Chapter 7: Ideation tools for experience design

This chapter is work in progress. It is written for a book that is not published yet, called "The GIFTED Museum: Designing hybrid interpersonal museum experiences".

Introduction

"What is the idea? What is the core? We are working with VR now to see how hospitalised people can go to the museum. What is important about VR is not that it's another tech gadget but that it can build relationships: If you have a grandmother in an elderly home, you can actually go and invite her to the museum and have an experience together." (Museum professional participating in the GIFT Action Research)

As mentioned in the introduction, the perspective we offer in this book is technology-agnostic, giving primacy to the design of experiences, and selecting technologies from their ability to deliver these experiences. We are not proposing technology "for the sake of technology" (Olesen, 2016) but as a potential route towards fulfilling a purpose that is relevant and meaningful in a specific museum for particular visitors. As exemplified in the introducing quote, a technology such as VR is not interesting in and by itself, but as capable of building relationships between people, such as a granddaughter and her hospitalised grandmother.

The *idea* behind tech, then, becomes crucial. And the processes of generating, developing and communicating ideas through what has been called *ideation* (Jonson, 2005). While ideation is always an important element in design (Jonson, 2005; Laamanen & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2014), we find it particularly pressing to prioritise in solving what we–in the introduction to this book–framed as the "wicked problem" of developing technologically mediated visitor experiences at museums. In this chapter, we explain why and showcase three ideation tools. The tools are paper based tools that you print and bring to a meeting or workshop where you have invited relevant people to generate new ideas or to work on an existing idea. The tools have been developed with and for museums as a way to help prioritise ideation in early phases of design work.

Why is ideation important?

As noted by Löwgren & Stolterman (2004: 47) “every design starts out as an idea”. An idea of how to solve a problem (Löwgren & Stolterman, 2004). Or change “existing situations into preferred ones” (Simon, 1996: 111). Following Jonson (2005: 613), an idea can be understood as “a basic element of thought that can be either visual, concrete or abstract”. But where do ideas come from? And how do they become ‘designs’? While there are no simple answers to these broad questions, one thing is certain: Ideas need work. As suggested, for instance, by Löwgren & Stolterman (2004: 51), ideas should be transformed, externalised and made visible in order to be collaboratively criticised, developed, expanded, revised, and often discarded. These kinds of ideational tasks are typically attributed to or explored in the early phases of design, focusing on the generation and emergence of ideas (e.g., Dorta, Pérez, & Lesage, 2008; Halskov & Dalsgaard, 2007; Laamanen & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2014). However, ideation very often improves through physical manifestation, why early evaluations and prototyping are also recognised as important ways to work with, test and iterate ideas on their route towards becoming designs (Sanders & Stappers, 2014).

Ideation is clearly important. But, actually, we did not realise *how important* in the context of museums when we initiated the GIFT Action Research – a 1,5 year long process with 10 museums from Europe and USA (see Chapter N). The tools presented in this chapter were used in and grew out of this process. They were inspired by our previous research on designing digital technologies at museums that showed a tendency towards tech-driven development (e.g., (Olesen, 2016; Olesen, Holdgaard, & Laursen, 2018). We therefore set out to prioritise initial phases of design, valuing contextual and collaborative activities. The result of this process was however much more radical than we originally imagined, in that many of the museums questioned why the process at all should be framed through the perspective of technology. Three practices were highlighted as important: 1) to start idea generation with purpose and people in mind (not tech), 2) to collaborate on ideas, and 3) to test ideas. The tools presented in this chapter seek to support these ideational practices in a museum context.

Three tools for ideation

The three tools that we showcase are called the VisitorBox Ideation Cards, the ASAP Map and the Experiment Planner. They are all intended to support collaborative work but at different stages of ideation: The VisitorBox Ideation Cards focus on generating ideas, the ASAP Map focuses on strengthening ideas and the Experiment Planner focuses on testing ideas. As mentioned in the introduction, they are all paper based tools that you print and bring to a meeting or workshop with relevant collaborators.

VisitorBox Ideation Cards: Generate ideas

- What? VisitorBox Ideation Cards is a card game that helps you come up with innovative and thoughtful ideas for digital experiences.
- When? Play the cards in the early phases of design as a fun and inspiring method for generating new ideas for digital experiences.
- How? Print the cards and bring them to a meeting with relevant collaborators.
- Why? Museums that use the cards generate innovative ideas and are able to demonstrate exactly how they determined an idea to be 'good' or 'bad.'

VisitorBox Ideation Cards – a small selection. You can download the entire deck as a printable pdf at https://visitorbox.org/.

VisitorBox Ideation Cards were developed as part of the Horizon Digital Economy project and are available at https://visitorbox.org/ (accessed May 15, 2019). They constitute a set of ideation cards that can be printed out and used in various ideation activities. The purpose of ideation cards is to support collaborative design in a playful way (Wetzel, Rodden, & Benford, 2017). Many such ideation card decks have been developed, for different purposes and contexts (see

Wetzel et al., 2017). They typically encode important design knowledge in a domain and suggest a range of design options of particular relevance.

The VisitorBox Ideation Cards were developed specifically for cultural heritage institutions, and focus on the use of various technologies to support visitor experiences. Even though the cards come with a tech focus, the suggested activity is not driven by tech. You start the game by thinking about the purpose of designing an experience and the people you want to reach, through discussing context and institutional goals. Next, you create a design brief, leading on towards generating and storyboarding design ideas. As a final stage, you broaden your view through disrupting the design and planning for future steps.

Using the cards became an important part of the work done by museum professionals in the GIFT Action Research. The cards were considered "a great exercise for thinking concretely about tech". Some of the participants implemented the method in their home institutions afterwards. As a museum professional stated later: "I really really really found the cards useful. I have used those loads since then and they really help you design a design brief and then think about what you can do and how you can do it."

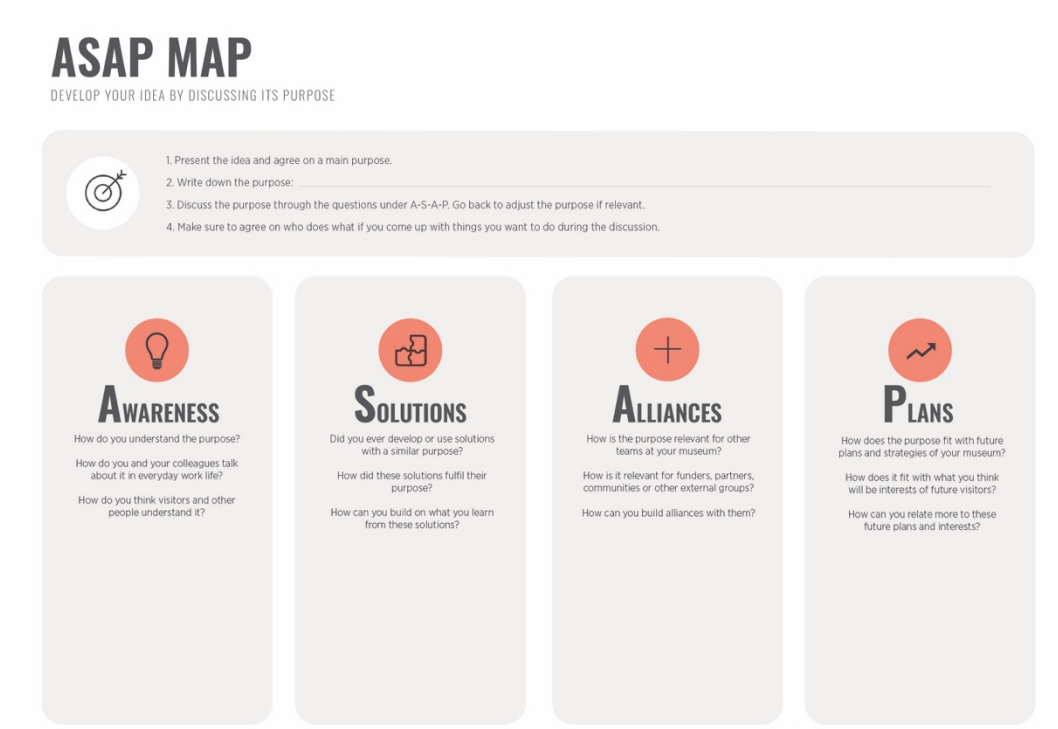
ASAP Map: Strengthen ideas

- What? The ASAP Map helps you facilitate a discussion about an idea in order to develop shared understanding and build on what you already know.

- When? Use the map as soon as possible when you have an idea for a digital experience.

- How? Print the map and use it to facilitate a discussion at a meeting.

- Why? Use the map to strengthen your idea, make on-going collaboration easier and be able to better explain your decisions.



The ASAP Map. You can download the map as a printable pdf at gifting.digital.

The ASAP map is inspired by the idea of making maps for design reflection (Dalsgaard, Halskov, & Nielsen, 2008), as a reflection-in-practice intervention (Schön, 2017) that supports people in reflecting collaboratively on the context in which they design and on which way they are heading. You use the map when you already have a design idea that you would like to develop further with relevant collaborators, not by focusing on the idea as such but on *the purpose* behind it. First, you discuss the purpose and then talk about it through questions split into four categories: Awareness, Solutions, Alliances and Plans (ASAP). The name of the method, ASAP Map, both refers to the four categories, but also playfully encourages people to use it ASAP (As Soon As Possible) when having some kind of first idea.

The ASAP map was developed in collaboration with the 10 museum professionals in the GIFT Action Research. Early in the process, they tested an initial version in their home institutions. Through this test and as a result of two followup workshop sessions with the group, the map was iteratively developed into the final version. From the tests with the first version we could see that the map held a potential to support both micro level discussions on new perspectives, possibilities or barriers and more macro level discussions on strategies and strategic awareness. In the workshop discussions, the museum professionals highlighted the map as a way to “dig in and give flesh and bone to some fancy stuff” and as a good frame for discussions: “If somebody comes up with a digital idea, you can use the map to anchor it”. Also, they saw it

as having a potential for supporting early collaboration, as one of the museum professionals argued: “Without all stakeholders involved from the very start, you’re building in a potential problem further down the line.”

Experiment Planner: Test ideas

- What? The Experiment Planner helps you plan an experiment to find out if your idea makes sense and how you can develop it.
- When? Use the Experiment Planner when you have an idea that you would like to test or know more about.
- How? Print the planner and bring it to a meeting with relevant collaborators.
- Why? Use the map to save time and money, make more useful solutions and be able to better explain your decisions.

The Experiment Planner. You can download the planner as a printable pdf at gifting.digital.

The Experiment Planner encourages experimental practices. The method is inspired by principles from Theory of Change, where the idea is to explicate ones theory around how and why an initiative might change an existing situation. Doing so helps to articulate what might be done in order to enable the change, and later on evaluate whether the desired change was realised or not (Connell & Kubisch, 1998; Weiss, 1999). With the Experiment Planner, the focus is not on changing existing situations but on experimentation as a knowledge-generating or meaning-making procedure (Macdonald & Basu, 2008). When you have an idea, you can use the planner to think through how you might construct an experiment to test and learn more about that idea. On the front of the planner, you fill out 6 categories: Goal, Action, Who & When, Evaluation, Success and Next Steps. On the back of the planner, you find questions related to Outputs, People and Assets that can support a discussion around the experiment if needed.

Like the ASAP Map, the Experiment Planner was developed in collaboration with museum professionals in the GIFT Action Research. They used a first version of the planner in an early workshop, and subsequently gave feedback on iterated versions in two more workshop sessions. In these discussions, the museum professionals particularly highlighted the planner as a means to “help you report the process” and “a good way to communicate plans”. Based on their feedback, the backside was added, having questions that offer more support in filling out the planner. This was deemed useful later in the process, as one of the museum professionals

expressed: “I really like the Experiment Planner. I think it works really well. Having the questions on the back, those prompt questions, I think that is really helpful.”

Concluding reflection: Combination and usefulness of the tools

In this chapter, we have showcased three paper based ideation tools developed with and for museums with the purpose to help prioritise ideation in early phases of design work. As a concluding reflection, we would like to ponder a bit on the possible combination of these tools as well as their usefulness.

When it comes to combining the tools, it is important to say that each project should find its own way of combining them. While the three tools surely can be used one after the other in the presented sequence (from VisitorBox Ideation Cards to Experiment Planner), they could also be used separately or combined with other approaches. Acknowledging the differences across museum institutions and practices, the tools should be used in whatever way they might make sense in a specific context. This also counts for the individual tools and actually, from our test of the first version of the ASAP Map, we found that museum professionals used the map quite differently in their home institutions: There were great variations in terms of who participated in using the map, the setting of use and how the map was used. Overall, this test illustrates a flexibility of the map and that there is no right way to use it.

This leads us to reflect on the usefulness of the ideation tools. Following Löwgren & Stolterman (2004: 2), we acknowledge that “normative approaches are not enough. In order to handle the complexity of interaction design, there is a need for a reflective mind – what we would label a thoughtful designer.” The tools cannot, and are not intended to, substitute a reflective mind. They are meant as a way to encourage and support reflection – not only for the singular mind but as a *collaborative* endeavor. However, this is not an easy goal. Especially not since museums often portray a wide range of professions and different levels of digital literacy. As a museum professional in the GIFT Action Research explained:

“I would see digital as being more experimental, thinking about design practices, being more agile, taking more risks, whereas the people in the organization see it very much as technology led.”

In a similar vein, another museum professional highlighted the need for deeper organisational changes in order for the ideation tools to work: “To actually be accepted as a way of doing things, you would need to have the right capacity.” However, he did find them “a useful first” that “does create space” for reflection. But then we are back at that one person; that one reflective mind willing to take up the challenge to include others in the reflections. Taking on that role is a

challenging task, where you risk being seen as the “one complicating things”. As the museum professional expressed:

“All these big companies are constantly selling you products from the basis that ‘this product solves that problem’. And so many people are acculturated to assuming that’s the way digital works. So if you’re a person on the move who thinks ‘well, we could do this but we need to do x, y and z’, you’re always in that disadvantage where you present the most complicated set of arguments.”

While being “the one complicating things” is not an easy role to take, it might be necessary. Following the arguments of this chapter, there is a need to carve out more space for ideation in order to solve the wicked problem of developing technologically mediated visitor experiences. Thus, VR – or some other technological product – might be the solution. But not in and by itself, only as a potential route towards fulfilling a purpose that is relevant and meaningful in a specific museum for particular visitors. The ideation tools presented here are intended to support such explorations. And by that, hopefully, empower “the one who presents the most complicated set of arguments”, enable museums to save time and money wasted on bad ideas and, in the end, lead to better visitor experiences.

References

Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (1998). *Applying a Theory of Change Approach to the Evaluation of Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Progress, Prospects, and Problems*.

Dalsgaard, P., Halskov, K., & Nielsen, R. (2008). Maps for Design Reflection. *Artifact*, *2*(3–4), 176–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/17493460802526412

Dorta, T., Pérez, E., & Lesage, A. (2008). The ideation gap:: hybrid tools, design flow and practice. *Design Studies*, *29*(2), 121–141. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2007.12.004

Halskov, K., & Dalsgaard, P. (2007). The emergence of ideas: the interplay between sources of inspiration and emerging design concepts. *CoDesign*, *3*(4), 185–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/15710880701607404

Jonson, B. (2005). Design ideation: the conceptual sketch in the digital age. *Design Studies*, *26*(6), 613–624. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2005.03.001

Laamanen, T.-K., & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, P. (2014). Interview Study of Professional

Designers' Ideation Approaches. *The Design Journal*, *17*(2), 194–217. https://doi.org/10.2752/175630614X13915240575988

Löwgren, J., & Stolterman, E. (2004). *Thoughtful Interaction Design: A Design Perspective on Information Technology*. MIT Press.

Macdonald, S., & Basu, P. (2008). *Exhibition Experiments*. John Wiley & Sons.

McIntyre, A. (2008). *Participatory Action Research*. SAGE.

McTaggart, R. (1991). Principles for Participatory Action Research. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *41*(3), 168–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001848191041003003

Olesen, A. R. (2016). For the sake of technology? The role of technology views in funding and designing digital museum communication. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, *31*(3), 283–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2016.1163643

Olesen, A. R., Holdgaard, N., & Laursen, D. (2018). Challenges of practicing digital imaginaires in collaborative museum design. *CoDesign*, *0*(0), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2018.1539109

Sanders, E. B.-N., & Stappers, P. J. (2014). Probes, toolkits and prototypes: three approaches to making in codesigning. *CoDesign*, *10*(1), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2014.888183

Schön, D. A. (2017). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Routledge.

Simon, H. A. (1996). *The Sciences of the Artificial*. MIT Press.

Weiss, C. H. (1999). Nothing as Practical as Good Theory: Exploring Theory-based Evaluation for Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families. In J. P. Connell, A. C. Kubisch, L. B. Schorr, & C. H. Weiss (Eds.), *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives: Concepts, Methods, and Contexts* (pp. 65–92). Washington, D.C. : Queenstown, MD: Aspen Inst Human Studies.

Wetzel, R., Rodden, T., & Benford, S. (2017). Developing Ideation Cards for Mixed Reality Game Design. *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, *3*(2).

https://doi.org/10.26503/todigra.v3i2.73