

# EXPLORING THE NORTHERN DIMENSION

Northern Dimension Institute Policy Brief 1 - January 2019

## Designing innovative public services

Contemporary challenges that ND area governments face are increasingly sophisticated and complex. This is due to the rapid development of technologies that blur the boundaries between the government and citizens, and because of societal changes such as aging of population and increasing immigration flows.

The ND Future Forum on Culture<sup>1</sup> focused on the potential of creative and cultural cross-overs in producing public services that tackle societal challenges more effectively. The forum concluded that

- \* Public sector should be more flexible and open to engage users of policies and services in their design. This is needed to make policies and services more user-friendly and cost-effective, and to react timely to emerging user problems.

- \*Public sector representatives need to have more opportunities to learn design methods in trainings and workshops, where they can work hands-on in real-life cases. Cooperation with educational institutions provides a fruitful platform for this.

- \*The design of public policies and services needs to take an iterative approach, where solutions are first tested in smaller scale experiments and pilot projects, and modified if needed to ensure their scalability. This saves time and resources, helps to identify risks, and prevents errors in large-scale policy changes.

- \*ND Future Forums and other cross-border and cross-sectoral platforms of sharing experiences and lessons learned from novel public service design approaches must be organized and further developed.

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<sup>1</sup> The Forum, organized by the Northern Dimension Institute, took place in November 2018 in St. Petersburg, Russia. It brought together public sector representatives, artists and creative professionals, as well as academia and civil society organizations to discuss the potential of design thinking and creative industries in developing public services in the ND countries. For more information visit <http://www.northerndimension.info/news/news/814-northern-dimension-future-forum-on-culture-creating-a-better-world-through-cultural-and-creative-crossovers-15-nov-2018-in-st-petersburg>

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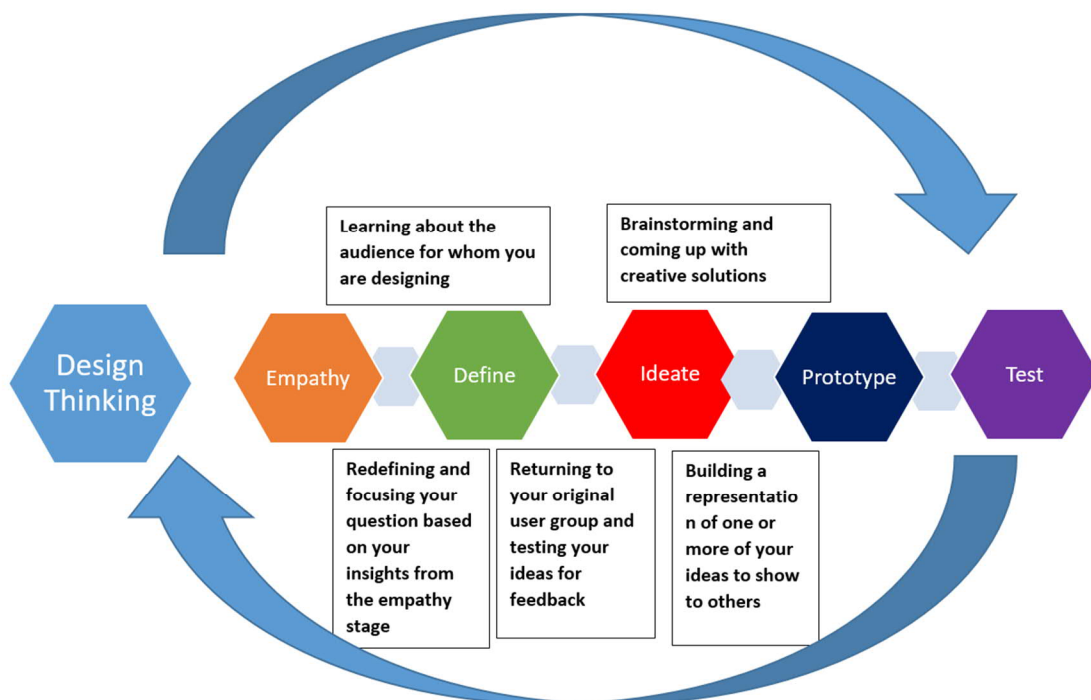
## Contemporary challenges call for innovative public service solutions

**Contemporary challenges** that governments face are increasingly **sophisticated and complex**. This is due to the rapid development of technologies that blur the boundaries between the government and citizens, and because of societal changes such as aging of population and increasing immigration flows.

These challenges are characteristic to the societies in the ND area as well, calling their governments to **innovate novel solutions** that enable the production of public services in a more **user-friendly and cost-effective way**. This implies **re-thinking the very rationale of public service**, viewing it as a collective effort of societal actors rather than as a silo surrounded by a boundary.

The novel approach to public service production calls for replacing the traditional top-down thinking with **design thinking** that “*puts end-users’ needs at the centre of the policy formulation system*”<sup>2</sup>. The design thinking approach views the policy solutions as results of an iterative process, where **end-users are engaged** in the identification of the real needs of people, and in **innovating and testing** of solutions to them.

The design of novel public service solutions also implies the governments to be **open to ideas** generated in other sectors of the economy and society. **Cross-overs with creative industries** help in approaching the challenges from a fresh, often unexpected angle that lead to innovative solutions that may prove as more user-friendly and cost-effective.



MrJanzen,1984 ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Design\\_thinking.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Design_thinking.png), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/capacity-development/English/Singapore%20Centre/GCPSE%20Design%20Thinking%20Summary.pdf>

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## Evidence-based public service solutions to societal problems

The ND Future Forum on Culture<sup>3</sup>, which gathered public policy-makers, creative professionals, academia and civil society organizations, focused on the potential of creative and cultural cross-overs in producing public services that tackle societal challenges more effectively. In ND countries, **design thinking and cultural cross-overs** have been applied to **address societal problems** such as social stratification and age-related diseases. These initiatives have had **positive spill-overs** in their communities, including giving citizens an example of bottom-up policy that works, and thereby encouraging them to participate.

At the same time, ND governments have recognized the **need to re-engineer their own work processes** and practices to **learn a new, more user-centred and co-creative way of producing services**. The assessment of the potential for scaling up the tested solutions is an integral part of design thinking approach, eventually leading to their broader application.

**Societal problems** such as social exclusion and age-related diseases can be tackled by measures that take an user-driven approach, or apply artistic methods in social and healthcare services. Examples include:

- Applying design-thinking to improve **accessibility of public transport**, resulting in a resource centre for disabled, and changes in policies and rules
- **Empowerment of marginalized youth** through artistic modes of expression, which helps them in becoming active members of the society as, for example, experts by experience who contribute to alleviating negative consequences of social stratification
- Using **music therapy in treatment of old-age dementia**, leading to improved well-being of the patients and care workers, less use of drugs and, ultimately, cost savings

The adoption of a novel, innovative approach towards public service production implies that principles of design thinking and co-creation of services via sectoral cross-overs are internalized into **public sector work processes and practices**. Means for implementing that include:

- Focused **training programs** in design thinking and service design for the public sector, and including them in different training programs for policymakers, leading to a **change in the mindset** and openness towards new ways of innovation
- Development of **methodological materials** with design thinking tools and methods that civil servants can utilize in their work
- **Collaboration with educational institutions**, providing a platform where students and public sector employees can co-learn how to apply design thinking to public services via concrete case assignments

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## User centred approach needs to be at the heart of every policy and service design

Tackling increasingly complex and sophisticated societal challenges calls for a **novel, user-centered and innovative approach** on policy-making and public service.

The novel approach calls for **rethinking the very rationale of public service** and its relationship to citizens and other actors of the society and economy:

- The public sector should be **more flexible and open to engage users of policies and services** in their design. This means viewing citizens and other users not as passive objects of policies and services, but as active actors who have interest in and resources for **co-creation of more user-friendly and cost-effective services**.
- Public sector should be **more supportive towards civic bottom-up initiatives** from actors in the private and non-governmental sectors, who tend to notice and **tackle user problems faster** than public institutions.
- Public sector representatives need to have **more opportunities to learn design methods** in design-based trainings and workshops hands-on in real-life cases. Cooperation with **educational institutions** provides one fruitful platform for this.
- The linear model of developing public policies and services needs to be replaced with an **iterative approach**, where solutions are first **tested in smaller scale experiments and pilot projects, and modified if needed to ensure their scalability**. This saves time and resources, helps to identify risks, and prevents errors in large-scale policy changes.
- There is a need for a **more widespread cross-sectoral, cross-institutional and cross-border cooperation** when developing public policies and services, as many of the contemporary societal challenges have a **cross-border and multi-domain nature**. ND Future Forums and other platforms of sharing experiences and lessons learned from novel approaches, must be organised and further developed.

### Further information

Presentations and summary of the ND Future Forum on Culture are available at

<http://www.northerndimension.info/news/news/820-design-thinking-approach-as-a-strategic-tool-for-ensuring-creativity-and-innovations-in-public-sector>

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