

## Design Atelier

Faculty: ESSB  
MSc Public Administration  
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### Description of the course

The Design Atelier aims: (1) to improve academic education by providing an educational space in which students can reach the highest level of learning goal of creating knowledge by learning to design solutions for real societal problems; (2) to strengthen the societal impact of academic education by letting students design solutions for real-life problems experienced by existing organizations. In such a way, the Design Atelier creates a challenging classroom where students can enhance their professional skills by working on complex, wicked problems. In contrast to most projects in their education, students work on designing a (potential) solution to a real-life problem. Students get acquainted with design methods and tools through several design seminars offered in the course. These seminars are facilitated by reputable designers with experience designing in a public sector context. In this Atelier, students carry out a design assignment for a client from the public sector (e.g. Ministries, County offices, Municipalities, NGOs). This approach helps them understand the societal impact and define what that means for them. Additionally, lecturers are trained in design methods and tools, which could add to their other courses at this university. Lastly, clients obtain a fresh perspective on the problem they experience

For a complete overview of the Design Atelier Course  
<https://www.eur.nl/en/impactatthecore/design-atelier>

### What have we learned about impact-driven education in practice?

- **Students and lecturers find it important for the professional development of students that they work with real clients and take the initiative.** Lecturers and students indicated that working with external clients and real cases made this course different. The course facilitated learning skills that students and teachers similarly mentioned as most important for the student's future careers: communication, social skills, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The Design Atelier course also asked students to take the initiative in their projects. Students point out that the course enhanced, to some extent, their skills in creativity, initiative, and productivity.
- **The course met this goal. Clients gained new insights from their experience working with the students.** In some cases, the course activities led to internships and graduation projects, which can positively impact establishing a reliable network of clients for future courses and represent potential student job opportunities.

- **There needs to be attention to the communication between lecturers and clients.** Students were responsible for communicating and contacting the client, which was sometimes challenging. The most voiced suggestion of clients is that more contact with the lecturer could improve progress and the integration of the solution by the students.
- **In the new academic year 2022-2023,** the Design Atelier's lecturers stay in close touch with clients by implementing a mid-way and final evaluation together with the clients. In addition, the program includes a masterclass Design 'thinking' for clients. This masterclass was very impactful in many different ways. For example, this masterclass enabled the clients to give better guidance to the students, and during the masterclasses, the clients also connected.
- **Introducing Interdisciplinary teams to the classrooms required practical considerations for scheduling activities.** Students found working with peers from different master tracks challenging in a practical sense of planning with very different schedules.
- **Impact-driven education design implementation should balance multiple stakeholders' needs: lecturers, students and clients. Students experienced a significant workload compared with the ETCS assigned for the course.** Clients indicated the course period as short, although the total duration was half a year. This observation suggests that stakeholders have a long-term interest.

## **What are next steps to increase the impact capacity of students in similar learning environments?**

- Introduce participants to how impact-driven principles are implemented in the course impact-driven principles. In this way, students can identify what skills they would like to have developed more after completing the course,, leading to increased engagement and development of impact skills.
- Facilitate time and space to bring students and lecturers together to discuss professional identity, process and personal struggles
- Including a client management plan at the beginning of the course in which lecturers communicate with the clients about needs and expectations
- Adjust the perceived workload, for example by examining task complexity, composing teams based on personal interest and continuation of projects by other student groups.

## **Want to know more? Contact the team**

### **Research and Evaluation**

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### **Learning Innovator IATC**

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## **Contributions Impact at the Core**

The Design Atelier partnered with Impact at the Core to:

- Provide continuous support to lecturers from a learning innovator from IATC
- Evaluate how the course could be upscaled to other master programs by assessing which skills and learning outcomes students achieve after following the Design Atelier.