

DESIGNING WITH PEOPLE

Developing a multidisciplinary design education environment for more inclusion

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ABSTRACT

Attention for inclusion and diversity in the learning and living environment of students in higher education is important. Our aim is to stimulate students to adopt an inclusive attitude, both in their personal and future professional lives. Higher education can play a key role in facilitating and setting a good example themselves on inclusion and diversity in their communication, infrastructure, teaching methodologies, etc.

The educational programs of 'Interior Architecture and Architecture' and 'Occupational Therapy' (OT) of Hasselt University both teach about inclusion and human-centered design approaches, but want to join forces for the purpose of elevating knowledge and expertise on inclusion to a higher level (see Young et al., 2019).

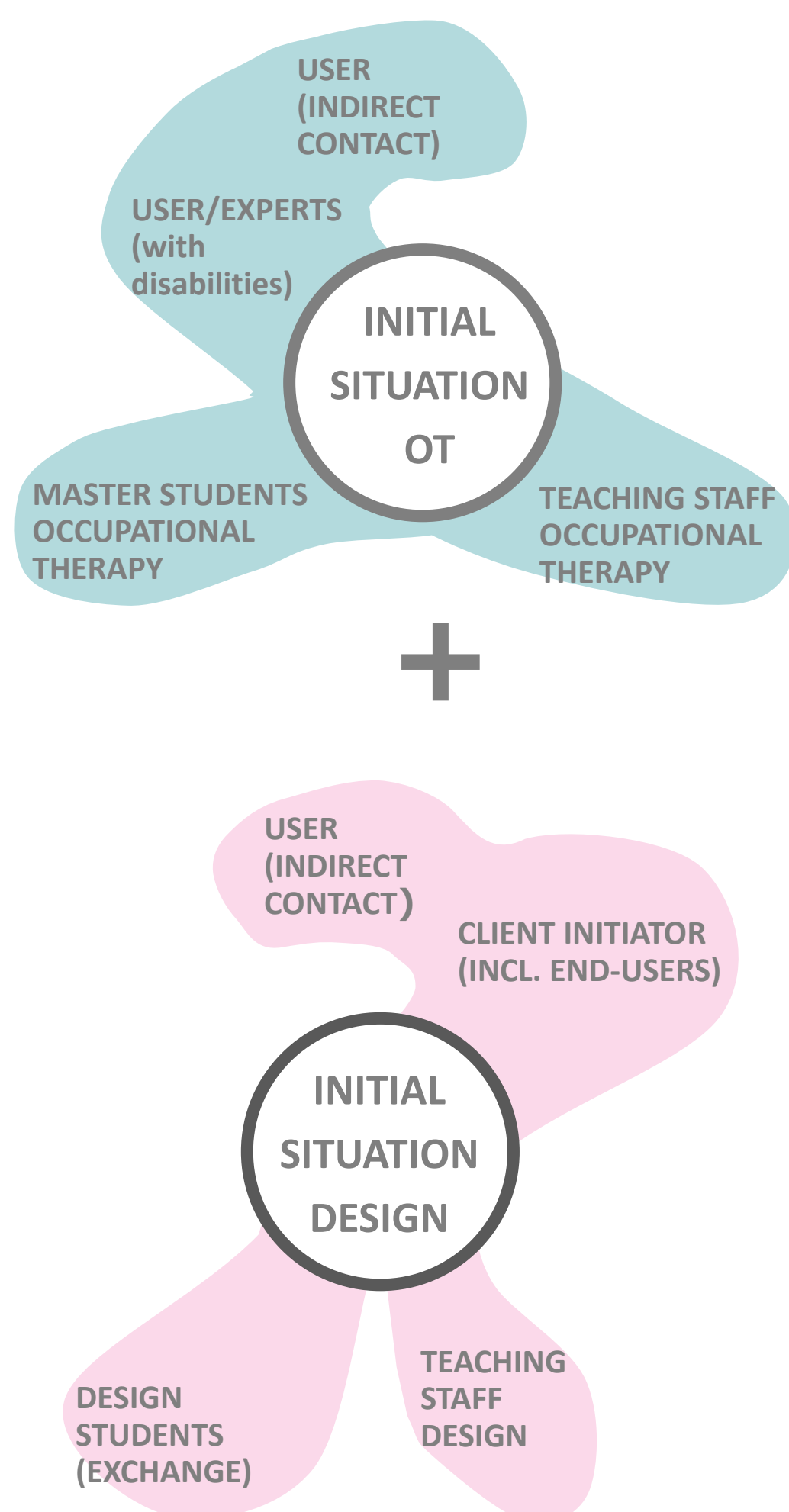
In a two-year project (Oct '22-Sep '24), we explore how to create the best possible setting to teach inclusive design and create an inclusive learning environment. This poster outlines the steps to develop the new, multidisciplinary course called 'Designing with people'. In this course, we will gather and share knowledge on diversity and inclusion throughout the design process, using the paradigm of Universal Design.

Through co-creation with user-experts with a disability, we will address issues in real-life cases from actual clients and propose design solutions that are usable, understandable and enjoyable for a diversity of users, irrespective of their needs and abilities.

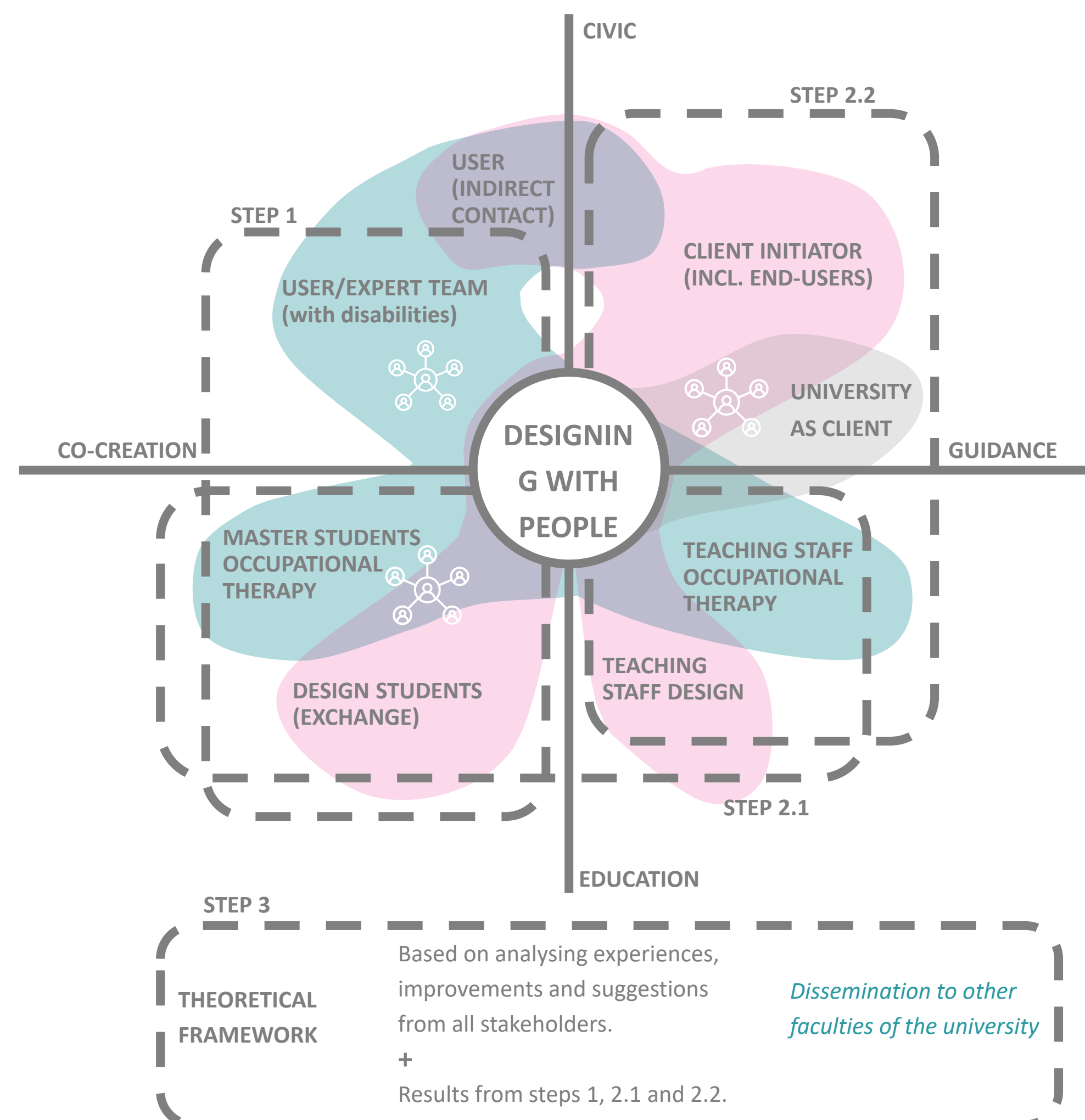
The outcome of this project is threefold:

- 1) a new interfaculty course linked to structural and sustainable learning networks;
- 2) more knowledge and awareness towards inclusion and a variety of people, with different (dis)abilities, needs, experiences and backgrounds, not only among students, but also among staff as well as the broader network of practicing clients and user-experts;
- 3) the development and dissemination of a theoretical framework on inclusive co-creation.

INITIAL SITUATION IN SEPERATE FACULTIES



DEVELOPMENT OF SHARED 'DESIGNING WITH PEOPLE' COURSE



STEP 1 Optimizing multidisciplinary design teams (within education)

Expertise and competences of both disciplines are analyzed according to complementing and strengthening/reinforcing properties. They are combined to establish more powerful design teams: For example, Occupational Therapy students' knowledge of the needs of people with disabilities, design students' expertise in creating elegant, user-friendly design, and user-experts' daily life experiences and insights from their different backgrounds.

The benefits of this collaboration have been demonstrated in the literature, but little is known about the best ways to create a (safe) setting in which each group's competences can flourish. Different scenarios will be developed and tested in practice.

STEP 2 [2.1 + 2.2] Realizing an inclusive learning environment

STEP 2.1: First, students and staff will focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Staff members will test teaching methodologies and alternative strategies to create an enabling environment for everyone. Students will need to communicate and present (within the design team with students of different backgrounds, user-experts, clients, etc.) in an inclusive way.

STEP 2.2: For stakeholders involved within real-life cases, a network is installed. In this network, the different clients (and end-users) not only learn from the design teams' spatial analyses of the as-is situation and design proposals. They also learn from each other's problems and possible solutions. Within this network the Universal Design paradigm will be used to open up the design process to the widest diversity of people possible.

STEP 3 Developing a methodology for inclusive co-creation

Experiences, improvements and suggestions from the process of optimizing powerful design teams (i.e. step 1), from the inclusive learning process (i.e. step 2.1) as well as from the Universal Design process within the broad network (i.e. step 2.2) will be structurally gathered from all stakeholders and analyzed.

Insights and lessons learned will be established in a theoretical framework on 'Designing with People' to further disseminate to other courses and other environments in order to facilitate diversity and inclusion in real life.