

Resource

Reimagining design
personas for a future
that *works for all life.*

rewired



What

A toolkit to elevate the use of personas to influence the design of products/services that support a just and sustainable future.

For Whom

Designers, innovators, entrepreneurs and anyone who wants to build solutions that work for both people and the planet.

When

Along the design process, especially good during research and ideation sessions to ensure solutions are developed with a life-centered, long-term, and holistic mindset.

Introduction

Personas are a well-established tool that creative professionals use to build empathy for the people they have to design for.

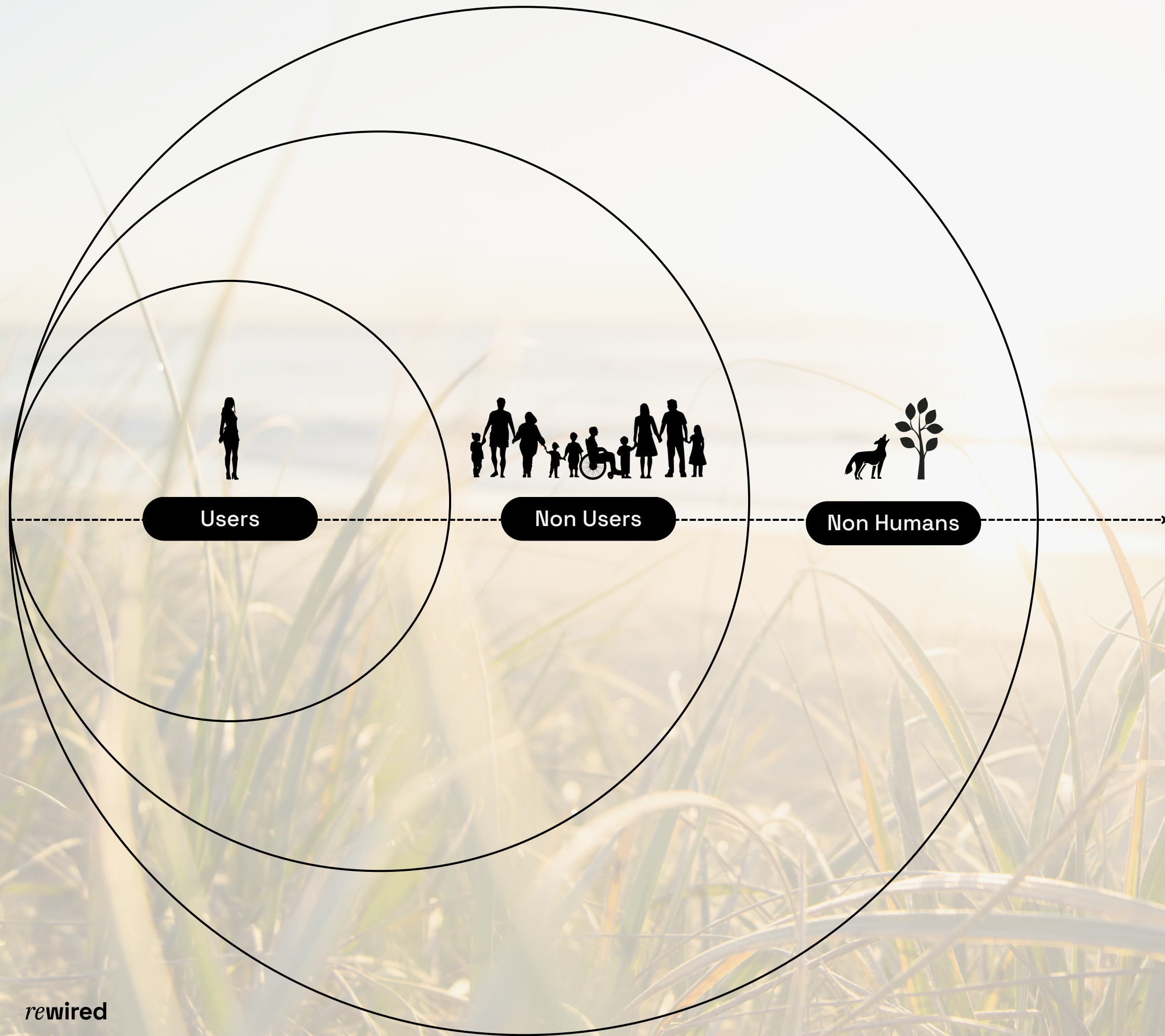
For years, they have done a pretty decent job in helping organisations design solutions that better cater to the needs of their customers. Yet, they also contributed to fuel the build up of a short-term, profit-driven, exploitative society; ultimately losing sight of what design should do:

Make the world a better place - for people and the planet.

This little toolkit is a first attempt to reimagine how designers can think of personas to become active agents of positive change in their own space.

Building on the work of life-centred design pioneers, we look at personas considering our symbiotic relationship to nature, a global-local approach, the importance of maintaining a close connection with the organisation's priorities to increase relevance and actionability, and ultimately that, no matter the brief, we always have a responsibility towards sustainability.

Disclaimer: all examples are purely illustrative and intentionally incomplete; please also note that additional elements to the design personas can always (and should) be added depending on project's goals and needs.



**Expanding our lens
beyond humans**

1

User Persona

2

Non-User Persona

3

Non-Human Persona

1: User Persona

Definition

The fictional, yet realistic description, of a typical or target user, customer, or consumer of a product or service. These are the people who (may) decide to engage with the product or service and are directly impacted by it.

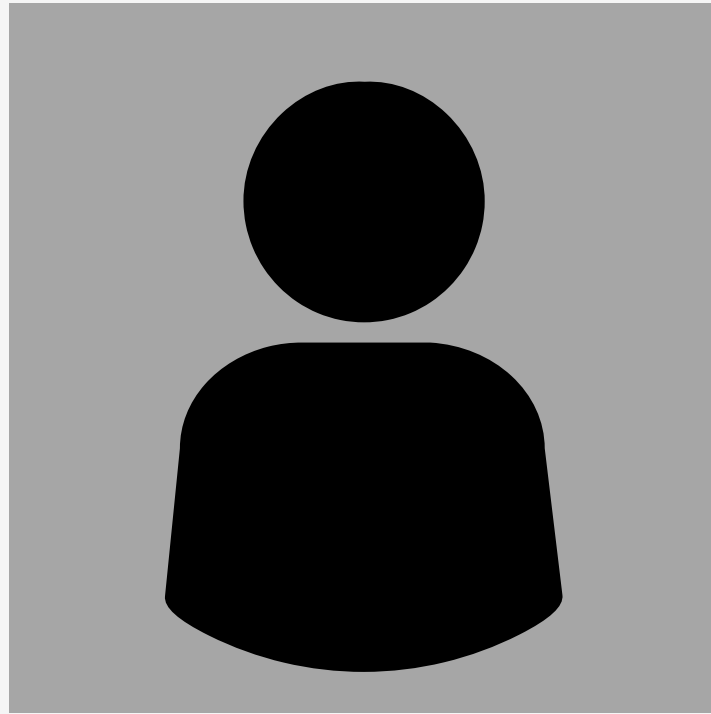
Building blocks

Besides the classic insights that from a human-centered design standpoint help us empathize and connect to our target audience, we suggest a few tweaks to how designers can think and present user personas to become advocates for a just and sustainable transition in their day-to-day work.

- Go for Archetypes: de-prioritize the use of fictional names, real pictures, and demographics typical of personas, and opt for archetypes that place emphasis on users' insights and behaviors to minimize the risk of cognitive biases, and support a more inclusive approach to design.
- Plug in Sustainability: always providing information about a user's values, behaviors, and needs around sustainability can help naturally trigger conversations about the role the product or service provider can play in enabling a shift towards more sustainable consumption choices.



Archetype Title



Quote

What are they saying that provides a good reflection of their overall personality, goals, needs, behaviours, and thinking styles?

Overall Profile

Goals

What are they trying to accomplish in their life and/or in relation to the product or service?

Behaviours

How do they behave in their life and in relation to the product or service?

Needs

What are their needs and expectations in relation to the product or service?

Frustrations

What pain points are they experiencing that they might try to overcome?

Sustainability Profile

Perceptions

What are their thoughts, and values around sustainability?

Attitudes

How do they behave with regards to sustainability? What activities do they do?

Needs

What do they need to "be sustainable" in relation to the product or service?

Frustrations

What challenges do they experience to embrace sustainability in relation to the product or service?

The Practical



Quote

”

I buy clothes because I need to. I want to look good, but I won't spend much of my time or money on it. Recently, I have tried to be more responsible with my shopping but it's not easy. Either things are hard to find, or they are expensive, or worst you do not know what information to seek or trust. If I could choose, I wish I had someone to do the all the right shopping for me!

Overall Profile

Goals

- Live a life in tune with own values and dreams
- Grow his own business
- Create a family and have few strong relationships
- Find work-life balance to reduce any compromise

Behaviours

- Works hard but with flexible schedule
- Lives by "healthy body, healthy mind" principle
- Shops a few items every 3-6 months and in-store
- Sticks to the same shops unless recommended

Needs

- Needs items that reflect his values and personality
- Needs a minimal and versatile closet
- Needs to have a strong reason to go and shop

Frustrations

- Feels that is hard to find items that fit him which makes shopping painful

Sustainability Profile

Perceptions

- Cares about sustainability
- Believes that we all have a role to play but companies and govt. should do more
- Thinks that things are not so black and white though

Attitudes

- Is open to shift behaviours to play his part in change
- Is willing to pay a slight premium for sustainability
- Seeks to increasingly shop more responsibly but this is not a deal breaker yet

Needs

- Needs alternative options that are convenient too
- Needs to know what information to look for
- Needs information that he can trust to choose

Frustrations

- Has not found yet his set of go-to-options for sustainable shopping
- Feels sustainable options are often too expensive
- Feels more skeptical on brands and newspapers sustainability comms.

2: Non-User Persona

Definition

The fictional, yet realistic description, of a specific group of people that is indirectly impacted by the product or service. These could be any group along the value chain such as employees, workers, or local communities.

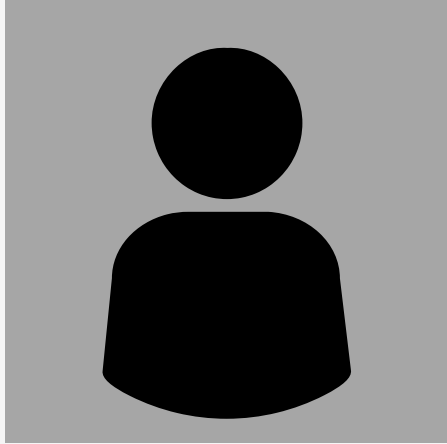
Building blocks

Non-user personas are inspired by the elements found in the traditional user persona framework but expand their view to infuse a systems-thinking and sustainability-grounded perspective in the design conversation. We find it helpful to consider these extra elements when crafting them:

- Global-Local Context: anchor the non-user persona around a specific global sustainability issue, but build it with a local lens to make it human, and relatable, and not to forget that change needs to start somewhere.
- Facts & Figures: include data points related to the persona and issue that come from credible information sources; do not boil the ocean but think about the audience and the reasons why the persona was created.
- Strategic Relevance: integrate information relevant to the priorities of the organization that is seeing the persona to raise attention. This may include references to strategic goals, risks, key regulations, or any other framework or fact that directly or indirectly impact the organization.



Related Global Env/Soc Issue
<p>Description</p> <p><i>What is the global sustainability issue about? How does it relate to the product or service and/or business challenge under analysis?</i></p>
<p>Facts & Figures</p> <p><i>What data points may help to provide a holistic and fact-based picture of the size and scope of the global issue you want to highlight?</i></p>
<p>Relevance</p> <p><i>What information could you add that speaks directly to the product or service provider's strategic priorities and/or concerns?</i></p>

Non-User Persona Name	
	<p>Quote</p> <p><i>What are they saying that provides a good reflection of their overall context, goals, needs, desires, worries, and challenges related to the product or service and impact on their lives?</i></p>
<p>Facts & Figures</p> <p><i>What data points may be useful to bring greater detail to the context of the persona? How do they connect to the product or service and/or business challenge under analysis?</i></p>	<p>Goals -----</p> <p><i>What are they trying to accomplish in their life and how might it relate to the impact and/or influence the product or service may have on their lives?</i></p>
	<p>Needs -----</p> <p><i>What are their needs to achieve their life's goals and how might they relate to the impact and/or influence the product or service may have on their lives?</i></p>
	<p>Concerns -----</p> <p><i>What challenges are they experiencing to be able to achieve their goals and how might they relate to the impact and/or influence the product or service may have on their lives?</i></p>

Waste & The Fashion Industry

Description

The fashion industry generates 92 million tonnes of textile waste every year - resulting in significant environmental and social damages. Besides the huge contribution to increases in GHG emissions and water and soil pollution of waste per se, more frequently unsold and/or discarded items are moving from high-income countries to low-income countries causing several issues such as financial instability, unhealthy living conditions, and the decline of local industries.

Facts & Figures

- 150 billion new clothing items produced annually
- 25% new garments remains unsold
- 80% of all secondhand clothing is down cycled, exported or landfilled
- \$500b value lost every year due to lack of recycling and clothes thrown into landfills before being sold

Relevance

- Company Goals: "Zero-Waste" , "Healthy Communities"
- SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13
- EU Strategy for Sustainable & Circular Textiles
- European EPR policies for textile

Source: HEY Fashion! ; Greenpeace

Celestine



Quote

”

I recall those times when all our clothes were made in the local community and we could just live from this and agriculture. Now I feel like I work harder but conditions are worse. I can stand this but I am afraid for my kids: the smell and dirt around the market where we live is awful and sometimes I am forced to reduce the amount of meals because the money isn't enough for us to get by.

Facts & Figures



Where: Kantamanto, Accra, Ghana

Stage: Pre/post consumer waste

What:

- One of the world's largest secondhand clothing markets
- Provides work to ca. 30,000 people
- Handles ca. 15m imported second-hand garments a week purchased in bulks of 55kg each by traders
- \$1.58 average per garment debt incurred by traders at purchase
- 40% of avg. bulk becomes waste

Source: The Or Foundation

Goals

- Be able to cater to all family needs without much hustling
- Move into a safer and cleaner neighborhood
- Send her kids to university one day

Needs

- Needs a stable income enough to sustain her and her family's needs
- Needs a safe space where to sell clothes and do her business

Concerns

- Has to juggle multiple jobs to stay afloat and pay back her debts
- Struggles with regular back pain which makes her work harder
- Wonders what her husband will do now that fishing is not possible due to high pollution from waste

3: Non-Human Persona

Definition

The realistic and fact-based description of a specific group of living species or ecosystems that is indirectly impacted by the product or service. These could be any natural element along the value chain such as animals, plants, water systems, air, or soil that is in support of the well-being of our planet.

Building blocks

Non-human personas are approached similarly to non-user personas and serve to help us create an emotional connection with nature and non-human entities. The main differences compared to non-user personas are these:

- Functions: instead of life and/or product/service-specific goals, outline the role (function) the non-human persona plays in the ecosystem and the value-added it provides to nature and humans when this is thriving.
- Needs & Concerns: show what the non-human persona needs to perform its functions and what may be hindering its performance (concerns).
- Scientific basis: include data points and information related to the persona and its issues that come from trusted and scientifically sound sources. This may be derived from secondary or primary research and significantly helps to ensure that discussions are based on solid ground.



Related Global Env/Soc Issue

Description

What is the global sustainability issue about? How does it relate to the product or service and/or business challenge under analysis?

Facts & Figures

What data points may help to provide a holistic and fact-based picture of the size and scope of the global issue you want to highlight?

Relevance

What information could you add that speaks directly to the product or service provider's strategic priorities and/or concerns?

Non-Human Persona Name



Quote

What is the non-human persona saying that may provide a good reflection of their current context and level of well-being? How might this relate to the impact and/or influence the product or service may have on its life's conditions?

Facts & Figures

What data points may be useful to bring greater detail to the context of the persona? How do they connect to the product or service and/or business challenge under analysis?

Functions

What is the role the non-human persona plays in the ecosystem? What value-added does it provide to people and the planet when it is in good health?

Needs

What does the non-human persona need (conditions, nutrients, etc.) to properly perform its ecosystem's functions and continue to stay healthy? How might this relate to the impact and/or influence the product or service may have on its life?

Concerns

What are the challenges that the non-human persona may be experiencing that prevent it from properly performing its functions and thriving in the long run? How might this relate to the impact and/or influence the product or service may have on its life?

Water Pollution & Fashion Ind.

Description

The textile manufacturing process consumes thousands of gallons of water, and at the same time, it also releases an enormous amount of textile effluents rich in hazardous chemicals. These end up in water ways, harming wildlife, destroying marine and freshwater environment, and negatively impacting near-by communities.

Facts & Figures

- Fashion, 2nd largest consumer of water
- 20% of world's wastewater generated by fabric dyeing printing, and finishing practices (wet-processing)
- The process of turning raw materials into textiles often takes over 8000 different synthetic chemicals

Relevance

- Company Goals: "Climate Positive"
- Internal project XYZ
- Different business partners requirements
- Strategic suppliers based in region (Tirupur)
- SDGs 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14
- Several regulatory frameworks (eg. REACH)

Noyyal River



Quote

”

I was once a life-giver, but now I'm the farmers' curse. Where my waters are still fresh and clean, I can give people drinking water and they can even use me for domestic purposes; but as soon as I hit Coimbatore I am a dead river, and I can't serve any of my functions anymore. I wish we could change this!

Facts & Figures



Where: Southwest India

Stage: "Wet-processing" stage

What:

- 180 km long, 25 km wide river
- Important river passing through Tirupur and Coimbatore which make up 90% of India's textile exports
- Known as sacred river, now one of the most heavily polluted river and termed the "dead river" in India

Functions

The Noyyal river and its interconnected tank and canal system were used for agriculture, water transport, storage, and maintaining stable groundwater levels by preventing unwanted flooding and replenishing it when there was surplus water. Today, it mostly serves as a water source for the textile production.

Needs

- Get back to healthy water levels
- Prevent the discharge of sewage from all the human activities happening along its shores, mostly from the highly polluting textile industry

Concerns

The lack of a well-functioning river, and the state of the water health, has a deeply negative impact on people and agriculture. The heavily polluted water that floods from the water system, pollutes the down river villages after every rainfall, causing diverse health issues, and a loss in agricultural production.

Few tips for implementation

1

Make it together: if you can, always opt to co-create and/or validate your personas with colleagues and key stakeholders before sharing them out; this will make them better and increase chances of buy-in. For non-user and non-human personas, reach out to the sustainability team: they can be fantastic allies!

2

Make it sound: ensure that any claim you make in your personas is supported by reliable data. This can be information coming from primary and/or secondary research such as interviews, observations, or reports. For sure you want to avoid any form of "washing", build trust, and let's say it, play tribute to the scientists!

3

Make it real: personas exist to help empathise and connect with the humans and non-humans who have a stake in the product or service you are designing. No matter whether these are written in the first or third person, it's recommended to always read (or act) them out in the first person to make them come to life.

4

Make it actionable: as with any other design tool, personas should be seen as boundary objects relevant only when they prompt the right discussions. To make them helpful, consider complementing them with questions (eg. How Might We...?) that can quickly spark "so what / what's next" conversations in your team.

Further Reading

- [Your personas probably suck. Here's how you can build them better.](#) (Amber Westerholm-Smyth)
- [Using thinking styles to look beyond the "Average User".](#) (Indi Young)
- [The story of Spotify personas.](#) (Mady Torres de Souza et al.)
- [Dimensional design.](#) (Board of Innovation)
- [Non-human and non-user personas for life-centered design.](#) (Damien Lutz)
- [Your next persona will be non-human - tools for environment-centered designers.](#) (Monika Sznal)
- [Why do we need non-human personas?](#) (Jeroen Spoelstra)
- [Non-human personas in practice.](#) (Martin Tomitsch)

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Creating ripples of positive change

This toolkit is nothing but the result of a conscious designer being inspired by other conscious designers wanting to elevate our professional practice to start to play an active role as contributors and shapers of a world that works better for people and the planet.

If you enjoyed this content, I'd like to invite you to keep creating ripples of positive change by liking, sharing, using, and providing feedback on this first version of the tools. You can do so by following and tagging [Rewired on LinkedIn](#) or directly contacting the author at: hello@projectrewired.co



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re make

We love to help you
equip yourself with the
practical resources & tools
you need to *drive action*.



Thanks for
reading!



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