



How to Validate Design

Validating Design Using Target Group Interview

Riikka Uhmavaara

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the topic of design validation. The theoretical aspects concentrate on design process and different attributes of design that can be measured. The objective was to gain knowledge on how design solutions can be validated or improved. The aim was also to find out if the validation data could be useful for designers. In addition to the theory, this thesis consists of a practical part, which includes a design case for a client, and a target group interview that aims to validate the design.

For the practical part the research data were collected using a target group interview. The collected data were mainly qualitative and they were analysed in order to validate the design and to evaluate target group interview as a validation tool. The results were mainly qualitative, but some results are also presented in quantitative methods to create a general overview of the case.

The results suggest that design can be validated and measured by analysing different design attributes, which are connected to the client's needs, design objectives, target group response and available resources. This research identifies the subjectivity of experiencing design and indicates that predicting an audience response may never be completely accurate. The research also suggests that understanding different stages of design process is important for creating successful design solutions.

At the end of this thesis, a conclusion ties together the theory, the practical case and the findings done based on the gathered data. On the basis of the thesis, it is possible to understand design process and design validation better, and to evaluate the need for a target group feedback.

Key words: graphic design, design process, measuring design, target group interview.

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1 INTRODUCTION

I have been working as a freelance and agency designer for the past few years and I have noticed that design processes can be managed in many different ways. It is easy to get used to certain ways of working, but it is necessary to try to find new ways improve your professional skills as a designer. An important part of progressing is to learn from your previous design cases and analyse their success.

As a designer I am used to measuring the quality of my design work in certain ways. These ways usually consist of personal review and feedback from colleagues and the client. A lot of times the design work is thought to be successful when the client and the designer are pleased with the results. I have noticed that it is quite rare for a graphic designer to get feedback from the actual target audience. In this thesis I want to find out if design solutions can be measured, and if it is possible to use target group feedback as a part of design validation.

In this thesis I will research graphic design as professional, commercial work where the designer creates solutions for a client. To set the grounds for my research I explore the theory of design as a process. This is important for understanding how design solutions come together, and what are the critical points in the process that have a vital effect on the outcome.

The main part of the thesis concentrates on measuring design. Thesis researches the different attributes of design, which can be measured in order to validate the design solution. This thesis explores the subjectivity of experiencing design, and gathers information on aesthetic appeal, emotional appeal and desirability of design. This research is used as a base for the practical part of the thesis.

This thesis involves a design project for a client, and a target group interview that aims to measure the success of the design. This thesis consists of three theoretical chapters, overlook of the project design process and an analysis of a target group interview that was conducted during the process.

2 DESIGN PROCESS

Design is a complex process. I chose to research design process as a part of my thesis because it is important to understand that design is more than just the end product. Design is a process where a client's need or a requirement is turned into a design solution and finished work. Solutions can differ widely concerning creativity, practicality and budget. Understanding design as a process helps us to generate and refine ideas to meet the stated aims of a brief. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 7 – 10.)

Design process does not aim to prescribe a definite methodology for design (Skolos & Wedell 2012, 4). Design is a flexible and evolving process that aims to meet specific goals. Design process only provides a framework to work in; it does not give guidelines for design solutions. (Pabini, 2010.) It is a creative process that is controlled and directed so, that it produces a viable solution to the existing design problem. Valid design serves economic goals, as well as creative and personal goals. A design process seeks to encourage designers to analyse their ideas, think outside the box and come up with creative solutions. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 11.)

A design process can be divided into different stages. The process usually starts from defining a problem and it ends in a delivered solution (Bennett 2006, 132-134). There are different interpretations about the amount of stages, and what they are called in theory, but the process itself is usually the same. In this thesis I chose to research design process mainly as it is explained in the book “Design Thinking” by Ambrose & Harris. Ambrose & Harris examine the process in a way where they divide it into seven stages (figure 1).

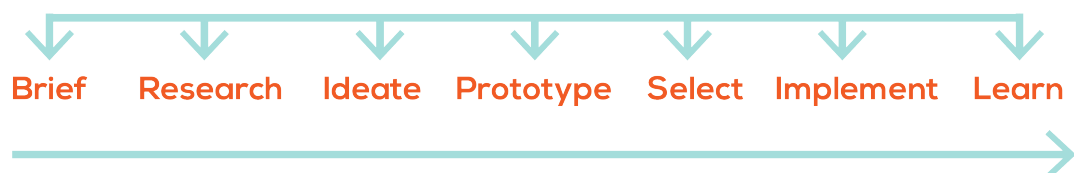


FIGURE 1. Design process stages (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 11)

Design process is seldomly linear, but it is often seen this way. It is an iterative process. This means the process involves revisiting its earlier stages and reworking them if needed.

2.1 Design brief

Design process starts when a client gives designer a design brief. A design brief is a detailed description of an assignment. A thorough brief is a critical part of a design process because it helps to develop trust and understanding between a client and a designer. It also ensures that important issues are considered before going forward with the design process. (Skolos & Wedell 2012, 5.)

A design brief presents the client's requirements for a project and establishes what the core problem is. It outlines the aims, objectives and milestones of a project. These need to be specified so that the designer or design team knows what they need to achieve. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 14-17.) Even if the importance of a good brief is widely acknowledged, it is not always done or received properly. A lot of times defining the real needs and objectives can be difficult for a client. The quality of the design brief and the accuracy of the design problem are dependent on the client and the designer both.

A good designer should be able to help the client to define their needs. It is important to remember, that the client in charge of the brief, is usually not a part of the design audience. While it is necessary to please the client, designers should always also look at their audience for inspiration and direction. (Leonard & Ambrose 2012, 70.)

2.2 Design research

Research is an important part of a design process, since it helps designers to understand the whole project's context. It is important for a designer to identify what kind of elements will affect the project and what are the limitations for it. (Skolos & Wedell 2012, 5.) Research gives the design process direction and focus, and it determines the quality of the outcome. (Leonard & Ambrose 2012, 10.)

Research can be either quantitative or qualitative. These are different approaches that both give information on an audience. In design research the quantitative research usually means hard statistical numbers about target groups, indicating the most popular

results. Qualitative research reveals more information about the user group behaviour and lifestyle by allowing the audience to give their opinions in a more open way. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 18.) In this thesis I will mainly be using qualitative research to get the right type of information. I chose this method to get information that makes it easier to understand how the target group experiences the outcome.

2.3 Creating ideas for design

During the ideate stage, the information that is gotten from the research, is used to create ideas that meet the design brief. There are multiple ways and methods that can be used to create ideas. These include brainstorming, sketching, adapting and borrowing, taking an analytic design-centred approach, or user-centred approach.

There are always limitations to design solutions, such as the amount of resources available, money, and how original the design needs to be. In this stage these limitations should not be considered too much. Ideating is the creative stage where raw concepts are formed. Different interpretations of the design brief are important for finding the right solution. (Saffer, 2009.)

2.4 Prototyping and testing ideas

Once you have different concepts and ideas for your design that meet the given brief, they should be evaluated and refined in the prototyping stage. The most promising design solutions should be worked a bit further so that they can be compared with each other. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 22.)

The prototyping stage begins with rapid design development. Prototyping means getting ideas into the physical world. A prototype can be anything that takes a physical form, such as notes, space, objects, interface or for example a storyboard. (Skolos & Wedell 2012, 137.) In graphic design prototype usually means determining structure, type, colour palette and look. Often at this point it is possible to say if the concept will work, or if there is a need to research other possibilities.

According to Lyndon (2010), prototypes are most successful when they are experienced with a design team or a target user. This gives the designer a possibility to gather information on how others feel about the design at this point. This information can be valuable in guiding the design process further. Feedback is an important part of the whole process, and it should somehow be utilized in all cases. This can be done by just asking for someone's opinion over a small design choice, or implemented as user experience testing on a larger group. Interacting with people guides the design into a new direction and helps to make successful solutions.

2.5 Selecting and refining a concept

One of the proposed design solutions is selected for further development and refinement. The decision on selecting a solution should be based on the criteria and design goals set in the beginning of the process. The concept should meet the most important goals of the design brief, but it is not always necessary to meet all the requirements within a single design. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 24.)

Sometimes it is difficult for designers to understand that clients may value different things than they do. It is important for designers to try to explain their design solutions to their clients as well as they can. Refining the design is a way to make sure that every design element is working in harmony with the design concept. This is a constant exchange between experimenting and carefully judging the work. (Skolos & Wedell 2012, 138-144.) Refining should lead to a holistic design solution. This requires a thorough review of the design, including design feedback on the solutions that were made. Feedback often leads to further refinements before the design may be approved for implementation. (Pabini, 2010.)

2.6 Implementing the design

The final solution to the design brief is called an implementation. At the implementation stage the design is adjusted to meet the needed specifications and formats. A lot of times the actual implementation, the production of the design, is outsourced for example to a printing house or a web builder. In the implementation stage the refined design

work takes its final physical form and is delivered to the client. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 26.)

It is important that the actual product is a reflection of the design, and it has not changed during production. Print proofing and production monitoring is not always possible in design projects because of tight schedules or budget limitations, but they should be done in order to ensure the quality of the final product.

2.7 Learning from the process

The design process does not end when the final design solution is delivered to a client. In the final stage there should be analysis on how the process succeeded. This involves learning. It is necessary to analyse the whole process and identify what worked and what can be improved in the future. This is not only a subjective opinion, but this includes client and audience feedback on the implementation. (Ambrose & Harris 2010, 28.)

This thesis concentrates on the learning stage of design process because it is important for progressing as a designer and creating better design solutions. A lot of times this part could be utilized more, and designers should find ways to get information from the design audience and target groups. Any information on the results can be beneficial for future projects, for the designer and for the client.

3 MEASURING DESIGN

Design should be defined as a concept in order to be able to measure it. (Pitkänen 2012, 19). In this thesis design has already been defined as a visual implementation to a client's communication needs, and the whole process leading to a design solution. By measuring the success of design, one can measure the quality of the design solution in response to the design problem. Good design is not measurable by just one criterion since it is a combination of meeting the design brief, communicating to the right audience, being cost efficient and combining aesthetics and information. (Lawson 2005, 63.)

The difficulties in measuring design are that we need to be able to measure the outcome and the process both. While some parts of design can be easily measured, some parts are more connected to subjective experiences and personal judgement, which is why measuring, can be more complex. Measuring design requires quantitative and qualitative criterion. (Lawson 2005, 63.) Graphic design itself is hard to measure because it is mainly a subjective experience, unlike for example web design where you can track certain results. (Stone, 2012.)

When we measure the value of a design, quantitative and qualitative factors are divided so that we can examine them as separate parts. In quantitative value contribution we can look at things such as process improvement, cost savings, reduction in materials and user interaction. In qualitative research we can focus on customer satisfaction, brand reputation, aesthetic appeal and functionality. (Stone, 2012.) Measuring the overall success of a design and design process is not simple and it can be viewed from many different angles. Even though a design process always involves a lot of subjective input and judgement, both qualitative and quantitative factors should be taken into account.

Thomas Lockwood (2007, 90) writes in his article that the design and creative community traditionally resists quantification. According to him designers are rational about emotion, but they struggle to convey their thoughts to the client or client company management. The problem is in communication and terms. Designers and business managers may have the same goals for a design, but they view things differently and use a different language. According to Lockwood (2007, 91) design industry should adapt to the business world and start using tools for measuring design. But it is also possible that investments in design are not monitored as well as other business operations are. Some

studies show that on a company level, monitoring profitability of design is less common than monitoring the profitability of other marketing operations. (Pitkänen 2012, 44.) Measuring value and performance of design is possible, but we cannot measure every design case with all the same metrics. We need to remember that design is not only a skill, but also intuition and creativity.

3.1 Economic influence and brand image

Design has the ability to influence purchase preferences. If experiences can be designed, they also have to be measurable. (Lockwood 2007, 93.) The role of design can be measured for example by looking closely at cases where a product packaging has been re-designed. A good package design generates higher return on investment. Botanical Bakery, a small conventional bakery is a good example where successful design solutions lead to major increase in product sales. In 2010 the company decided to rebrand their products with new packaging (image 1). The new design set them apart from all the other similar products, making Botanical Bakery stand out. They took on a visual appearance that was not conventional in their product market at that time. This rebranding did not only increase their sales a little, but it took the company to a completely next level. Their sales tripled the first and the second year since the new design was launch. (Brier, 2014.)



IMAGE 1. Case Botanical Bakery (Brier, 2014)

Bridgette Borja de Mozota (2006, 46) sets a value model for design. She separates design into four categories; differentiator, integrator, transformer and good business. In Botanical Bakery's case, design is viewed as good business and differentiator. Design

as differentiator means market-based advantage that is gotten from design, which shows as brand equity and customer loyalty. Design as good business is more visible, as it focuses on the increase of brand value, sales and return on investment. (Borja de Mozota 2006, 45). These are perhaps the most easily understood advantages that design can create, and maybe the most important to understand as a graphic designer. But to understand Borja de Mozota's view on design as a whole, it is important to know the rest of the terms as well. Design as integrator is more abstract and invisible. It means design that gives companies' market advantage through resources, processes and science. Design as transformer uses design as a resource for creating new business opportunities and improving company's ability to cope with change. (Borja de Mozota 2006, 45.) This theory is not actually created to help designers to understand their processes, but to remove the gap between design and business people. Borja de Mozota's value model is made so that business managers would know how design can create value in companies. Understanding this side of design can help designers to communicate better with business management, and explain processes and solutions better.

Especially identity design aims to increase a company's brand value. This can be measured using either qualitative or quantitative methodologies. One way of measuring the success of design is to measure brand image and recognition. Brand knowledge refers to the fact whether consumers know the brand, whereas brand image means the associations that consumers have with the brand. (Chandon 2003, 1.)

3.2 Process efficiency

Design can also be measured based on its process and its time to market, which usually means looking for the best combination of process efficiency and design success. A common way to speed up design processes is to first create graphic guidelines. (Lockwood 2007, 95.) Having guidelines for brand colours, typography, photography style and iconography speeds up the design process, since the framework for the design is already set. Using guidelines gives the designer less options to work with and it helps the designer to understand the company or brand better. (Fussel, 2015.)

In my work I am used to using graphic guidelines in design work. In my experience it can speed up the design process, because you do not need to create everything from the

start. You can skip some of the design process stages, since graphic guidelines combine the information about visual appearance, design audience, tone of voice and overall feel of the company. Good design guidelines help the designer to understand the process and meaning behind the visual elements. This way guidelines do not feel like restrictions, because they leave the possibility for different solutions and creativity. A good example for well designed guidelines is Skype's brand book (image 2).

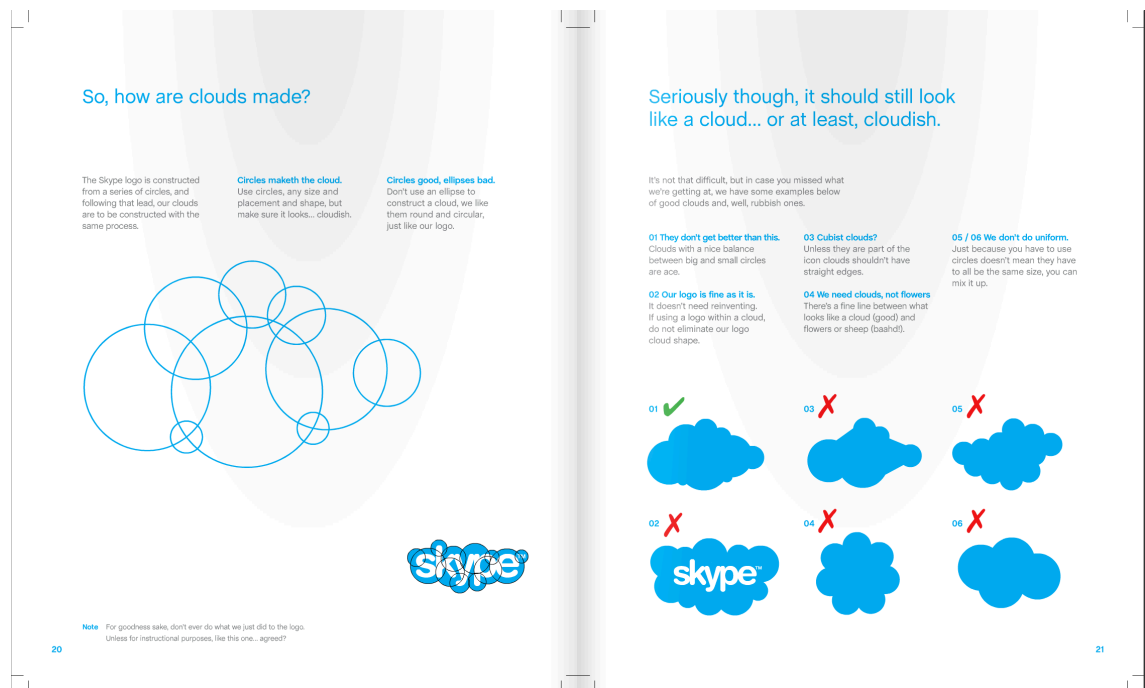


IMAGE 2. Case Skype (Skype Brand Book, 2012)

Skype brand book is a good example of design guidelines that explain the design solutions in a understandable way, with a tone that is specific to their brand. It is overall cohesive and detailed, but every design solution in it has a purpose. Just by having a quick look of the book, a designer can understand the brand message and style. This has a big impact on the design process efficiency.

3.3 Increased customer satisfaction

Good design can be measured as increased customer satisfaction. Designers have started to gain important insight from qualitative research to better understand customer needs and expectations. (Lockwood 2007, 95.) Customer satisfaction often leads to better and

more stable customer relationships and increase in sales. By measuring customer satisfaction we can get valuable information that can indicate whether the design solutions we make are right or wrong. Customer satisfaction is most often measured by surveys, and the best information is usually gotten when the questions are detailed and they relate to the customer's experience. (Hague & Hague, 2015.)

Customer satisfaction is closely related to good user experience and increase of user value. User experience testing, such as usability testing, is used in various design areas. It has become a standard tool for measuring different design solutions during the design process. Usability testing is mainly used to test and improve user's interaction with the design, for example completing certain tasks in a given time. This is why this thesis does not concentrate on user experience methods and studies. Customer satisfaction is affected by usability and aesthetic appeal of design, but as a concept it is more complex. (Albert & Tullis 2013, 4-5.)

3.4 Social and environmental value

Design can be measured in terms of its ability to improve the world and peoples lives. Designers should think how their work impacts the people who will see it, and if it communicates a truthful message that respects the audience. (Lockwood 2007, 97.) It is important that design is honest, and that it is not discriminative or harmful. In commercial work it is possible to face some ethical issues, but it is important to respect personal and social moral. Many businesses these days indentify with the social impact. Social concern has become an element that effects many companies' working methods and brand image. It is not easy to measure social value generated through design, but there are some tools that can help companies analyse the value and areas of possible improvements. (Social Values of Design 2014, 4.)

Sustainability in design means making solutions that enable the best possible destination for our work, weather it is reusing design or recycling materials (Dougherty 2008, 62). We can impact the source of the materials we use and the energy that is used in the making, but sustainability should be present throughout the design process.

Dougherty (2008, 48) suggests that designers should brainstorm their design processes backwards to acknowledge all the steps that could be taken into consideration. He writes that we should first think of waste and design destiny, then user experience, delivery and distribution solutions, warehousing, bindery and then printing. This way we actually focus on each step that has an environmental effect. Green design is a moral issue, but it is also a business issue (Dougherty 2008, 62). Responsible design does not only mean green design, but also ethical solutions throughout the process. As Lockwood (2007, 97) states in his article; good design is good for all.

4 AESTHETIC APPEAL

Aesthetics and visual appeal have a big impression on how people experience design. It is very closely related to user satisfaction, emotion and usability. Aesthetics can be defined in many different ways, as it is a very complex concept. Most definitions see aesthetics as beauty in appearance, which generates some sort of pleasure and harmony for the person experiencing it. As it usually is a pleasant experience, it also has a relationship with our emotion. (Lindagaard 2007, 3-6.)

4.1 Measuring aesthetic appeal

According to Rohrer (2008), measuring the aesthetic appeal of design is something that is not very well known, even if visual design is considered important. I also noticed this while trying to research this topic. According to my findings it seems that testing visual design on users is usually only a part of a wider user experience study, and rarely conducted on its own. Instead of measuring aesthetics, we measure the appeal or effect it has on a viewer. (Sauro, 2013.)

Rohrer (2008) implies that this is because design itself is a subjective approach to a problem. This topic was also discussed in a professional blog by an interaction designer Kaye Mao (2014), who stated that graphic design should be tested more often to find design flaws. In her opinion graphic design should not be seen separate from any other design where user testing is a standard.

Much like to Rohrer's (2008) opinion, there are opposite views on the topic. Some think that user testing graphic design reflects a lack of confidence on a designer (Mao, 2014). There is some truth in both point-of-views. While a designer should have the confidence to trust their own expertise, it does not mean there is no room for user opinions. Learning from mistakes and understanding limitations is important for every designer. It would also be important to hear feedback from the design audience, not just other designers.

4.2 User experience and desirability studies

While user experience testing has become a design industry standard, it usually only measures behaviour, or potential behaviour (Albert & Tullis 2013, 4-5). This is why it is not a perfect tool for measuring how target audience actually feels about visual design. Desirability study is a method used in some usability testing cases, which can be used to inform and inspire different visual design directions, or to measure the outcome. It is an attitudinal study that helps the design process by getting subjective opinions from the target audience. (Rohrer 2008.)

Desirability studies can be either qualitative or quantitative. In qualitative studies participants are usually given descriptive words, of which they are supposed to choose the ones that match their ideas of the shown visual design. After choosing the words, the participants are asked to explain why they chose those particular ones. The main idea is to find out why certain designs cause those reactions, not the reactions themselves. Quantitative version of desirability studies is conducted as a survey, which usually gathers a larger target audience. (Rohrer 2008.) Desirability studies offer a good way to understand if the design aesthetics evoke the right kind of response in the audience. It is good for testing first impressions, but since design is much more than just aesthetics, it does not validate the whole design solution.

4.3 Emotional response to design

Visual elements always create some type of connection with its viewer. Studying this connection is important because it tells if the design is received as it was intended. Many things in addition to the actual design affect the emotional connections people have. These are for example cultural, personal or environmental factors, earlier experiences, expectations and mood. The emotional connection that people have with a design is not always in designer's control. (Cousins 2014.)

Emotions can be among others sadness, trust and disgust, fear and anger, and surprise and anticipation. In design they can be associated with colour, sound, words, texture, usability, readability, photo style and shape of design. (Cousins 2014.) These attributes, together with the message and tone of design, all evoke emotions. They can all be stud-

ied individually to better understand the target audience. There are always differences on how people associate visual elements to certain emotions. It is not possible to predict if someone does not like the colour red, or if someone is afraid of spiders, but it is possible to design better by understanding associations and emotions in the desired target groups.

4.4 Case Airbnb

Emotional response is not always what is expected. Designer's thoughts on emotion or desirability do not necessarily match the audience's feelings. This is why testing them could potentially guide the design process to better solutions. Even though experiences are subjective and they can never be completely monitored, sometimes it is beneficial to test design solutions with some of the previously given methods.

A good example of a design that evoked a lot of unexpected feelings and associations is the case where Airbnb redesigned their visual identity and logo. Airbnb did not only make a new logo, but they branded their whole business around a symbol they call Bélo (Image 4). Airbnb's Co-founder Brian Chesky writes in Airbnb's blog that the company had done a lot of research and brainstorming around this idea. Airbnb even launched a video that introduced the new logo and the story behind it. In the video they explain how the logo represents community, people, places and Airbnb itself. They call it a new universal symbol for belonging. (Chesky 2014.)



IMAGE 4. Airbnb logo (Airbnb, 2016)

The target audience did not associate the logo with the things that Airbnb design team had predicted. While the look got some praise in the professional world, there were also

opposite reactions from the audience. The logo was mocked in various social media channels. The audience started to make new versions of the logo and compared the original design to offensive and pornographic imagery. Even a blog was created to gather all the mocking material in one place. (Kelion 2014.)

Audience reaction was not the only problem in this case. It appeared, that an automation company had almost exactly a similar logo. This similarity was soon noticed widely, and raised a lot of unwanted attention towards Airbnb's new design. (Kelion 2014.)

In this case it becomes clear, that no matter how much time and effort you use to make the perfect design, a lot can go wrong. Predicting audience response is never easy. While Airbnb stated that they did a lot of research, the outcome of the design suggests that maybe the research was not successful. It is also possible that some other stages of the design process went wrong. While it is impossible to know what exactly happened in this case, it is a good example of why it is important to get fresh views on designs.

Eventually this case may have turned to Airbnb's advantage, because they got a lot of publicity. But if we look at the emotional response or aesthetic appeal that the design had, the audience may not have responded the way the design team expected.

5 CASE LTOL

This thesis covers the topic of design process and different design attributes that can be measured. I am using a customer design project as a way to implement the theory. The customer of this project was The Association of Kindergarten Teachers in Finland, Lastentarhanopettajaliitto (LTOL).

LTOL is a trade union that has over 13 000 teachers as members. It is part of the Trade Union of Education in Finland, OAJ. LTOL's members are kindergarten teachers, special teachers, day-care centre directors and other professionals in early childhood education. Local government employs most of the members and the average age of the members is 43,5. The main goals of the association are to develop kindergartens, develop the profession and to promote economic and legal interests of members. (Lastentarha.fi, 2015.)

Every two years LTOL arranges an educational event for the members. The place of the event changes each time and the event always has a specific theme. The event aims to combine the content, programme and theme to locality, since the happening brings together people from all over the nation. The design case in this thesis is an identity and layout design for LTOL's event, held in Turku in September 2015. The project included logo design, illustrations, graphic manual and layout design for a 28-page brochure.

5.1 Design process

The design process started with the brief, which I received from the client. It explained what design work would be needed in the project, and a short explanation of the event itself. I was instructed first to design a logo that would clearly bring out the event theme in a visual and colourful way.

The event was organized in Turku and the main theme was "bridges". Turku is known for its landmarks and many bridges, and the idea of a bridge is also something that can be seen as a theme in childhood education. The client asked me to design the identity so, that it would have the bridges of Turku as the main aspect.

I did a lot of research in order to understand what kind of visual world is usually used in early childhood education. I also needed to combine my own personal style to this. I used qualitative research to collect information about the professional field, and typical behaviour and lifestyle of kindergarten teachers. In my research I also looked for identity and logo styles connected to childcare and teaching, as well as styles of different professional associations. With my research I understood that these two visual worlds are very far apart from each other. While kindergartens and early education is associated with a lot of colours and childlike elements, professional associations are visually closer to the corporate world.

To meet the given design goals I also had to research the bridges and infrastructure of Turku. I had to bring elements from the city to portrait the locality and the bridge theme, and they had to be presented in a clear way. I studied the city bridges from different angles and also researched how bridges were usually presented in illustrations or logos.

My first ideas were to come up with an image that would have multiple meanings instead of only being seen as a bridge (image 5-6). I showed some of my early ideas to the client and even though none of them were quite what they wanted, the conversation and brief that followed this got me closer to the right design solution.



IMAGE 5-6. First round logos in colour (Uhmavaara 2015)

The feedback that I got helped me understand that the client did not want corporate style and symbols, and that they needed the logo to be simpler and playful, and more childish than professional looking. The client also stated that it was necessary for the bridges to be the main focus.

I had previously done my research quite well, but ended up going to a wrong direction first. Since my first drafts were more inspired by professional education and bridge's stability and form, the new approach was closer to the teachers themselves. For the next drafts, the teachers and what I learnt from their lifestyle and work inspired me to try different things. I wanted the feel and look to be nicer, more casual and happy. After sketching I did some further development with a different type of design idea I had.

The client selected a design that they were pleased with and wanted me to continue working with. I had to refine the logo to make it suit better the client's specific requests concerning the typography. I also designed a broader concept for the visual identity around the logo. The final logo was chosen and the identity started to find its form (image 7).



IMAGE 7. Final logo (Uhmavaara 2015)

5.2 Applications

Because there was a lot of communication during the logo's design process, the work with the rest of the design applications turned out to go really smoothly. Overall I designed a short graphic manual, a 28-page brochure, advertisement, posters, shirt layout and screens for the event. Below you can see some of the applications (images 8-10).



IMAGE 8. Brochure cover with illustrations (Uhmavaara 2015)



IMAGE 9. Brochure (Uhmavaara 2015)



IMAGE 10. Shirt design (Uhmavaara 2015)

6 TARGET GROUP INTERVIEW

In this thesis I focus especially on the learning stage of the design process. Learning means measuring my design solutions by testing them on the defined target audience, and then analyzing the results. Testing design is often done during the ideation or implementation stage, but it can also be done on the finished product to validate the design solutions.

I had tested my design on another designer and friends for feedback during the earlier stages. The client was also satisfied with the final product, but it was interesting to find out if target group feedback would give me valuable information about the success of the design. Even if the client is happy, there is always a possibility that something in the process goes wrong. Client's needs may not be similar to target group's needs, the target group can be poorly segmented or the design can have an unexpected response.

By conducting an interview I aimed to find out if the target group itself could validate the design solutions. I also wanted to find out if the interview results could help me to become a better designer, or if they could be beneficial to the client. In order to measure the success of the design, I wanted to find out how the target group actually felt about the design.

While the information that I gathered was mainly qualitative, I also used quantitative methods in analyzing the results. I chose this method in order to understand individual responses and experiences, but also to take a more general look at the gathered data.

6.1 Conducting the interview

I chose to conduct an interview as my testing method because it produces qualitative data and is often used for attitudinal studies (Rohrer 2008). Measuring emotion is especially difficult, since humans have trouble describing how they feel, and the reasons behind certain feelings. (Agrawal & Meyer 2009, 2.) In LTOL's case it is not possible to measure the immediate reaction that the design evokes, because the design has been visible to the target group for a longer time.

Interviews should be neutral, and the questions should be asked so that they do not implicate a specific answer themselves. While conducting an interview, it is important that individual questions are not too difficult to understand. If the questions are complex, it is important to be able to explain their meaning to the person who is being interviewed. It also needs to be taken into consideration that people can have a different understanding of visual design in general. (Turner 2010.) I interviewed each participant separately to make sure that there would not be misunderstandings or mistakes that would affect the results. I wanted to be able to interact with the respondents to make sure they would understand what I was trying to find out.

I prepared for the interview by writing down all the questions I wanted to ask in order to get all of the information that was needed in validating this design case. Questions concentrated on the visual identity of the event, but also visual design in general, and how people value or experience it. The interview was planned and rehearsed in advance so that I knew what should be said before, during and after the actual questions.

My goal was to make the interview relaxed and easy. Some of my questions needed more detailed explaining, so I gathered some cases that would help the respondent to understand my concept better. I prepared a slideshow presentation showing the visuals of the design case. The slides had for example the logo, colour scheme and overall visuals, so the respondent could see them during the interview. I rehearsed and tested my questions beforehand, and did a trial interview with my friends.

Because I wanted to do all the interviews in person, they were done at the LTOL's event in Turku. At the event location the attendants would have a clear memory of the visuals, since they were presented at the event location in multiple forms. My goal was to get at least ten respondents for the interview during the event day.

6.2 Interview and interview respondents

I set up an interview corner to the event location and chose a quiet place to talk to the respondents in peace. This thesis was conducted together with the event organizers, so I was given a staff-sign that made it easier for me to approach people. I used my laptop to write down all the interview answers, and a tablet to show the respondents the images. I

explained all the respondents what my thesis was about and why the interview was a necessary part of my research, but I did not tell them that I had designed the identity myself unless they asked about it specifically. This was because I wanted them to be able to say their honest opinions without potentially being cautious about hurting my feelings, if they had some negative things to say.

My goal was to interview men and women, but this turned out to be more difficult than I thought. There were hardly any men at the event, and the two that were approached did not want to take part in the interview. It was difficult in general to get people to participate, as everyone was busy and seemed not to have the time or the interest in answering the questions. I interviewed eleven members from my target audience, who were all women. My target audience was quite homogenous, and this is why I tried to find respondents from all age groups (figure 2). To my findings the age did not seem to have a big effect on the given responses during the interview.

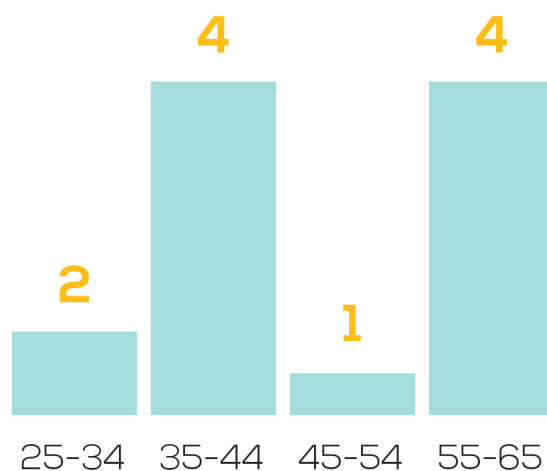


FIGURE 2. Interview respondents by age group (Uhmavaara 2015)

6.3 Overall response to event identity

Overall the design got a positive response from people. Most of them were familiar with the visual identity of the event, and had seen it on advertisements and newsletters before. Some respondents were able to share their first experiences seeing the design, but some people could not recall how they felt about it before the event. Most of the res-

pondents liked the style and the colour scheme. Many also thought the design was positive and professional.

Seven out of eleven respondents thought the design represented the event well (figure 3). Those who thought it represented the event said the design felt clean, modern and fun and this why it was suitable for the themes of childcare, education and future. They seemed to like the playfulness and colours. Three out of eleven thought the identity did not represent the event, and they felt it was too technical and city-centred.

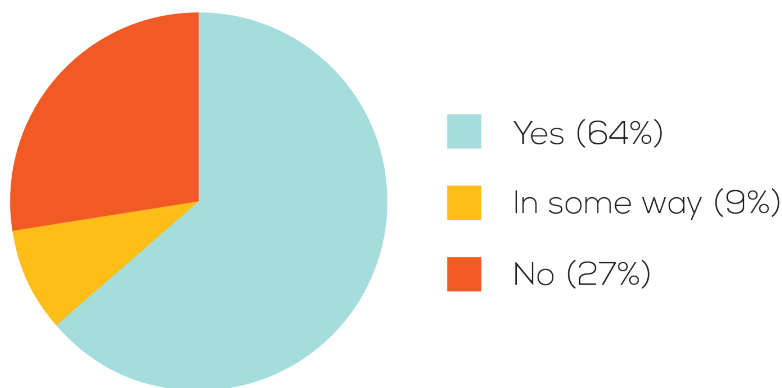


FIGURE 3. Does the identity represent the nature and the purpose of the event? (Uhmavaara 2015)

Nine out of eleven felt that the design was suitable for the target group (figure 4). Most of them identified themselves of being part of the defined target group. I understood that many people in this group have a strong connection to their profession and it reflects to their identity in all areas of life. When talking about target groups, many respondents said the shapes and colours were something that you immediately connect to kindergarten teachers. Some said the design was clearly professional, but still playful and not too stiff, which they liked.

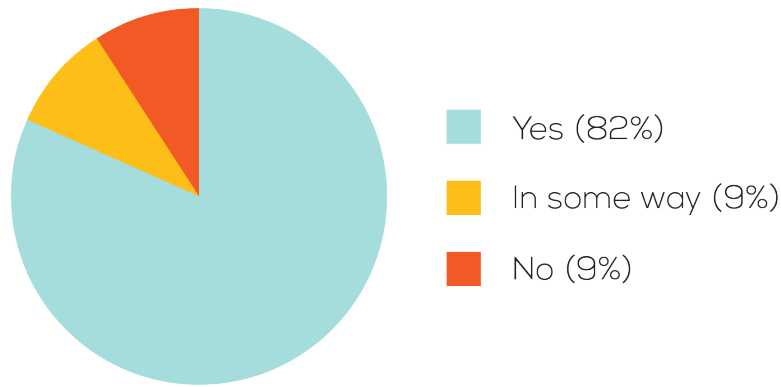


FIGURE 4. Is the identity suitable for the target audience? (Uhmavaara 2015)

One respondent felt that the visual design did not work for the target audience, because the imagery was too clearly connected to the city where the event was held. Even though most people thought the design was suitable, it was good to find out why some felt it was distant. There were good comments about the locality, which is something to consider in a case like this. Yet most people, who were not local, did not seem to mind that the event was so strongly connected to Turku. They felt it was one of the ideas of the events, that they somehow showcase the event location.

Nine out of eleven respondents said that even if they did like the visual design, it had no effect on their participation in the event (figure 5). It was clear, that the event was a professional event that motivated people to participate in some other ways. Most respondents said that they had taken part in the events multiple times before, and they participated because of the seminars and their friends. They did not feel like a visual aspect would impact their decisions or their expectations. Two of the respondents said that even though the visual design did not really have an effect on their participation, it added positive thoughts and interest towards the event.

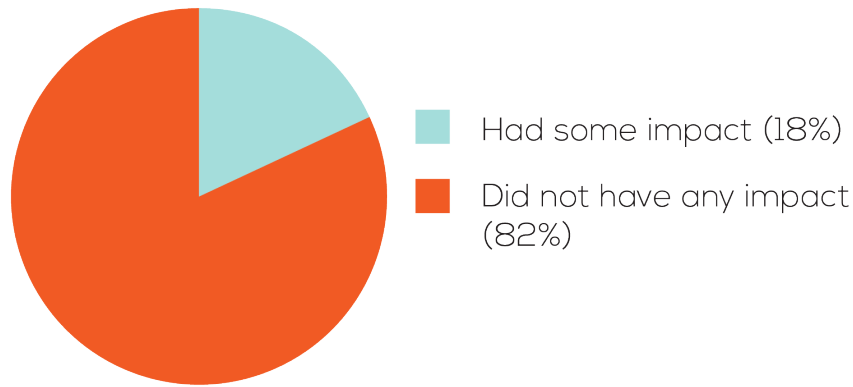


FIGURE 5. Did the visual identity have an effect on your participation in the event, or expectations towards it? (Uhmavaara 2015)

At least half of the respondents said that they felt talking about design was difficult. They said it was because they rarely thought about design, or that they felt they were not experts in that field. But as the interview progressed, everyone seemed to have some kind of idea of what they thought looked nice, and some even got quite enthusiastic about sharing opinions. These interviews turned out to be successful, since they produced a lot of information for my research.

Many respondents seemed to be afraid of using the wrong terms or sounding unprofessional, but as they noticed the questions were mainly about emotions and their personal experiences, they became more relaxed. Most people seemed to like the design, but for this research it was more important to hear why they liked it, or what they thought was good about it.

6.4 Visual appeal and emotional response

Some of the questions I asked in the interview were more concentrated on the emotional appeal of the design. I wanted to know if the respondents experienced the certain design solutions as I had thought they would. Mainly the results were similar to what I had expected, but some seemed to associate certain things in unexpected ways.

Seven out of eleven respondents had a positive first reaction to the visual identity. Many said their first impressions were that the look was trendy, fun and colourful. A few re-

spondents said they did not have any reaction to the visual design at first, because they are either not interested in visual appearances in general, or that they felt the design did not set apart. Two respondents out of eleven had more negative reaction. One of the respondents said she felt annoyed, because the logo had only one language version instead of two. One felt the logo and the identity was too distant, because it was so closely related to the location instead of the actual target group. A few commented that the locality was nice, and that they felt it gave the event more personality.

I asked the respondents to describe the visual design as they saw it. Some were able to answer right away, but some had to stop and think before answering. I tried to make sure they understood that I was not looking for certain words. Some described the visual identity as fun and active, some clear and responsible. Some of the respondents associated the design with caring and connection, while some thought it was distant and technical. Many associated the design with the event city, Turku. The most common words to describe the design were playful, positive and interesting. Over half of the respondents used at least one of those three words. Still the variety of answers was surprising (image 11).

Professional	Positive	Too city-centric
Modern	Warm	Distant
Active	Colourful	Technical
Playful	Balanced	

IMAGE 11. Words used by respondents describing the visual identity (Uhmavaara 2015)

I also asked the respondents to describe their emotions towards the design, and what kind of feelings the design evoked. Most people said they associated feelings such as happiness, warmth and positivity. Some said the design was neutral and balanced. One respondent said it did not evoke any feelings at all.

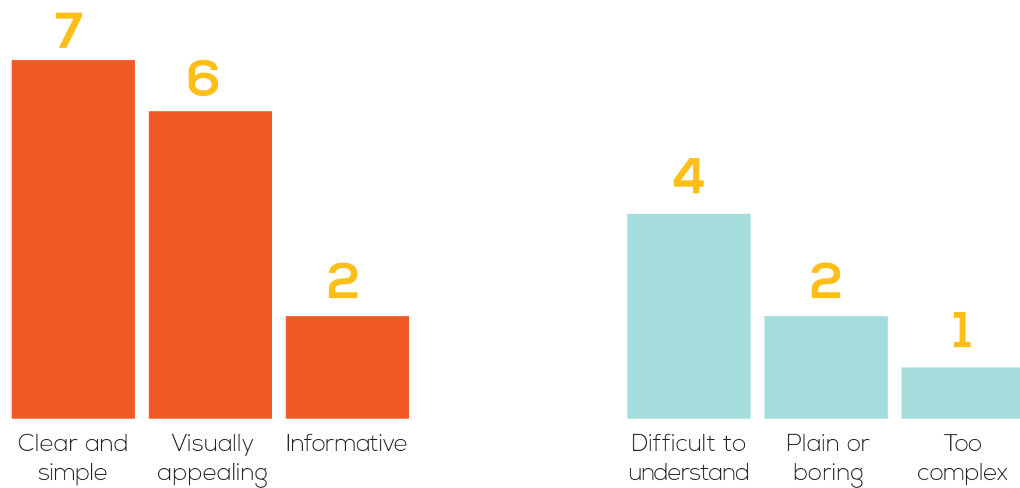
Overall the emotions that were experienced were quite similar with all of the respondents. When I asked them to describe how they felt about the colour scheme by itself, the respondents seemed to have bit more variety in their answers. I showed them the colour

scheme without any other visuals, just as colour blocks. This made it easier for the respondents to concentrate only on the colours. The colours were described as neutral, sunny, well balances and bright. One respondent said they reminded her of 70's Germany, some said they were modern. Five of the eleven respondents said the colours were harmonious. Three said they associated the colours with autumn, which was the season the event was held in.

Other comments that I got about the visual identity was that it was nicely done, clear and informative. One person thought that the bridges were nice and they represented well the idea of uniting people. Also others found different meanings in the design, such as a journey, continuity and togetherness. Some seemed to concentrate more on metaphorical things and others experienced the design as simple visual elements and shapes.

6.5 Experiences about visual design in general

Part of my interview was to discover how people felt about visual design in general. I asked them what they thought was good design, and what were the things they valued. The charts below (figures 6-7) show most common design attributes that appeared in the interview, when I asked the respondents to define things that they like or dislike in visual design. I combined some of the answers that I felt had the same meaning, even if the actual adjective used may have differed a bit from the words written in the chart. On the left chart it shows that seven respondents of eleven said that they think good design is something that is clear and simple. This attribute was by far the most popular answer. By looking at the charts we can clearly see, that this target group values simple yet visually appealing design. Simplicity does not only mean that the design is constructed out of few elements, but that it is easy to understand and that it does not have too many hidden meanings. The responds that the event identity got was in line with these results.



FIGURES 6-7. What is good design, and what is bad? (Uhmavaara 2015)

I also asked the respondents if they had any memories of design cases that they thought were done really well or really poorly. This was mainly because I thought it could help me get more valuable information on this target group; how it experiences design or how it affects their behaviour. I wanted to know if they felt a design case was so powerful, that it made them act or consider making an act, weather it was attending an event, sharing something on social media or boycotting a brand.

Even though most of the respondents could not name any design cases by name, six out of eleven respondents said that they felt that design has made, or could make them react in a way that would lead to action. None of them said they would do anything radical, but they might talk to their friends about a case. Only two said they would share or comment on a case on social media.

It was interesting to talk about design with people who are not involved in the design world. Many of the respondents said that they did not really care about visual design or design in general, but it appeared that all of them had some kind of thoughts about what they like, and what really annoys them.

6.6 Using target group in design process

One part of the interview was to find out how the target group felt about being part of the design process, or if they would be interested in participating somehow. I asked if

they thought that target group's opinions should be taken in notice somehow, and why. Ten respondents felt like it was a good idea to ask opinions straight from the crowd, at least in some cases. Only one thought this was not preferred (figure 8.) Some of those who felt like designers could benefit from asking opinions from target group said it was because they often felt designers did not really understand their audience well.

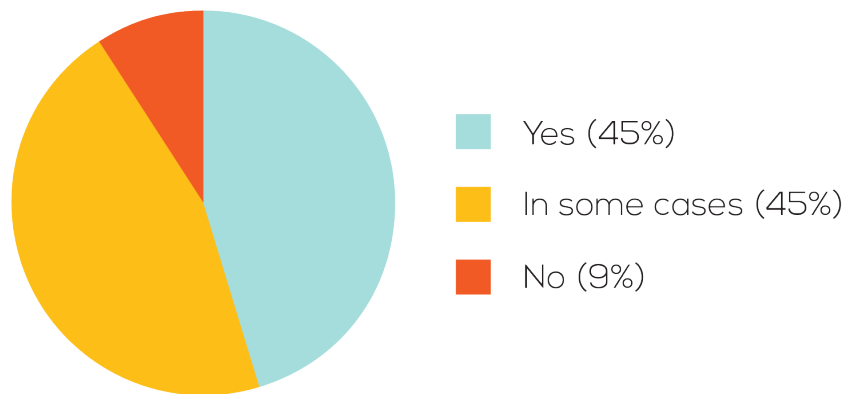


FIGURE 8. Do you think designers should utilize target group's opinions more often? (Uhmavaara 2015)

Many of the respondents did not know how target audiences could be utilized more in design cases. They all still thought that if target audiences were utilized, there should only be a small group of people presenting the audience, and not a big crowd of people. Some suggested just talking to people, or doing a poll. Some said that audience feedback could be used, but it should not replace a good research.

Overall people trusted designers and their research, but thought some feedback from the audience could be helpful in avoiding mistakes. Some felt that asking for an opinion or direction was a good idea, but the audience should not distract the designer too much. Even though most of the people I interviewed seemed to think that target groups could give valuable information for designers, very few said they were interested in participating in these kinds of processes.

6.7 Validating design using target group interview

The interview produced a lot of valuable information that helped to validate the design. The objectives for this design project were that the identity needed to communicate the main purpose of the event and the event theme. It was also supposed to represent the local environment and the profession of the attendants. The results from this interview suggested that mostly the design objectives were met.

Majority of the respondents liked the design and thought it was well suited for the audience. The majority also said it represented the event, and the theme. In the results it occurred that the urban aspect of the design bothered some respondents, although the client especially wanted to showcase the city infrastructure in the identity. As a result this is an interesting point. While it is impossible to take every feedback in notice, this aspect might be something that the client should acknowledge in the future.

While the design was well received by the majority of the respondents, the qualitative methods also revealed valuable information on subjective experiences. The results revealed some similarities with the theories presented earlier in this thesis. One of these results was the fact that it is impossible to predict audience response perfectly.

I had a good understanding of my target audience, but I was not able to predict how some of the design solutions would be received. This was one of the most interesting findings. It was surprising that one of the respondents experienced elements, which were meant to evoke positive feelings, as technical and distant. It is possible that the respondent already had some negative feelings about the event beforehand, and looked at the design from a different point-of-view. But even so, it does not change the fact that the emotions were just as accurate as they were for the others. It is impossible to design something that everyone would like since a designer cannot control the situation where the design is experienced in. While this feedback did not necessarily have an effect on the overall validation of the design, it was a good example of the importance of receiving feedback and understanding other possible point-of-views.

Receiving feedback has its benefits and it should not be forgotten as a part of a design process. It is recommendable to ask for feedback after the design implementation, but also during the earlier stages. Asking for feedback on ideas and prototypes helps to

guide the design into the right direction already from the beginning. I think reasons why this design case occurred quite successful were because the research was done properly, feedback was received during and after the implementation, and there was close communication with the client.

Conducting the interview and analyzing the results was time-consuming. Based on the resources that were needed for it, I would say it is probably not beneficial to conduct this type of interview as a part of every design process. But depending on the resources and budget, it is definitely a tool that can be useful in some cases. It can also be something that is done before the finished design solution, in order to refine the design. Also the interview respondents felt that utilizing target group feedback in a design process could help a designer to meet design objectives better.

If conducting an interview like this, it is important to understand your target group and their level of design knowledge. What I experienced was that talking about design was challenging for many. Many respondents stated, that they did not understand visual imagery. In most cases it turned out they were actually lacking the vocabulary, and not opinions. This is why it was helpful, that the used method was an interview where it was possible to take the time to talk to the respondents. I noticed that once the respondent felt relaxed in the situation, they managed to analyse their emotions and experiences quite well. It was important that they knew there were no right or wrong answers, and that design is not something that is distant from their life.

This target group interview was a useful tool in learning how the end user experiences design. Overall the results suggest that a target group interview can be used in design validation, but it is time consuming and has to be well conducted in order to produce valuable information.

7 CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to find out if design solutions can be measured, and if it is possible to use target group feedback as a part of design validation. The goal of the target group interview was also to gather information on how the design was received. Other objectives were to understand design as a process, and to identify which attributes of design can be measured. This thesis also took in notice the difficulties of measuring subjective experiences and predicting design success.

This thesis concentrates on visual design as communicational graphics, and not as a part of an application that involves user interaction. This is because user experience is a widely researched subject, but it is rarely talked about among graphic designers who are not working with interactive elements. During the research it occurred that testing visual design on its own is not considered a norm in the industry. Finding information about the topic was difficult, so a lot of material was researched from design principals to design management, business objectives and user experience.

This thesis covered design as a process, and not just the end product that is visible to masses. The concept of a design process is interesting, since it does not end with a finished design, but continues to a learning stage. Researching the process made it easier to understand how the solutions come together, because dividing the process into different stages helps to identify the crucial points to concentrate on. The focus of this thesis was on the learning stage, where the aim was to improve as a designer by analyzing the conducted design case and receiving feedback from the target group.

As a designer I am interested in the subjective experiences that design can evoke, which is why the thesis introduced topics such as aesthetic appeal, desirability and emotions. The subjectivity of design is challenging, and you can never completely predict the experiences people will have on your design. This point came up in my research, but I also noticed this in my own project. Graphic design usually aims to evoke certain emotions or thoughts in people, but it is impossible to control how people experience design.

I designed a visual identity and applications for Lastentarhanopettajaliitto's annual event and as my thesis project I conducted an interview on the target audience. The goal of the interview was to produce qualitative and quantitative data that would give me

some insight on how my design was received and experienced. I wanted to find out if I had made valid solutions during my design process. I also wanted to find out how the respondents felt about design in general.

The interview did not have as many respondents that I had hoped, but the information I got turned out to be valuable. The interview helped me validate my design, as it was well received by the client and the target group. The gathered data confirmed my design solutions, but also brought out some problems. The feedback is useful for myself, but also for the client of the project.

I realized it is impossible to predict every response on your design, but asking for feedback may give you some insight that can help you in other design cases. I also learnt that talking about design might occur unfamiliar to some people. When planning an interview on people who are not used to talking about visual design, it is important to make the topic easy for them and not use difficult terminology.

The results from the interview and the overall research topics were interesting. The concept of validating and measuring visual design could be researched much further, and I am interested in finding out if visual design will someday be more open to target group feedback. When it comes to feedback in general, I think designers should have the ability and confidence to follow their own views and ideas, but they should not be completely immune to outside opinions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions for target group interview

Part 1.

1. Do you remember when and where you first saw the event identity or part of it? How did you feel when you first saw it?
2. What kind of expectations did you have towards this event? Did the visual identity have an effect on your expectations? Did it have an effect on your participation on the event?
3. Do you think the identity represents the event well or does it not? Why?
4. Do you think the identity is suitable for the audience, or is it not suitable? Why?
5. What adjectives would you use to describe the overall design?
6. What emotions does it evoke in you?
7. What emotions do the colours evoke in you?
8. Is there something else you want to say about the design?

Part 2.

9. What do you personally think is successful design? Or what is not?
10. Do you remember any specific cases where you felt visual design was not successful? Why?
11. Did it have an effect on you that lead to some kind of action?
12. Do you feel a flawed design could have this type of effect on you or do you think it is not important?
13. Do you think designers should utilize target groups and their opinions more in their design cases or should they not?
14. Do you have any ideas on how target audiences could be utilized more in design cases?
15. Would you be interested in taking part in or sharing your opinions on a design case?
15. Do you have any other thoughts you would want to share?