

The Young Designers foundation is a platform for experimentation with new design practices, and as an experimental platform, it has gone through many radical changes itself, too. What have remained constant over the years are the emphasis on working with young designers and young artists, the drive to really push the envelope of what design can contribute to the world, and a strong educational agenda inspiring young designers to extend their abilities and the scope of their work through participation in these special projects. After all, these projects are a far cry from “normal” design practice, where one generally starts with a question and designs a solution. In contrast, the YD/ projects start with the signaling of an issue in society and seek interest from a group of initial stakeholders to partner in an open process (a “quest,” a true exploration) around this issue, shaping the questions that should really be asked. Within this quest, creative freedom is combined with the need for subtle analysis and a keen sense of the relevance of the chosen path. This balance between radical openness and goal-directedness is safeguarded by a dialogical approach, where designers and partner organizations come together regularly in meetings to question the assumptions and challenge the conventional ways of working. The openness that is needed for radical exploration requires all participants to step out of their usual roles and defined authority. This is often challenging for the people from the partner organizations, as they are pushed beyond their normal professional role and possibly their comfort zone. But it is equally hard for the young artists and designers, who have to focus their analytical and creative abilities on the development of questions rather than solutions. These complex processes are guided by the YD/ staff, acting as a “producer” of the conceptual journey. With minimal interventions, they ensure the quest reaches a depth where new approaches to issues can be found. This is the art of the YD/ practice (see chapter 8). Experience has shown that once core questions can be articulated, possible solutions generally arise very quickly—and these are sure to be nonstandard outcomes, far beyond the reach of where conventional problem-solving would have led. Despite their openness and the radical creativity involved, these projects are not vague, irrational, or random. Rather, their originality arises from careful, in-depth exploration. The YD/ organization has learned that to be successful, it is crucial to make sure that the people from the partner organizations are intrinsically and personally motivated; only a strong internal drive will sustain their involvement in these complex, multistakeholder quests, in which the nature of the outcome