

# Analyses of the possibilities in using Visual Thinking as tool to empower cultural associations to innovate.

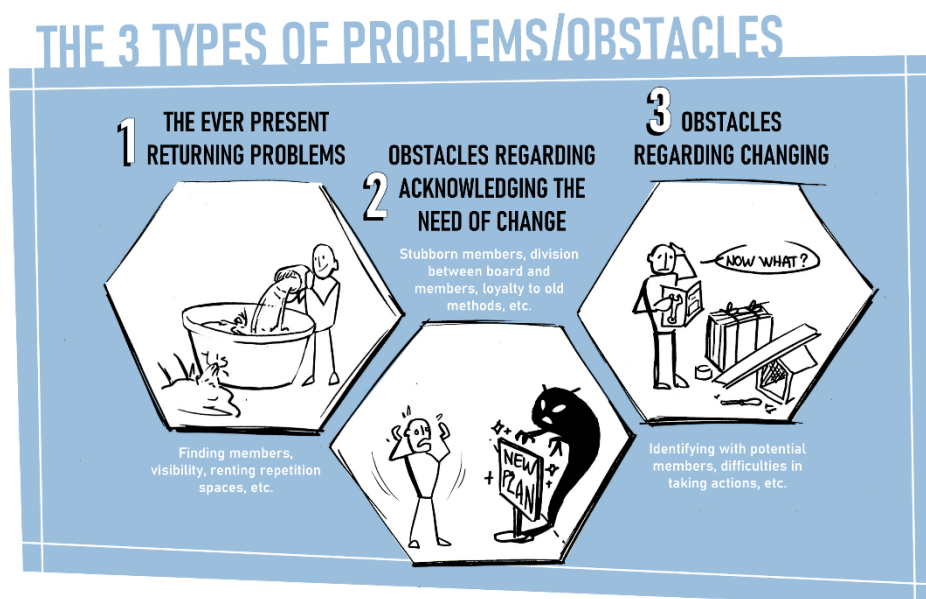
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Designing a visual thinking tool for associations.

This assignment was in collaboration with *de Tekenafdeling* as main client and *Cultuur in Enschede* as secondary client. *De Tekenafdeling* is a one-man company by Remko Waanders, who specializes in services regarding Visual Thinking. One of these services is called visual consultancy. In this service, visual thinking is used as tool to guide organizations into critical analyses on a certain topic and is the service Remko wants to explore more opportunities of. *Cultuur in Enschede* is an organization of culture coaches that helps cultural associations in the region of Enschede with problems and regulations that they face in the form of guidance and courses. Often the focus of this guidance is helping the associations find their purpose and their roots to why they are an association before facing the small problems.

There is strength in using visual thinking in business environment (Roam D, 2009). Therefore, using this in helping associations can offer great results. As associations struggle with their longevity due to aging and difficulties in innovating. Yet these associations form a building brick in the social networks of society (Bone JK, 2022). Therefore, this assignment's goal is to find where visual consultancy and the help *Cultuur in Enschede* offers can be combined, therefore what visual thinking can offer in the help of cultural associations.

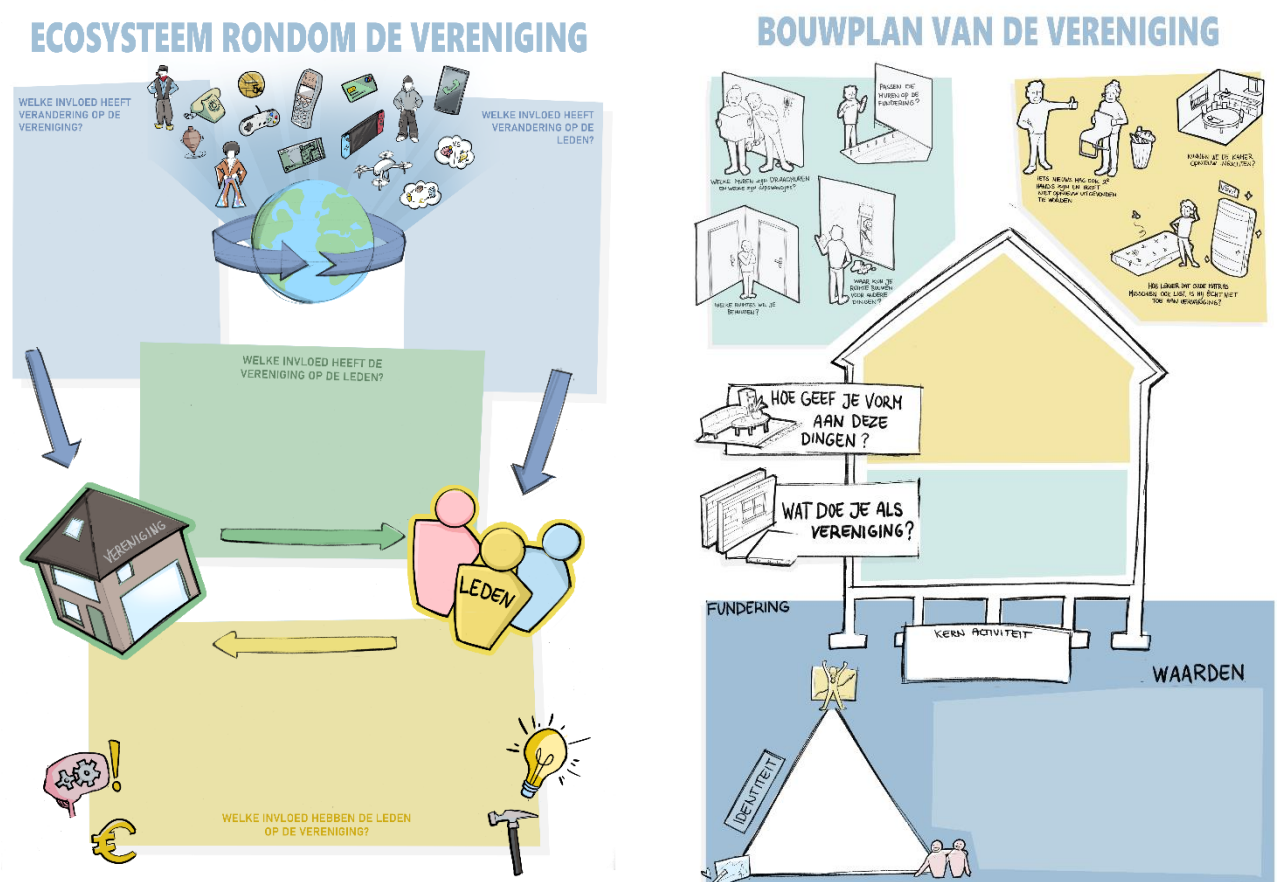
In the first step of this thesis research has been conducted to understand the ins and outs of why these associations struggle so much with their longevity. With this also came an exploration of the tools that were already available and why these succeeded or where improvement could still be found. To do so, literature has been scoped to find the problems the associations deal with, which were aspects such as finding members and visibility of the associations (Neele A, 2021). However, the most prominent obstacles were concluded from observing an association taking a class from *Cultuur in Enschede* and by constantly checking in with the culture coaches who have the most overview of what the associations really struggle with. This resulted into the conclusion that the problems such as finding members or visibility were mostly born from stubbornness and the inability to see why changes were needed within the association, whilst the world is in a constant flow of change (van Damme F, 2022).



Visual thinking was explored by looking at the work from experts in the field and by talking to them about their applications and experience. In literature, enough evidence was present of why visual thinking was a good tool. In short, visual thinking helps stimulate diverse thinking processes that regular conversations or text reading would not achieve (Kelley T, 2012). Especially metaphors were discovered to be a strong asset of visual thinking, as they compare things that are hard to understand to things that are easy to understand.

For finding ideas to start off the designing process, a brainstorm session with various stakeholders has been held. This gave insight in the capacities of non-visual thinking characters and the need for reference material to create understanding. Metaphors were argued to be the best starting point for creating the tool. These were explored with ideation sketches and brainstorm sessions with *de Tekenafdeling*. Since the focus of improvement was to create understanding in the need for change within associations, a metaphor of a house resulted from the ideation. This house was developed into a visual that explained the levels of change and maintenance a house needs throughout the years. This directly translated into an association needing to change things over time as well.

To ensure it was usable by the culture coaches of *Cultuur in Enschede*, ideation regarding the use of this metaphor had been created. After consulting with the contact person of *Cultuur in Enschede*, the decision was made to make the tool usable in an approximately 2-hour evaluation session. Therefore, the ideation resulted in two canvasses that help the associations discover how they are influenced by change and what the foundation of their association is, referring to the house metaphor, after being presented with the need for change is necessary.



This tool was tested by presenting it to a group of association coaches and in a pilot session with a photography association. Both test sessions resulted in positive results, as the culture coaches saw great value in the tool and expressed excitement to use it in the future, and the association showed eagerness to start reviewing parts of their association.

The tool focusses on why it is important to make changes within an association with the use of the metaphor. However, the metaphor has more potential to be applied in the steps made with the coaches after this understanding. There is also a possibility to apply this tool to other association branches such as sports, but the tool would need some tailoring to the culturally specific parts and validation on whether this metaphor is also useful for such associations.



## References

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