

REFLECTION M2.1 RESEARCH PROJECT AT A COMPANY

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DRP = Design Research Practices; U&S = User & Society; C&A = Creativity & Aesthetics; T&R = Technology & Realization; B&E = Business & Entrepreneurship; MD&C = Math, Data & Computing;

For my M2.1 project at studio cocosmos, a small (social) design research studio, I have developed a method for youth participation, more specifically to research the lived experiences of young people. This method is the response to the assignment of the city of Eindhoven, who wants to know how they can contribute to the happiness of young people. The method, called OPEN FRAME, was developed in co-creation with young people and in dialog with the policymakers of Eindhoven. The method includes a series of interventions with an installation called OPEN FRAME which eventually will lead to a festival organized for and by young people. I carried out 10 interventions in different districts of Eindhoven. In total we spoke with 92 youths (between 14-25 years old). In this reflection I critically look back at my development throughout the past semester, how my previous learning activities contributed to this development, the lessons I learned as a young designer working in a complex multi-stakeholder context and my experiences/growth working in a design studio.

I will start this reflection by looking back on my development in the expertise areas. My growth within the competency of DRP and U&S stand out. I have learned to address an ill-defined challenge (contributing to the happiness of youth) and reframe it to a concrete design research project with multiple interventions. I have learned to not only manage and deal with the uncertainties of the design process for myself but also helped the policymakers to trust the design process. In addition I was able to implement newly learned methods from Anthropology, such as domain analysis and ethnographic writing). Moreover I have learned to mitigate between the tendency of the municipality to ask social design studio to just gather insights and my vision on my role as designer, which is to stay involved throughout the participation process and dare to question the “problem statement” as proposed by the client.

The second expertise area, central in my project, was U&S. I have developed a new method to research the lived experience of young people. For this I engaged with a new target group and through co-creation and fieldwork I have immersed myself in their life-world to better understand how they giving meaning to the world around them. Together with my co-worker we spoke with 92 young people in Eindhoven, throughout this extensive fieldwork I most of all learned how to listen to young people. I was surprised and touched by their openness and honesty, which also made me aware of my responsibility as researcher and designer to be careful with their data and to show empathy. The fieldwork also trained my patience, as we sometimes waited a whole evening for the “hang youths” to arrive and it helped me step out of my comfort zone, for example when we brought the installation to Stratumseind.

The third expertise area I want to highlight is T&R, I have learned to design a practical yet for youths appealing installation which we could easily build up and take a part. For the installation to be practical in use, I decided simplicity was key. Even though I could have added sensors and actuators, to for instance monitor the balance board, I felt this would make the installation unnecessary complex. The final design was designed in such a way that we could take it apart with Allen keys and build up in under 15 minutes. This gave us great flexibility on our quests to find youths in the city of Eindhoven. For the fourth expertise area, C&A, I have learned to design tools to co-create with policymakers and to involve them in the design process. Additionally, I prepared and facilitated co-creation sessions with students. After experiencing the challenge of ideating alone during COVID lockdowns, it was a nice change to ideate together with students and my co-workers at cocosmos. The intervention helped me gain more experience in reflecting in action, as we had to explore what way of approaching youths worked best. Moreover I learned to communicate the progress of the project to different audiences; policymakers through presentations, youthworks and other stakeholders involved through newsletters and the youths themselves via our social media channels.

For the expertise of M, D & C I have learned to take ethnographic fieldnotes and analyze the notes with the domain analysis method. Although I used qualitative research methods for this project, I have learned to do quantitative analysis through the statistic elective that I took as part of the Anthropology minor. This mostly thought me how to be more critical of statements made in research papers, but also to better understand the

statistic statements made in the news such as the numbers about the covid infections. As we expect to engage with many young people during the festival in July it might be interesting to take a mixed method approach., which we also allow me practice my quantitative research skills. For the expertise of B&E I have learned to define my role as a designer and communicate this repeatedly to various professionals in Eindhoven such as the policymakers and youth workers. In order to communicate the value of the project I have used different media's such as presentations, newsletters and social media posts.

In this part of my reflection I will discuss the development of my professional skills. Firstly I have prepared and presented work to the project team of the municipality of Eindhoven, where I clearly described the design process and our role as designers. Secondly I took the policymakers with us during the intervention, for which I trained them on how to do the conversations. Thirdly I have planned and organized the activities with policymakers, youth workers, neighborhood coordinators and local police. Helping out with other projects at cocosmos, I have facilitated thematic meetings and workshop. Moreover as CDR track representative I have organized a workshop about research grants in collaboration with the grant officers of ID. This taught me how grants and research design works.

Besides of my study related activities I have been the admin of the secretary of the NGO Circuspunt; the platform for Dutch circus. For this I have organized workshop for artists, managed the administration, wrote funding applications and organized other events such as the launch of the circus catalog. Working for Circuspunt also taught me how to mitigate the different interests of people in the circus world as there is some tension between contemporary circus and traditional circus.

What I am mostly proud of is my growth as a professional and increased awareness of skills and qualities. I feel confident in interacting with policymakers and being critical about their practice but also my own practice. Moreover I learned to communicate my boundaries, which I learned to do when I ended up having way to many tasks and responsibilities on my plate.

Regarding my learning goals I would like to highlight; "Applying methods & perspectives from Anthropology". I was able to implement methods for data collection and analysis and I noticed that I could bring in new perspectives during the design process. Also at some point I gave a small presentation to my coworkers to give a crash course about Anthropology. "Experience in practice" I feel like I have a good understanding of what the working in the social domain entails and I think I would like to work for cocosmos or a similar company.

Lastly I want to discuss the missed opportunities and learnings. Whereas last year the missed opportunity was the limited engagement with policymakers, practitioners and citizens, this year was the opposite. However a missed opportunity was seeking more contact with experts on the field of pedagogy. If I could jump back, I would have liked to plan a few interviews with a pedagogist.

Concluding this reflection, I am mostly proud of my development as a professional and the extensive fieldwork I have done. In addition I believe I have taken a lots of responsibility in the project and process which was appreciated by the company. They have also offered me a job to finish the project in summer. During this semester it felt like my previous experiences and learning puzzled together. I could apply anthropology in design. However, I also see many more future opportunities for learning. To further develop my skills ethnographic fieldwork and expand my horizon I will start the master Anthropology in September. My goal in this year is to gain much hands on experience in doing field research and to bring back this knowledge to the design community.