

International Student Workshop on Design Thinking in Time of Corona

From 5 to 7 May 2020 an International Student Workshop on Design Thinking, organized by the Erasmus+ project DT.Uni, took place. This international workshop was first planned as a 4 day event in Lublin (Poland) from April 21-24. Due to the Corona crisis this was not possible and as a result the workshop was organized online. The online workshop succeeded in keeping the interactive character that characterizes a design thinking approach. The students developed competences, such as improving their capacity to solve complex problems, adaptation to rapidly changing circumstances, critical thinking, flexibility, 'learning to learn', teamwork, and creativity. The goal of this workshop was for each team to develop a unique design vision or point-of-view to a complex (wicked) problem, and thus to frame it in an innovative way.

The online workshop had 33 participants from 7 European countries. The lead for the design and development of this international workshop was in the hands of the University of Amsterdam's DT.Uni team. The three day workshop was organized in two online sessions of both three hours with a day in between for the groups' research work (Fig. 1: Workshop Agenda).

WORKSHOP AGENDA	
Session 1 (all times are CET)	Session 2
13.00-13.10 Intro + warm-up	10.00-10.10 Intro
13.10-13.30 Brief on the design challenges	10.10-10.35 Persona
13.30-14.00 Challenging assumptions	10.35-11.00 Point-of-view
14.00-14.30 Remember the future	11.00-11.20 Storytelling
14.30-14.45 Take a break	11.20-11.35 Break and switch to plenary session
14.45-15.15 Framing question	11.40-13.00 Plenary session for final presentations
15.15-15.45 Field explorations	End session 2
End session 1	

Figure 1: Workshop Agenda presented on Miro. Session 1 was given on May 5 and session 2 on May 7 2020.

The participants were organized in small internationally mixed groups of 3 to 4 students. Each group worked on one complex problem that had been described beforehand in the design brief. Subsequently, each team executed 8 design thinking tasks before giving its presentation. The workshop was given by André Nusselder (Faculty of Science, UvA), who also wrote the method descriptions (that will be made available as intellectual output of the Erasmus+ project). He was accompanied by facilitators of the working groups coming from all project partner universities. (Fig. 2)

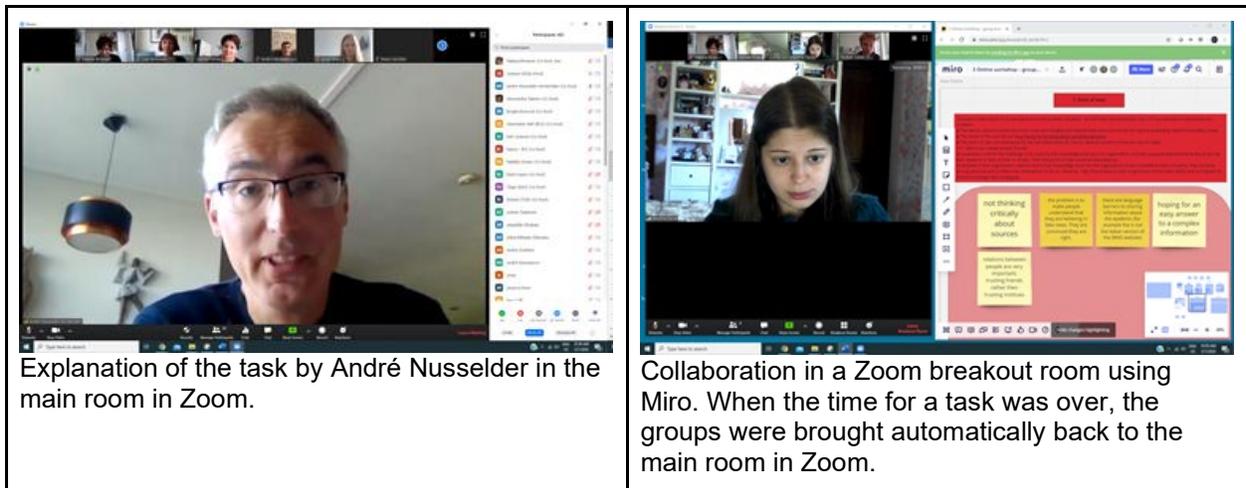


Figure 2: Main group and breakout room during the workshop

The workshop was given in Zoom, using the main room for explanations about the tasks, the presentation of groups and the final reflection. The breakout rooms were used by the groups to work on their tasks. Miro (miro.com), an online collaborative whiteboard platform, was used on which each group had its own collaboration board showing all the time the 8 workshop tasks to complete. In the day between the sessions the students could use the tools of their own choice or Miro.

All groups achieved very good results and group presentations were very different from each other and quite fascinating (Fig. 3).

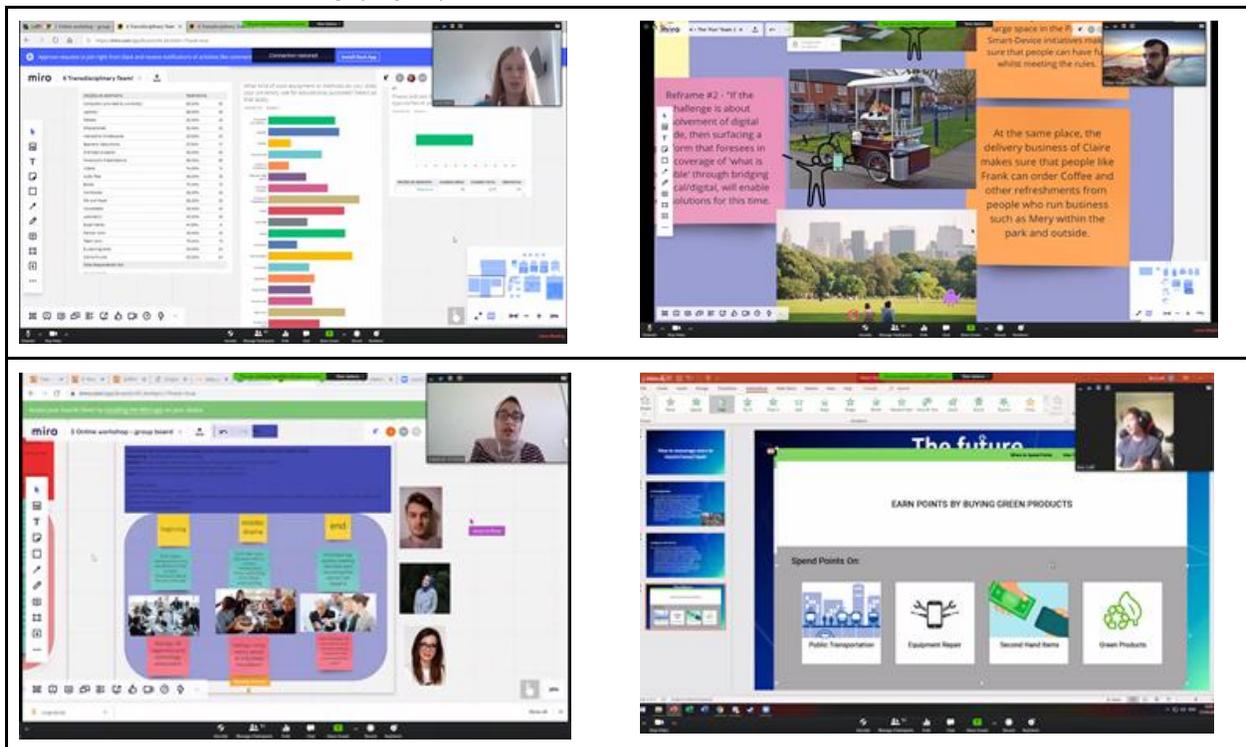


Figure 3: Presentations of groups

Although students did not know each other before, the online collaboration in groups was fully achieved. The online workshop didn't have a competition character which was initially the plan for the variant in Lublin. Looking back on this online workshop, no competition element or prize was needed to motivate the participants to fully invest their energy.

The last session was a reflection chat session (Fig. 4).

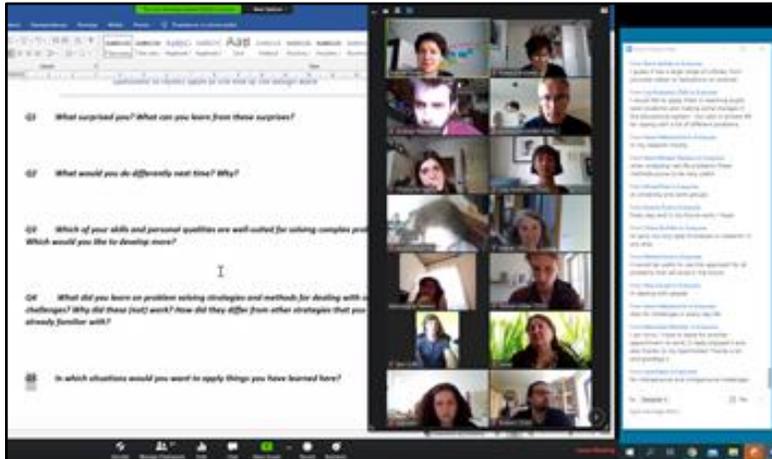


Figure 4: Reflection questions (left on the image) at the end of the workshop using chat (right on the image)

The students were very positive about the workshop and about what they had learned. Most of the participants expressed the preference for an even longer workshop. Some quotes of the participants:

What surprised you?

"The fact that good results can also be made up in a small amount of time."

"I was surprised to be able to work remotely and quickly even though I know little about my 'team', thanks to being united by the same motivation"

"The thing that surprised me the most was that we could all work in groups even though we are from different countries and speak different languages, we could work together and understand each other for a common purpose"

In which situation would you want to apply things that you have learned here?

"School and work projects mostly"

"teamwork and human relations in general"

"idea generation in work"

"Further in my course to better break down complex mechanics and situations to create better solutions"

"every day in different situations"

"I would like to apply them in teaching pupils (and students) and making some changes in the educational system - but also in private life for coping with a lot of different problems."

"it would be useful to use this approach for all problems that will arise in the future"

To get prepared for this international workshop, all participants attended before a local bootcamp at their own university. At the University of Amsterdam, André Nusselder was the trainer in the local bootcamp (Fig. 5: Local Bootcamp).



Figure 5: UvA Local Bootcamp, February 14 2020

The pre- and posttest to measure knowledge gain were taken in all design thinking workshops organized in different countries by DT.Uni project. All workshops were also extensively evaluated. The paper is being prepared now to share more results about it.

About the DT.Uni project:

The overall objective of this Erasmus+ project is to enhance the level of interdisciplinary thinking at HEIs by using a bottom-up approach that supports students, researchers/academics and management/administrative staff in developing their ability to think divergently, creatively and in a designy way. <https://www.umcs.pl/en/dtuni.htm>

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DT.Uni.
Design Thinking Approach
for an Interdisciplinary University



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