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Designing the Future Academy

Building creative confidence for the challenges of tomorrow

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Technology is a tool, not the goal. Innovation begins with understanding people — and only then putting technology in the service of the common good.

Designing the Future Academy

Building creative confidence for the challenges of tomorrow

The future will be shaped by people who can face problems no one has solved before. **Designing the Future Academy (DFA)** is a learning instrument that builds exactly that capacity — creativity, *creative confidence* and personal empowerment — and makes it accessible to those who need it most. Developed by FabLab Zagreb, Croatia's first FabLab, DFA turns design thinking from an abstract methodology into a daily, practised skill, so individuals and communities can generate their own solutions to new and unknown challenges.

A tool for people, within a wider strategy

DFA is the **People** component of an integrated framework — **People · Places · Policy** — connecting who we empower, where they create, and how we sustain it.

Empower people

Especially the less-privileged — to create solutions for unfamiliar challenges.

DFA

Open the spaces

Transform abandoned spaces into inclusive, creative, collaborative environments.

Sustain it over time

Secure the legal, financial and value framework that keeps it alive.

Who it is for

DFA targets a deliberately broad definition of **less-privileged** — and for all of them it is an instrument of personal empowerment and of the democratisation of access to technology.

● Geography — islands, rural & remote

● Economics — technology priced out of reach

● Age — disconnected from new tools

● Physical ability

What DFA builds

01 Creativity	02 Creative confidence	03 Personal empowerment	04 Future-readiness
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The method · design thinking, practised daily

At its core DFA is **design thinking**, structured as a five-phase journey applied to real-world challenges anchored in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is delivered as **three layers of one tool** — a curriculum, modules, and an application — so the methodology can be practised, repeated and measured.

EXPLORED THROUGH · DIGITAL SKILLS · PROTOTYPING & DESIGN · CIRCULAR ECONOMY · NEW MATERIALS

01 Empathise Step into a stakeholder's shoes.	02 Define Frame the real problem.	03 Ideate Generate many options.	04 Prototype Make the idea tangible.	05 Test Learn and iterate.
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THE PRINCIPLE

Technology is a tool, not the goal. Innovation begins with **understanding people** — and only then putting technology in the service of the common good.

The application

Available now at app.dfa.fablab.hr, the DFA app makes the method a short daily practice — about ten minutes a day. Users take the perspective of a real stakeholder affected by a challenge, guided by an **AI mentor** and motivated through progress, streaks and badges. It runs in three modes, each matching a different context:

Community LIVE · BETA Facilitated SDG workshops for civil society. Participants explore one local challenge from many stakeholder perspectives and see each other's contributions.	Class For schools: randomised teams to break up cliques, and a two-level competition between teams and between classes — on privacy-safe aggregates.	Org Corporate team-building: colleagues are mixed into teams and build one shared solution together across the five phases.
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One method · three layers

LAYER 01 Curriculum The structured design-thinking journey across five phases.	LAYER 02 Modules Themed challenges — digital skills, prototyping, circular economy, materials.	LAYER 03 Application A daily, measurable practice with an AI mentor and progress tracking.
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Why it matters for Europe

DFA contributes to Europe's resilience by activating the people and places usually left at the margins. It advances:

- › **Democratisation of access to technology** — narrowing the gap between those who can afford it and those who cannot.
- › **Inclusion & reduced inequality** — between developed and less-developed regions.
- › **Quality of life & social cohesion** — a means for isolated communities to express themselves and participate.
- › **Innovation & growth, generated bottom-up** — resilience built from local capacity rather than imported from the centre.

CROATIA AS A LIVING LABORATORY

Croatia is not a periphery but a **living laboratory**: people in its island, rural and remote communities must be resourceful and inventive every day — a real-world testbed that capital cities lack. From here the model extends naturally across the **Mediterranean** and beyond — a Croatian contribution to the revitalisation of Europe through its non-urban people and places.

About

Designing the Future Academy is developed by **FabLab Zagreb** — Croatia's first FabLab, founded in 2013 — as part of the People · Places · Policy framework, in connection with Horizon Europe initiatives.

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Notes