Naturalized Customer

Can citizenry engagement be designed?

Author: Théo Löfgren
Supervisor: Anthony Wagner, Daniel Gustafsson and Åsa Stahl
Examiner: Mathilda Tham
Term: VT23
Subject: Design + Change
Level: Bachelor
Course code: 2DI60E
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holder's signature</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Given names</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Date of expiry</th>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Country code</th>
<th>Pass No.</th>
<th>Records No.</th>
<th>Authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>000-0001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CITIZEN IS NOT ENGAGED

CITIZEN

AC000000

00000-00001

VAXJO, SWEDEN

16/01/23

LINNEUNIVERSITY

LNU

00000-00001

Can citizenry engagement be designed?

Naturalized

Customer
The Citizenlab is an innovative and dynamic project that aims to empower citizens and foster their active engagement in the democratic process. By creating a modular and welcoming space, the Citizenlab provides a platform for participants to reflect on their role as citizens and explore alternative perspectives on societal issues. The following provides an overview of the essential elements and objectives of the Citizenlab, emphasizing its distinctive approach in promoting citizen participation and fostering critical thinking.

The Citizenlab utilizes interactive workshops as a central component, where participants are invited to engage in stimulating discussions and collaborative activities. These workshops are carefully designed to promote an inclusive and participatory environment, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to share their ideas and experiences. By incorporating thought-provoking "provotypes," the Citizenlab encourages participants to challenge prevailing assumptions and envision alternative solutions to complex problems.

Ultimately, the Citizenlab aspires to create a more informed, engaged, and empowered society. By promoting critical thinking, community engagement, and active citizenship, the project seeks to inspire individuals to take an active role in shaping their communities and influencing policy decisions. The potential impact of the Citizenlab extends beyond the immediate workshop setting, envisioning a ripple effect that transforms societal attitudes and practices towards a more democratic and participatory future. Through its innovative approach, the Citizenlab holds the potential to redefine the relationship between citizens and public institutions, paving the way for a more inclusive and collaborative society.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my group partner, Tanu, for her collaboration, dedication, and hard work throughout this project. Her enthusiasm and creativity were invaluable to the success of the Citizenlab workshop, and I am grateful for her contributions.

I also want to thank my teachers for their guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Their expertise and support were essential in shaping the project and helping us navigate the challenges that arose during its development.

I would like to extend my thanks to our collaborators, Kronofogden and Malmö City library, for their partnership and assistance in organizing and promoting the workshop. Their collaboration was instrumental in reaching a diverse group of participants and making the project a success.

I am also grateful to the participants who attended the Citizenlab workshop and shared their thoughts, opinions, and personal experiences. Their contributions were crucial in shaping the workshop’s activities and outcomes, and their enthusiasm and engagement were inspiring.

I would like to give a special thanks to my friend Sixtine Reuter for her insights and feedback, which truly helped me shape the project in ways I did not foresee.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my friends and family for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this project. Their love and encouragement helped me stay motivated and focused, allowing me to see this project through to completion.

**Keywords**

Citizenlab, citizens, collaboration, creativity, diverse, engagement, interactive, participation, problem-solving, props, public institutions, workshop.

**Abstract**

The Citizenlab is an innovative and dynamic project that aims to empower citizens and foster their active engagement in the democratic process. By creating a modular and welcoming space, the Citizenlab provides a platform for participants to reflect on their role as citizens and explore alternative perspectives on societal issues. The following provides an overview of the essential elements and objectives of the Citizenlab, emphasizing its distinctive approach in promoting citizen participation and fostering critical thinking.

The Citizenlab utilizes interactive workshops as a central component, where participants are invited to engage in stimulating discussions and collaborative activities. These workshops are carefully designed to promote an inclusive and participatory environment, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to share their ideas and experiences. By incorporating thought-provoking "provotypes," the Citizenlab encourages participants to challenge prevailing assumptions and envision alternative solutions to complex problems.

Ultimately, the Citizenlab aspires to create a more informed, engaged, and empowered society. By promoting critical thinking, community engagement, and active citizenship, the project seeks to inspire individuals to take an active role in shaping their communities and influencing policy decisions. The potential impact of the Citizenlab extends beyond the immediate workshop setting, envisioning a ripple effect that transforms societal attitudes and practices towards a more democratic and participatory future. Through its innovative approach, the Citizenlab holds the potential to redefine the relationship between citizens and public institutions, paving the way for a more inclusive and collaborative society.
As someone with a background in both politics and design, I have always aimed to use my knowledge and skills to make a positive impact. Lately, I have been particularly drawn to the concept of social design, which leverages design principles to address social, environmental, and political issues (Brown, 2015; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Walker, 2017). Through this project, I want to demonstrate how design can be a powerful tool for promoting positive societal change.

In this report, I will explore the steps of citizenship from birth to naturalization and draw parallels to the design process. Just like design, citizenship is a dynamic and iterative journey influenced by both internal and external factors. Each stage of citizenship comes with unique challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities. By comparing these stages to the steps of the design process, I hope to showcase the creative and participatory nature of citizenship, which requires engagement with one’s community, environment, and personal identity. My reflections on the intersection of citizenship and design will also shed light on how this project has influenced my understanding of citizenship. I hope to inspire readers to reflect on their own relationship to citizenship as they read on.
Have you ever thought about what it means to be a citizen? Citizenship is a concept that goes beyond legal status and encompasses a sense of belonging, responsibility, and participation in society. It involves rights and duties, as well as the ability to shape the society in which we live. However, citizenship is not simply a status that we hold. Rather, it is something that we do. It involves active engagement and participation in the political and social life of our communities. Whether we are born into a country or acquire citizenship later in life, understanding the meaning of citizenship and its implications can help us become active and engaged members of our communities.

In this essay, I will explore the concept of citizenship and its different dimensions, from legal status to civic engagement and social responsibility. In this project, my partner Tanu and I strived to examine how we can cultivate a sense of citizenship and become more active and engaged members of our communities, working towards a more just and equitable society.
WE ARE ALL ACTORS: BEING A CITIZEN IS NOT LIVING IN SOCIETY, IT IS CHANGING IT.

World Theater Day Message, Geneva, Switzerland
by Augusto Boal, March 27, 2009.
In recent years, the relationship between the state and its citizens in Sweden has undergone a significant shift due to the adoption of a business-like mindset known as New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991). This approach emphasizes a customer relationship. It has had unintended consequences for citizenship, resulting in citizens being treated as consumers of services provided by the state rather than being co-creators of their citizenship (Osborne, 2013). This trend towards turning citizens into customers has significant implications for citizenship and accountability in Sweden.

The concept of New Public Management has been widely adopted in many countries, including Sweden, as a way of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. According to Hood (1991), NPM seeks to bring market-like mechanisms, such as competition and customer orientation, into the public sector. This has led to a significant shift in how state institutions operate, emphasizing on providing services to meet individual needs and demands rather than collective responsibility and participation. In Sweden, this shift towards a customer relationship model has resulted in citizens being viewed as customers who demand services from the state without feeling a sense of responsibility towards their community (Rhodes, 1997).

This trend towards turning citizens into customers has been particularly evident in the public sector, where citizens are increasingly treated like service consumers. As Osborne (2013) highlighted, the language used by state institutions in Sweden has shifted towards that of the market, with citizens being referred to as clients, patients, or customers rather than citizens. This language reinforces the idea that citizens are consumers of services provided by the state rather than active participants in shaping their communities and societies.

This trend towards treating citizens as customers has had significant implications for citizenship in Sweden. According to Bovaird (2004), the customer relationship model emphasizes the satisfaction of individual needs and desires rather than collective responsibility and participation. This has led to a lack of collective responsibility necessary for sustainability (Ecological Economics, 1989; European Environment Agency, 2018; Horton, 2015). The emphasis on individualistic preoccupations has also led to declining civic engagement in Sweden, with citizens feeling less connected to their communities and less inclined to participate in civic activities (Henriksen et al., 2019).

The trend towards turning citizens into customers has been criticized by many scholars, who argue that it undermines the fundamental principles of citizenship and democracy. As Osborne (2013) highlighted, citizenship is based on the idea of a shared community, where individuals have collective responsibilities and obligations towards each other. The customer relationship model, on the other hand, emphasizes individualistic preoccupations, which can undermine the social fabric of communities.
The adoption of a customer relationship model between the state and its citizens in Sweden through NPM has significant implications for citizenship and accountability. As a result, citizens are viewed as customers of services provided by the state rather than as co-creators of their citizenship. This shift towards individualistic preoccupations has led to a lack of collective responsibility necessary for sustainability and a neglect of social and ethical considerations in delivering of public goods and services. The consequences of this change in the relationship between the state and its citizens can undermine citizens’ trust in their government, leading to disengagement from public services. Its effects are far-reaching and require attention to avoid further harm.

According to Rhodes (1997), the customer relationship approach emphasizes the satisfaction of individual needs and desires rather than collective responsibility and participation. Bovaird (2004) argues that this shift towards individualistic preoccupations has led to a lack of collective responsibility necessary for sustainability. Additionally, Horton (2015) highlights that this has resulted in a lack of trust in public institutions, with citizens feeling that the state is not acting in their best interests.

The customer relationship model has also had an impact on the accountability of the state towards its citizens. In this model, accountability is primarily focused on delivering services to meet the needs and demands of individual citizens rather than on the broader public interest. Stoker (2018) argues that this has resulted in a lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, which can undermine citizens’ trust in their government. This is particularly problematic in Sweden, where trust in public institutions has historically been high (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008). The shift towards a customer relationship model risks eroding this trust and may lead to disengagement from public services.

The consequences of this shift towards a customer relationship model are evident in the Swedish context. According to an article in Le Monde, there is a trend of disengagement from Swedish public services following the reforms of the 1990s financial crash, which popularized the neoliberal philosophy of decentralization and private management of the public sector (Hivert, 2022). This disengagement is particularly evident in areas such as healthcare, where patients are increasingly seeking private alternatives due to a lack of trust in public institutions (Hivert, 2022). Similarly, there is a growing trend of parents choosing to send their children to private schools, despite the availability of free public education, due to a lack of trust in the quality of public schools (Sverige Skolverket, 2003).

This shift towards a customer relationship model has also had implications for how citizens behave. The customer relationship model emphasizes the satisfaction of individual needs and desires rather than collective responsibility and participation. This has resulted in citizens being viewed as consumers of services provided by the state rather than active participants in shaping their communities and societies. As Osborne (2013) highlights, this has led to citizens being treated as customers rather than as co-creators of their citizenship. This has the potential to undermine the sense of community and shared responsibility necessary for a functioning democracy (Putnam, 2000).

I will argue that design can play a crucial role in fostering civic engagement as it involves engagement itself. According to Buchanan (1992), design thinking encourages empathy and understanding of the user’s needs, which is a significant aspect of engaging citizens in the design process. In addition, Fallman (2008) explains that interaction design can be used to facilitate participation by providing opportunities for citizens to engage in design activities. Through this participation, citizens can express their preferences and opinions, and their involvement can contribute to more effective solutions. Furthermore, design research through practice, as advocated by Koskinen et al. (2011), can help establish a better understanding of the social context in which the design is taking place. The involvement of citizens in design activities can enhance their sense of ownership and responsibility towards their community, promoting civic engagement and fostering a more participatory society.
THE DESIGNER DOES NOT, AS A RULE, BEGIN WITH SOME PRECONCEIVED IDEA. RATHER, THE IDEA IS (OR SHOULD BE) THE RESULT OF CAREFUL STUDY AND OBSERVATION, AND THE DESIGN A PRODUCT OF THAT IDEA.

Thought on design by Paul Rand, 2014.
As a passionate advocate for taking action to effect positive change, I recognized the importance of finding like-minded individuals who shared my drive and commitment. That is why I reached out to my classmate Tanu, who I knew was similarly dedicated to making a difference in the world. Together, we embarked on a project that aimed to tackle the issue of low citizen engagement and promote inclusivity in democratic processes. Our goal was to use our skills and knowledge to create a more participatory and accessible system of civic engagement that would empower individuals and communities to have a more significant say in the decisions that affect their lives.

As my partner Tanu and I delved into the topic of citizenship, we recognized that adopting various design approaches would help us gain a more profound understanding. We saw that by exploring and challenging assumptions about citizenship, we could develop new perspectives and offer insights that could shape policies and practices that impact our collective lives. With this in mind, Tanu and I decided to focus on these methods ourselves, as we believed they held the key to creating more inclusive and participatory forms of citizenship.

Metadesign involves reflecting on the design process itself and examining preconceptions and biases that may be embedded in it. In the context of citizenship, this could involve scrutinizing the preconceived notions that underlie our current citizenship systems and considering alternative approaches. Through metadesign, we can uncover the underlying assumptions and values that shape our understanding of citizenship and critically evaluate whether these notions are suitable for our society (Giaccardi, 2005; Tham, 2019; Wood, 2007).

Critical design involves using design to challenge societal norms and assumptions, often provocatively. In the context of citizenship, critical design could be used to question the exclusivity and limitations of current citizenship systems and propose alternative models that are more inclusive and equitable. By pushing boundaries and challenging dominant narratives and power structures, critical design can inspire new possibilities for citizenship.

Speculative design involves using design to imagine possible futures and exploring different scenarios and their implications. In the context of citizenship, speculative design could be used to envision alternative forms of citizenship that are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of diverse communities. By creating imaginative and provocative scenarios, speculative design can challenge our assumptions about citizenship and inspire new thinking about how citizenship can be practiced and understood.
Participatory design involves stakeholders in the design process, engaging them in co-creating solutions that meet their needs and priorities. In the context of citizenship, participatory design could involve citizens in designing citizenship systems that are more responsive to their needs and aspirations. By empowering citizens to shape their vision of citizenship, participatory design can create more inclusive and equitable citizenship systems.

The concept of sustainability has become an increasingly important issue in design, particularly concerning citizen engagement. Felts’ (2000) and Thomas’ (2013) articles highlight the potential for citizen engagement in the context of new public management, which encourages citizen participation in decision-making processes. Similarly, Hackl (2017) and Irwin (2022) emphasize the role of participation in transition design toward sustainable futures. Transition design refers to a design approach that seeks to address the challenges of transitioning to a more sustainable society. This approach requires engaging citizens as active participants in designing sustainable solutions. By involving citizens in the design process, designers can gain valuable insights into the communities’ needs and desires, ultimately resulting in more sustainable and practical designs.

The article “A Framework for Open Civic Design: Integrating Public Participation, Crowdsourcing, and Design Thinking” by Reynante et al. (2021) argues that design has the potential to shape how we understand and practice citizenship, encouraging critical reflection and active engagement with social, political, and environmental issues. Through these design approaches, designers can create new forms of engagement and participation that promote more inclusive and sustainable communities. The authors emphasize the importance of designing for citizenship, as this can enhance opportunities for civic engagement and promote more meaningful and effective forms of democratic participation.
THE CREATIVE PROCESS, LIKE A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY, IS INTUITIVE, NONLINEAR, AND EXPERIENTIAL. IT POINTS US TOWARD OUR ESSENTIAL NATURE, WHICH IS A REFLECTION OF THE BOUNDLESS CREATIVITY OF THE UNIVERSE.

The Zen of Creativity: Cultivating Your Artistic Life by John Daido Loori, 2005.
Similarly, DiSalvo’s work on experimental civics provided a framework for our project (DiSalvo 2022). His emphasis on design as a means of inquiry and exploration aligned with our goals of involving citizens in the design process and creating solutions grounded in real people’s needs. His emphasis on experimentation and prototyping inspired us. We used these methods throughout our design process to refine our ideas and ensure they were practical and accessible to a broad range of users.

These works provided valuable theoretical frameworks and practical tools for our project (Redström 2017; DiSalvo 2022). They helped us to develop a more nuanced and critical understanding of the role of design in promoting citizen engagement and to create solutions that were more responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

In order to develop a tangible outcome for the concept of citizenship, we engaged in a participatory, speculative, and critical design approach, as we believed they would help provoke critical reflections and facilitate imaginative exploration of potential future scenarios for the participants (Bardzell et al., 2012; Dunne and Raby, 2001, 2013; Hoang et al., 2018). Our goal was to create physical prototypes that would embody our vision of citizenship and serve as a tool for citizens to engage with their communities. To achieve this, we involved citizens in every stage of the design process, from ideation, to prototyping, to testing. We also utilized speculative design techniques to create multiple versions of the prototypes that challenged traditional assumptions about citizenship and civic engagement.

At the beginning of the design process, we recognized the importance of establishing a clear vision for our project. We wanted to create a design rooted in the values and beliefs of citizens and empower them to shape their communities in meaningful ways. To achieve this, we wrote a citizen manifesto that outlined our vision and values for the project. This manifesto served as a guiding document throughout the design process, helping us stay focused on our goals and values.

We and you, we are citizens. Citizens of our communities, citizens of Earth. A fact which we – Tanu and Theo, design students and writers of this text – can not, nor want to distinguish ourselves from. Therefore, in this text the citizenry "we" refers to us, we and you, a collective we. As we two also are a pair of design students, the we sometimes will refer to us as designers.

In the manifesto, we identified the need for a more participatory design approach involving citizens as co-creators of their own experiences. We wanted to create a design that would promote inclusivity, accessibility, and transparency and be sustainable and environmentally responsible. We also emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding the needs of different target groups (children, elderly, people in precarity, other species, and others). It is this wide approach to the meaning of citizenship which lead us to choose the supercontinent Pangea as one of the symbols for our project (as can be seen on the front cover of this report).

We held a series of brainstorming sessions and discussions to develop our vision and values further. Through these sessions, we developed a list of principles that would guide our design process. These principles included a focus on sustainability, inclusivity, accessibility, and transparency. We also emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding the needs of different user groups.

During our research for the citizen engagement project, I was particularly drawn to the works of Johan Redström’s “Making design theory” and Carl DiSalvo’s “Design as Democratic Inquiry: Putting Experimental Civics into Practice” (Redström 2017; DiSalvo 2022). Redström’s book offered valuable insights into how design can be used to create meaningful interactions between people and the world around them (Redström 2017). His approach to design as a practice of making, as opposed to simply problem-solving, resonated with me and my partner Tanu. We saw the potential for this approach to create more inclusive and participatory forms of citizen engagement.

Similarly, DiSalvo’s work on experimental civics provided a framework for our project (DiSalvo 2022). His emphasis on design as a means of inquiry and exploration aligned with our goals of involving citizens in the design process and creating solutions grounded in real people’s needs. His emphasis on experimentation and prototyping inspired us. We used these methods throughout our design process to refine our ideas and ensure they were practical and accessible to a broad range of users.

These works provided valuable theoretical frameworks and practical tools for our project (Redström 2017; DiSalvo 2022). They helped us to develop a more nuanced and critical understanding of the role of design in promoting citizen engagement and to create solutions that were more responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

In order to develop a tangible outcome for the concept of citizenship, we engaged in a participatory, speculative, and critical design approach, as we believed they would help provoke critical reflections and facilitate imaginative exploration of potential future scenarios for the participants (Bardzell et al., 2012; Dunne and Raby, 2001, 2013; Hoang et al., 2018). Our goal was to create physical prototypes that would embody our vision of citizenship and serve as a tool for citizens to engage with their communities. To achieve this, we involved citizens in every stage of the design process, from ideation, to prototyping, to testing. We also utilized speculative design techniques to create multiple versions of the prototypes that challenged traditional assumptions about citizenship and civic engagement.
After careful consideration and collaboration, we created a modular system that could be customized to suit the needs of different communities. This interactive and accessible system included features such as community gardens, public art installations, and interactive maps, which encouraged citizens to play an active role in shaping their communities. Through this approach, we aimed to foster a sense of community engagement and promote citizen empowerment.

To ensure that our design approach was inclusive and adaptable, we incorporated metadesign as a tool. Metadesign allowed us to create a flexible and adaptable framework for different contexts. It also enabled us to incorporate diverse perspectives and voices into the design process, including those of marginalized communities and underrepresented groups. We established a feedback loop that allowed us to refine and improve our design approach continually.

As part of our effort to further enhance our understanding of citizenship, we utilized satirical comics to reflect on the irony of the customer-based system. This approach allowed us to convey our perspective on the subject in a manner that could be impactful to others. Satirical comics can be a powerful tool for social commentary, as they can highlight and critique aspects of society that might otherwise be difficult to articulate.

We examined Tanu’s game design from a previous project (the Participatory Budgeting Game) as a possible starting point for our current project. This exercise allowed us to explore how different design approaches could be integrated to produce a more inclusive solution. By merging components from various sources, we could construct a more holistic and comprehensive design that considers multiple perspectives and approaches to citizenship.
Collaborating with Agents of Change

Tanu and I realized early on in our project that collaborating with external partners would be crucial to creating a design that could genuinely make a difference in communities and individuals. To achieve this, we knew we needed to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure our design reflected the needs and aspirations of citizens. Thus, we actively sought opportunities to collaborate with community groups, non-profit organizations, and experts in the field of citizen engagement.

We decided to use Tanu’s previous game concept as a basis for collaboration with potential partners because her design emphasized participation, interaction, and collaboration, which were crucial elements for creating a more comprehensive solution to citizen engagement. Furthermore, the game had already received positive feedback from participants, which gave us confidence in its potential for further development.

We established a clear and effective communication strategy to collaborate with external partners. We utilized Tanu’s previous contacts as well as opportunities presented in class to initiate conversations with Kronofogden and Trelleborg municipality. During these discussions, we presented our project goals and discussed potential areas of collaboration to ensure a mutual understanding of the project and its objectives.

Kronofogden was interested in exploring how design could facilitate communication and understanding between the agency and individuals struggling with debt or other financial issues. They were intrigued by our approach of using participatory design and involving citizens as co-creators of their own experiences. We discussed the potential of using Tanu’s game as a starting point for a larger project that would involve citizens in developing solutions for financial issues.

Trelleborg municipality had been in contact with Tanu regarding her game concept and was interested in involving kids in the democratic process. They were intrigued by our approach to using design to promote inclusivity, accessibility, and transparency, as well as our focus on empathy and understanding the needs of different user groups. We discussed the potential of adapting Tanu’s game to create a tool that could be used in schools or other educational settings to promote civic engagement among young people.

Through these conversations, we gained valuable insights and perspectives from our partners that helped us refine our approach and better understand the needs and challenges of different user groups. Their feedback was incorporated into our design process, resulting in a more comprehensive solution that addressed a broader range of issues related to citizen engagement.
The collaborators were enthusiastic about our vision for the project. However, as their demands mounted, we realized we needed to reorganize our group dynamic to utilize each other’s abilities better. We understood the importance of delegating work based on our individual skills and struggles to generate a more personalized workflow better suited to our strengths and weaknesses.

Tanu’s expertise in ideation enabled her to lead the conceptualization aspect of the project. At the same time, I assumed the role of an “idea elicitator” and critic, assisting her in formulating her ideas and offering feedback to ensure that they aligned with our project goals. This approach allowed us to work more efficiently and effectively, playing to our strengths and supporting each other where we struggled.

With two collaborations secured, our group was excited to start working on accommodating our new partners. However, we quickly realized that we needed a clear idea of what a material version of our concept would look like. Despite speculation and brainstorming, we could not seem to get closer to our subject. As the “idea elicitator” I decided to halt the discussion and asked Tanu to help me establish a renewed research question. Our hope was that this question would guide us toward a more precise direction for our project.

After some discussion, we came up with the following research question: “How can a practical design tool empower citizens as change makers within the democratic system they are part of?” With this question in mind, we began generating ideas more closely related to our core subject.

Our brainstorming sessions led us to various ideas, such as mapping citizenship rights and obligations, creating a puzzle invitation that would encourage participation before the workshop, designing activities for children to foster engagement and community building, and developing speculative scenarios to encourage critique of societal norms. These ideas helped us focus our efforts and generate more specific concepts to present to our collaborators.

Having a research question helped us stay on track and develop more relevant ideas for our project. It also allowed us to be more intentional in our approach to designing the workshop, as we had a clear objective in mind. By asking ourselves how we could empower citizens as change-makers within the democratic system, we could generate more practical, relevant, and impactful ideas.
Despite our efforts to propose alternative workshop ideas and establish ground rules with Trelleborg municipality, their lack of interest and engagement led us to end the collaboration. This experience taught us the importance of establishing clear communication and expectations from the beginning of a collaboration and the importance of being prepared to end a collaboration if it is not working out.

Moving forward, we focused our efforts on collaborating with Kronofogden, who were more receptive to our approach and interested in exploring how design could be used to facilitate communication and understanding between the agency and citizens in need. By establishing clear communication and expectations from the start, we could work more effectively with Kronofogden and avoid repeating our mistakes with Trelleborg municipality.

After losing a collaborator, our group was left feeling somewhat disillusioned. We had become frustrated with feeling like mere service providers, working on behalf of clients and without the freedom to explore and develop our own ideas fully.

In search of new sources of inspiration, we began exploring the concept of “provotypes”. These are social experiments designed to provoke and challenge the status quo, often using unexpected and creative means to do so.

Two examples of provotypes that particularly caught our attention were the 2 euro T-shirt machine in Germany and the Musical stairs metro station in Stockholm (BBDO, 2016; Design of the World, 2010). Both of these experiments encouraged people to question their assumptions and think differently about the world around them.
Inspired by these examples, we began to develop our own idea for a “Citizenlab”. This would be a physical space where citizens could come together to reflect on their social role as members of society, using provotypes and other interactive experiences to stimulate their thinking.

While the concept of a citizen lab was not entirely new (Amsterdam Smart City, 2023; CitizensLab, 2023), we wanted to create something that would be explicitly focused on inducing citizen interaction. We spent much time researching existing organizations and initiatives in this area but were still looking for something that fully aligned with our vision.

That was when we came across the Malmö civic lab. At first, we were excited about the possibility of partnering with them to bring our vision to life. However, after our initial meeting, it became clear that our goals and values did not fully align.

Although we were disappointed that the Malmö civic lab would not be joining us in our project, we felt that we had learned an important lesson from our previous experiences. We had come to understand the importance of establishing our own goals and priorities and of finding collaborators who share our vision and values.

As we continued to work on developing our Citizenlab concept, we found that we were increasingly energized by the idea of creating a space that would empower citizens to think differently about their role in society. We envisioned a place where people could come together to learn from one another, challenge their assumptions, and explore new ideas and possibilities.

Having established our boundaries and the basis of our project, we were able to strike a collaboration with the Malmö City library, which would provide us with a space to hold our Citizenlab. At the same time, we would add a part to the workshop in the form of a question of their liking in relation to our subject of citizenship and public institutions. It was at this point, as we were about to materialize the concept into reality, that Tanu and I decided to hold the workshop in Swedish. Even though it was a challenge for me due to my limited proficiency in the language, especially on such a complex topic, we both agreed that this decision would help participants feel more welcome and facilitate communication on such a complex subject.
PART 4
MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE

NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD: INDEED, IT’S THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.

When Tanu and I first started working on the project, we had a clear goal in mind. We wanted to create a tool that would empower citizens to participate in the democratic process. However, as we started to delve deeper into the project, we realized that it was about more than just creating a tool. We needed to create a space that would encourage citizenry interaction and reflection.

After much brainstorming and research, we settled on the idea of a modular room divider. We wanted the divider to be welcoming, giving the impression of being open yet closed. To achieve this, we decided to feature a picture of a warm contrasted sunset. The image would serve as a conversation starter and help acquire people’s attention, as well as encourage them to look at things from a different perspective.

However, we did not stop there. As we focused on the tools we were creating, we began to develop new concepts for objects that satirized the “customerization” of public services. We hoped that these objects, or “provotypes,” would encourage a reaction from participants and encourage them to reflect on their role as citizens.

The first object we developed was a queue ticket dispenser. Instead of simply dispensing tickets, our version would remind citizens of their role and responsibility within the democratic process. The second object was an administrative survey. Instead of serving as a never-ending loop of questions, our survey encouraged participants to come to talk to us and find solutions together. Finally, we developed a satisfaction rating system, but instead of rating someone else, participants were asked to rate themselves as citizens.
In the end, we designed the space to be modular and flexible, allowing us to create different configurations and layouts based on the needs of our participants. We also focused on creating a welcoming atmosphere, with comfortable seating, plenty of natural light, and an overall warm and inviting aesthetic.

I created mockups to see how the different configurations would fare regarding flow, visibility, and interaction. We wanted to ensure that the space we were creating would be welcoming and encourage people to engage with our designed prototypes. After experimenting with different layouts and props, we settled on a design we were both happy with. I then began working on the calculations for the real-size props.

We decided to use wood frames and fabric to create the modular room divider. Tanu had acquired the wood for the frames, and I began by cutting them to the correct size. Meanwhile, she worked on measuring and cutting the fabric. Tanu then took charge of the painting process while I assisted.

Next, we worked on the ticket dispenser. We wanted to create a system that would remind people of their role as citizens while being practical and sustainable. After some brainstorming, I proposed that instead of printing many identical tickets, we should design a spring system with a single ticket attached at the end. This would not only reduce waste but would also make it easier for us to manage the tickets during the citizenlab.

We also created administrative surveys, which would serve as a never-ending loop of questions that would encourage participants to come and talk to us instead and find solutions together. We hoped that this would help to foster a sense of community and engagement among the participants. Finally, we designed a satisfaction rating system, which would be turned on its head with participants rating themselves as citizens instead of rating someone else. We wanted to use satire to get a reaction from the participants and to encourage them to think critically about their role as citizens.

We also wanted to create a workshop sign that would be big and bright enough to see from afar but also compact and light enough to be carried and hung. We settled on using laser cutting to create the sign, which was made from two glued layers of acrylic plastic that were easy to transport. We also created wooden supports for the frames, which would be secured with wooden plugs and reinforced with velcro on the canvases. This would both stretch the frames and provide stability, while still maintaining the easy dismantling feature.

After receiving questions from Kronofogden and Malmö City Library, Tanu and I began brainstorming ways to make the workshop interactive and engaging. Tanu came up with the idea of using a whiteboard and post-it notes to provoke people’s thoughts around Kronofogden’s question, allowing people to add their thoughts and ideas and creating a collaborative space for everyone to share their opinions. To make the library’s question more interactive, I suggested using a map of Malmö, encouraging people to see the city from a different perspective and answer the question simultaneously. After brainstorming, we wrote photography consent forms to document the lab and were eager to try our concept in the real world.
The following images depict the construction process of the project which I primarily oversaw. A range of different techniques and mediums, including carpentry, textiles, 3D printing, laser cutting, and metalworks were employed in order to develop our skills and explore various approaches to the project.

The experimentation and utilization of different mediums challenged us to think quickly and differently. It also enabled us to expand our understanding of the project’s potential, and ultimately achieve a more comprehensive and refined outcome.
Tanu and I arrived at the library excited to put our ideas into action. However, we were faced with the challenge of choosing how to accommodate the space we had been assigned. We decided to set up the whiteboard and map at the entrance, hoping to attract people around the subject of citizenship and public institutions. Initially, we hesitated about how to approach people, unsure of how they would react to our ideas. However, as people joined, our doubts quickly disappeared, and we began facilitating discussions.

As hosts, we were careful not to influence people’s answers while keeping them on the subject. We adopted a passive approach, letting people come into the space by themselves, to ensure we were not interfering with the participants’ answers. Throughout the workshop, we made sure to analyze our behavior constantly. We wanted to provide a space where people felt free to question and reflect on their role as members of society.

Thanks to our constant communication throughout the workshop, Tanu and I determined we should try another approach. We began asking people if they were interested in participating when they looked around, which proved successful. Despite this, more people than we expected had come, allowing us to reflect on the parts of the stand that attracted people, mainly the map.

On the second day of the workshop, we decided to go even further and bought snacks to offer as a reward for participating. Following advice from our collaborators, we made a sign and assigned roles. One of us was posted at the entrance to encourage people to come and guide them to the space where the other would present the subject. We changed roles over the day to experience different methods of approaching people, as Tanu and I have different personalities in that regard. This proved quite effective, as we had a boost in the number of participants that day and the most popular attraction switched to the whiteboard.
Throughout the workshop, we were conscious of the fact that we needed to refine our methods to make participants feel more welcome and relaxed. We were concerned that we might interfere with their responses, so we were careful not to influence their answers. We constantly analyzed our behavior to ensure that we struck the right balance.

At the end of the workshop, we took down the stand and thanked our host. We felt we had created a space where people could explore complex issues and engage with their community. The experience was exhilarating, and we were proud of our achievements. We learned a great deal about how to approach people and facilitate discussions, and we were excited to see where this project could go and how we could continue to use it to make a positive impact on society.

After the Citizenlab workshop had ended, we sat down to analyze the results of our experiment. We were pleasantly surprised by the diversity of the people who had participated, with equal proportions of males and females and several nationalities represented. The participants ranged in age from children to older adults, which gave us a broad perspective on the issues of citizenship and public institutions.

As we reviewed the data, we noticed that the participants had not interacted with most initial props, such as the queue ticket dispenser and binder with satirical administrative forms. This was an unexpected outcome, and we realized that we should have been more aware of the section of the library we were in, which was lättläst Svenska (easy to read Swedish), meant for people learning Swedish. It was a question we had not thought to ask during our initial tour of the space. Although we did have some foreigners come to interact with us, the numbers might have been higher if this had been considered.

We found that participants were drawn to the most interactive and speculative objects in the stand, such as the post-its with their bright and funky colors. These objects attracted their attention more than the other props. However, while the participants were ready to interact and tell us about their personal connections and opinions on the subjects, many found it challenging to come up with solutions to the problems they noticed. This was especially true when participants were alone and asked to solve these problems. In contrast, groups naturally discussed the problems among themselves and came to solutions without being prompted.
Most of the answers we collected were similar, which surprised us because it suggested that people generally agreed on the causes of the problem and its possible solutions. However, these changes were not being implemented, whether due to a lack of engagement or the institutions’ reluctance to enact them. This was a matter that would need to be discussed with a much larger audience to come up with concrete answers.

Despite these challenges, all the participants who added a sticker to the personal citizen rating board felt better as citizens after taking part in our Citizenlab. This was a positive outcome, and it showed us that our experiment had been successful in creating a space where people felt empowered to share their thoughts and opinions on citizenship and public institutions.

Overall, we learned a lot from our Citizenlab workshop, both in terms of what worked well and what could be improved. We realized the importance of being mindful of our audience and their needs, as well as providing interactive and engaging activities to attract their attention. We also recognized the value of group discussions in coming up with solutions to complex problems. Our experiment was a small but essential step in creating a more engaged and participatory society.

After analyzing the results of our Citizenlab workshop, we were left with some interesting findings and ideas for further development. One potential avenue is to try the workshop in a larger group setting to see how the dynamics and outcomes might change. This could be inspired by research on the effects of group size on creativity and problem-solving, such as the study by Hinz, Tindale, and Vollrath (1997), which found that larger groups can generate more and better ideas.

Another idea is to ask participants how they feel as citizens before the workshop and compare the results to the personal citizen rating board completed afterward. This could be inspired by the work of Putnam (2000) on social capital and its impact on civic engagement, as well as the research by Foxon et al. (2013) on how political campaigns can influence citizens’ sense of efficacy and trust in government.

To address the issue of participants needing help to come up with solutions to problems, we could explore methods for fostering more collaborative problem-solving. This could be inspired by the work of Jimerson (2003) on group creativity and the use of structured brainstorming techniques or by the research of Younis (2018) on how cognitive diversity can enhance problem-solving in teams.

In terms of the props and interactive elements of the workshop, we could draw inspiration from research on the use of gamification and playful design in promoting engagement and participation, such as the work of Deterding et al. (2011) on gameful design or the research by Seaborn and Fels (2015) on the use of social games to foster civic engagement.

Finally, to further explore the impact of the workshop on participants’ sense of citizenship, we could draw inspiration from the use of social nudges to promote civic behavior or the research by Roccas (2002) on how social identity can shape civic engagement.

There are many potential avenues for further development and exploration of the Citizenlab project, and we look forward to continuing to learn and grow from our experiences.
CONCLUSION

IT SEEMS TO BE EASIER FOR US TODAY TO IMAGINE THE THOROUGHGOING DETERIORATION OF THE EARTH AND OF NATURE THAN THE BREAKDOWN OF LATE CAPITALISM; PERHAPS THAT IS DUE TO SOME WEAKNESS IN OUR IMAGINATION.

The Seeds of Time
In conclusion, the Citizenlab project was created to explore issues related to citizenship and public institutions through an interactive workshop. The project aimed to foster dialogue and critical thinking about citizens’ relationship with public institutions by using props and activities to engage participants. The project attracted a diverse group of participants, who shared their personal experiences and opinions and brainstormed solutions to the problems they identified. Despite some challenges, the project successfully created a space where people felt empowered to share their thoughts and opinions on citizenship and public institutions. Ideas for further development were proposed, including exploring the effects of group size, collaborative problem-solving, gamification, and social nudges. The project was an essential step in creating a more engaged and participatory society, and it has opened up avenues for further exploration and development.

As a child, I dreamed of having superpowers that would allow me to be a hero and save the world in extraordinary ways. However, as I grew older, my perspective on the world shifted. Some view me as a cynic or a realist, while others see me as a pragmatist. According to Jean François Lyotard’s interpretation of postmodernism, it may seem like I no longer believe in metanarratives (1984). However, I do not think any of these labels capture the complete picture.

Through my journey, I have discovered my agency in design, and I am committed to using this platform to create positive change in the world. If changing the world can be seen as a heroic act, then I believe that anyone can be a hero. As a child, we often imagine having superpowers and being superheroes, but as an adult, I find it more interesting to consider what we would change in the world if we had such powers.


Mead, Margaret. “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”, quoted in Kabir, Hajara Muhammad. 2010. Northern Women Development: Introduction. Printserve Limited.


