 2021; Tromp & Vial, 2023; Vaz et al., 2022; Whicher & Swiatek, 2022). Named in different ways - such as 'policy design' (Bebbington et al., 2022; Blomkamp, 2021; Johnson & Cook, 2014; Vincent & Thévenet, 2013; Whicher, 2020), 'design for policy' (Bason, 2014a; McAuliffe, 2023; Mortati et al., 2022; Rudkin & Rancati, 2020; Vaz et al., 2022), and 'design-led policy' (Blomkamp, 2021; Cairney, 2021; Schmidt & Mortati, 2024), *inter alia* - this "new" space of intersection between design and policy disciplines reveals an increasing but still emerging field of practice for designers and policymakers (Kimbell et al. 2022; Whicher & Swiatek, 2022). Its liability to lexical and semantic plurality (Curtabbi, 2025; Villa Alvarez & Wellstead, 2023), as well as its heterogeneity with regard to purposes, tasks, moments of design intervention, and relationships with institutions and policy processes, reveals this area as a spectrum of practices.

1.2 The challenge of recomposing the diversity of design for policy

The need to represent such diversity and recompose the fragmented knowledge on design for policy seems to be addressed by a few research contributions.
For instance, some researchers from the Public Management domain defined a set of three uses of design approaches in public administration: 'design as optimisation', 'design as exploration' and 'design as co-creation' (Van Buuren et al., 2020). In the authors' idea, the three modes correspond to different purposes: (i) making policy-relevant knowledge accessible to policymakers; (ii) adopting creative tools to help decision makers develop policy solutions; (iii) applying a participatory approach to the whole process of policy-making. One of these authors, together with other colleagues, developed a systematic literature review of consistent Public Administration publications, including one design journal (Hermus et al., 2020). Their work provides a two-level typology of design approaches in public policies: informational approaches and inspirational ones. The two clusters differ in content, context and impact of design - i.e. the use of knowledge, the situation in which design is employed, and the cognitive or practical changes evoked by design. Respectively, the authors claim that design in policy processes can be used with a theory-driven or synthesis-oriented approach, providing evidence or addressing users' perspectives, to create consensus or change.
A work worth mentioning from Design literature is the one by Kimbell et al. (2022), which enlightens the inner fragmentation of this research field, claiming that "differences in ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and contexts should be acknowledged", and suggesting the need for a cross-disciplinary investigation between Design and Public

Policy, within which "multiple conditions for, forms of practice and accounts of designing for public policy may emerge" (pp. 10-11). The research directions outlined by this analysis resulted in a broader publication, involving other colleagues from Design and Public Policy fields. Here, Kimbell et al. (2023) present a framework to differentiate the purposes, scopes and agents of design in policy-making, highlighting three relationships between design and policy. Design is presented (i) as "a tool for policy-making" to achieve specific goals and generate solutions, (ii) as a practice of improvising with policy-making and making it more open, or even (iii) as a way to regenerate its approaches. Different types and owners of knowledge are analysed within this framework: in the first case, design is adopted by both policymakers and professional designers, while in the second case, also policy takers contribute as co-designers, and, when "regenerating" policy-making, a more inclusive approach to knowledge is enacted.

Another relevant framework (even if referred to a broader scope than the policy realm) is the one by Brinkman et al. (2023), suggesting a series of strategies for applying design in a public sector context. The authors provide a taxonomy of strategic actions ascribed to four different strategic purposes: (i) building confidence in design; (ii) forming alliances with design thinking advocates; (iii) generating support and political buy-in; (iv) enhancing compatibility between design and the external context.

The analyses just mentioned confirm the demand for approaches that display the diversity of design for policy. They focus on design "agents"[1] and the contributions of design to policy-making processes, particularly in terms of knowledge production and impact on policy as a whole. More importantly, they describe the field as it appears in contexts where its related practices are well-established, resulting in frameworks that may not apply in countries like Italy, where design for policy is still emerging and limited to a few examples in academic research. Based on our research experience, it becomes clear that there is a need for an intermediate acknowledgement of the conditions enabling design for policy, before focusing on the full spectrum of design contributions. Hence, the research question which we attempt to answer through this paper: What framework can define ways to recognise or pursue experiences of design for policy? More precisely, we question the possible 'entry points'[2] allowing the recognition of existing

[1] Within Design literature, the term "design agents" is typically used to refer to those entities and organisations making use of design and embedding professional designers are often embedded, such as centres, associations, networks and clusters (Whicher, 20217) We use the expression to refer to all those actors who, in their professional roles, embody and exercise design practice, acting as *bearers* of design capability (Maffei et al., 2014; Muratovski, 2016). This includes not only professional designers, but also those who design as part of their profession or – as is often the case with civil servants and policymakers in the design for policy landscape – draw upon design tools and methods in their everyday work. We deliberately adopt this broad definition in order to later articulate, throughout the paper, the internal distinctions and implications arising when diverse actors – with varying backgrounds and intentions – engage in design competencies and approaches when making and innovating policies.

[2] For "entry point" we mean both a strategic opportunity and enabling condition for initiating a certain kind of process, and an analytical lens for identifying and interpreting that process, offering a new perspective from which to observe it. The concept of an "entry point" is widely recognised in computing, where it refers to "an address from which a program or subroutine is to be executed" (Collin, 2004). This analogy can inform our use of the term in the context of design for policy. In our

experiences of design for policy not yet labelled as such, and serving as a proactive approach to this new design field where it is not explored. In response, we propose a framework of three 'entry points' that complement rather than replace existing ones, creating new opportunities within those frameworks. This approach underscores the importance of considering how the 'posture' of design agents shapes the purposes and consequences of integrating design practices into policy processes.

2. Methodological approach

Methodologically (Figure 1), the three "entry points" framework mentioned emerges from an inductive process by analysing and connecting academic research, supplemented by further cases. We belong to two different academic groups having in common social design subjects and action-research initiatives both in the field of social inclusion, and belonging to two Universities placed in two different regions in Italy: the Innovation in Design & Engineering Laboratory (IDEE Lab) within the University of Florence, in Tuscany, and the Social Design Lab (SDL) from Politecnico di Torino, in Piedmont. SDL is mainly concerned with social cohesion challenges related to severe adult marginalisation, such as housing insecurity and food poverty among people experiencing homelessness (Campagnaro & Ceraolo, 2022). The group adopts a transformative and participatory approach, fostering alliances with local stakeholders, particularly Public Administrations, to engage in policy-oriented processes. In parallel, part of the team of the IDEE Lab is also engaged in experimenting with co-design, service design, as well as product-service system design for social change processes, collaborating with third sector entities and local public bodies.

Our two groups share a common interest in social design and design for policy. Through discussions, we recognised that the heterogeneity of our research experience was not easily identifiable within the design-for-policy arena[3]. This led us to a reflective process to determine whether we were already engaged in design-for-policy practices or how to actively participate in such initiatives. As a result, we initiated a collaborative reflective process (Figure 1) to explore our research question, focusing on how to recognise or pursue design-for-policy experiences. This process involved three stages: (i) collecting cases from

interpretation, the "address" signifies an access point—an enabling condition through which one may enter a design for policy process. Crucially, this entry point is not necessarily part of the process itself, but rather a situational or contextual factor that facilitates engagement with a design for policy setting.

[3] With the term "design-for-policy arena", we refer to the concept of the "action arena" introduced by Ostrom (2005), which encompasses both the "action situation" and the actors involved in it. Ostrom (2019) describes it as "the social space where individuals interact, exchange goods and services, solve problems, dominate one another, or fight." A similar use of the term "arena" in design has been recalled by Gaete Cruz et al. (2023) through the notion of the "co-design arena", which also draws upon Ostrom's framework. Accordingly, in this paper, the term "design-for-policy arena" denotes design for policy as a distinct and dynamic realm—understood in processual and relational terms. It refers to the space in which design practices and designers contribute to policy-making, and where interactions between designers and policy actors—such as decision-makers, policy implementers, and other stakeholders—take place.

our research groups based on direct experience or study, (ii) inductively identifying an initial pattern, and (iii) validating it with examples from other contexts. The following paragraphs detail each stage.

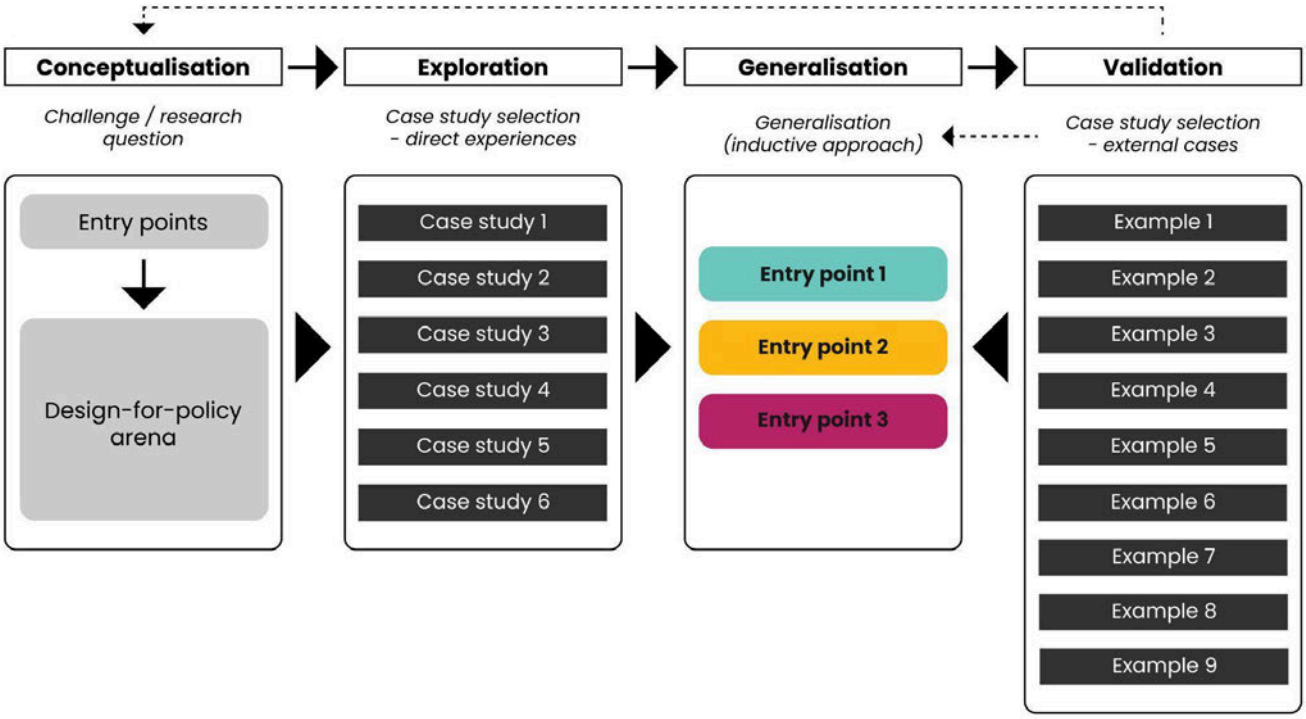

Fig. 1. Methodological approach applied to develop the framework.

2.1 Case collection

Based on our experience in design research, we selected cases according to the following criteria:

- They were carried out in the last decade and were either directly experienced or thoroughly studied by us.
- They were related to design research questions, involved design practice, or reflected specific design stances.
- They were linked to policy-making processes, including collaborations between designers, non-designers, public institutions, and policymakers, as well as involvement in other processes that directly or indirectly influence policy formation and implementation.

The collected cases, summarised in Table 1, vary in terms of topic, purpose, context, duration, designers' roles, and stakeholders involved. They include collaborations with both public actors and civil society organisations engaged in public interest functions, representing both explicit and latent policy dimensions. These diverse, often "hidden" examples were chosen not for being conventionally "successful" but for their potential to initiate a design-for-policy dimension, reinforcing the idea of plurality within the field of design for policy. The following are the selected cases.

Reorienting Turin's system of public services for homelessness

The first case study, launched under the National Operational Programme on Social

Inclusion of the ESF 2014–2020, involve SDL in supporting the Municipality of Turin and third sector organisations in reorienting public services for people experiencing homelessness (Campagnaro et al., 2022). The process has followed a participatory approach, enabled by the legal framework of Codesign (Campagnaro & Di Prima, 2022). Initially, it focused on problem-framing and strategy definition, informing policymakers' introduction of a new intervention within Turin's Social Inclusion Plan. The current phase involves experimentation, monitoring, and evaluation of new service models, with the potential to institutionalise these innovations within the city's social inclusion policies (Di Prima et al., 2025; Campagnaro et al., 2022).

Alimenta

Alimenta is a design-led systemic initiative addressing food poverty among people experiencing homelessness in Turin. Supported by a private actor and a collaboration with three social cooperatives managing six public shelters, the project operates on three levels: food access, capability-building through food-related activities, and academic research on innovative solutions to combat food poverty (Campagnaro et al., 2023; Passaro et al., 2021). Over time, the initiative has expanded into a broader network, fostering a local food system that creatively supplements institutional responses to food poverty. From a design-for-policy perspective, the research group and other stakeholders see Alimenta as a potential reference point for engaging with the City on food policy, showcasing a systemic, multi-stakeholder, and multidimensional approach (Campagnaro et al., 2023; Curtabbi & Campagnaro, 2023).

Design Research Lab

The Design Research Lab (DRLab) was an experimental research initiative at the University of Trento's Department of Humanities, integrating complexity theory, semiotics, and design methodologies—specifically, Service Design Thinking and Design Research. Co-funded by the Provincia Autonoma di Trento, it functioned as a local policy lab to introduce and promote service design culture in strategic sectors, including education, private industry, and public policy. During its first three years, DRLab developed and tested a framework for transferring design knowledge to policymakers and public civil servants (Busciantella-Ricci et al., 2019; Busciantella-Ricci and Ventin, 2020a; Busciantella-Ricci and Ventin, 2020b). This process also fostered recognition of service design as a strategic tool for local policy development (Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2019; Busciantella-Ricci et al., 2022).

The Healthy Neighbourhoods Hub project

It is a two-year action-research project introducing the Healthy Neighbourhoods Hub (HNH) framework to address urban health within the built environment (Busciantella-Ricci et al., 2024; Macchi et al., 2024; Rinaldi et al., 2025). Focused on two areas in Florence—spanning three neighbourhoods and five districts—the project involved partnerships with local public policy bodies such as the Municipality of Florence and the

Local Health Authority. The research engaged key stakeholders, including local communities, third sector entities, and policymakers, to co-create the HNH framework and develop strategies for building healthy and inclusive neighbourhoods by integrating local knowledge with best practices and literature reviews. The project resulted in a set of strategies, design scenarios, and guidelines to implement the HNH framework (Setola & Rinaldi, 2024), which were incorporated into observations on the Municipal Operational Plan and Structural Plan of Florence.

The Riace model in the DesIA project

The Riace model is a case study in a research project that explored the Design for Inclusive Attitudes (DxIA) (Busciantella-Ricci, 2023; Busciantella-Ricci et al., 2024). Design ethnography methods, including direct observation, contextual interviews, and spontaneous focus groups, were conducted in the villages of Riace and Camini in southern Italy. These villages are known for their immigrant hospitality models (Driel & Verkuyten, 2020; Ranci, 2020; Carbone, 2023), developed by local communities without formal design training. The researchers interacted with the founders, former policymakers and local communities to explore how these models shaped attitudes toward immigrants and how they could inform the DesIA project (DesIA, n.d.) from a design for policy perspective.

The LoveGiver project

The LoverGiver project was also explored as a case study within the same research project mentioned earlier, which focuses on service examples promoting inclusive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion (Busciantella-Ricci, 2023). The project aims to raise awareness about the relationship between sex and disability, serving as an experimental service that promotes the sexual independence of disabled individuals (Morales et al., 2020). It became a key reference in regional policy discussions in Tuscany (Popolla & Scudieri, 2023; Mozione 1228 [Motion 1228], 2023), leading regional policymakers to propose a law to the Italian Parliament (Proposta di legge al Parlamento n. 15 del 21 dicembre, 2023 [Bill submitted to Parliament No. 15 of 21 December 2023]) to introduce the role of operators and educational programmes on emotionality, affectivity, and sexuality.

Table 1. Selection of the cases and their relevance

Case name	Relationship with the policy level	Achieved impact on the policy level
Alimenta 2014-ongoing (case 1)	Long-term institutionalisation of a bottom-up process - aiming at institutionalising the bottom-up process to inform local food policies, expanding the system to the entire city scale	Dialogue with the Municipality, raising awareness on the existence of this process (and its outcomes)
Design Research Lab 2017-ongoing (case 2)	Specially funded by a local government to test the application of service design in strategic sectors and to improve their policies	Widespread introduction of service design in the construction of new policies in some strategic sectors

Reorienting public services for people experiencing homelessness in Turin 2018-ongoing (case 3)	Planned indirect influence on policies - collaborating with policymakers for system analysis and problem-framing - setting new objectives and interventions for the current service system, incorporating them and their principles in the city's social inclusion policies	Recognition of the process and its outcomes by the political side of the Municipality, taking them as a reference for future policy formulation
The Healthy Neighbourhoods Hub project 2022-2024 (case 4)	Local government as a project partner: - Influence policies by involving policymakers and relevant influential actors in action-research processes and co-design events	The main results have been included in a series of observations on the POC (Municipal Operational Plan) and the PS (Structural Plan) of the local municipality (Florence, Italy)
LoveGiver project 2023-2024 (DesIA project time-frame) (case 5)	Guiding the discussion and providing information on the debated topic about the relationship between disability and sex	A regional law approved the role of the figure of the "operator for emotionality, affectivity, corporeality and sexuality for people with disabilities"
Riace's model 2023-2024 (DesIA project time-frame) (case 6)	Piloting the complexity of the refugees' hospitality in accordance with the local needs	The local experience has been recognised as an effective experience at the national level

2.2 The first framework formulation

In the second stage, we adopted an inductive reasoning approach (Trochim, 2005) to identify patterns from our cases, specifically focusing on how they suggest an entry point into the design-for-policy arena. We developed a first hypothesis of the framework (results in Figure 2) by collaboratively noting the factors in each case that could position it as a potential starting point for 'making' design-for-policy. The theoretical construct used for this analysis aligned with two key elements from the academic frameworks mentioned in the introduction: the definition of the actors bringing design capability and the relationship between design contributions and knowledge production to inform the policy process. In the first round, a general code was assigned to each case, followed by a second round where we identified predominant factors that could serve as recurring entry points for design for policy.

2.3. Validation of the framework

To substantiate the initial version of the framework, additional cases drawn from our studies were selected using a typical-case approach (Gerring, 2006), being guided by the three entry points. These cases were identified through: (i) Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020-funded projects, accessed via the Cordis search engine with keywords such as

'design for policy,' 'policy design,' and 'design thinking'; (ii) policy labs, public policy innovation labs, and governmental innovation labs; (iii) impactful literature and repositories that showcase selected examples of design for social innovation (including Manzini, 2015; Amatullo et al., 2021; Manzini & D'Alena, 2024) and community-led social innovation cases (European Commission, 2020; European Social Fund Plus, n.d., filtering for 'Delivering+public+policies' and selecting related initiatives), which particularly focus on the innovation of social policies (Junginger, 2013; Amatullo et al., 2021).
The following paragraph presents the selection of examples we used to discuss and validate the initial version of the framework.

The Interreg Europe project RETRACE (Barbero, 2017) (EX1) exemplifies entry point 1 by promoting systemic design as a method for local and regional policies toward a circular economy. Systemic design experts provided stakeholders with essential knowledge to enhance policymaking and support the transition to a circular economy (Giraldo Nohra et al., 2020). A key output was the creation of a "Systemic design method guide for policymaking," which aimed to equip policymakers with the tools and guidelines to define sustainable interventions (Barbero, 2017).

La 27e Région's project La Transfo (EX2) is an experimental program designed to help public administration departments develop innovation labs. Its goal was to foster a new approach to policymaking that enhances effectiveness and sense-making (La 27e Région, 2015). The program focused on capability-building for civil servants and elected officials, training them in innovation-oriented competencies, including design methods. Designers collaborated with social scientists and city planners to support this process (Amatullo et al., 2021). This example supports entry points 1 and partially 2, representing a pioneering effort to create spaces for experimenting with design for policy and gradually integrating it into the public sector.

As another example of entry point 1, Public Sector Innovation (PSI) labs (EX3) serve as spaces for "applying design approaches to policy-making" (Whicher, 2021, p. 253), integrating design into public administration alongside other disciplines. These labs transfer design capabilities, such as creativity, abduction, and human-centeredness (Villa Alvarez et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2020), while also promoting multi-actor collaboration (entry point 2). This approach enhances policy outcomes by fostering a more citizen-aware perception of public issues and enabling more effective solution development and implementation (Fuller & Lochard, 2016; Lewis et al., 2020; McGann et al., 2018; Tõnurist et al., 2017).

Similarly (entry point 1), the SEED project (EX4) aims to establish Social Innovation Competence Centers, where multi-actor teams (e.g., researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and civil servants) collaborate to develop public infrastructures that help national authorities better utilise European Social Funds to mainstream Social Innovation as a Public Sector Innovation approach (SEED, n.d.a). The project emphasises capacity-building, with design playing a crucial role in directly influencing policies. The toolbox provided, based on the double diamond design thinking approach, highlights the

project's commitment to using contemporary design as a central element in the development of the Competence Centers (SEED, n.d.b; SEED, 2023).

The SISCODE project (entry point 2) (EX5), funded through Horizon 2020, aimed at "stimulating the use of co-creation methodologies in policy design" by applying bottom-design-driven approaches to influence Responsible Research and Innovation, and Science, Technology, and Innovation Policies (SISCODE, n.d.). This project highlights three key factors (c.f. Deserti et al., 2020; Deserti et al., 2022): (i) co-creation as a central activity for impacting policies, (ii) co-creation labs as spaces for aligning multiple actors' needs in policymaking, and (iii) a design-driven approach to foster bottom-up policy initiatives. Additionally, the creation of the SISCODE Toolbox illustrates the project's commitment to facilitating collaboration in the design-for-policy process.

The Global GovJam (Global Gov Jam, n.d.) (EX6) is a notable example of a co-creation initiative that supports policy design processes (entry point 2). It operates in three key directions: (i) networking individuals, including non-designers, interested in designing policies or services for the public interest, (ii) promoting contemporary service design culture, and (iii) co-designing or simulating the co-design of services and policies, thereby opening new opportunities for local policy development. This event exemplifies how citizen-driven collaborative processes, often led by design, can contribute to proposing new public services and policies.

Community-driven initiatives can also provide valuable insights for policy-making, even if they are not design-led (entry point 3). These social innovation projects, developed by citizens or specific communities, have had a significant impact on policies and are often recognised as inspirational practices in Europe (European Commission, 2020). Examples include:

- The Malopolska Incubator for Social Innovation (EX7), which focused on disability challenges and facilitated the co-creation of innovative products and services. Some of these innovations were upscaled nationwide through support from the Polish Ministry of Investment and Economic Development, demonstrating both community-driven and policy-collaborative impacts (entry points 3 and 2).
- Intercultural Assistants in Czechia (EX8), which aimed to improve migrants' access to public services by introducing a new role in social services. This initiative increased tolerance and intercultural competence among service officers, exemplifying how community-driven efforts can lead to policy innovation (entry point 3).

Finally, the Buurtzorg model (EX9) was developed to address neighbourhood nursing care needs, offering a system tailored to the specific needs of citizens within their local context (Buurtzorg, n.d.). This model has been implemented in various countries, including the US and UK (Gray et al., 2015; Lalani et al., 2019), and is gaining attention from policy levels bridging health and social care sectors (Department for Health and Social Care, 2022;

Rajan et al., 2024; Khan, 2023). Though some authors recognise elements of design thinking in the model (Monsen & De Blok, 2013), it was originally founded by a nurse with different intentions, aligning more closely with entry point 3.

3. Results

From the initial analysis of the selected cases (paragraph 2.1), we identified three relevant patterns that describe the following three entry points in design for policy:

- Entry point 1: Transferring design knowledge to non-designers for policy-making processes;
- Entry point 2: Fostering knowledge co-creation among the actors involved in policy design;
- Entry point 3: Recognising existing policy design processes led by non-designers through a design perspective.

These three elements (highlighted in Figure 2) frame the initial version of the framework, which was refined with the introduction of the examples presented as cases in paragraph 2.3.

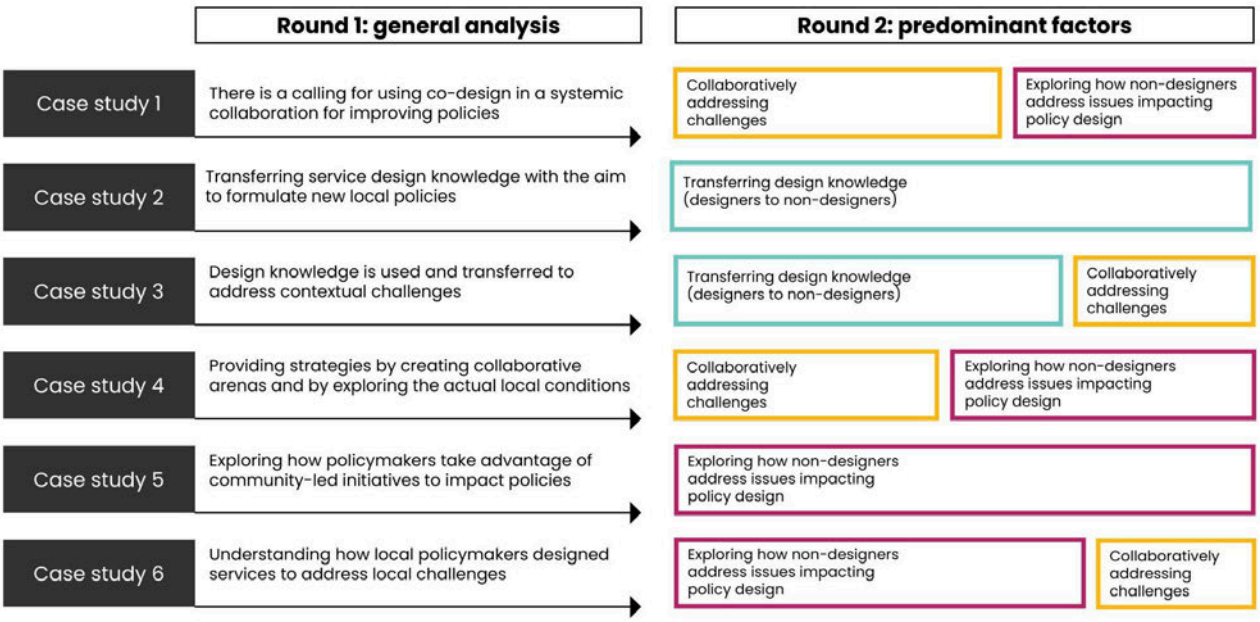

Fig. 2. Entry points identified in the case analysis: The initial version of the framework.

According to the validation process described in paragraph 2.3, the three entry points were refined based on the cases analysed in Figure 2. Specifically, Figure 3 provides a synthesis of 15 cases used to generate and describe the framework. Initially, these cases were identified as cases 1 to 6 (drawn from our direct experience). Later, they were expanded with additional examples that helped refine the patterns and enhance the details for describing the three potential entry points, which are the focus of this contribution.

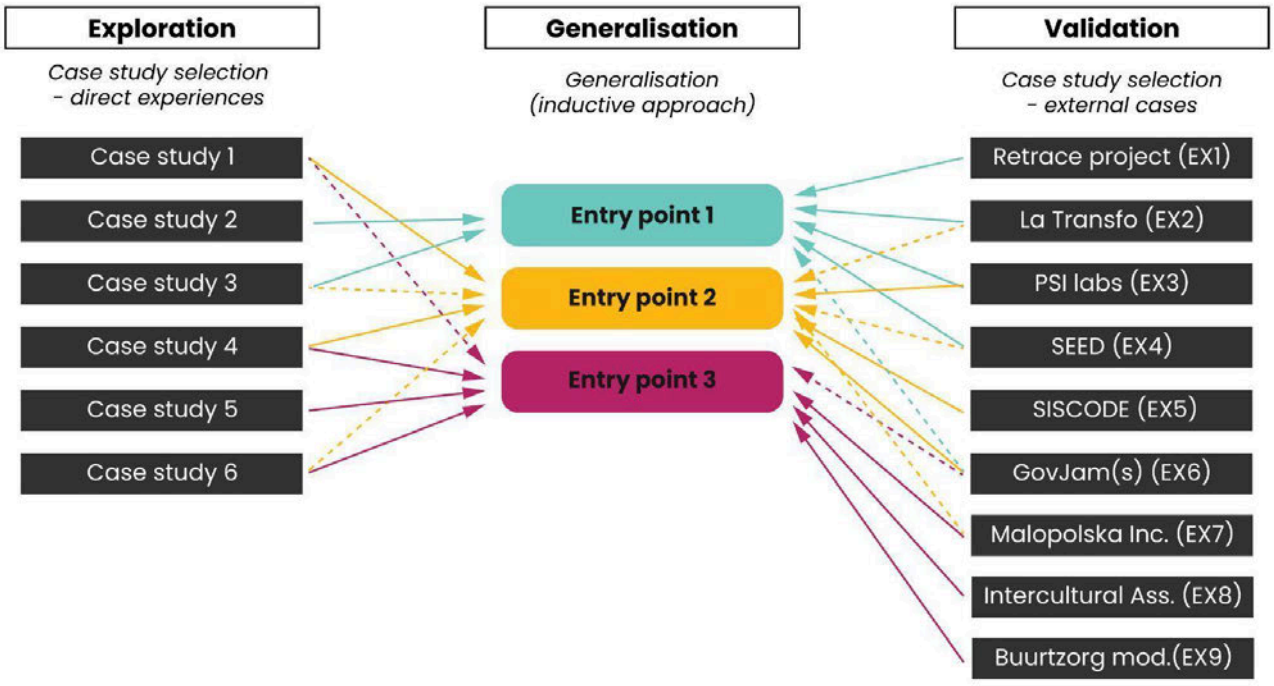

Fig. 3 The distribution of the cases according to the three entry points.

The three entry points correspond to the 'axes' on which design and designers can act to impact policies. In this sense, these entry points can be seen as 'strategies' for triggering design-for-policy initiatives.

Entry point 1 focuses on transferring design culture and expertise to policymakers and public sector actors, enabling them to independently adopt a design-led approach to policy-making. It involves initiatives that build design capabilities to introduce contemporary design thinking in the policy-making process. The study highlights cases 2 and 3, along with examples 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, as key representations of this entry point.

Entry point 2 is related to co-creation within policy processes, epistemologically grounded in co-design, and exemplified by models such as Research Through Co-Design (Busciantella-Ricci & Scataglini, 2024). Co-design can serve as an entry point for opening a policy arena and addressing a challenge collaboratively, defined as the application of collective creativity from both designers and non-designers at any stage of the design process (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). According to the study presented in this paper, cases 1 and, partially, 3, 4, and 6, as well as examples 3, 5, 6, and partially, 2 and 4, are the most appropriate to represent this entry point.

Entry point 3 focuses on the transformation of a context by non-expert designers, including active citizens and policymakers who engage in designing for policy without formal design expertise. This entry point is characterised by initiatives driven by policymakers aiming to creatively address local problems or challenges, often under constraints of time and resources. While these projects might lack explicit design training, they contribute valuable insights to the design-for-policy field, particularly when explored by design researchers.

Also, many of the initiatives in this entry point fall under community-led projects, which can open new design-for-policy arenas and are frequently found in the field of social innovation. The study highlighted that 4, 5, 6 and partially case 1, as well as examples 7, 8, 9, and partially example 6, are the most appropriate to represent this entry point.

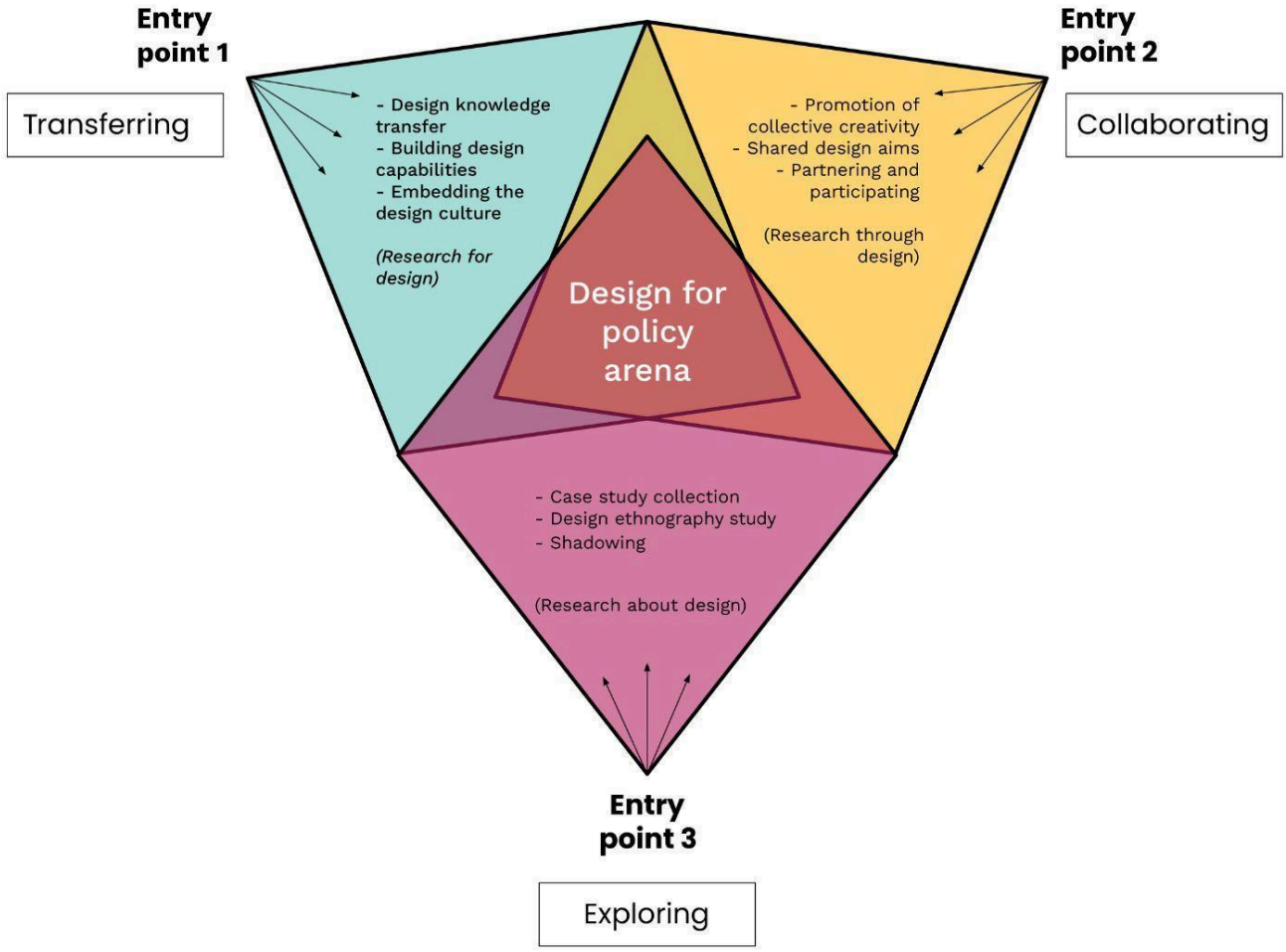

Fig. 4. The three entry points in design for policy.

Analysing the cases clarified the potential functions associated with each entry point for those seeking to access policy arenas. As explored in Figure 3, it is possible to propose several activities that enable the concretisation and implementation of these entry points:

- Entry point 1 involves initiatives that focus on transferring design knowledge to specific policy areas, building design capabilities, and embedding design culture within relevant contexts, aiming to develop a design-for-policy process. From a design research perspective, this entry point can align with "research for design" (Jonas, 2015; Glanville, 2005; Frayling, 1993), emphasising the need to understand what design knowledge is most useful to facilitate entry into the design arena.
- Entry point 2 focuses on initiatives that promote collective creativity, particularly through co-design, and foster discussions around shared challenges with local partners. Key actions in this entry point include engaging local authorities in co-design activities to address common challenges or strategic topics. From a design research perspective, this

entry point is closely aligned with "research through design" (Jonas, 2015) and, more specifically, "research through co-design" (Busciantella-Ricci & Scataglini, 2024) using co-design as the epistemological medium to address the design-for-policy arena.

- Entry point 3 focuses on initiatives that involve case study collection, particularly those exploring projects led by policymakers, civil servants, or third sector entities, as well as design ethnography studies that examine strategic areas for design in policy. It emphasises exploring the contexts in which policies are developed daily. From a design research perspective, this entry point aligns with "research about design" (Jonas, 2015; Frayling, 1993), which involves observing and studying how policy design processes are carried out by policymakers and other stakeholders. The primary interest here is in uncovering new knowledge that enriches the design field, thereby facilitating access to the other entry points and contributing to the broader understanding of design-for-policy processes.

Table 2. Key aspects of the three entry points.

Entry points	Key actors and roles	Priority context	Typologies of interventions	Barriers	Enablers
Entry point 1	- Design researchers/ professionals (senders) - Civil servants and policymakers (receivers)	- Vocational education and training programmes	- Transferring design knowledge - Building design capabilities	- Beneficiaries' mood and backgrounds (e.g. cultural and organisational resistance to change)	- clarifying design contributions, show potential (with success stories and 'proof by example' approach) - starting from policy challenges characterised by low scale and complexity
Entry point 2	- Design researchers/ professionals (partners) - Civil servants and policymakers (partners) - Local third sector entities (partners)	-Multi-stakeholder local development projects	- Solving local problems or addressing local challenges through co-design	-Low/seesawing level of participation of local actors/capability of involving them - Timing and stalemates of institutional processes - Limited transformative power of the process/actors	- Identifying (institutional) frameworks and contexts fostering collaboration - Making the value of design emerge from the process itself / Promoting design contribution in terms of benefits for the process and outcomes,

					rather than in terms of new competences and approaches - Building mutual trust between actors and spaces for reflexivity
Entry point 3	- Design researchers/professionals (observers) - Civil servants and policymakers (observed) - Local third sector entities (observed)	- Policy design and development by non-designers	- Observing and collecting data on how policies are designed by non-designers	- Time and resources for the observation - Possibility to join the process in order to observe it - 'Designerly' value not evident from the outset/delay in identifying the right process to observe	- Being attentive towards social innovation processes at a local scale

4. Discussion and conclusions

As discussed so far, the three entry points can serve as potential gateways to be introduced into the design-for-policy arena. Conceptually, they act as pre-conditional factors or inputs—'triggers'—that help democratise access to the design process within policy-making.

However, it is important to note that a few conditions must be considered when using the framework as a reference. First, acknowledging the ongoing struggle in design research to clearly define who qualifies as a "policy designer" (Whicher & Swiatek, 2022; Vaz & Bosch Gomez, 2022), the selected cases for validation highlighted the challenges in distinguishing roles and boundaries within each example. This partially supports the emerging discussion in the fields of design for policy and design for social innovation (e.g., Kimbell et al., 2023; Amatullo et al., 2021), which suggests that differentiating individual roles may not be necessary, convincing, or even beneficial in such arenas. However, if these differences continue to be emphasised in the literature, this could impact entry points 1 and 3.

Second, keywords such as participation, co-design, and co-creation are becoming increasingly popular in the design for policy field to describe how to address the challenge of creating policies through creative, collaborative, and more democratic processes (e.g., Blomkamp, 2018; Mintrom et al., 2024; Matti et al., 2022). However, it is important to emphasise that the full integration of co-design into the design for policy field can face

challenges (e.g., Mintrom et al., 2024) and may lead to confusion, as seen in the diverse values, meanings, and types of activities associated with the selected cases. Therefore, entry point 2 suggests that design-led collaborations require structured and thorough preparation before entering the design-for-policy arena (cf. Matti et al., 2022).
Third, the examples related to entry point 3 highlight that it can function as a precursor to the other two entry points. We still encountered challenges in explicitly identifying cases or examples where design researchers gather insightful data on how civil servants and policymakers - who are not necessarily influenced by contemporary design culture or buzzwords - design policies in complex social situations. This could be a strategic way to enter policy arenas and contribute to enhancing contemporary knowledge of design for policy.
This also opens the discussion on the entry points as a series of strategies for introducing entities engaged in design or design research into the design-for-policy arena. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, existing literature has suggested frameworks for strategic actions to enable design thinking in the public sector (Brinkman et al., 2023). However, the framework by Brinkman et al. (2023) focuses on a taxonomy of strategies that assumes design thinking is already established within the entities it targets. Consequently, similar to this framework, 'Enhancing compatibility' and 'Building confidence' correspond to entry point 1 of the framework presented in this paper, while 'Forming an alliance' and 'Generating support' align with entry point 2. However, entry point 3 is not explicitly represented, and entry point 2 is not clearly emphasised as a strategy in the framework. Entry point 3 underscores the importance of design in navigating approaches such as those recognised as 'community-led'—including the radical ones (e.g., see Udoewa, 2022)—and cautions against adopting a design-ego approach when understanding design for policy, as this may risk trivialising the role of design.

With regard to existing frameworks on design for policy (e.g., Brinkman et al., 2023; Hermus et al., 2020; Kimbell et al., 2023; Van Buuren et al., 2020), our set of entry points shares a common focus on identifying who carries design expertise within policy-making processes. Additionally, it reorders some key elements found in those analyses. First, entry point 1 highlights a design for policy approach aimed at innovating policy-making on a broad scale—by training policy professionals and equipping them with new skills and knowledge. Second, entry point 2 aligns with literature emphasising the participatory nature of the policy process, with a focus on fostering a more inclusive and democratic generation of solutions and interventions. Finally, the inclusion of entry point 3 allows us to address the diverse perspectives found in the literature, which examine whether design contributions come from expert designers or from non-designers involved in the process. Regarding the differences and distances from existing frameworks, it is important to note that the entry points presented here do not focus on well-established contexts of design for policy but on the ways to create these kinds of spaces. Our proposal is not intended to substitute or advance existing frameworks; rather, its goal is to encourage reflection on how design researchers can enter these frameworks. In this sense, it identifies possible access channels or 'triggers' through which design can be engaged and solicited to contribute within policy processes. For example, the framework can serve as a reference

for designers and, particularly, for academic entities engaged in design research, helping them understand how to structure research projects aimed at influencing design for policy. Embedding these entry points within the work packages of design research projects may increase the likelihood that those organisations establish touchpoints and find opportunities to enter the design-for-policy arena.

Entry point 1 encourages collaboration between designers and public administration bodies, focusing on the need to develop innovation-oriented capabilities and understanding how these efforts, even indirectly, relate to policy-making. Entry point 2, on the other hand, invites designers to explore opportunities for co-designing with public and private stakeholders to address shared public issues, while critically examining the impact of this collaborative action on policy outcomes and the governance of the process. Finally, entry point 3 may inspire designers to explore other fields looking for approaches that display a 'designerly' sensibility and could inform policy design actions, learning from non-designers on how to approach design for policy.
From a more analytical perspective, these entry points can serve as lenses for designers to identify and uncover cases not yet recognised in the design for policy discourse. By examining these cases through the proposed entry points, designers may gain new insights into the impact of policies, while also opening up fresh research avenues and reflections.

According to the research question, entry points 1 and 2 help identify existing experiences of design for policy that have not yet been labelled as such, while entry point 3 creates a space to proactively approach this emerging design field of where it is underexplored. The three entry points should be seen as potential entryways into the design-for-policy arena, and more than one entry point— or even all three— can be used simultaneously to establish the necessary conditions for projects that enable a promotional entity to enter the design-for-policy sphere.
In contexts where design for policy is primarily dominated by a few powerful entities, this framework can serve as a tool— potentially even a political one— to raise awareness about how certain design and research skills can be instrumental in breaking down seemingly closed barriers.
An expected impact of this framework is that it could encourage a reflexive approach, prompting a re-evaluation of past and future design research projects through the lens of the three entry points. This shift in perspective may influence how projects are designed, both for design research and practice and for policy purposes, potentially transforming the way design engages with policy processes moving forward.

4.1 Limitations and perspectives for future research

This study, however, has limitations that also point to avenues for further research. First, the cases and examples presented here need to be examined through more exploratory research, ideally involving design-for-policy experts, policymakers, and civil servants, complementing and balancing the current approach with a more field-based research perspective. Second, the framework should be developed in collaboration with other academic institutions and social innovation entities to facilitate an iterative validation

process of the three entry points, and potentially introduce new ones. Third, a more deductive approach should be adopted in future research to strengthen the identified patterns. These aspects are still in an early stage, primarily because field-based research has not yet been developed due to a lack of time and funding to support such projects. Moreover, initiating these activities requires a solid theoretical foundation, one that needs further discussion and refinement. Feedback gathered in contexts such as this conference can play a valuable role in helping to strengthen the theoretical framework and optimise the planning of future research activities.

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