

CULTURALL

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THE TOOLBOOK

*How to engage young
migrants in cultural life — a
Design Thinking field guide.*



A practical handbook for cultural institutions, NGOs, youth workers and policymakers.

Workshop for Social Innovation (PL) · Action Synergy (GR) · Fundatia Nationala pentru Tineret (RO)



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Who this toolbox is for

For anyone who wants young migrants to help shape cultural life — not just attend it.

You will find it useful if you run a cultural institution, a museum, a theatre, a library or a festival and you sense that young people with migration experience are missing from your audiences — or worse, missing from the room where decisions are made.

It is written for youth workers and NGO teams who already work with young migrants and want a structured, repeatable way to turn their voices into real programmes. And it is for policymakers and funders who want participation to mean more than a photo on a report.

You do not need to be a designer or a researcher. You need curiosity, a little time, and a willingness to listen before you build. The rest is in these pages — the mindset, the steps, and the ready-to-use tools.

Why bother engaging young migrants?

Because culture is one of the few places where a newcomer can stop being a "case" and start being a person with something to offer.

Young migrants are already part of cultural life. They go to concerts, exhibitions and workshops; many create, perform and organise. Yet institutions rarely design with them. They design for an imagined young migrant — and then wonder why the seats stay empty.

The gap is rarely about interest. In our interviews across Poland, Greece and Romania, the barriers that came up again and again were ordinary and fixable: events in a language with no subtitles, unreliable transport, fees, schedules that assume you already know how things work here, and a quiet feeling that "this place is not really for me."

There is also a trap on the other side. Inviting young migrants to "co-create" can tip into **tokenism** — using their faces and stories to decorate a programme that was already decided. Several interviewees named this directly, asking whether they were being invited to contribute or simply to take on work the institution didn't want.

Genuine participation is different, and it pays off twice. The institution gets programmes that actually fit real lives, and the young person gets something culture is uniquely good at giving: recognition, a sense of belonging, and a voice. **That is the whole point of this toolbox** — to give you a way of working that earns trust instead of spending it.

WHAT WE HEARD

"What attracts them, what discourages them, what feels missing, and what helps build a sense of belonging." Those four questions — straight from the CulturAll interview guide — are the spine of everything that follows.

How to use this book

Read it once for the mindset. Come back to it for the tools.

1 First, the mindset (Part 1).

A short, plain-language tour of Design Thinking — the five phases, the rhythm of widening and narrowing, and the attitudes that decide whether any of it works.

2 Then, the practice (Part 2).

The journey step by step: listen, make sense, generate, build, test. Each step explains what to do and — just as important — why.

3 Keep the toolbox close (Part 3).

Ten ready-to-run tools, each marked with the ✨ symbol: when to use it, how long it takes, what you need, and the steps. These are the pages to photocopy.

4 Borrow from the cases (Part 4).

Real and pilot examples showing how a single interview insight can grow into a programme — plus how to keep young people in the room for the long run.

A NOTE ON THE ✨ SYMBOL

Throughout the book, the spark marks a hands-on tool or exercise you can run with a group. If you are short on time, flip straight to those.

01

PART ONE

THE MINDSET

Three simple ideas that make the difference between a workshop and a transformation: a clear process, a rhythm of opening and closing, and a set of attitudes you can practise.

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Design Thinking in plain language

It is just a disciplined way of solving problems by starting with people instead of starting with answers.

Design Thinking has a reputation for being a buzzword. Strip the jargon away and it is something very old and very human: pay close attention to the people you want to serve, understand their world before you act, then try things, show them, and improve.

Two myths get in the way. The first is that good ideas arrive as a flash of genius in one person's head. The second is that they appear in a single "aha" moment. In reality, useful ideas are the product of a **process** — a series of steps spread out in time, where understanding comes first and solutions come late.

That is good news for a cultural institution. It means you do not need a resident creative genius. You need a method that a small, mixed team can follow — and the patience to listen before you build.

One more thing matters before the steps: **diversity and expertise**. The best ideas come from teams that differ — in background, role, age, and lived experience — and from people who actually know the problem. When the problem is "how do young migrants experience our city's culture," the real experts are young migrants. The whole method is built to put their experience at the centre.

DESIGN FOR THEM



The institution decides; the young person receives. Easy — and easy to get wrong.

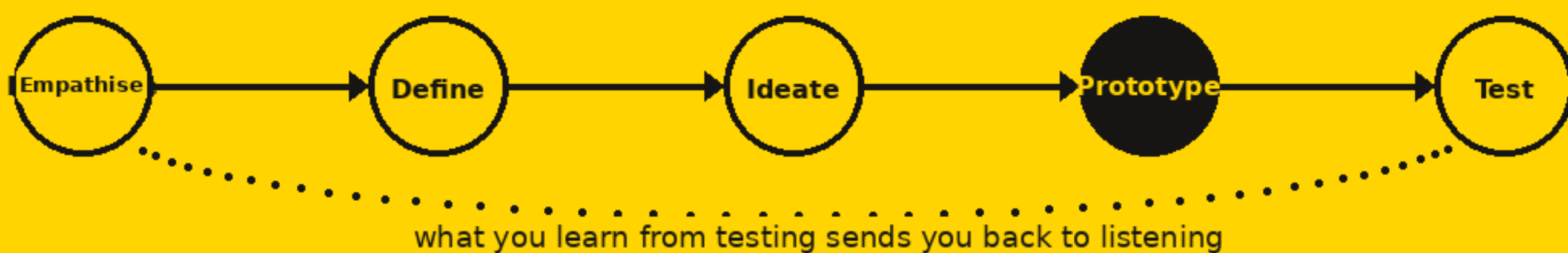
DESIGN WITH THEM



Young migrants help shape the thing itself. Slower — and far more likely to work.

The five phases

Empathise, define, ideate, prototype, test.
Not a straight line — a loop you can re-enter at any point.



Empathise. Get out of your assumptions and into people's lives. Interview, observe, listen. The goal is to understand what young migrants actually experience — not what you imagine they need.

Define. Make sense of what you heard. Cluster the noise into patterns, pull out the insights that surprise you, and frame the challenge as a sharp, hopeful question.

Ideate. Now — and only now — generate solutions. Go for quantity before quality; the wild ideas often unlock the useful ones.

Prototype. Make the most promising idea real enough to react to. A mock invitation, a single test session, a storyboard — cheap and fast.

Test. Put it in front of the people it is for, watch what happens, and let what you learn carry you back to the beginning. The loop is the method.

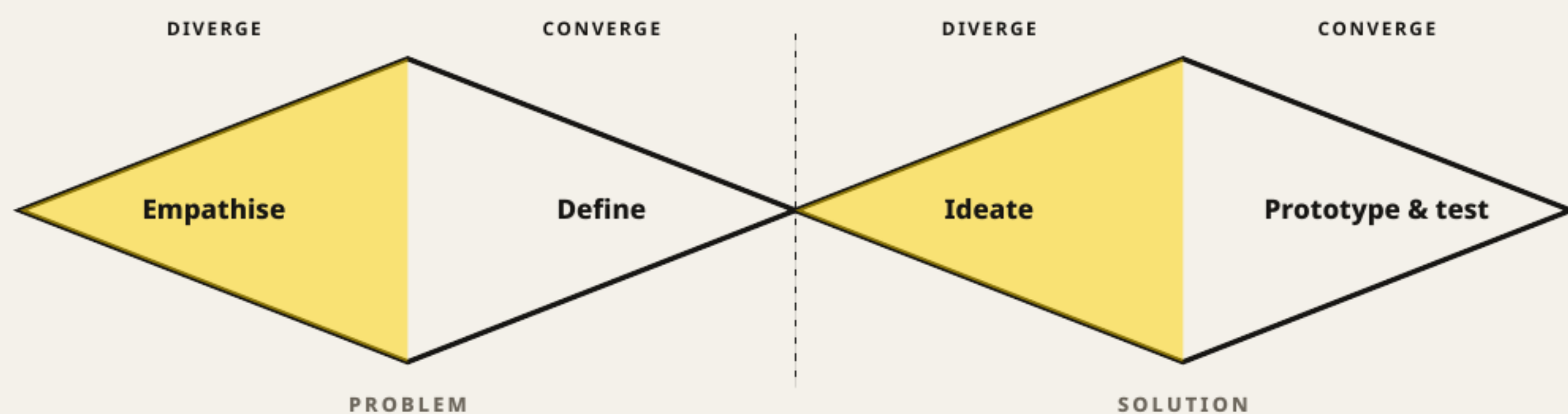
Diverge, then converge

Every phase has two movements: one that opens the field wide, and one that narrows it to a decision.

When you research and when you brainstorm, you **diverge** — you multiply perspectives, welcome contradiction, and let the picture get gloriously complicated. It can feel like getting lost in a forest. That feeling is a good sign; it means you are seeing the problem in its real complexity rather than the tidy version in your head.

When you define the challenge and when you choose ideas, you **converge** — you simplify, synthesise, and commit. You take the tangle and turn it into one clear sentence or one clear choice.

The two moves matter equally, and they should never happen at the same time. Judging ideas while you are still generating them kills the flow; generating endlessly without ever choosing means you never act. Open all the way, then close all the way.



The "double diamond": open wide to explore, narrow to decide — twice. Widen the problem, focus it; widen the solutions, choose one.

Think of it as breathing in, then breathing out. You need both — don't you.

The mindsets that make it work

The tools are easy. The attitudes are what separate real participation from theatre.

1 People first, solutions later.

Resist the urge to fix things on day one. Understanding earns you the right to propose.

2 Stay in "not-knowing."

Be curious. Let the young person be the expert on their own life. Your job is to ask, not to assume.

3 Invite, don't instruct.

Creativity can't be ordered. People give their best when they want to be there, not when they have to.

4 Make it tangible, fast.

A rough prototype tested today beats a perfect plan argued about for a month.

5 Co-create for real.

If young migrants shape the idea, they should also share the credit, the decisions and the benefits. Anything less is decoration.

6 Have fun.

An interview or a workshop is a human encounter, not just data collection. Warmth is a method, not a distraction.

02

PART TWO

THE PRACTICE

The journey, step by step. Listen, make sense, generate, build, test — with young migrants in the room at every stage.

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Why we listen first

You cannot design a welcome for someone whose experience you have only imagined.

Empathy is not a soft add-on; it is the fuel for everything that comes later. Skip it, and your pool of ideas will be shallow — limited to your own worldview and the stereotypes you didn't know you held.

The most common failure in cultural inclusion is designing for an invented "young migrant": a single, flat figure who stands in for thousands of different lives. The antidote is to gather many real perspectives, in their own words, until the flat figure dissolves into specific people with specific needs.

There are several ways to do this — observation, spending time in the spaces young people already use, simple cultural probes. But the workhorse method of the CulturAll project, and the heart of this toolbox, is the **in-depth interview**: one person, one open conversation, ninety minutes that can genuinely shift how an institution sees its city.

THE CULTURALL BASELINE

The CulturAll cohort: young people aged 18–30 with migration experience. Ten interviews per country, in Poland, Greece and Romania — thirty conversations, each turned into a summary grid and a persona. That is the evidence base this whole method rests on.

The in-depth interview

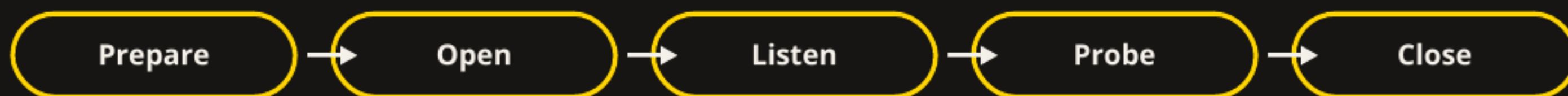
A one-on-one, open conversation that goes beyond questions to explore a person's experiences, feelings and perspectives — in a natural, story-like way.

An in-depth interview (IDI) is not a survey read aloud. It is a guided conversation in which the other person is the expert and you are the curious learner. You bring a guide — a list of themes — but you treat it as a compass, not a script. If something interesting opens up, you follow it.

Before you start, create a safe space. Make the person feel welcome and respected. Explain the purpose, the length (around 60–90 minutes), and that there are no right or wrong answers. Confirm consent, including consent to record. With young people, and with anyone carrying difficult experiences, this care is not optional.

During the interview, keep the focus 90% on them and 10% on you. Ask open questions that invite storytelling, not yes/no answers. Use gentle probes — "What did you mean by that?", "How did that feel?", "Could you give an example?" Leave room for silence. If something sensitive comes up, slow down, acknowledge the feeling, and continue only if they are comfortable.

Stay neutral. Don't judge, don't insert your opinions. And — genuinely — enjoy it. Treat the encounter as a chance to connect and learn, not a box to tick.



USE THE GUIDE AS A COMPASS — FOLLOW THE INTERESTING THREADS

THEM — talking 90%

YOU 10%

DO open questions · silence · "tell me more"

DON'T lead · judge · fill every pause

A good interview keeps the participant talking and the interviewer curious.

The shape of the conversation

A good interview arcs from warm-up, through a concrete story, to the bigger picture — and the full guide is in the toolbox (T2).

- **1** **Getting to know each other.**
Daily life, free time, how long they've lived here. "If you had a free day with no duties, how would you spend it?" — a question that quietly reveals real interests.
- **2** **The last cultural experience.**
Walk through one real event step by step: what it was, how they heard about it, why they went, how it felt, what was good and what was missing.
- **3** **Engagement & co-creation.**
Have they ever helped create or organise? And a deliberately provocative question: is inviting migrants to co-create a real opportunity — or a way to offload work onto them?
- **4** **Appreciation & benefits.**
A moment they felt recognised or valued, how it was expressed, how it felt.
- **5** **The broader picture.**
What pulls them toward events, what they take away, and what once made them give up on something — surfacing barriers: time, money, language, transport, "this is not for me."
- **6** **Close.**
"If someone built an event just for people like you, what would it include?" Then: anything we missed?

From transcript to persona

A 90-minute conversation is too rich to act on directly. You condense it — first into a grid, then into a person.

Record and transcribe. With consent, record the whole conversation and make a verbatim transcript. Tools like Dovetail (or NotebookLM for quick AI-assisted tagging) make transcription, coding and clustering much easier.

Read and tag. First pass: get the flow. Second pass: highlight the key insights — motives, barriers, needs — the emotional moments, and the memorable quotes that capture the person's voice.

Summarise in the grid. Compress the transcript into a one-to-two page snapshot (tool T3): who they are, what they said, what matters to them, plus a few quotes. Keep it short and sharp — bullets, not essays, in the participant's own words wherever possible.

Build the persona. Finally, turn the recurring picture into a portrait of a type (tool T4): a fictional name, an illustrative photo (never the real person), demographics, and the psychographics that actually drive behaviour — values, motivations, needs, frustrations, dreams.

Meet Shreesh

One of the personas built from the CulturAll interviews in Greece. Notice how a portrait is more useful than a statistic.

Shreesh

AGE

35

LOCATION

Athens

FROM

India

OCCUPATION

Works at a Greek company

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

High

MAIN NEED

Belonging & recognition

PROFILE

Indian-born, he lived in the US, the Middle East and the UK before settling in Greece six years ago. Open-minded and culturally curious, he uses ballet, contemporary dance and theatre to connect with Greek culture and community.

WHAT DRIVES HIM

Learning and personal growth, structured creative and physical activity, and a genuine sense of community in inclusive artistic spaces.

BARRIERS

Theatre performances without English subtitles, unreliable public transport, the "fluid" timing of classes and events, and occasional stereotyping — being a man in ballet.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A ballet school where teachers and peers recognised his effort and made a welcoming, non-judgemental space — and he flourished.

From a flat label ("a migrant in Athens") you now have a specific human with specific, designable needs: subtitles, predictable timing, recognition, and spaces that signal "you belong." That is what a persona buys you.

Making sense of what you heard

Ten rich conversations are not an answer. They are raw material. Defining is the craft of turning noise into a clear challenge.

Spread everything out — quotes, observations, grid notes — and look for patterns. The simplest reliable method is **affinity mapping** (tool T5): write each observation on a sticky note, then cluster the notes that belong together until themes emerge. Six to eight clusters is plenty, even for a complex picture.

Resist the urge to jump to solutions. The purpose here is comprehension: the quiet moment when it suddenly becomes obvious why young migrants don't show up — and you realise it was never about a lack of interest, but about subtitles, timing, cost, and signals of belonging.

As Einstein is supposed to have said: given an hour to solve a problem, spend fifty-five minutes on the problem and five on the solution. Time spent here is never wasted; it is what makes the later ideas hit the target.

Insights & How Might We

An insight names a tension. A How Might We turns that tension into an invitation to solve it.

An **insight** is not a fact ("Shreesh likes theatre"). It is a surprising truth that reveals a tension — usually the gap between what someone wants and what gets in the way. For example: "He wants to belong through theatre, but a missing line of subtitles quietly tells him the room wasn't built with him in mind."

Once you can state the tension, reframe it as a **How Might We** question (tool T6). The form matters: "How might we..." is hopeful, specific, and open to many answers. It assumes a solution exists and invites the team to find it.

Keep them neither too narrow ("How might we add subtitles?" — that's already one solution) nor too vague ("How might we help migrants?"). Aim for the middle: "How might we make a theatre night feel made-for-me to someone still learning the language?"

Generate ten or more, then converge: pick the two or three that best capture what should change. Those become the brief for ideation.

FROM QUOTE TO QUESTION

Quote: "I gave up — I wasn't sure it was for someone like me." → **Insight:** uncertainty about belonging stops people before cost or language ever do. → **HMW:** How might we signal "you belong here" before a young migrant even walks through the door?

From quantity to quality

Now you generate solutions — as many as possible, before you judge a single one.

A good 45–60 minute session produces 60–100 ideas. At this stage, quality is not the point; volume is. The wild, "unfeasible" ideas are not waste — they break deadlocks, reveal what the team really values, and often contain the seed of the idea that works.

Real ideation runs on a few firm rules: **suspend judgement** (including praise, which quietly tells people to stop), **welcome wild ideas, build on others'**, **stay on the challenge**, hold **one conversation at a time**, and make everything visible — one idea, one sticky note.

Expect **waves**. Energy is high at the start, then dips, then surges again. The later waves are usually the most valuable; the first wave is mostly the obvious, stereotypical answers. Wait the lull out.

The toolbox gives you three engines: classic **brainstorming** and quiet, equal **6-3-5 brainwriting** (tool T7), plus **reverse brainstorming** (tool T8) for when the group is stuck. Then converge with **NOW–HOW–WOW** (tool T9).

Build small, test for real

A prototype is the cheapest version of an idea that is real enough for someone to react to.

You do not need to launch a programme to learn whether it works. For cultural projects, a prototype can be a mock invitation, a storyboard of the visitor's journey, a single test session, a sample of the cards, or a role-played welcome at the door. Cheap, fast, and disposable — that is the whole idea.

Then **test with the people it is for**. Put the prototype in front of young migrants and watch more than you ask: where do they hesitate, light up, get confused? Invite honest reactions, and make it safe to dislike it. You are testing the idea, not them.

What you learn sends you back around the loop — to a sharper insight, a better question, a stronger idea. The marshmallow lesson applies: teams fail when they leave the hardest assumption (here, "will young migrants actually feel this is for them?") untested until the very end. Test it first.

The sooner you make an idea real, the sooner you learn its true value.

03

PART THREE

THE TOOLBOX

Ten tools you can run tomorrow. Each one tells you when to use it, how long it takes, who you need, what to bring, and exactly what to do. These are the pages to photocopy.

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Open call & recruitment

WHEN

Finding participants to interview

TIME

1–2 weeks running

PEOPLE

Aim for ~10 per location

MATERIALS

Short sign-up form, partner channels

- 1 Write a short, warm, inclusive open call. Say who you're looking for (age, location, migration experience, cultural involvement), what it's about and why it matters, what participants gain, the practical details, and one clear next step.
- 2 Offer a genuine thank-you: tickets or vouchers, a festival pass, a small gift, or rewards co-sponsored with partners.
- 3 Build a 3–5 minute sign-up form. Collect only what you need: name, age (18–30, to check eligibility), country of origin, time in the country, contact, area, a couple of screening questions on cultural participation, availability, and consent to take part and be recorded.
- 4 Post the call across channels — social media, newsletters, partner networks — and monitor responses.
- 5 Select participants as diversely as possible: gender, country of origin, length of stay, and the roles they play in culture (audience, creator, supporter).
- 6 Confirm each interview individually and personally.

Tip. Inclusive, motivating language in the call does half the recruiting. Spell out what's in it for them — a chance to be heard, not just "help with research."

In-depth interview guide

WHEN

Understanding lived experience

TIME

60–90 min per person

PEOPLE

One interviewer, one participant

MATERIALS

Recorder, consent, this guide

- 1 Introduce & reassure.** Explain the purpose, the length, confidentiality and voluntariness. "There are no right or wrong answers — what matters is your opinion." Get consent to record.
- 2 Warm up.** Daily life, free time, time in the country. The free-day question to surface real interests.
- 3 One real story.** Their last cultural or social event, walked through step by step — what, where, with whom, how they heard of it, why they went, how it felt, what was missing.
- 4 Engagement & co-creation.** Past involvement; the provocative question on whether co-creation is opportunity or offloading; what they'd contribute, with whom, and under what conditions.
- 5 Appreciation.** A moment they felt valued — how, and how it felt.
- 6 Broader view & barriers.** What pulls them in, what they take away, what they once gave up on and why.
- 7 Close.** "An event built for people like you — what's in it?" Then: anything we didn't cover?

Remember. 90% them, 10% you. Open questions only. Use the guide as a compass — follow the interesting threads. Allow silence. Respect the 90-minute limit. And have fun.

Interview summary grid

WHEN	TIME	PEOPLE	MATERIALS
Right after each interview	30–45 min	The interviewer	Transcript, this template

A one-to-two page snapshot that lets the team recall a person without re-reading 90 minutes — and compare across interviews to spot patterns. Fill each field with short bullets, in the participant's own words where you can.

- 1 Basic information** — name (fictional), age, gender, country of origin, occupation.
- 2 Personal background** — everyday life and free time, cultural interests, the "free day" answer.
- 3 Cultural experience** — last event (what / when / where / with whom), how they heard of it, why they joined, impressions (good and missing), a short arrival-to-exit highlight.
- 4 Engagement & co-creation** — past involvement, role, what was enjoyable or hard, their view on migrants co-creating, and what they'd contribute if invited.
- 5 Appreciation & benefits** — when they felt valued, how it showed, how it felt.
- 6 Broader perspective** — what motivates attendance, what they take away, the barriers that stop them.
- 7 Key takeaways** — 3–5 bullets. **Memorable quotes** — 2–4 short, powerful lines.

Tip. Bullets, not essays. One or two lines each. The grid is a cheat sheet, not a second transcript.

Persona canvas

WHEN

After several interviews

TIME

45–60 min per persona

PEOPLE

2–3 from the research team

MATERIALS

Grids, canvas, illustrative image

A persona turns a recurring pattern into a believable person the whole team can design for. Build one per distinct type you noticed.

- 1 Identity** — fictional name, illustrative photo (never the real person), age, gender, location, occupation, country of origin.
- 2 Profile** — a short paragraph: who they are, their migration story, how they relate to culture.
- 3 Motivations & needs** — what drives them; their single most important need (e.g. belonging and recognition).
- 4 Interests & involvement** — what they do, and the role they prefer (audience, creator, organiser).
- 5 Barriers & frustrations** — what gets in the way (language, transport, timing, cost, exclusion).
- 6 Goals, dreams & channels** — what they're reaching for, and how they actually hear about things.
- 7 Best practice** — one example where it worked, and why.

Tip. If you can't picture the persona ordering a coffee and choosing whether to attend your event, it's still too abstract. Add detail until they feel real.

Affinity mapping & insights

WHEN

Making sense of the research

TIME

90–120 min

PEOPLE

The team + young participants

MATERIALS

Sticky notes, wall, markers

- 1 Write every observation, quote and grid takeaway on its own sticky note. Put them all on a wall.
- 2 Stand up. Group notes that belong together; name each cluster. Six to eight clusters is enough. A note can sit in two clusters.
- 3 For each cluster, **tension** here? Where does what people want collide ask: what's the with what stops them?
- 4 Write that tension as an **insight** — a surprising, specific truth, not a bland fact.
- 5 Keep the insights that make the team go "oh." Those are the ones worth designing around.

Tip. Involve young migrants in the clustering, not just the interviews. They will read the notes differently — and more accurately — than your staff will.

How Might We

WHEN

Framing the challenge for ideation

TIME

30–45 min

PEOPLE

The whole team

MATERIALS

Flipchart, marker

- 1 Take your insights to a flipchart.
- 2 Invite the team to phrase challenges starting with "How might we...". Help people hold the form — it's worth insisting on.
- 3 Write down every suggestion, even imperfect ones.
- 4 When you've got ten or more and feel tapped out, review the list.
- 5 Select about three that best express what should change. Check each: inspiring, specific, and open to many solutions — not too narrow, not too vague.
- 6 These become the brief for the brainstorm.

Watch the width. "How might we add subtitles?" is a solution in disguise. "How might we help language-learners feel a play was made for them?" leaves room to invent.

Brainstorming & 6-3-5

WHEN

Generating many ideas

TIME

45–60 min

PEOPLE

3–6 per group

MATERIALS

Sticky notes / 6-3-5 sheets

Classic brainstorm. Post your HMW questions on the wall. Share ideas out loud — one idea per sticky note, placed under the question it answers. Don't discuss; if it's understandable, write it down. Run at least 45 minutes; aim for 60–100 ideas. Rules: suspend judgement, welcome wild ideas, build on others, stay on topic, one conversation at a time.

6-3-5 brainwriting — the quiet, equal version, great when some voices dominate or the group is shy:

- 1** **6** people each take a sheet divided into three columns.
- 2** Each writes **3** ideas for the challenge — in silence — in about **5** minutes.
- 3** Pass your sheet to the person on your left.
- 4** Build on the three ideas in front of you with three new ones.
- 5** Repeat until sheets return to their owners — up to 108 ideas in half an hour, with everyone contributing equally.

Tip. Expect waves of energy. When the room goes quiet, wait — the second and third waves are where the non-obvious ideas live.

Reverse brainstorming

WHEN

The group is stuck or too polite

TIME

30–45 min

PEOPLE

3–6

MATERIALS

Flipchart, sticky notes

- 1** Flip the challenge on its head. Instead of "How might we make young migrants feel welcome?", ask: **"How might we make them feel completely unwelcome?"**
- 2** Brainstorm the worst ideas freely — they come fast, and they're fun. (No subtitles, hostile front desk, events at impossible times, insider jargon everywhere...)
- 3** When you have a good list of "how to fail," reverse each one into its positive counterpart.
- 4** You'll often find concrete fixes that a straight brainstorm missed — because naming the failures exposes the things you were quietly doing already.

Why it works. People find it far easier (and safer) to criticise than to invent. Reverse brainstorming uses that, then turns the energy into solutions.

Idea selection • NOW–HOW–WOW

WHEN

Choosing what to prototype

TIME

45–60 min

PEOPLE

The whole team

MATERIALS

Masking tape, dots/markers

- 1 Draw a two-axis grid: **impact** (low→high) against **feasibility** (hard→easy).
- 2 Place each idea in a quadrant:

NOW (easy, low impact — quick wins),	HOW (high impact, hard — ambitious, needs resources),	WOW (high impact, easy — your stars), and the bottom-left to drop.
---	--	---
- 3 Discuss to place them — the goal is shared understanding, not winning the argument. Park anything contentious on a borderline.
- 4 Then **dot** : give everyone a few dots to put on the ideas that "really run a **vote** resonate." Trust this informed intuition — after all this quick listening, the team's gut is well-fed.
- 5 Pick one or two to prototype. Nothing is destroyed; you can return to the rest.

Tip. Start with the WOW quadrant — high impact and genuinely doable. It builds momentum and early proof that co-creation delivers.

Prototype & test plan

WHEN

Before you commit real budget

TIME

Half a day to plan + a test session

PEOPLE

Team + young migrants as testers

MATERIALS

Whatever makes the idea tangible

- 1 Name the idea** on an idea card: a memorable title, a short description (what / who for), the gains, what implementation needs, and the risks.
- 2 Build the cheapest real version** — a mock invitation, a storyboard, sample cards, a single pilot session, a role-played welcome.
- 3 Name your riskiest assumption** — usually "will young migrants actually feel this is for them?" — and design the test to check exactly that.
- 4 Test with the people it's for.** Watch where they hesitate, light up or get confused. Ask for honest reactions; make it safe to dislike it.
- 5 Capture what you learned** and decide: keep, change, or drop — then loop back to a sharper insight or idea.

Tip. Test the hard assumption first, not last. The "marshmallow" that topples cultural projects is almost always an untested belief about what young people want.

04

PART FOUR

IT WORKS

Three pilots, one in each country — each one an answer to something young migrants told us in the interviews. Insight first, then the idea.

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Obrus

When young migrants told us they wanted to give to a city's culture — not only receive it — a museum handed them the needle, and the room.

THE INSIGHT THAT STARTED IT. Across the CulturAll interviews, two threads kept returning: the wish to be recognised for what you bring, and the sharp difference between being invited to co-create and being asked to perform. People wanted to contribute their own heritage, on their own terms — and be valued for it.

WHAT WE MADE. Obrus ("tablecloth") — a series of communal embroidery workshops at the Emigration Museum in Gdynia, run with the Workshop for Social Innovation Foundation. The decisive move: the sessions were **led by artists with migration experience**. Belarusian textile artist Maryia Latyshava taught "birds of paradise" — folk symbols of abundance and good fortune; Ukrainian artist Marta Zwarycz brought the Petrykivka style and the Tree of Life, a folk emblem of connection, continuity and mutual support. No sewing skills were needed; everything was provided.

WHAT HAPPENED. Over two open, free sessions (8 and 14 March 2026), each participant embroidered their own square — birds, flowers, a Tree of Life, words like "być sobą" ("to be yourself"). The squares were then sewn together into one large tablecloth and shown in the museum: many hands, many origins, one cloth.

WHAT WE LEARNED. The move that mattered was inverting the roles. Young migrants arrived not as a "target group" to be served, but as teachers and authors, sharing a craft the institution didn't have. A tablecloth is a quiet, perfect metaphor — the thing you gather around — and the museum walked away with both an artwork and a relationship.



Obrus — Emigration Museum in Gdynia × Workshop for Social Innovation, within CulturAll / Erasmus+. Workshops led by Maryia Latyshava and Marta Zwarycz. Photos: project archive. polska1.pl

A stage of their own

In Romania, what the interviews revealed about being seen turned into a play — rehearsed and performed by young people themselves.

THE INSIGHT THAT STARTED IT. The conversations kept circling back to visibility and voice: young people wanted to be authors of their own story, not extras in someone else's. Performance offered a way to put exactly that on a stage.

WHAT WE MADE. A youth-theatre pilot, co-created and performed by young participants together with the Fundația Națională pentru Tineret and partners (HEAL Permanent Theatre). Built collectively in rehearsal, it turned lived experience — memory, family, home, leaving and arriving — into a shared performance.

WHAT HAPPENED. Over weeks of rehearsals the group shaped the piece together and staged it for an audience. The curtain call — the whole cast holding hands across the stage — said as much as the play itself. For several of them, it was a first time performing.

WHAT WE LEARNED. Co-creation works when the form lets people speak in their own voice. A stage quietly turns "being talked about" into "being heard."



Youth-theatre pilot, Romania — Fundația Națională pentru Tineret with HEAL Permanent Theatre, within CulturAll, co-funded by the European Union. Photos: project archive.

If my life was a book

In Athens, a library full of donated books became a recording studio — and a first microphone for people telling their own story.

THE INSIGHT THAT STARTED IT. The interviews and personas — Shreesh among them — kept naming the same needs: to belong, to be recognised, and to have a voice rather than be spoken about. For many, the barrier was never talent. It was permission, and a safe place to begin.

WHAT WE MADE. A podcast-creation event at **We Need Books**, a multilingual community library in Athens, on the theme "If my life was a book, what would the stories tell?" Run together with young participants, it turned the library and a simple recording set-up into a place to make culture, not just consume it.

WHAT HAPPENED. It opened with a gentle warm-up — wandering the shelves and picking a book that mirrored their own story, or the podcast they would create. From there people opened up, shaped their ideas, and recorded. For many it was their very first time behind a microphone; they faced the nerves and shared their stories with honesty and heart. The episodes air as part of the CulturAll podcast.

WHAT WE LEARNED. A welcoming, low-pressure space plus a real tool — books, a mic — is often all it takes to move someone from audience to author. Start with play, let people choose their own way in, and the courage follows.



If my life was a book — podcast-creation event at We Need Books, Athens, within CulturAll / Erasmus+. Photos: project archive. [We Need Books](#)

Putting young people in the room

Methods are only as good as the power you're willing to share. Participation is a ladder — aim higher than "consulted."

It is easy to ask young migrants what they think and then decide everything yourself. That is the bottom of the ladder. The rungs above it are where the value lives:

Informed → **consulted** → **involved** (they shape options) → **co-deciding** (they hold real votes and budget) → **youth-led** (they set the agenda; you support). Each project should know honestly which rung it's on — and aim one rung higher next time.

To keep participation real rather than performed: bring young people in before the brief is fixed, not after; put them in the synthesis and selection rooms, not only the interviews; pay or meaningfully recognise their time; and close the loop — tell them what happened to their ideas. People stay involved when they can see their fingerprints on the result.

And watch for the tokenism trap your interviewees named themselves: never invite co-creation as a way to offload work or to decorate a decision already made. If you take their ideas, share the credit, the choices and the benefits.

A QUICK TOKENISM CHECK

Could the young people you involved point to one concrete thing that changed because of them? Did they help decide, not just react? Were they thanked in a way that cost the institution something? If "no" to any — climb a rung.

A short conclusion

You now have a mindset, a process, and ten tools. The rest is the courage to listen before you build.

Engaging young migrants in cultural life is not a campaign you run once. It is a way of working: start with real conversations, make sense of them together, generate boldly, build small, test honestly, and keep young people in the room throughout.

Something else happens along the way. Each time you run this process, your institution gets better at it — more confident with co-creation, quicker to spot tokenism, more trusted by the communities you want to reach. You are not just designing one programme; you are building the muscle to keep doing it.

Three things will help you make it stick. **Be patient** with people and with your own organisation — change takes time and new habits. **Find allies** inside the institution who can secure the resources and decisions a good idea needs. And **protect agency** — let the young co-creators see what became of their ideas, so they come back.

Don't design for young migrants. Design with them — and let culture do what it does best: make people belong.

Read, watch, keep learning

A short shelf to go deeper into Design Thinking, creativity and participation.

TITLE	TYPE	WHY
Where Good Ideas Come From — Steven Johnson	Book / TED talk	Why ideas are born from environments and connection, not lone genius.
Creative Confidence — Tom & David Kelley (IDEO)	Book / TED talk	From the people who popularised Design Thinking — how anyone can build creative confidence.
The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design — IDEO.org	Free guide	A practical companion to running empathy, ideation and prototyping with communities.
Framework for Innovation / Double Diamond — UK Design Council	Web resource	The discover–define–develop–deliver model behind this book's rhythm.
Build a tower, build a team — Tom Wujec	TED talk	The marshmallow challenge and why prototyping beats planning.
Hart's Ladder of Participation — Roger Hart (UNICEF)	Paper	The classic model for genuine — versus token — youth participation.
The CulturAll podcast — Poland & Greece	Podcast	Young migrants telling their own stories (e.g. "If my life was a book" at We Need Books, Athens) and institutions on the pilots.

THANK YOU

Now go and have the conversations. The seats fill up when people can see their own fingerprints on what's inside.

THE PARTNERSHIP

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STAY IN TOUCH

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