Training Pack for Youth Workers

Module: Design thinking methodologies and practical worksheets for youth workers

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this module you will find information about design thinking for youth workers. Design thinking has become more popular in the last years because of its innovative and bottom-up approach, which some people see as a useful tool to make use of in complex situations where there seems to be no solution to a problem. From policy makers to youth workers, design thinking is a theory but also a set of practical tools that can help understanding and defining a problem, before ideating and trying solutions.

Design thinking encourages people to have an open mind and a creative spirit, since a lot of the work goes on understanding a person's problem, their situation and their context, to try to find a possible solution. Understanding is the first step, which is followed by a given structure of phases: observe, define, ideate, prototype, test and reflect. In order to do so, there are several tools that can be used, some of them summarized in this module, but we invite you to read more to have a wider toolbox when applying design thinking in your youth work.

Youth work can find design thinking useful since it's human-centered, which would help youth workers to have the youths in the center. This is important due to the key role of youth workers in empowering youths, which they do by supporting them, listening to them, giving importance to their struggles and questions, and guiding them in complex situations. We hope that the module and this brief introduction to design thinking for youth workers can be inspiring and will open a window for a new framework for youth work.

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2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learning outcomes of this module are the following:

- To become familiar with the concept of design thinking
- To learn the definition of design thinking and its phases
- To understand how design thinking can be applied by youth workers
- To reflect on the role of youth workers in empowering youths
- To know about the relation between policy making and design thinking
- To understand the benefits of applying design thinking in youth work
- To have practical worksheets ready to use with youths
- To see examples of design thinking in youth work
- To have new tools and inspiration to use design thinking in youth work

3. REFERENCES TO EU POLICIES

For many working in policy, design thinking constitutes a 'bottom-up' approach where the gap between designers and citizens is narrowed through decisions being informed and even sometimes driven by those who are affected by policies. This participatory focus of design draws from the democratic concept where all those 'affected by design decisions should be involved in the process of making the decisions'. In particular, developing more collaborative approaches that involve multi-actor networks of public and private stakeholders is viewed as a key imperative.

When conventional problem solving fails, a focus on the problem-as-presented first needs to be deconstructed before it can be solved. For these reasons, its supporters claim that the application of design thinking approaches is helping to generate 'an entirely different decision-making model for policy'.

Design thinking, considered here as the parallel creation of a thing and its way of working, pushes policy decision-making towards 'a fundamentally creative form of deliberation, which operates with different decision processes to those of rational choice'. It implies an iterative and 'self-correcting' approach to policymaking that proceeds through interlocking processes of scoping, defining and reframing problems; ideating, prototyping and testing solutions; and learning by doing. The iterative nature of policymaking from a design thinking perspective stems from viewing the design process as a 'bottom up' approach to public problem solving that is playful, creative and, at times, even illogical.

One of the most important ways in which design thinking is being taken up in practice within policy systems is through the spread of PSI labs. In 2016, it was estimated that there were more than 60 public policy innovation labs within EU member states alone, while others have estimated that, worldwide, around 100 PSI labs had been established at various levels of government, with new labs being created at 'a rate of at least one a month'.

However, design thinking is far from being part of specific EU policies up to date. What can be found are similar approaches in different innovation initiatives from the EU and EU member states, which try to find more effective ways of decision-making.

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4. CHAPTER I: Design Thinking in Youth Work

4.1. What is Design Thinking?

Design thinking is a non-linear, innovative process that can be used to understand complex situations, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test. Involving five phases—Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test—it is most useful to tackle problems that are ill-defined or unknown.

In an increasingly fast changing world, it's crucial to develop and refine skills to understand and address rapid changes in peoples' environments and behaviors. The world has become increasingly interconnected and complex since cognitive scientist and Nobel Prize laureate Herbert A. Simon first mentioned design thinking in his 1969 book, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, and then contributed many ideas to its principles. Professionals from a variety of fields, including youth work, subsequently advanced this highly creative process to address human needs in the modern age. Twenty-first-century organizations from a wide range of fields find design thinking a valuable means to problem-solve for the users of their products and services. Design teams use design thinking to tackle complex problems because they can reframe these in human-centric ways and focus on what's most important for people. Of all design processes, design thinking is almost certainly the best for "thinking outside the box". With it, youth workers can do better with youths, understanding, framing and ideating new ways to meet youths' needs.

A good starting point for understanding the design thinking approach is to envision ourselves with a beginner's mind. With the "beginner's mind," we want to encourage people to ask questions as though we didn't have the slightest idea as to their answers. Like an alien from outer space who sets foot on Earth for the first time and asks themself why we throw plastic into our oceans, work during the day and sleep at night, why we wear ties all the way to rituals that seem strange indeed to an outsider, such as looking for eggs at Easter time.

How we behave in order to apply design thinking successfully:

- We bid farewell to prejudices on "how things work."
- We put aside expectations about what will happen.
- We strengthen our curiosity to understand facts and problems in depth.
- We open ourselves up to new possibilities.
- We ask simple questions.
- We try things out and learn from it.

4.2. The Role of Youth Workers in Empowering Youth

The key purpose of youth work is to enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their potential.

Empowerment of young people means encouraging them to take charge of their own lives. Today, young people across communities are facing diverse challenges and youth work in all its forms can serve as a catalyst for empowerment. By working on empowering young people, youth workers focus on the skills and potential of the youths to do things, as well as on giving young people time to share their views and opinions about their interests and struggles.

Youth workers can empower the youth in many ways, which can be by engaging them in different social and leisure activities. Using a collaborative approach and involving young people and youth organisations, youth workers can support them to be more engaged in society. This is crucial for the youths to develop opportunities to take an active role in their communities, which can mean to stand up for their rights, to talk about what they do and don't like, and to react against unfair situations.

Another way to empower young people comes hand in hand with the figure of a mentor: someone to guide the youths and help them navigate the struggles that they face. Youth workers can guide the youths and understand their concerns, so that they can take a step forward to start creating the change that they need in their communities.

In order to take the role of engaging and mentoring youths, youth workers need strong listening skills. By actively listening to what the youths have to say, what might be worrying them, or what they are struggling to understand, youth workers are giving the youths the opportunity to speak and be heard. This is extremely important in a fast time when people live in a constant rush, with no time to stop and listen to each other. When young people are listened to with respect, their opinions and feelings become valid and important. If the youths perceive their opinions and feelings as valid, they can reflect, talk, and act on them with a proactive attitude.

Finally, it is important to mention youth work as a guidance for youths to find what they like. Understanding what your passion is, especially at a young age can be very difficult. Youth workers can also have a key role in helping the youths to identify what they like and to pursue it. Young people usually get lots of advice from parents and teachers, which don't necessarily have to match their needs. It's important to allow the youths to have spaces where they don't feel judged and they can explore what they like. When young people are given the tools to embrace their passions they become very productive and contribute to building safer communities.

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4.3. Benefits of Applying Design Thinking in Youth Work

The benefits of applying design thinking in youth work come from some of the success factors and core propositions of design thinking, which make it a powerful tool to use with youths.

- Starting with human beings: youths with their needs, situations and possibilities are in the center of design thinking. This goes hand in hand with the empowerment process described earlier where youth workers engage, listen, mentor and understand the youths.

- In design thinking, it is of crucial importance to understand what we work on and what greater vision ought to be pursued. In order to work with youths and help them find solutions to their struggles, youth workers can use design thinking and its in-depth approach to problems. In order to find a solution, youth workers must have internalized the problem and have understood it in depth. This will help them guide and support the youths.

- Collaboration between youth workers is crucial for the holistic consideration of problem statements. Youth work can benefit from teams with different skills and experiences to help in the creative process and the reflection upon ideas. This creative and holistic approach helps to have different perspectives on a problem, which can also help figuring out how to go about it.

- Design thinking has a strong practical approach, that comes after understanding and ideating solutions for given problems. Youth workers can benefit from this approach that does not need heavy theory to work, and that can offer the possibility of trying different simple solutions with youths (e/g/ building prototypes and interaction with potential users)

- Some problem statements are quite complex since we want to integrate different systems and react to events agilely and with purpose. Thinking in systems is more and more becoming a critical skill, for example, in the case of digital solutions.
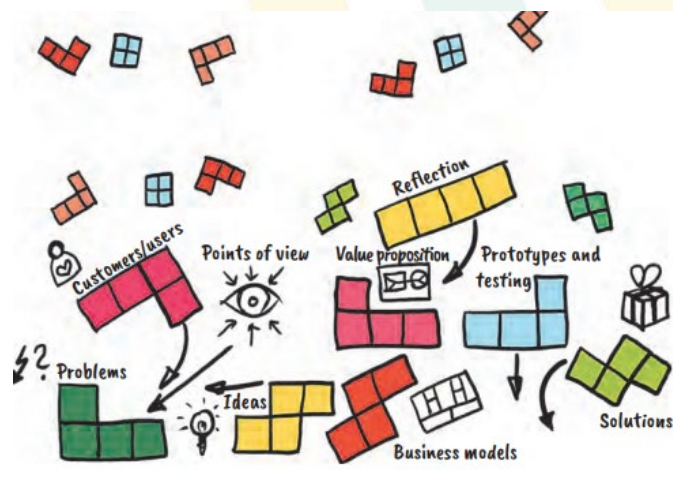
5. CHAPTER II: The Design Thinking Process

5.1. Empathize: Understanding Youth Needs and Challenges
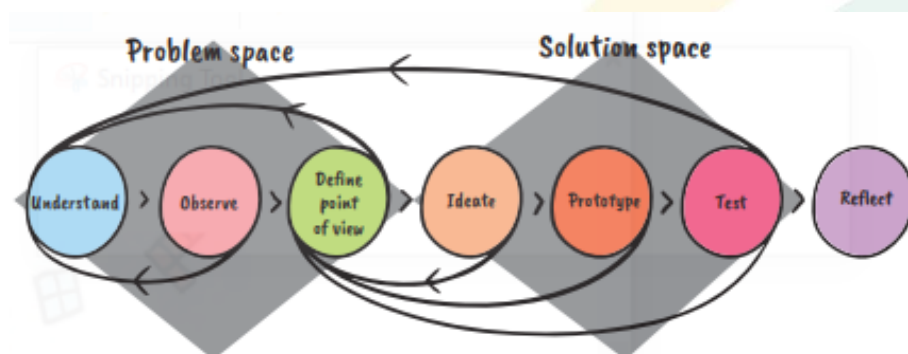
The design thinking process can be organised in six phases: **understand, observe, define point of view, ideate, develop prototype, and test**. In the end, we can add the phase of reflecting, which is usually crucial in order to learn from the process. In this section, we would like to briefly explain the phases of this micro-cycle. In the double diamond model of the British Design Council, the first three phases encompass the problem space and the next three the solution space.

Understand

In the first phase of the micro-cycle of design thinking, we want to learn more about the young person, their needs, and the tasks that they must complete. At the same time, we define the creative framework more exactly, for which we want to design solutions. For the definition of the challenge, we use, for example, "WHY" and "HOW" questions in order to broaden or limit the scope.

Observe

Only reality can show whether our assumptions will be confirmed. This is why we have to go to the place where our potential youths are located. We should strengthen the observation of youths in their real environment or in the context of the respective problem. A trend analysis can shed light on technological and social trends that help us recognize developments. The findings from the "observe" phase help us in the following phase to develop or improve the persona and the point of view. When we speak to young people in order to learn more about their needs, we should ask questions that are as open as possible, working with a question landscape, for example. A structured interview guide can also be helpful.

5.2. **Define**: Framing the Problem and Setting Goals

In this phase, we focus on evaluating, interpreting, and weighting the findings we have gathered. The result eventually flows into the result synthesis (point of view).

Storytelling and context mapping are methods that can be used for the presentation of the findings:

- Context mapping: to get a better picture of a particular situation. What are these experiences like for others? When do they undergo this experience? With whom and in what context? This can be used to map the gathered information in a visual way in order to understand it better as a whole.
- Storytelling: to present insights, ideas, and solutions to the members of the team. It is also useful to highlight unexpected results and generate new perspectives.

The point of view is usually formulated as a sentence "How might we...", for example, to make a statement on the basis of the findings. It helps to formulate a question that makes it possible later, in the "ideate" phase, to work in a targeted manner. The "how might we" question uses a special language that helps to switch to a different way of thinking. "How" implies that there are more possible ways to solve the question. "Might" creates a safe space in which we know that a potential idea might work. "We" reminds us that we solve the problem as a team. It is useful to come up with several questions. Example: how might we help our youth group connect to the environment?

This guideline can be useful to start:

Name of the person (WHO):	
Needs (WHAT is needed):	
In order to (Aim, goal):	
Because (WHY):	

5.3. **Ideate**: Brainstorming Creative Solutions

Once we have defined the point of view, the ideate phase begins. Ideation is a step toward finding solutions for our problem. Usually, different forms of brainstorming and specific creativity techniques help to select and cluster the ideas, such as finding analogies and dot voting.

The Ideation phase is the key to innovation. It offers youth workers an opportunity to take all of their research and understanding about a problem space and couple it with imagination to craft solutions that youths might need. It's not just about coming up with one correct answer—it's also exploring possibilities so you can choose from many viable pathways as your journey progresses.

Ideation allows the Design Thinker to go beyond the obvious solutions to discover creative possibilities to unlock the most suitable option.

During ideation, we experiment with creative techniques to create new pathways to innovative ideas. We play with the constraints, reframe the challenge, reserve judgment, and build on each other's ideas.

After the ideate phase, the following steps would be:

- **Prototype**: The building of prototypes helps us to test our ideas or solutions, quickly and without risk, with the people that we are working with. This can be done online with social media surveys or questionnaires, or in person with consultations, focus groups or interviews.

- **Test**: Testing should take place after each built prototype. When testing, the most important thing is that interaction with the potential user takes place and that we document the results. The tests provide us with feedback that helps with the improvement of our prototypes.

- **Reflect**: After the design thinking cycle, we should spend some time on the reflection phase to evaluate the process. This can be done with a session to get feedback from the parties involved, but also with a questionnaire or focus group. The aim is to find what worked, what did not work, in order to improve in future design thinking cycles.

# 6. CHAPTER III: Practical Worksheets for Design Thinking in Youth Work

6.1. Worksheet: Empathy Mapping for Understanding Youth Perspectives

What is empathy mapping? It consists of four quadrants laid out on a board, paper or table, which reflect the four key traits that the youths show during interviews or in-depth conversations in the understanding phase.

The four quadrants refer to what the youths: *Said, Did, Thought, and Felt*. Determining what they said and did are relatively easy; however, determining what they thought and felt is based on careful observation of how they behaved and responded to certain activities, suggestions, conversations etc. (including subtle cues such as body language displayed and the tone of voice used).

What can you do with the tool? Build up a solid understanding of the user's needs, emotions, motivations, and ways of thinking. Gain insights that would have remained hidden in a superficial consideration (e.g. a youth's frustration and deeper motives).

When to use the tool? The tool is normally used at an early stage in the design thinking cycle in order to understand the context in which the youth person acts. Only then can the development of a solution begin.
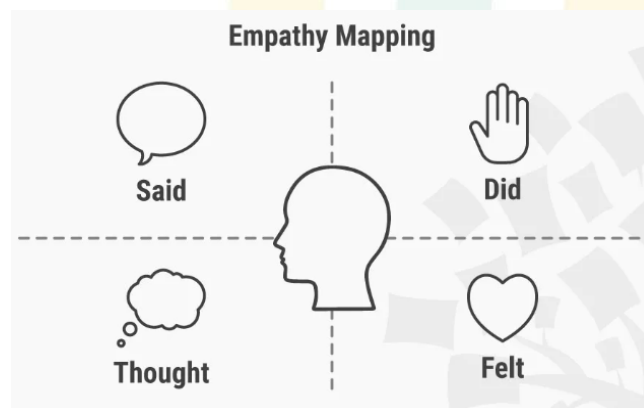
What's the next step? After the empathy mapping, the information collected should be shared with the team to prepare for the observation and defining phases.

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6.2. Worksheet: Problem Statement Formulation

A problem statement is a short description of a specific problem that needs to be solved. It's used to help teams understand the problem so they can work towards solving it.

A good problem statement highlights the gap between where you are and where you want to get to. When youth workers want to help the youths to solve an issue or to improve a situation, a problem statement tells them what's wrong and needs to be worked on. This will allow you to ideate in a goal-oriented manner.

The problem statement captures your design vision by defining the right challenge to address in the ideation sessions. It involves reframing a design challenge into an actionable problem statement. You can use this tool by combining your knowledge about the youth you are working with, their needs and the insights which you've come to know in the understanding and observing phase. This should help you move to the ideation phase.

A problem statement shouldn't tell you how to solve the problem or how to approach solving the problem; it simply states what the problem is. If it's a big, complicated problem, writing a longer, more descriptive problem statement is ok. If it's a small, simple problem, then one or two sentences will do.

If a problem statement is difficult to understand, it won't get solved very well. You could end up solving the wrong problem, so remember to review the outcomes of the tool to make sure you get the results that you need. A good problem statement is broad enough that you can start thinking of lots of different ideas and directions and narrow enough to focus on what's important and stay on track.

Problem Statement Template

Who?	Who has the problem...
What?	What is the problem...
When?	When / where does the problem occur...
Why?	Why is it important to address for the customer...

6.3. Worksheet: Idea Generation and Brainstorming

The classic way of ideating is brainstorming. Brainstorming is applied in the "ideate" phase in a variety of ways. It is primarily about generating as many ideas (ideation) as possible before they are sorted, combined, or clustered. The selection of preferred ideas usually takes place within the framework of an evaluation and vote on the team. For this, tools such as dot voting can be used:

Dot voting: to make a clear decision on what options should be pursued in the form of ideas or concepts. This is useful to make joint decisions as a team and to limit the selection, simplify and prioritize. The idea is that the team collects possible solutions, they write them on post-its on a wall and they vote for the most suitable solution by drawing a dot in the post-its.

Remember that good brainstorming sessions should stimulate creativity and allow all participants, regardless of their hierarchical level, to contribute their ideas.

Before the actual ideation, brainstorming is frequently used as a "brain dump" so that everybody on the team has a chance to make their ideas and solutions known. This procedure helps people clear their heads. In later brainstorming sessions, you can then focus on the respective problem statement or task.

Keep in mind the following brainstorming rules:

#1 Creative confidence #2 Quantity before quality #3 Visualize ideas #4 Use gestures #5 Build on the ideas of others #6 One person speaks at the time #7 No prejudices #8 Continue to brainstorm #9 Fail often and early

You can follow this template when organising your brainstorming session:

Brainstorming session	Cluster the found ideas	Findings and next steps
"How might we…"		

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8. SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this module aims at showing a specific approach to problem-solving for youths called design thinking. This approach has the characteristic of working from an open and comprehensive point of view, where the human is in the center. When using design thinking with youths, youth workers are invited to start from a deep understanding of the young person and their situation. This would be followed by a process of defining, in order to then work on the creative process of ideating a possible solution to any given problem. Finally, youth workers would try the possible solution and test it to see if it works, or go back and re-evaluate the problem.

These steps are to be done in an active and creative way, which is why the worksheets are included in the module. In order to follow the design thinking approach, youth workers will need to make sure that they choose activities and dynamics that make sense to achieve the goals in each step. Here we can find some examples to follow, but youth workers are invited to go on the references and to look for more exercises to implement the design thinking methodology.

It's important that we look for new ways of tackling conflict in these changing times, especially with conflicts that have been going on for some time and no solution seems to be seen. That is why design thinking has become popular in recent years, both at the institutional and governmental level. Creativity is a tool that should not be underestimated when trying to solve complex conflicts, so our invitation is for youth workers and anyone who feels invited to try to use this methodology from an open, emphatic and creative starting point.

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