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Collaborative approaches for Societal issues



Domain:
Democratic Change
& Society



Place:
Stockholm,
Sweden



Duration:
Two days workshop



Target audience:
Students and CCIs

Mission

The Swedish cultural and higher education sectors are currently grappling with a significant challenge: a sharp increase in real estate costs. Held at the culture centre Rågsveds Folkets Hus and the SSES premises, the workshop, inspired from traditional hackathons, created an immersive environment for students' collaboration and exploration of this challenge.

Engagement activities

Students were introduced to case studies highlighting the challenges faced by cultural and educational institutions, such as rising rents, budget constraints, and their impact on communities. Guided by representatives from the local community and SSES, participants analysed these issues using a design-based systems-thinking framework, which encouraged them to see the interconnectedness of factors influencing these challenges.

Artistic activities

The workshop was designed to include the arts at all stages of the students' reflection. This was manifested through exploratory walks concentrating on colors and sounds, compulsory artistic communicating ways and video development.

IMPACT

Replicable framework

Students' empowerment

Stimulation of critical reflection

Combination of artistic and technological
approaches to enhance learning



WHAT HAPPENED?

The surge of costs has led to skyrocketing rent prices, forcing museums and theatres to make painful cutbacks and layoffs. Insufficient funding further exacerbates the problem, creating a pressing societal issue that inspired the development of a two-day weekend workshop with students.

To ensure a multidimensional approach to tackling this issue, RISE partnered with the Stockholm School of Entrepreneurship (SSES) to organise a Weekend workshop on the topic. SSES is an interdisciplinary initiative offering courses and workshops to students from six prestigious member universities - Karolinska Institutet (KI), the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design (Konstfack), the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), Stockholm University (SU) and the Royal College of Music (KMH).

PARTICIPANTS ENGAGEMENT

A key feature of the workshop was its focus on **art and design methods** as tools for understanding and solving complex problems. Students engaged in a creative mapping of a case, using all the material and perspectives that they could gather and collect (i.e. case information, personal perspectives, materials collected through the explorative walk). The inclusion of an explorative walk indeed allowed participants to connect with physical spaces and consider the broader societal and cultural implications of their work (see below). These exercises not only helped students approach the cases from fresh perspectives but also encouraged them to think deeply about the role of creativity, community, and innovation in shaping solutions.

Throughout the workshop, collaboration was a central theme. Students worked in small, multidisciplinary teams, bringing together expertise from fields such as medicine, engineering, business, arts, and social sciences. This diversity of perspectives enriched the discussions and enabled the development of innovative, multifaceted solutions. By rotating cases on the second day, participants were **challenged to adapt** their thinking and apply their skills to new contexts, fostering flexibility and critical problem-solving abilities.

The culmination of the workshop was a series of video prototypes, where students presented three potential future scenarios addressing the challenges faced by cultural and educational organizations. These scenarios sparked lively discussions about the feasibility, creativity, and potential impact of the proposed ideas. The final reflection session tied together the insights gained over the two days, emphasizing the interconnectedness of art, culture, design, and innovation in tackling societal challenges.

Overall, the workshop provided a rich and engaging learning experience, equipping students with the tools and mindset to approach complex societal issues with **creativity, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary collaboration**. It demonstrated the value of bringing together diverse perspectives and highlighted the potential of art and design to inspire meaningful solutions in the face of pressing real-world challenges.



Artistic activities

The structure's activity was inspired by a hackathon, but reimagined the format to focus on creativity, artistic exploration, and interdisciplinary learning. The artistic intervention took place on multiple levels, blending art and design thinking with the exploration of societal challenges.

At the **conceptual** level, the event's redesign emphasised using artistic methods and design to address complex societal issues. The students were encouraged to foster a more creative and holistic approach to problem-solving. The goal was not just to find solutions but also to reflect on the processes of exploration, collaboration, and critical thinking.

At the **physical** level, the workshop was strategically held at Rågsveds Folkets Hus, a cultural building with deep historical and artistic significance. This venue, known as the birthplace of the Swedish punk movement, infused the event with an atmosphere of creativity and rebellion against conventional thinking. Students had the unique opportunity to visit the historic music room where the punk movement began, connecting their work with the cultural heritage of the space. Additionally, the art gallery within the cultural house was opened for students to explore, offering an **immersive** and **inspiring** artistic setting for the workshop's activities.

At the **task** level, artistic methods were woven into the structure of the workshop itself. For instance, the exploratory walk tasked students with creative challenges to expand their thinking and heighten their **sensory awareness** of societal challenges. These tasks included following a specific color or sound, using these cues to navigate their **surroundings**, and then discussing a question related to their observations.

Furthermore, traditional tools like PowerPoint were deliberately excluded to encourage students to think **beyond conventional formats** when presenting their work. During the mapping phase, students used alternative methods to communicate their ideas. One group, for example, performed a theater piece with role-playing to illustrate their insights on societal challenges.

For the final task, students created three videos illustrating possible **future scenarios** for addressing the cultural and educational challenges they explored. The freedom to use any artistic medium resulted in an array of creative outputs. Some groups filmed role plays, while others produced simple animations made from hand-drawn illustrations, using visual storytelling to bring their ideas to life.

This multi-layered approach allowed students not only to engage with artistic activities as observers but also **to actively create** using their preferred artistic methods. By intertwining artistic exploration, creative expression, and collaborative problem-solving, the workshop offered a transformative learning experience that bridged the worlds of art, design, and societal development.





I heard that students did not want to leave the school on Sunday, after the workshop was over. This is a sign that they really liked it.

Partner from SSES, male

Impact of the interaction

Key Outcomes of the Interaction

The initiative has highlighted the critical challenges faced by the cultural and educational sectors in coping with budget cuts. It also demonstrated how innovative approaches can empower students and educators to address these challenges effectively, providing them with the opportunity to discuss and reflect on a real-world societal issue.

Active Engagement in Creative Exploration

Throughout the workshops, students displayed remarkable enthusiasm for the **exploratory** and **creative** processes. Their active participation highlighted the potential of combining artistic and technological approaches to enhance learning outcomes and stimulate critical reflection.

Fostering Problem-Solving and Systems Thinking

Students had the opportunity to explore and apply design and artistic methods to tackle complex problems when applying system perspective thinking (e.g., how to play with art and design methods to prototype for societal development; how appreciating diverse perspectives; how to experience multidisciplinary work real stakeholders, acknowledging different perspectives). This experience introduced them to systems thinking, enabling them to understand and address interconnected issues in a more holistic way.

A Replicable Model for Learning

The newly developed workshop process has proven to be highly effective and offers a framework that can be adapted and replicated for other problematics and challenges.



Looking to replicate this impactful experience? RISE has identified a few key ingredients to ensure success:

- **Diverse Student Perspectives:** Inviting students from a variety of disciplines is crucial to fostering rich, diverse perspectives.
- **Leveraging Cultural Spaces:** Hosting activities in cultural venues provides a unique opportunity to explore and reflect on the significance of these spaces within the community. Such locations add depth to the learning experience and create a stronger connection between the participants and the cultural environment.
- **Strong Collaborative Partnerships:** The collaboration between RISE, industry partners, educational institutions, and cultural organisations proved to be highly effective.



Resources

The costs for the interaction included the conference room rental, catering for participants, workshop materials (colour pencils, coloured pens, tape, glue, pins, string, coloured papers, coloured card, large paper, post-it notes (different colours and sizes), scissors), printing and artist contract for the workshop facilitation.



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