

Learning

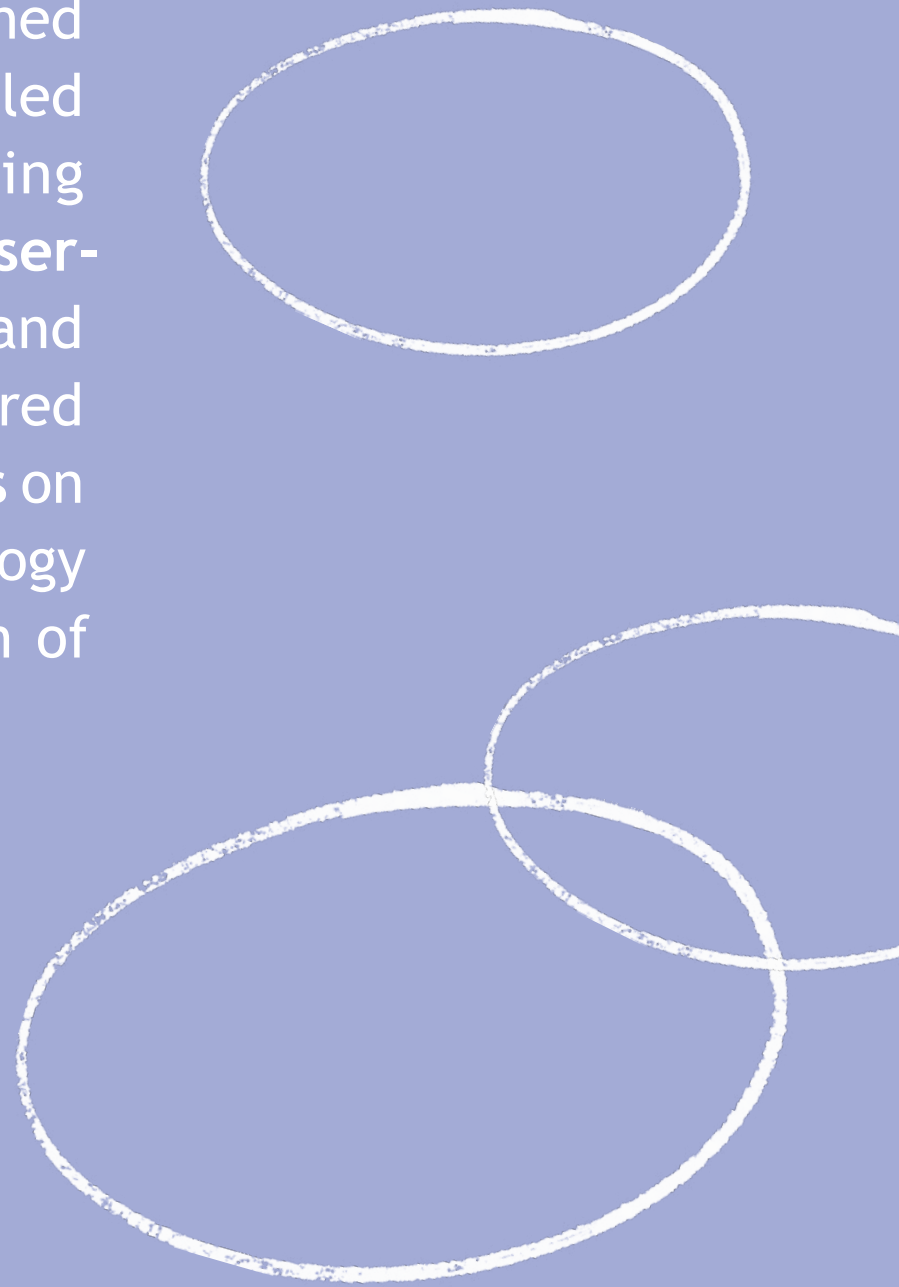
Community

Metodology

Brace yourselves! Just
a little bit of theory
to chew up, and then
neverending discovery
and practice!

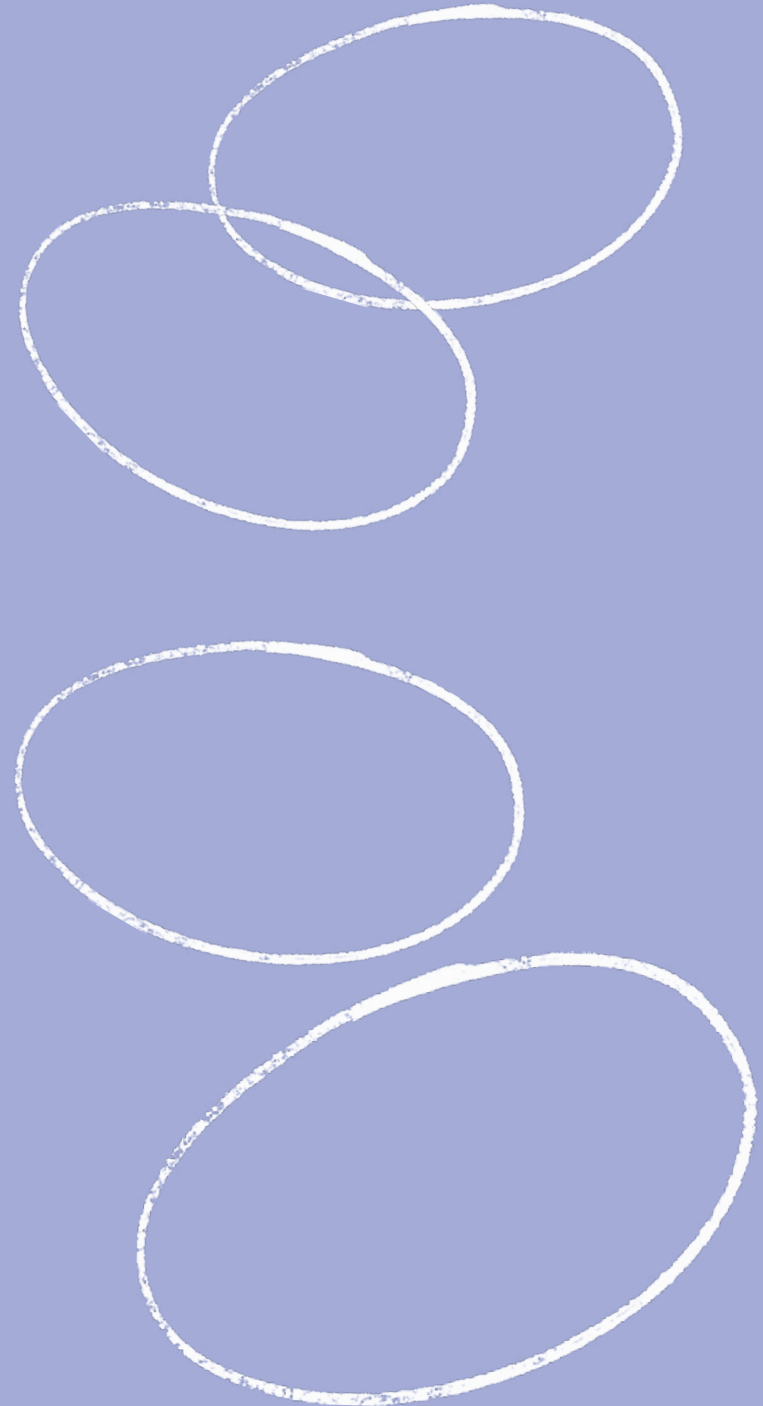
Creative spaces and creative people have the potential not only to occupy and utilise abandoned spaces effectively but primarily create so-called Learning Community¹. Building a Learning Community is a **dynamic, lively and complex user-oriented approach** based on understanding and **researching the needs of various actors**’ anchored in a complex web of **interactions and meanings** on multiple levels of social reality. The methodology and research subsequently support the design of spaces, institutions, and management.

¹Inspired by the theoretical approach “Learning Communities of Practice” as described by Étienne Wenger.



Learning Community are not just individuals with common interests. They intentionally **develop, maintain and disseminate a shared repertoire of resources:** experiences, stories, tools, ways of solving recurring problems - a shared practice through various rituals and procedures.

Learning Communities utilise formal and non-formal interactions, practices, and network exchange to **create, develop, and sustain common strategies for:** space utility, procedures and community organisation, financial and material redistribution, building collective identity and individuals' social and psychological support.



Learning Community has the following components:

- Practice and Learning
- Identity and Meaning
- Organisation and Procedures
- Materiality (objects and spaces)



Practice and Learning

1

Practice and learning is a crucial community component. Forget the classroom, massive university buildings, the dreaded teacher, seminar rooms and assignments or boring online training. Learning takes place in our lives every day, in banal situations, in different places and communities, or quietly over a glass of beer - situations in which we don't usually expect an organised learning process. Most importantly, **the knowledge is not stored in our minds and workbooks but is used, reused and applied in our everyday practice.**

By interacting between diverse groups, it is possible to overcome the bubble of interest and focus and create an **interdisciplinary learning community** for the modern and connected society of the future. It can be achieved by encouraging individuals and small groups to move freely between diverse communities of practice, connecting on similar interests but complementing the necessary practice for innovation and discovery. The true value of learning communities lies in forming **connections with representatives of other organisations who can provide outsider reality checks, critical feedback, and coaching.**

Learning is a process where an individual acquires not only certain knowledge but also is able, through social interaction and interaction with physical space, to shape himself, his community organisation, communicate to others, and impact the society in which they live.

In research and design, we are looking for this banal as well as formalised practices and experiences of various actors, diversity of groups involved and their actual and potential interactions.





What type of users are attracted to (the space/ institution)?

Who are the primary, secondary, tertiary users of the space/institution?

What does primary, secondary, tertiary mean for you, and why?

What type of users are attracted to (the space/ institution)?

Who are the primary, secondary, tertiary users of the space/institution?

What does primary, secondary, tertiary mean for you, and why?

What do different groups bring to the institution/ space?

What institution/space offers different groups?

Who do we miss in our community?





How open, closed are communities and groups?

What do they need to be
... more inclusive?
... more open?
... more innovative?

What different communities can emerge in (the space/ institution)?

How are they linked to other communities of practice at ...

... local level
(neighbourhood, block, community)?
... city level?
... country/state level?
... global level?

How do they ...
... influence each other?
... support each other?

... learn from each other?
... fight each other?

How do they ...
... share?
... store?
... disseminate?

How do users use knowledge in practice?



Identity and Meaning

2

Learning Community is not just a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest (e.g. photography, volunteering, robotics etc.).

Identity is enhanced by a feeling and our capacity of belonging. This capacity is developed through understanding the community as a shared enterprise, a collective understanding of the community's mission and purpose, mutual engagement, interacting with each other and setting norms, expectations, relationships, and communal resources.

Identity and meaning are usually stored and disseminated through a shared repertoire: finances, language, artefacts, tools, concepts, methods and standards, regular rituals built down-to-top, shared capital, signs, tags and names, common language.

Sometimes it's an energy that could not be described, but all members feel it when it happens - the magic of individuality based on collectivity.

In research and design, we look for collectivity practices and shared meanings of diverse actors involved.



What is the space/institution?

How do its users perceive it?

How does society perceive it?

How do we talk about it?

*What language do we use
(inside and out)?*

*How do you understand
the meaning of (space/
institution)?*

How do you feel about ...?

*What usually makes you
feel like you belong to
a particular group?*

*What are the values of the
space/institution?*

*How are the values
manifested in ...*

... practice?

*... materiality (space,
objects, signs)?*

*... organisation and
procedures?*

... communication?





What values unite diverse groups in the community?

What does the community represent?

What makes them different?

How do they complement each other?

What can they learn from each other?

What is the domain of the institution/space as a whole?

How does it reflect the needs of the ...

... city?

... the region?

... of the citizens?



Organisation and Procedures

3

Specific formal and informal procedures enable communities to function in certain spaces and sustain crises, conflicts or accelerate their potential. These are especially important in projects involving external financial flows (funds), managerial or public institution support, where natural and non-formal procedures have to be legitimised, controlled, reported, etc. Nevertheless, every community works according to certain written or unwritten rules. Clearly stated and, most importantly, lived rules and procedures are helping new community members to be easily assimilated. On the other hand, the openness and flexibility of these procedures give

new members and old the power to form them and feel more included and responsible for the community itself.

In research and design, we are looking for procedural and organisational practices enhancing other learning community components and meeting the needs of various actors.



How do we organise the community?

What rules do we need in order to function?

How do we ensure space/ institution...

...financial sustainability?

...environmental sustainability?

...inclusivity?

Who is responsible for ...?

How do we manage ...
... memberships and personnel?
... security?
... waste?
... budget?

How strict are the procedures? How do they change in time?

To what degree is the community involved in forming these procedures?

What do users need to emerge and sustain themselves organisationally?



Materiality

4

Materiality is understood as the spaces, places and objects that enable a community to learn through the reciprocal transaction between social and physical environments.

It enables and creates the space and conditions for individuals to find people of similar practices, share their experiences and, by fostering diverse competencies, innovate their projects, but at the same time take their expertise further beyond their communities and to the next generation. Shared spaces, safe and silent corners, trash bins, storage spaces, light and smell, may trigger or block important social interaction necessary for the Learning Community to function properly. Each material and space also relies on specific procedures.

Here we fully unveil the complexity and interconnectedness of all Learning Community components and embed them in our physical environment.

In research and design, we are looking for materiality - objects and spaces qualities enhancing learning community components and meeting the needs of various actors.



What do users need to emerge and sustain themselves spatially?

What objects are necessary to fulfil the needs of ...

... the community?

... individual?

... a particular domain of interest?

... values?

How much space does the space/institution and its users need for specific activities?

How many users are participating in a given activity?

What are the essential qualities of a specific space?

Where do groups interact?

How should the spaces be connected?

Which rooms should be adjacent to each other, and which rooms should be separated?





Do the spaces need access to external areas?

How do individual users move around the space?

Where can they enter, and where can they no longer?

Where do we want to create a more discrete flow of people or more open?

Does guest traffic flow through private areas?

How do we take care of the individual spaces?

How do we organise them?

Do users have specific needs (sanitation, funding, supplies, recycling) in a specific space?

Do the spaces need to be flexible?

Do the spaces have different light, ventilation, view, accessibility requirements?



The methodology you have in your hands uses simplified research methods and tools that everyone, not only researchers, can use. It combines two steps where we can use Learning Community components:

- **Research:** facilitated focus groups or workshops utilising various mapping methods to interactively analyse the needs of the users through the understanding of: social interaction and interaction with the physical space surrounding them
- **Analysis and communication of results:** representative biographies - combining storytelling, data visualisation and rigorous qualitative data analysis



LET'S START!



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