

# IMPACT

IMAGINING TOGETHER

PLATFORM FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND  
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

## Youth- Focused Design Lab Report

Developed by  
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IMPACT is an initiative of the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis University, in collaboration with the Baker Institute of Peace and Conflict at Juniata College and Maseno University in Kisumu, Kenya.

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# Perspectives of young people in the ACCT ecosystem

*“I learnt that this field is a remarkably complex one that requires countless resources in order to aid its emergence, but I also learnt that this field is one of the most promising to either be a part of or support in our world today. Learning about the ACCT field made me excited for so many reasons. I am excited to be a young person in this world and to witness how much power the youth have and will continue to have going forward, and I am also excited to be someone who appreciates the arts and understands their transformative power. That being said, the ACCT field is particularly special because it wields both of these unfathomably powerful impactors - the youth and the arts.”*

- Sarah Nzisabira, Brandeis student reflecting on the youth-focused design lab

## Overview

Recognizing the importance of the voice and leadership of young people, one IMPACT working group facilitated a collaborative space for youth to design strategies to support young people in the arts, culture, and conflict transformation (ACCT) ecosystem.

Drawing on human-centered design techniques, this youth-focused design lab engaged young people around the world in assessing the particular strengths and needs of young people in the ACCT ecosystem. Then, through a “Creativity, Arts, and Social Transformation” (CAST) course at Brandeis University, students used the creative, collaborative structure of a Design Lab to develop strategies IMPACT could adopt in order to leverage the strengths and meet the needs of young people in the ACCT field.

This supplement will cover:

- a. Background on IMPACT and the CAST course
- b. Goals and process of the Design Lab
- c. Learning that surfaced from each stage of the Design Lab
- d. Plans for next steps

## Acknowledgements

Many people from around the world put valuable energy into the creative, collaborative experience of this youth-focused design lab. When IMPACT decided to facilitate a design lab that centered on the voices of young artists from around the world, the organizers could not have dreamed of the rich sharing of experiences and knowledge that would emerge from the process.

**Thank you to everyone who made this youth-focused design lab possible, including:**

- *The artists from who shared their experiences and perspectives as young people in the ACCT ecosystem:*  
Victoria Gandini, Tatiana Cricun, Nicolas Gulluni, Guido Pérez Orue, Nataly Salas, Carlos Alberto Troncos, Julieta Cejas Sabaris, and Jorge Luis Barrios from Argentina; Nefeli Kentoni and Olgu Tosun from Cyprus; Vincent Mutwiri, Dennis Ngige, and Oscar Churchil Oduor from Kenya; Liselot van de Geer, Pauline van Leeuwen, and Jordy Dik from the Netherlands; Nayab Faiza, Hina Tariq, and Sibt-i-Hassan from Pakistan; Sara Cardenas, LaShawn Simmons, JJ El-Far, and Marcelo Brociner from the United States
- *The IMPACT players who connected the young artists above to this youth-focused design lab process and guests who provided feedback on final design lab presentations:*  
Ellada Evangelou, Carmen Olaechea, Cynthia Cohen, Armine Avetisyan, Jasmina Ibrahimovic, Shahid Nadeem, Kitche Magak, Bryson Omwalo, Leigh Swigart, Maria Madison, William Chalmus, and Daniel Feldman
- *The students at Brandeis University who connected with the young artists above, shared their own experience as young people in the ACCT ecosystem, and engaged actively in the design lab process as part of the Creativity, Arts, and Social Transformation course:*  
Aviva Davis, Ben LoCascio, Cassipea Stith, Eddie Friedman, Gemma Curnin, Jay Schwartz, Leah Sagan-Dworsky, Leah Teichberg-Sabath, Margo Sobel, Nicole Zamora Flores, Sarah Nzisabira, and Sophia Seufert

## Background

### IMPACT

IMPACT is an emerging platform designed to support the Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation (ACCT) ecosystem, so it can respond more effectively and creatively to complex, pressing contemporary challenges.

As part of the planning process leading to IMPACT's emerging platform, IMPACT hosted a Design Lab in September 2018 with 26 people from across the ACCT ecosystem coming from 18 countries. This experience generated many creative and promising ideas, one of which was to further amplify youth voice and leadership in the IMPACT emerging platform by recreating the design lab experience with young people.

### Creativity, Arts, and Social Transformation (CAST)

The Brandeis University undergraduate course "*Introduction to Creativity, Arts, and Social Transformation*" offered an opportunity to put young people at the center of designing youth-focused strategies to include in IMPACT's emerging platform.

Each year, the Introduction to CAST class (consisting of 12-15 students) spends several class sessions learning about creative, collaborative design processes by engaging in a Design Lab on a particular topic. Past CAST Class Design Lab topics have been:

- Rebuilding Aleppo, Syria (2016)
- Addressing gentrification in Boston (2017)

In the 2018 Introduction to CAST Design Lab, the process of learning about the topic at hand (in this case, the experience of young people in the ACCT ecosystem) was deepened by connecting students from the class with young people from around the world. More about this process is described in "Learning from Empathizing" (p. 9).



Several members of the CAST Class (left to right: Ben LoCascio, Eddie Friedman, Gemma Curnin, Sophia Seufert, Cassipea Stith, Leah Sagan-Dworsky, Nicole Zamora Flores)

# Goals: engaging young people in assessment, design, and learning

## The goals of the Youth-Focused Design Lab included:

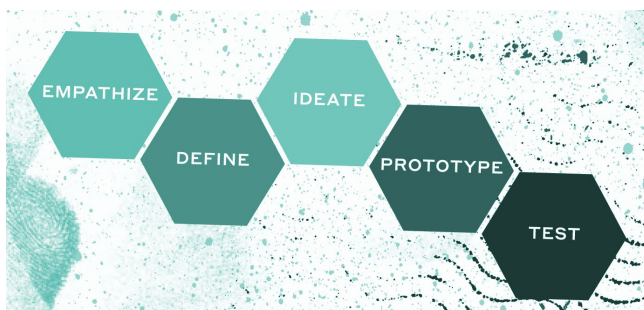
- a. engaging young people around the world in assessing particular strengths and needs of young people in ACCT ecosystem;
- b. developing creative and realistic approaches that both leverage strengths and meet the needs of young people in the ACCT ecosystem; and
- c. introducing Brandeis students in the *Introduction to Creativity, Arts, and Social Transformation (CAST)* course to Design Labs as a structure for creative, collaborative thinking

*“After completing the design lab, I truly grasped the potential that young people have on the ACCT field. Expertise on newer technologies, fresh energy, and spunky ambition are the skills that inhabit the next generation who will contribute to the arts, creativity, and conflict transformation as a whole. Change does not have to be done through war, violent protests, direct speeches, or other traditional forms of refusal. The power of collaboration between people, telling stories, creating art- these offer a peaceful, beautiful, and intellectual way of examining change that must occur around us. The ACCT field is designed to allow people’s creative energies to develop while also making direct change.”*

- Margo Sobel  
Brandeis University student from *Introduction to CAST* course

## Design lab process

The idea of human-centered design thinking (including approaches like Design Labs) is to center processes in a creative, horizontal, open, collaborative, and experimental structure that leaves space for “out-of-the-box” thinking. The design thinking process is especially popular with universities and businesses as it creates an interactive and new approach to problems that have become seemingly intractable (Dorst, 2011). The key to design thinking is making the human aspect of problem solving the central building block of the process (Dorst, 2011). The stages of the design thinking process, as laid out by the Institute of Design at Stanford are:



Graphic showing the stages of the design thinking process from the Institute of Design at Stanford

The youth-focused design lab followed this process over the course of 5 sessions and outside of class readings, conversations, and assignments. Many students expressed enthusiasm for the design lab format and its freeing yet structured methods for creating spaces where creativity can abound.

### Additional Resources on Design Thinking:

Dorst, K. (2011). The core of ‘design thinking’ and its application. *Design studies*, 32(6), 521-532.

Design Thinking Bootleg by d.school at the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University

“Designing for Influence: The Power of Performance” by Melissa Jones Briggs and Jessica Hastings Munro for the Stanford d.school

DesignKit.org by Ideo.org

## Facilitation Plan

The youth-focused design lab took place over 5 sessions, with preparation assignments before each session. A full facilitation plan can be shared with those who wish to adapt the process, the following is an overview of the plan:

### **Session 1: Introduction** to IMPACT, Design Lab, and empathizing stage (1 hour)

- *Goal:* Set up for the Design Lab, especially the “Empathize” stage of connecting with young people from around the world
- *Student preparation:* Read background on young artists from around the world; Read excerpt from “Walk Softly and Listen Carefully” (NCAI); Read IMPACT’s “Emerging Story”
- *Activities:* Discuss background on Design Lab process and IMPACT; discuss ethics of speaking with young artists

### **Session 2: Empathizing** continued (2.5 hours)

- *Goal:* Learn fellow students’ perspectives on the specific needs and strengths of young people in the ACCT ecosystem.
- *Student preparation:* Talk for 30 minutes with at least one young artist from around the world; Read IMPACT Guiding Values
- *Activities:* Discuss IMPACT discourse principles; Paired conversations about experiences as young people in ACCT

# Facilitation Plan, continued

## **Session 3: Defining** ACCT youth strengths and needs **& Generating ideas** (2.5 hours)

- *Goal:* Synthesize themes on the strengths and needs of ACCT youth; generate many ideas to draw on strengths and address needs
- *Student preparation:* Finish talks with young artists; Read excerpt from "Imagine: How creativity works" (Lehrer); Watch 2 videos on Human-Centered Design (designkit.org)
- *Activities:* Creatively present learnings from empathizing stage; synthesize into themes about youth strengths and needs; brainstorm ideas for addressing themes through IMPACT platform

## **Session 4: Prototyping strategies** (2.5 hours)

- *Goal:* Using ideas generated in last session (grouped into categories), narrow in on, develop, and prototype 3 strategies for amplifying strengths and addressing needs of young people in ACCT

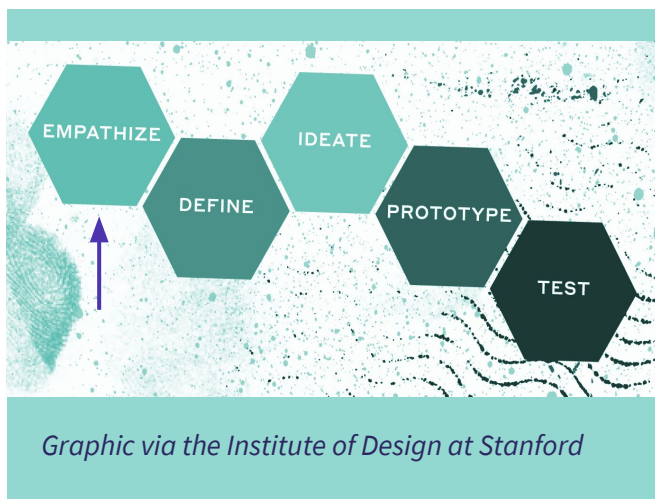
- *Student preparation:* Read "Using Emergence to Take Social Innovations to Scale" (Wheatley & Frieze); Read about the Six Thinking Hats (deBono) method; Read "Designing for Influence: The Power of Performance" (Munro)
- *Activities:* Vote for most promising categories; use ideas in categories chosen develop strategies to support ACCT youth in small groups; use Six Thinking Hats to prototype a different small group's strategy

## **Session 5: Presenting strategies** creatively and gathering feedback (1 hour)

- *Goal:* Creatively present prototypes for amplifying strengths and address needs of young people in ACCT, gathering feedback from invited guests
- *Student preparation:* Refine strategy in small groups; Prepare creative presentation of strategy



## Learning by empathizing with young people around the world



### Conversations

Empathizing with young artists around the world was the first step in designing strategies that IMPACT could move forward to support this segment of the ACCT ecosystem. For this step, Brandeis students worked in pairs to connect with at least 3 young people from around the world who are in the ACCT ecosystem. These young people were referred to design lab facilitators by local players in 6 continents who are connected to IMPACT. The informal, guided conversations involved sharing the artistic and/or cultural practices and activities of each person, then discussing what would make their

work more effective and what unique ways young people can contribute to the ACCT ecosystem.

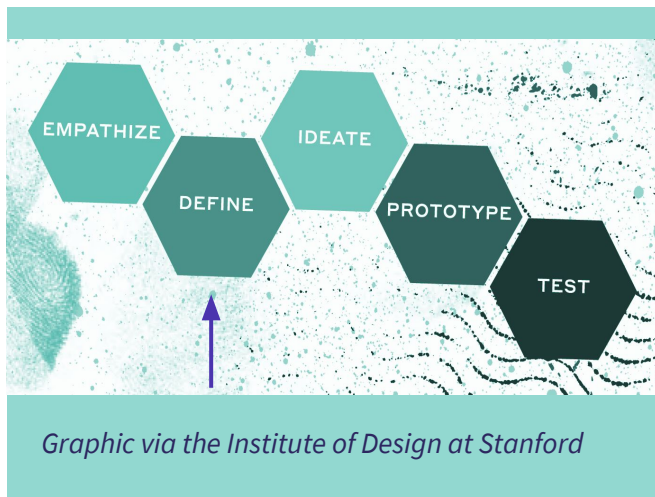
### Diversity of young people in conversation

Each student pair spoke with 2-3 young people from Argentina, Cyprus, Kenya, the Netherlands, Pakistan, and/or the United States. Brandeis students also spoke with one another during an in-class session to gather additional perspectives and practice grounding conversations in principles of reciprocity.

The representation of artistic and cultural practices of those in conversation were wide-ranging, including: photography, visual arts, music (performance and composition), poetry, dance, event curation, apparel design, community arts, arts education, broadcast, theater, film, stand up comedy, storytelling, creative writing, cultural studies, Jewish cultural practices, and Black homosexuality cultural practices.

The age range of artists in conversation was 18 to 35, with an average age of 23.

# Learning from defining problems and possibilities



## Cross-cutting themes from defining strengths and needs

Students reflected on their conversations empathizing with young artists around the world. Through discussion, the following cross-cutting themes about strengths and needs of young people in the ACCT ecosystem included:

### **Strengths:**

- Youthful, open-minded, risk-taking, emotionally vulnerable energy
- Networking locally and globally; connectedness
- Recognizing power dynamics
- Skilled with technology and social media

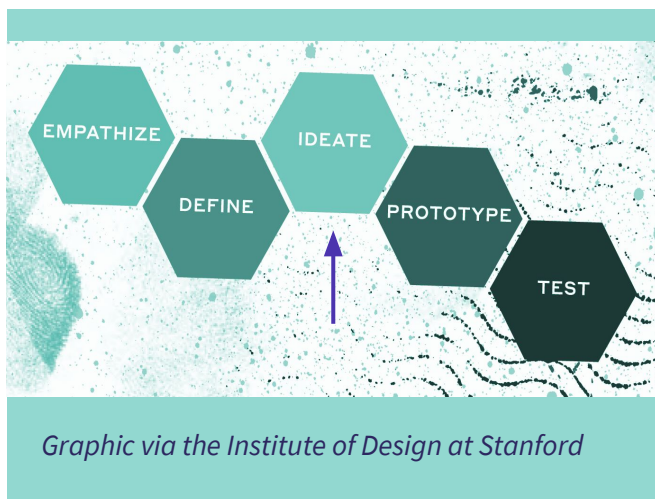
### **Needs:**

- Resources, especially space, infrastructure, technology, materials, access to opportunities and funding
- Breaking down language barriers (vocabulary sets, expressing IMPACT concepts simply, and spoken languages)
- Feeling less isolated and more respected across different levels of experience
- Emotional support
- Range from wanting anonymity to wanting to highlight identity

Many of these themes overlap with what was found in the overall IMPACT findings laid out in the Emerging Story. However, there were some particular strengths like youthful energy and skill with technology and some particular needs like seeking different language “registers”, which were notably different.

**Needs and strengths of young people in ACCT likely vary by region; this would be an important line of continued learning that would require additional conversations.**

# Learning from brainstorming ideas



## Ideas grouped into 9 categories

After grounding their thinking in the themes found across conversations with young people in the ACCT field, students generated as many ideas as they could for supporting young artists. The more than 90 ideas fell into these 9 categories:

1. *Communication materials* (e.g., a list of mythbusters about the ACCT field; information booths at arts festivals)
2. *Virtual platforms* (e.g., a platform or facebook page compiling language-specific, interest-based resources; a donor-artist matching site)
3. *Addressing language issues* (e.g., workshops to teach about and bridge

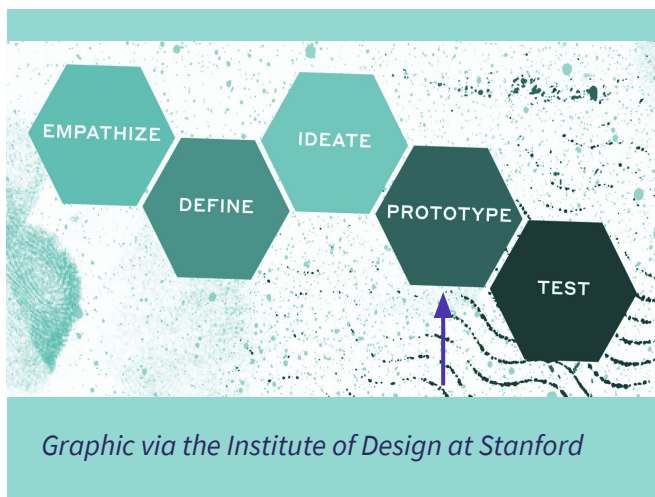
vocabularies of different players in the ACCT ecosystem)

4. *Fundraising and advocacy* (e.g., finding support for the ACCT field from famous artists popular with youth)
5. *Strengthening connections in the ACCT ecosystem* (e.g., young artist exchange programs)
6. *Bridging to connect with people at the edge of the ACCT ecosystem* (e.g., youth-led campaign for youth working on related issues, encouraging incorporating the arts)
7. *Learning spaces* (e.g., replicating the design lab process with different groups of youth around the world)
8. *Reflection spaces* (e.g., multi-purpose, outdoor art spaces)
9. *Transformative consciousness* (e.g., holistic emotional support on-site for artists during process and performance)

## Voting on categories to pursue together

The 12 students then voted and chose **virtual platforms, learning spaces, and transformative consciousness** as the categories that best addressed themes and interested students the most.

# Learning from prototyping strategies



## Prototyped “Virtual Platform” strategy

Creating a platform for ACCT that incorporates many different social media elements, including: spotlights of human experiences in ACCT, networking, digital marketplace, mapping and highlighting ACCT efforts, telethons, ability to categorize and use many languages.

*Highlights from the six hats prototyping exercise*

- Positives: provides easy/fast access to resources; can build on other platforms
- Worries: lack of internet access for some; diminishing enthusiasm as time goes on
- Creative idea: include this & youth voice in IMPACT communication strategies

## Prototyped “Inclusive Learning Spaces” strategy

University-based yearly conference that rotates regions and aims to reduce divisions between people in the ACCT ecosystem through reciprocity, homestays, and access to university resources

*Highlights from the six hats prototyping exercise*

- Positives: expands impact of existing work; builds new connections and dynamics
- Worries: “conferences” are not participatory or field-grounded enough
- Creative idea: showcasing art outside of university/conference space in salons

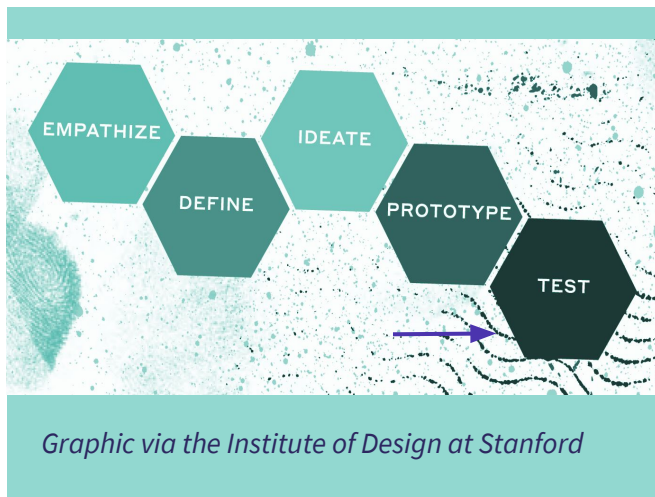
## Prototyped “Transformative Consciousness” strategy

Hosting a weeklong, holistic retreat/festival that rotates among regions, is live-streamed, and has plans for small-scale local replication afterwards.

*Highlights from the six hats prototyping exercise*

- Positive: gets the right people in the room to form bonds and let magic happen
- Worries: how to build in equity
- Creative idea: center funding on gift economies

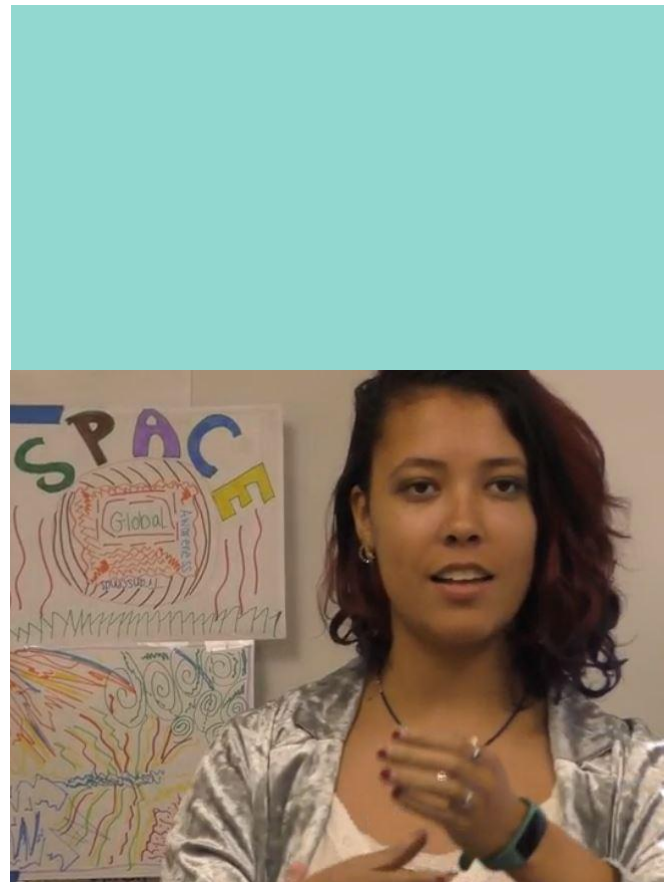
## Moving forward with strategies



### Moving youth-focused strategies forward

The prototyping stage helped refine the 3 strategies developed, as did feedback provided by guests who watched students' creative performances showcasing their strategies.

IMPACT's leadership circle will further explore these strategies and other ideas raised during this design lab to see how they might strengthen, be integrated into, or expand IMPACT's emerging platform. Many of the young people involved continue to foster the personal and professional relationships they sparked with others around the world through this design lab.



Aviva Davis, CAST student, presenting

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