

Experiential learning and design thinking for digital entrepreneurs-to-be.

As a Lecturer of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, I am committed to create a safe space for my students to experiment with entrepreneurial ideas and explore their entrepreneurial attitudes. I have often used pitch talks and business plan competitions to integrate experiential learning in my teaching and assessment, but my ambition is to push this even further and get my students to develop tangible prototypes of their business ideas.

This can become quite challenging if students decide to develop a smartphone app or digital service as part of their task (which happens most of the time!). I teach in a Business School and neither my students nor myself have expertise in coding or using programming languages.

Therefore I have been long facing this dilemma: how can I support students to develop prototypes for their digital apps and services?

I found the answer thanks to Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK). Early this year I was among the recipients of EEUK Richard Beresford Bursary, that allowed me to attend an online course on prototyping for digital experiences, delivered by IDEO.

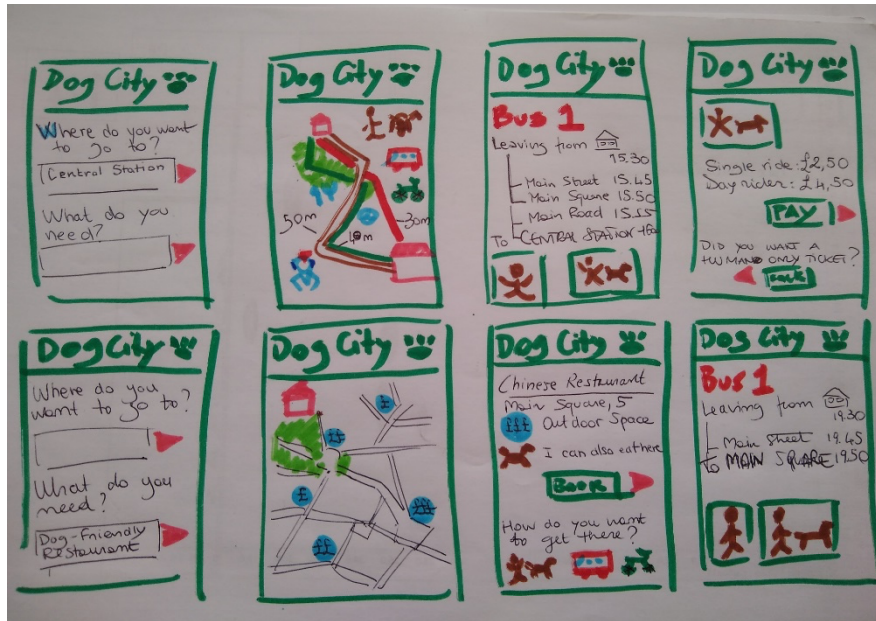
IDEO is the Olympus of design thinking, advocating for a human-centred design that keep people at the centre of creative work. Their approach has been truly inspirational for my teaching: I often use some of their design thinking techniques as part of my seminars to stimulate creativity and elicit entrepreneurial ideas. Their course on prototyping for digital experiences has been extremely helpful to understand how design thinking techniques can be applied to prototype human-centred digital services.

Technology is never the starting point. First of all, you need to map the needs and desires of your potential users. Therefore, developing a digital prototype does not require coding skills or software development tools. All you need is a piece of paper, some markers or crayons, and a good knowledge of who your users are and what they want.

Through the course, not only did I learn about IDEO's approach to prototyping: I also experienced myself their tips and techniques to unleash creativity and build low-fidelity prototypes for digital services.

- First, I had to reflect on my own experiences as a digital user and redesign my interaction with a digital service to make it more useful, usable and enjoyable.
- Secondly I had to pick up a digital experience and audience to design for, using IDEO spinners...

I ended up sketching a prototype for a public transit payment for passionate dog owners. Even if my drawing skills are debatable, I think I did a good job (you can judge yourself, see the pic below).



Definitely this course gave me a lot of insights into prototyping for digital experiences and is going to be a great inspiration for my teaching modules. I feel that now I can push experiential learning even further, showing students how to sketch a prototype for a smartphone app or a digital service. Following the hands-on approach developed by IDEO, students will be able to fully explore and challenge their creativity, creating tangible sketches of their virtual ideas. They will also have a chance to reflect on the importance of design for entrepreneurs and to appreciate how technology is (or should be) developed.

I am very grateful to EEUK for giving me the opportunity to learn new methods for experiential learning that will immensely benefit my teaching. I look forward to bring my new expertise to the classroom and to share it with my new students at Edinburgh Napier University... hopefully they can draw better than I can do!



