Testing the EHDM trainings

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The analysis was commissioned by the Estonian Association of Designers

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Praxis Center for Policy Studies is an independent nonprofit think tank in Estonia that supports engagement and analyses-based policymaking. Praxis has conducted policy research for more than ten years and is one of a kind in Estonia. The mission of Praxis is to improve and contribute to the policymaking cycle by conducting independent research and promoting public debates.

Abstract

The *European House of Design Management* (EHDM) has developed a web-based design management toolkit that helps to plan and deliver user-centred policy decisions, public services and communications. The toolkit represents an approach that is essential for achieving an improved outcome and better engagement of citizens in the context of decreasing public resources and rapidly changing environment. In order to facilitate the deployment of the toolkit, two training modules have been developed by the EHDM – one for future trainers and the other for end-users.

At the request of the Estonian Association of Designers, Praxis Center for Policy Studies has carried out the testing of the abovementioned training modules. The testing took place from December 2014 until January 2015 in Italy, the UK and Estonia in the form of pilot training.

The present report aims to give an overview of the testing process and its main results. In the **first** part the main objective, outcomes and the methods of the testing are introduced. The **second** part concentrates on the main findings that resulted from the trainers' training and in the **third** part the results of the end-users' pilot training are presented. In the final, **fourth** part, conclusions and main recommendations are pointed out.

In summary, it can be said that all the pilot trainings were well received by the trainees. In addition, the demand for further trainings on design management for the public officials was acknowledged. Concerning the training materials, it appeared that they need some revision and elaboration, especially on design management principles, process and role in the public sector work. Besides that, the provision of local examples was assessed as an important part of the training that should gain more attention. One conclusion would be, therefore, to allow enough flexibility for local trainers to add and/or change some of the information in EHDM training modules, if necessary.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The European House of Design Management (EHDM) has developed a training module to introduce the EHDM design management toolkit that would help to understand the key concepts of design management and support the adoption of the toolkit by public servants across Europe. The training module consists of two separate trainings for representatives of the public sector institutions who are the target audience for the EHDM toolkit and for design management experts who are potential trainers of the EHDM toolkit trainings.

Since December 2014, the testing process of the training modules has been undertaken in order to ensure better compliance with the target audience expectations and needs. The current report gives an overview of the testing process, its main objectives, methods used and the results. At the end of the report the main recommendations have been pointed out that can provide input for further improvement of the trainings.

1.1.   The objectives and process of the testing

The objective of the project was to test (i.e. to gather feedback and recommendations) on the structure and content of the trainings on the EHDM toolkit.

The training testing had the following outcomes:

- The testing materials (e.g. questionnaires for collecting the feedback) have been elaborated in collaboration with EHDM partners.

- The pilot training has been arranged in Estonia, Italy and the UK.

- The findings based on testing results have been formulated and presented to the contractor.

The EHDM trainings testing took place from December 2014 until January 2015.

The trainings testing on the toolkit were carried out in three EHDM partner countries – one user training was carried out in Estonia, two trainer trainings were arranged in Italy and one trainer training took place in the UK.

The testing process was coordinated by Praxis Center for Policy Studies located in Tallinn, Estonia. The main tasks of Praxis included elaboration of the testing strategy, preparation of the materials (feedback questionnaires), consulting the EHDM partners during the testing process, carrying out the testing in Estonia and compilation of the final report.

1.2.   Theoretical framework and testing methods

The testing framework is built on two pillars – **content** and **format**. For the content, the focus is on its usefulness, relevance and comprehension. For the format, the central issues of interest are training setup, structure and balance between different learning styles in order to help the learner to acquire new knowledge.

FIGURE 1. THE STRATEGY OF THE EHDM TRAININGS' TESTING
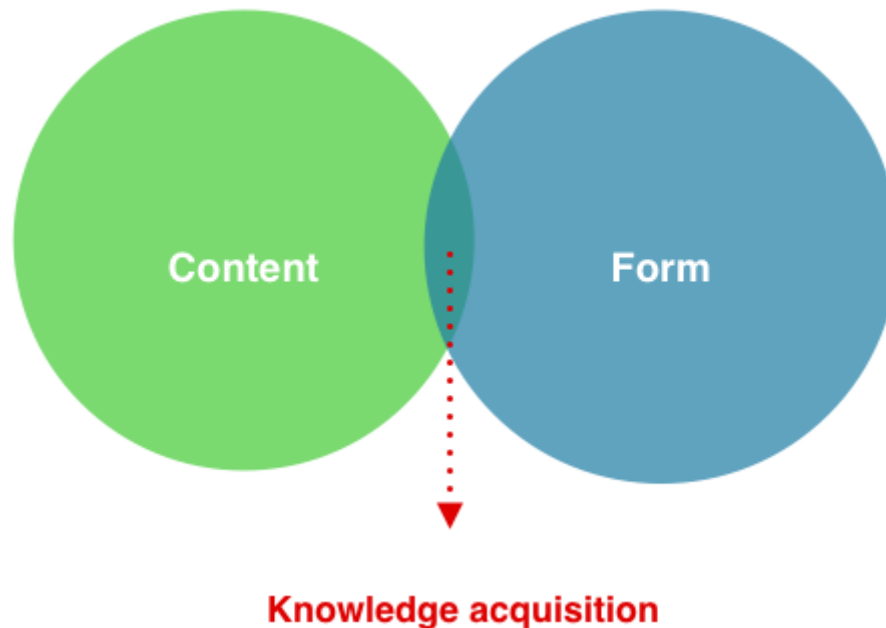
Source: The authors

Learning styles encompass a series of theories suggesting systematic differences in individuals' natural or habitual pattern of acquiring and processing information in learning situations. A core concept is that individuals differ in how they learn. Therefore, trainings should support all types of learners: auditory (very effectively remembers what was heard), visual (best in remembering what was seen or read) and kinaesthetic (very proficient at remembering what has been done or performed).

Methods used for testing

The data collection was based on a written feedback questionnaire and interviews in order to guarantee comprehensive in-depth feedback and recommendations within an optimum time frame.

- **Participant questionnaire** – The aim of the participants' feedback questionnaire was to get information on and understand the participant's view towards the training: how much did the training meet his/her expectations, how much new information related to design management did he/she acquire, did the training contribute to the understanding and use of EHDM toolkit, etc. The respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire on the spot immediately after the training (on paper or electronically) to guarantee a higher rate of responses.

- **Trainer interview –** The aim of the trainer interview was to gather trainer's feedback on training preparation materials, suggestions on how to improve the training's content and format. The interview with the trainers took place at the end of the training.

There were 11 participants (trainees) in **the trainers' training** in Italy (six in Perugia and five in Milan). The electronic feedback questionnaire that the participants needed to fill out was in English. Altogether there were eight out of nine participants who completed the questionnaire. The trainer provided his feedback in written format, according to a feedback form.

There were 22 participants in **the users' training** in Estonia –all of them also filled out the questionnaire. The questionnaire used for the participants' feedback was in Estonian and it was filled out immediately after the training. There were two trainers in Estonia. The interview with the trainers was held as a group interview after the training session.

IMAGE 1. GROUP WORK DURING PILOT TESTING IN ESTONIA

Source: authors

The trainers' training in the UK was held in December 2014 before the official testing period. Therefore, the collection of the feedback during this training session was not based on the methods specified above. However, the comments gathered from the trainer and the trainees during the training are taken into account to the maximum possible extent.

2. The feedback on trainer training

Main findings:

- *Most of the participants in the trainers' training assessed it very positively.*

- *The fact that the toolkit and the trainers' training is in English makes it difficult for non-native English speakers to gain maximum benefit from it. The language was also considered an obstacle for end-users to use the EHDM toolkit for his/her work.*

- *According to the participants view, the main aspect that should be covered in more depth during the training session is the provision of practical (local) examples and the possibility to practice with the toolkit.*

- *There should be more attention on the introduction of design and design management as a strategic tool for public sector work.*

- *The training session should be longer and should leave more time for discussion.*

The background information

Two EHDM trainings for future trainers were carried out in Italy (one in Perugia and one in Milan) and one in the UK. Most of the **participants** can be considered **well-experienced in design/design management** – seven out of nine people (who completed the questionnaire) stated that they work/have worked as designers or design managers. There were only two people who said that they have learned about design or design management, but have not practiced it. None of the participants were without any practical or theoretical experience in design/design management.

The feedback on training

According to the feedback, the participants (trainees) assessed the training **relatively highly**. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 was the lowest, meaning "don't agree at all", and 5 was the highest, meaning "completely agree"), the highest score was given to **the structure of the training** (mean 4.7, see also Figure 1). Besides that, **the usefulness of the training** was estimated very highly – most of the participants agreed completely with the statement that "the training provided them enough useful information for user trainings" (mean 4.6).

Slightly lower scores, but still rather high ones, were given to the rest of the aspects of the training. For example, the participants **agreed the least** with the statement that "the training provided **enough time and possibility for discussion and knowledge sharing**" (mean 4.1). The same issue was pointed out by the trainer. This demonstrates that the time for discussion is a very important part of the training, since it helps to create a common ground for knowledge that has to be delivered by the trainers' training participants to the end-users.

A positive estimation on the training can be seen also from the fact that **most of the participants in the trainers' training would also recommend the training to their colleagues** who would like to become EHDM toolkit trainers. The average positioning on a 1–10 point scale was 8.4, where 1 means

that the participant would not likely recommend the training for a colleague and 10 means that he/she would very likely recommend that.

FIGURE 1. THE MEAN RATINGS OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF TRAINERS' TRAINING
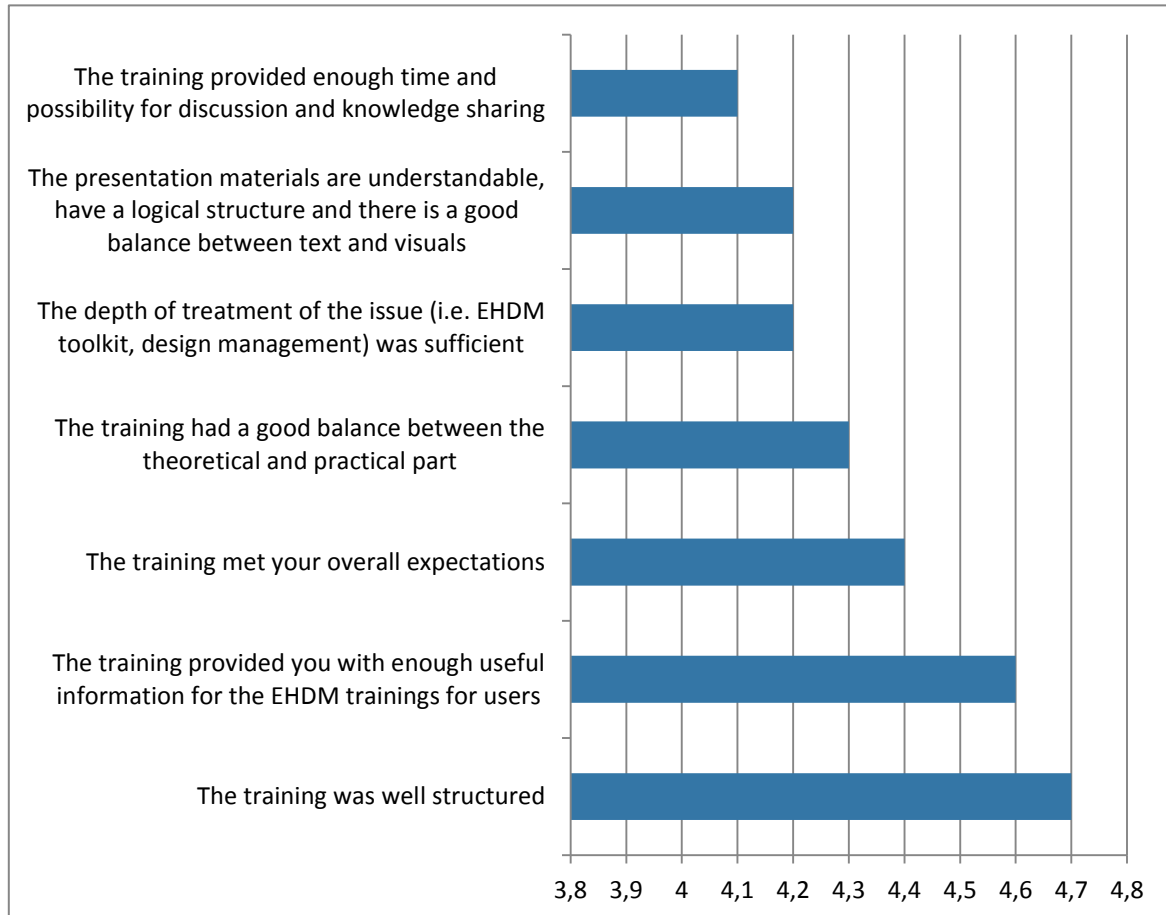
Source: authors

One **common problem** that appeared was **the language**, i.e. the EHDM toolkit is in English, which was considered too difficult for non-native speakers, for trainers as well as for end-users. Many participants mentioned that it in order to maximise the benefit of the toolkit, it should be translated:

> *"It would be helpful [to have] also an Italian version of the training in order to ensure a thorough understanding."*

Several participants also pointed to **the need to have a better practical experience** (based on a live project if possible) with the EHDM toolkit before they can start teaching others. The existence of thorough practical experience was considered a necessary prerequisite by the participants to become trainers. Many of them admitted that besides passing the training they need to familiarise themselves much more with the toolkit. As was commented by one participant:

> *"I understood the use and the contents of the toolkit, but it is necessary to have a self-training activity (by myself) in order to deeply explore the toolkit. Even if the training has been done, the time was not enough to go through all the sessions of the toolkit."*

Most of the participants thought that **the content of the training meets the needs** of the end-users and all parts of the training were considered mostly useful. Some topics that were mentioned as the **least useful** were related to the **introduction of the logic of the EHDM toolkit** and **its layout**. In addition, given the short timeframe of the training, it was suggested to skip the part of the toolkit before the log-in stage, or make it briefer.

The need to bring more **practical examples** and possibility to **go through the toolkit step-by-step** based on certain practical case was communicated as the main issue that should have been covered **in more depth**. The lack of the contextual information was also the trainer's main concern. According to him, there is a greater need to bring examples on how design has been successfully used in the public sector.

Besides the need to bring more practical examples, it was suggested to add information on **design and design management,** e.g. how it could be used as a strategic tool in public sector organisations. As the trainer suggests:

> *"The four slides in the users' programme should be part of the trainers' programme, and then an entirely new section dedicated to users should be developed. "*

One thing that was mentioned by participants as well as by the trainer was that the **duration of for the training (currently 3 hours) was too short**. Therefore it should be considered whether it is possible to make the training session longer, e.g. by including one or several practical exercises that would allow the trainers to get direct experience with the toolkit. Also, as was mentioned above, there should be left time to discuss and share knowledge. It is especially important if the trainings will be held in English for non-native English speakers.

Some more detailed suggestions and issues of concern were (according to the trainer's view):

- *"Presenting information about the future perspectives, etc. might not have to be part of the presentation, as that situation changes all the time."*

- *"Some of the assessment questions overlap."*

- *"The choice between the case example in the handout and their own case doesn't work, as some people land directly in the red section, which means that [too much] time is spent on directing them back to the blue section to be part of the process."*

- *"Some concepts create confusion and needs more explanation (also for trainers) – such as how you prototype a service, how you establish success criteria and measure progress and end result up against it, etc."*

In summary, the training was considered mostly useful by the trainees. It was proposed that there should be slightly more time left for the discussion, especially if the training is in English, which turned out to be a challenge for some participants. In addition, there should be more time dedicated to the design process in public sector organisations and practical examples/experience that would help to contextualise the training better.

3. The feedback on user training

Main findings:

- *The training was found to be interesting and relevant according to the participants. In addition, the general interest towards the training was very high.*

- *The trainers are expecting clearer guidelines on what are the expectations towards the trainers and the training, what the trainees should acquire by the end of the training, also suggestions on different methods and case studies/examples that the trainers could use. At the same time, possibilities to add slides in order to comply better with the expectations of the participants, also localise the exercises and examples should be left to the local trainers.*

- *The text of the presentation materials should be revised – reliable sources for definitions should be used, in some cases the text on the slides is too detailed, in some cases some of the information is absent, e.g. there should be more time dedicated to design management.*

- *There is too much time spent on the description of the toolkit's layout (e.g. where is the title, where is the log-in, share button, etc.) and too little time on its general purpose and logic of the toolkit.*

- *The most valuable aspect was, according to many participants, a practical exercise (writing a brief) and the examples. There was an expectation that the trainers would offer more (local) practical examples that would help them to contextualise the theoretical part.*

- *The trainings for the end-users, as well as the presentation materials, should be in the local language.*

- *The structure of the slides is currently inconvenient – the header of the slides (the EHDM logo) is too dominant, plus the reference to EHDM source and the logo of the European Commission in the footer makes it difficult to fit in the necessary information, especially in the case of pictures and schemes.*

- *The slides are very text-centred; they should include more schemes, figures, photos, videos, etc. In addition, different methods could be suggested for the trainers to use during the training.*

The background information

In the users' training, held in Estonia, there were 22 participants from different organisations. Most of them were from ministries (5) or agencies within the area of government, like inspectorates (7), and universities (2). People were also representing local government agencies (1) and agencies administered by a local government (2). There were two people from private bodies in which a local government or the state has a holding, and three people from private organisations.

Most of the participants stated that they have **some knowledge in design management but no practical experience**. There were a smaller number of those who had basic knowledge in design management and some practical experience and a few people who said that they have no knowledge or practical experience in design management at all.

There were **two trainers** in the end-users' training – one of them was a user experience designer and the other a designer/design manager. The fact that there were two trainers should be taken into account since these trainings are usually evaluated more highly.

Although the initial materials for the user training were used to the maximum extent, it should be taken into account that they were also adjusted to quite a large extent by the trainers. A significant section on design management was added, some slides on the layout of the toolkit were not used and the practical exercises were adjusted to the local context. Therefore, the feedback from the participants does not completely reflect their opinion on initial EHDM presentation materials. During the interview, however, both trainers commented on the original materials.

The feedback on the content of the training

In general, the feedback from the user training participants highlights **the need for such training.** It was admitted that it is increasingly important to understand the concept of design/design management and the ways how it can improve the public sector work processes. This mentality reflects also in the overall high interest towards the training and the fact there were several people who could not participate since the registration was closed due to the lack of free places. It was especially appreciated that the training was targeted for public sector officials.

The participants' overall estimation towards the training was positive and **most of them would recommend the training to their colleagues** (mean 7.7 on a 1 to 10 point scale where 1 indicates that the person would not likely recommend the training to his/her colleague and 10 means that he/she would very likely do it).

In contrast to the trainers' training the participants in the end-users' training **appreciated most** of all the fact that the **training provided enough time and possibility for discussion and knowledge sharing** (mean 4.4 on a 1 to 5 point scale, where 1 indicates "don't agree at all" with the statement and 5 that the person "totally agrees" with it; see also Figure 2).

It was estimated that the training was **relatively well structured** (mean 4.0; it was mentioned also in the participants' individual comments). Still, there were some participants who pointed out that the structure of the training (i.e. the sequence of the topics) was confusing for them.

It was commonly assessed that the training had a **good balance between theoretical and practical part** (mean 4.0). According to the individual comments the most highly evaluated aspect of the training was its **practicality** – especially the **examples** that were brought by the trainers, the **group work** exercise and the **practical application** of the toolkit that helps to understand and associate the topic with their everyday work.

FIGURE 2. THE MEAN RATINGS OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF END-USERS' TRAINING
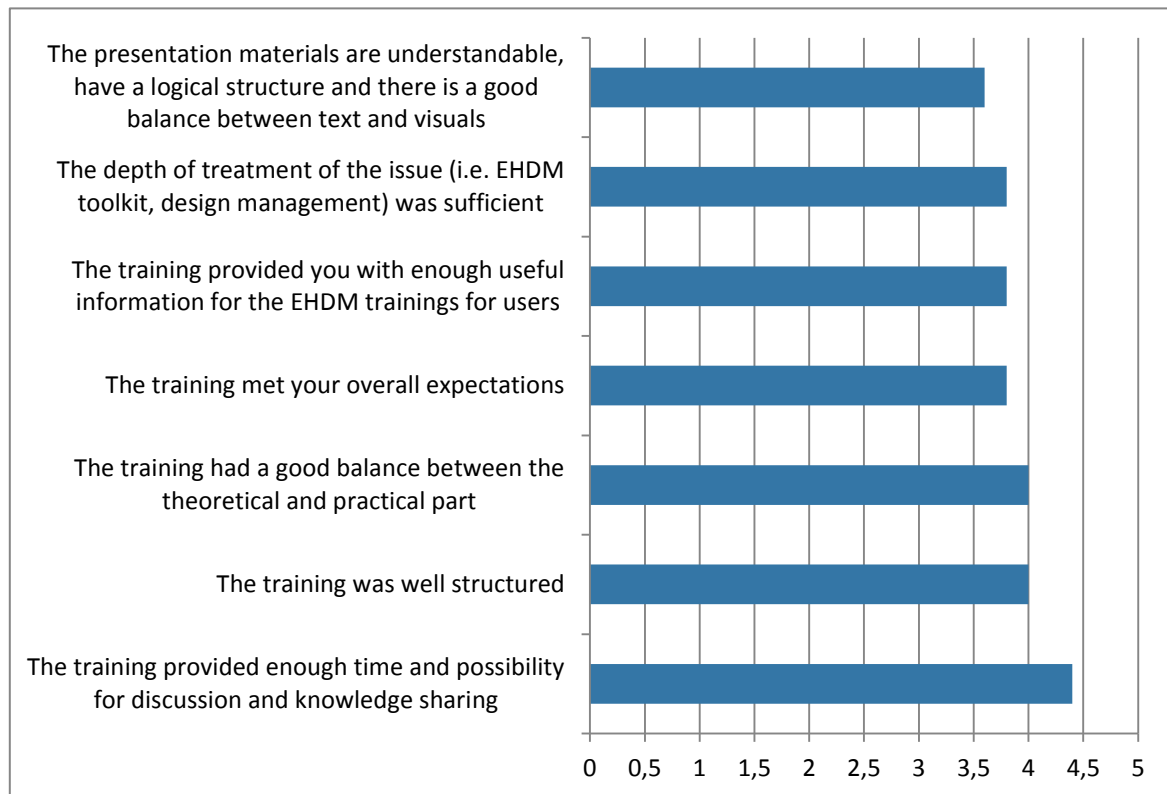
Source: authors

Despite that, there were several suggestions that would make the practical part of the training even more beneficial. For example, most of the trainees admitted that they would have liked even **more (local) examples**, i.e. case studies and examples from the public sector in Estonia.

> *"I would like more examples of how design use has resulted in success or what could have been done differently."*

Concerning **the introduction of the EHDM toolkit**, some of the participants would have liked more information about the toolkit and some stated that the EHDM toolkit introduction was somewhat tedious. According to them, the toolkit itself seems logical, but too voluminous and boring to go through the steps in sequence.

> *"I was expecting more information about the toolkit. Too much time was spent on a practical exercise that covered only part of the toolkit – could not understand fully what the possibilities of the toolkit are."*

Part of the criticism can be associated with the toolkit itself. For example, participants expressed that they would have liked to get a clear vision what the added value of the toolkit is and what its practical outcomes are. As already pointed out in the EHDM design management toolkit testing report, this is an issue that has been raised by several testers of the toolkit, which could be solved during the development of the toolkit.

Practical exercises were commonly perceived as very valuable and useful. In addition, the time spent on them and the amount of tasks was considered appropriate by most[1]. This part of the training helped the participants to understand the overall design management process slightly better and to test out the theoretical knowledge gained in practice. For example, writing the design brief was pointed out as the most useful by several participants. As one user training participant comments:

> *"Practical exercises gave me tips how to approach my own projects differently – other indicators and factors to analyse and think about."*

Suggestions from the participants on how to gain more value from the practical part:

- It was suggested that the practical exercises **should be related to their everyday work** so that they would not solve hypothetical cases.
- Some participants pointed out that currently the food waste exercise does not relate to public sector challenges enough, so it should be **better adapted to public sector work**.
- The exercises should be taken **from the local environment.**

It was mentioned by the trainers that the text of the practical exercises should be critically revised since in the users' handout there was still text that was been meant for the trainers. In addition, it was criticised that it is not advisable to start the group work exercise by reading it for 10 minutes.

Due to **overall low awareness on design and design management in Estonia** and the fact that most of the participants had only some theoretical and no practical experience in design management, **an extended introductory part was added** to the presentation materials in Estonia. According to the feedback, the participants evaluated that part of the training (i.e. the overview of design and design management) as **very valuable** that helped to understand the concept. There were some participants who would have liked to have the strategic design part in even more detail. For example, there was a comment that the added value of the design in public sector work should have been explained in more depth.

The fact that the design management part was largely absent from the training materials, but at the same time that the participants could have a better understanding of it as a result of the training (see the slide "After today you will…"), also received much criticism from the trainers. Therefore, the presentation materials could be revised accordingly – whether **the expectations towards training results should be decreased or quite a significant amount of information about the design management should be added.** Adding information about design management would be a good choice also because it is doubtful whether people would dedicate a full day's training for learning only the introduction of the toolkit.

Along with that it should be more clearly communicated who is **the target group for the trainings**, i.e. what level of understanding of design management is expected from participants. It could be seen from the feedback that some participants were somewhat more advanced and **therefore expected**

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[1] The practical exercises and worksheets were adjusted to some extent by the trainers and some parts of the exercises were skipped.

more in-depth information on design management, while others were very satisfied with the introductory part. That created slight confusion among some of the participants for whom the training was too basic (on Figure 2 see also the participants' agreement with the statement "the training met your overall expectations" – mean 3.8).

In sum, the content of the training should be elaborated and the text on the slides should be revised by adding more information on design management and more practical local examples. In addition, the definitions from Wikipedia should be substituted with some reliable sources. At the same time, there should be less time devoted to the toolkit's layout.

The feedback on the training materials and methods

The user training participants **agreed the least** with the statement that "the **presentation materials are understandable**, have a **logical structure** and there is **good balance between text and visuals**" (mean 3.6; see Figure 2).

According to the trainers' view, the information on the slides was **too text-centred** with no graphics, schemes, examples, videos, etc., which does not comply with the idea of design (management) training. Therefore, **more graphic visuals** – photos, schemes and **videos** should be included and some case studies or tools from the toolkit could be introduced during the training. Although schemes, graphics and two short videos were added to the training in Estonia, one participant commented that there should still be more of them and several commented that more local examples would raise the value of the training.

The **physical layout of the slides was not very convenient** according to the trainers. For example, the black heading with the EHDM logo is too dominant and there is no room for the title of the slide in the heading. In addition, the European Commission logo and reference to the EHDM source (www.ehdm.eu/ info@ehdm.eu) do not have to be on each slide. In sum, due to too many large elements there is too little room for information that the trainees should pay their attention to and fitting in the information is especially difficult when there is a picture to be displayed.

In addition, several participants pointed out that they would have liked the training to be **more playful**, i.e. they expected that different methods would be used during the training (like post-it notes or having the practical exercises on A2 paper format on a wall so that everyone could see them). Furthermore, the trainers' comment was that the design training should evoke **more creativity** and **use different methods** to support it. For example, currently there was no "icebreaker" included in the beginning of the training session.

One point of concern for the trainers was the fact that the expectations that the trainers should emphasise during the training or what are the overall expectations towards the trainers and the training were missing. One reason for that could be that the Estonian trainers have not participated in the trainers' training that is actually in the programme. However, looking at the slides that are meant for the trainers, there is not much information on that either. Therefore, **guidelines for the trainers on the training's aim, results** and the **main expectations** could be added, with the instructions on what and how much there could be adjusted in the materials. In addition, methods and examples that the trainer can use could be suggested.

Conclusions

It can be seen from the feedback that the trainings were very positively assessed by the potential trainers and by the end-users. It has also been admitted by many participants that there is a great need for such trainings and implementation of design management principles in the public sector in general.

Despite the overall positive estimation, there were several suggestions on how to improve the trainings.

In the **trainers' training** the main concern was that the training was in English which made it difficult for participants to be engaged in the discussion and to fully understand the content of the training. It was especially emphasised that the trainings for the end-users need to be in the local languages.

Another most common remark made by the participants was related to the practical side of the training. It was pointed out that there should be more practical (local) examples presented during the training and possibility to use the toolkit in practice. It should be considered therefore, whether it should be a precondition that the trainees should have already familiarised themselves with the toolkit at home. Since the trainers' training is only half a day long, then it helps to save some time. That time could be spent, for example, on more thorough discussion and knowledge sharing that was currently rated the lowest among different aspect of training.

Although the participants in the trainers' training are more or less experienced design managers/designers, it was mentioned that there should be a somewhat more time devoted to the role of design management, e.g. to the issue of how the public sector can benefit from it.

The practical side of the **users' training** (hands-on exercises, examples and a possibility to try out the toolkit) was considered one of the most valuable by the participants. It was, however, emphasised that there should be even more examples (especially from the local context) that help to bind the theory with peoples' own work.

The main critics on the users' training was that there is not currently enough information/materials on design, design management and design management processes as such, but at the same time it was communicated that the participants will know about them by the end of the training. A more thorough introductory part was considered necessary since in some countries the general awareness on design management among public officials is rather low.

In addition, a need to modify the presentation slides was pointed out by the trainers. For example, the presentation materials need to be translated into the local language, more reliable sources should be used for definitions, some slides were too detailed (e.g. the introduction, also a number of slides on the physical layout of the toolkit are unnecessary), but some parts seemed to be missing (e.g. there were not any suggestions on how to start the training – what should be the "icebreaker", it is also advisable to ask for feedback at the end of each training, the part on design management was already mentioned). From the visual side, it was mentioned that the slides are currently too text-centred and lack creativity that is expected from design/design management training. Therefore, more pictures, photos, videos, schemes and graphics could be used instead of the text. Furthermore, there could be more inspirational methods used during the training.

Taking all of that into consideration, some clearer instructions for the trainers could be developed that point out what is the aim and what the participants should learn as a result of the training. It should also be thought through and communicated clearly to what extent it is permitted for trainers

to make adjustments in the training materials. Based on the feedback, it can be suggested that **enough flexibility should be left for the trainers to adjust the exact content and methods according to the expectations and the needs of the trainees** (especially in the users' training).

Annexes

1. Feedback questionnaire for trainees in end-user training
2. Feedback questionnaire for trainees in trainers' training
3. Interview questionnaire for the trainer