# DEVELOPING CITIZEN DESIGNERS

BLOOMSBURY

# LLAGOSTERA YOUTH CENTER

**Ariel Guersenzvaig**, Lecturer, ELISAVA, School of Design and Engineering, Barcelona, Spain

2.52 The kitchen is a social and learning environment; the users can learn to cook and prepare meals for their friends.

**CLIENT**
Llagostera (Girona, Spain) City Council and Autonomous Government of Catalonia (Spain).

**PROJECT TITLE**
Llagostera Youth Center (Casal Jove Llagostera).

**DURATION**
4 months, September 2013–December 2013.

**BUDGET**
€9,800.

**TEAM**
*Faculty advisors:* **Núria Coll, Stefano Colli,** and **Ariel Guersenzvaig.**
*External advisor:* **Mercè Graell.**
**Supervision: Albert Fuster.**
*Students:* **Banui Barragán, Mar Ferrer, Laia Fusté, Maria Massó, Christopher Montserrat, Laura Oliver, Laia Pascual, Albert Puig, Jordi Ros, Berta Sagristà, Ariadna Veas.**

**DESCRIPTION** Llagostera (pop. 7,700) is a municipality in the autonomous community of Catalonia, Spain. It is located 20 km south of Girona (pop. 750,000) and 15 km west of the Mediterranean Sea. ELISAVA, a design and engineering school located in Barcelona, was commissioned by the client to develop an innovative solution for the redesign of an existing youth center located in Llagostera. The redesign would include the interior and exterior of the center's building as well as the center's service offerings.

The existing youth center is a public-funded space where young people aged 15–35 can meet and participate in activities. Its current user base is small, and the center does not connect with the needs of the people it serves.

This project was developed by recently graduated students from various design disciplines (interior, graphic, and product design). All students were familiar with people-centered design techniques, but for most of them this was the first real deep dive into a complex challenge involving real people.

**RESEARCH** The students performed three types of research: desk and field research, consisting of a photographic safari, architectural observation, benchmarking, and mystery shopping; user research, with ethnographic interviews and contextual observation; and participatory design using co-creation.

**CHALLENGES** The main challenge was to design a space and a set of offerings that would serve the needs of a broad group of users. Another important challenge was to step outside of a self-referential frame in order to create new solutions that work. In order to achieve that, the team needed to research and gain deep understanding of the people using the center: What were their needs? What were their dreams? What did they expect from the future? How did they behave? What would they do to get the future they wanted?

**STRATEGY** As in most projects with a "fuzzy" front-end, our project did not evolve in a linear manner but iteratively. Nonetheless, the project could be divided into four main stages:

1. **Discovery** After initial briefing sessions with the client, the students used online research to get a sense of what type of youth centers were available and what kind of services were offered. They visited several youth centers to gather brochures and leaflets and to learn about the physical spaces that housed these centers. They developed empathy with the services' users and got an understanding of the dynamics that took place in youth centers.

At this stage the students conducted ethnographic interviews and contextual observations of the end-users. Through these techniques, the students gained a deep understanding of the users needs, their attitudes toward the service providers, and especially the possible role the new youth center might have in their lives.

Several participatory design sessions were held. The toolkits created by the students specifically for these sessions were used to facilitate the sessions. The main co-creation techniques used were visual card sorting and storytelling and the creation of visual experience maps and mood boards to explore present issues (i.e., the user's daily chores, leisure activities, or states of mind) and future issues (i.e., what their ideal space for sharing time with friends or family would look like).

> *"All students were familiar with people-centered design techniques, but for most of them this was the first real deep dive into a complex challenge involving real people."*

2. **Interpretation** Interpretation was mainly carried out by means of clustering techniques such as affinity diagrams. Main themes were explored through rapid sketching techniques. In our view of design, interpretation of research and problem finding (an analytic task) is deeply linked to problem solving through the exploration of solutions (a synthetic task).

**2.53a** The club has an open meeting place where users can meet their friends, read a book or simply relax.

**2.53b** The club includes an open and modular co-working space where courses are offered and the city's future entrepreneurs can meet each other.





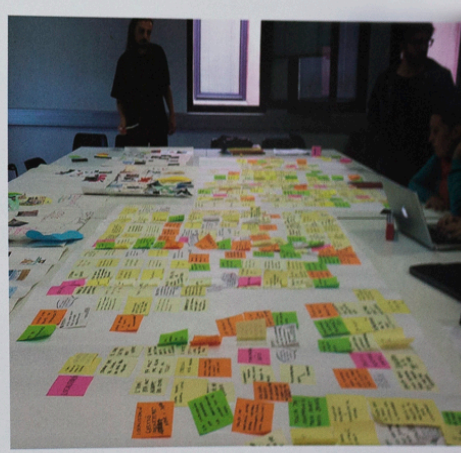
Four main themes emerged during this stage: *learning*, *identity*, *shared ownership*, and *place*. Each thematic cluster yielded several insights that were used to define opportunity areas, seen as open-ended questions to be answered in the next stage. The main opportunity areas that were defined were: how to get there, inside and outside the youth center, learning to learn, and connected community. While finishing this stage, the team framed a solution: The center was there to help local young people learn about and understand the present and future world around them.

**3. Concept generation** Through divergent design thinking, sketching, and rapid prototyping we aimed to rapidly generate many different conceptual solution ideas. These ideas were evaluated according to their fitness for purpose (how well they matched the insights and how well they fit the opportunity areas). Several (partial) conceptual solutions were chosen and incorporated into a comprehensive conceptual framework consisting of three pillars: open youth center, activate the neighborhood, and entrepreneurial learning.

**4. Delivery** In this stage the conceptual solutions (the *what* of the solutions) were further developed into technical designs (the *how* of the solutions). The technical designs had a service design element—the service for the youth center was defined, and then an element was designed that defined the spaces that would accommodate that service. The technical designs were the project's end results and will be used by the client moving forward to communicate with the architects, engineers, and contractors who will implement the design. Deliverables included customer journeys, service blueprints, floor plans, and architectural renderings.

**EFFECTIVENESS** If we were faced with a similar challenge in the future we would allow more time for participatory design during the concept generation stage. Overall, we are very satisfied with the results and so are the clients. They are currently planning its development and construction. The project will become a reality.

**ASSESSMENT** This project was an eye-opener for all of the students. They realized that working side by side with the people they are designing for increases the quality of the end solutions and their likelihood of success. The techniques and participatory tools we used pleasantly surprised the community's young people. They enjoyed the activities and could share their views with the design team and see how this process was translated into concrete solutions. The client experienced how our design methodology can provide new ways of reaching meaningful and innovative solutions. For me, as a teacher, it was a wonderful opportunity to see young designers at work and assist them in their first complex professional challenge.



**2.54** Chris Montserrat, Jordi Ros, and Maria Massó (left to right) making sense of raw data obtained through user research and participatory design.