Design Your Own Supportive Lifeworld
An Enactive Approach

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Background
Supportive technologies for autistic young adults are promising in principle, yet their uptake remains limited.
- Many originate in healthcare and are designed to teach autistic people - children, typically - skills that they supposedly lack.
- Assistive technology design strongly focuses on medicalized limitations, with little attention to the real-world experiences that users have with these technologies.

Objectives
Inspired by enactive psychiatry, the aim is to bring the lived experience of autistic individuals also to supportive technology design. In the on-going Design Your Life-research project (DYL), we are developing a toolkit that helps young autistic adults design supportive technologies based on their unique preferences. The toolkit should help:
1. users to explore and map their physical and social environment;
2. understand the supportive role that technology can play in that environment;
3. bring technology to fruition.

Method
First, we investigated which design tools and techniques could be used for the collection and analysis of experiential data. Second, we investigated how the context of design - context-mapping, idea generation, idea selection, testing, evaluation, reflection - could help young autistic adults learn more about themselves and their personal support needs.

Results
The toolkit was completed in October 2022, consisting of twenty six design tools.

Conclusions
From the case studies, we observed that the toolkit was indeed used to develop supportive technology going beyond only functionality: users considered aesthetics and existing routines and social networks in which the technology would interfere. Whenever the user was asked to clarify their design decisions, this seemed to provoke delicate discussions about one's situation – regarding existential, family or domestic affairs –, yet shifted responsibility from the autistic person themself to their surroundings.

Examples

For more information:
This poster was presented at: