Cultivating Collaborative Lifestyles in Urban Neighbourhoods
CULTIVATING COLLABORATIVE LIFESTYLES IN URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS

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Abstract

Despite the increase of urban populations resulting in people living in close proximity to each other, society continues to operate with a focus on individual desire and hyper-consumption, at the expense of the earth’s ecologies and all that encompasses it. How can we begin to cultivate an alternative consumption model that not only focuses on the conservation of ecologies but also begins to break away from ways in which “habits, routines, social norms and cultural values lock us into unsustainable behaviours”? (Botsman, R., Rogers, R. 2010). Collaboration, through its many forms, be it ‘commons’ or modern-day ‘sharing economy’, continues to be a topic of discussion as a favourable solution to environmental, social and economic issues. This paper and design project explores the everyday practice of collaboration and its potential for activating a network in urban neighbourhoods, specifically in high-density housing. The project explores how we can share, where we can share, and what we can share, using the sharing of household items as a seed for sustainable development. The resulting project presents methods and guidelines for cultivating collaboration in the form of a multipurpose toolkit. The toolkit “Collaboration is Cultivation” enables individuals to become activists and implement collaborative practices in their own neighbourhood. Through designerly research and a design project I shed light on the potential of the coming-together of neighbors through collaborative lifestyles that can incrementally transform neighborhoods into one’s that are socially and environmentally, sustainable, resilient and thriving.
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INTRODUCTION

Excessive individualism in modern urban societies continue to challenge our role as humans and threaten the complex ecological and social systems that sustain us. In recent years, the environmental crisis facing our earth can be addressed as "the emergence of limits" which we cannot simply continue to ignore. "In a limited system, a society like ours, where economic and social well-being are measured in terms of material growth, is intrinsically unsustainable." (Manzini, E., Jegou, F., 2005). An increasing number of people are acknowledging that “business as usual” cannot continue to persist and we must transition towards sustainability as an everyday practice. Many realize that we have a personal and shared responsibility to sustain ourselves rather than relying on the governance of capitalistic systems. Small and large scale alternatives created by the people, for the people are bringing creative visions and innovative solutions for new ways of living.

These alternatives are offering lifestyle changes that are not only environmentally-sound but build on the basic human need of connecting and engaging with others. Collaboration and sharing, in its many forms, trigger patterns of socialisation through engagement and empathy as well as lessening the impact of our daily lives on the environment through the sharing of resources, time, skills and space. Collaborative lifestyles, implemented locally as an everyday practice, becomes a forceful driver towards building communities of care, particularly for socially and environmentally worn out urban societies.

Purpose

The purpose of this design project is to examine the possibilities of how collaborative lifestyles can be cultivated by bringing urban neighbours together to promote sustainable alternatives to consumption and build social capital between neighbours. This project aims to tap into underutilized goods and explore how the sharing of household items can be a seed of change for developing a hyper-local community, leaving room for new possibilities of sharing. Through practical and theoretical research the possibilities of cultivating collaborative lifestyles will be explored. The thesis question asks the following:

“How might one cultivate collaborative lifestyles in urban neighbourhoods to foster a sense of community and lessen the environmental impact caused by overconsumption?”

Personal Motivation

My interest in the subject of sharing economy stems from my own lifestyle and consumption methods. My personal interest in examining my own consumption habits and the social and environmental impact it has, coupled with a student lifestyle of living on a budget, has made me become aware of my actions as a consumer. In the past few years my lifestyle has involved numerous moves and travels resulting in the need to make a home in different places. Keeping in mind an effort to consume consciously has led me to many creative alternatives such as the subject/idea of sharing economy. While living with only a small amount of personal possessions during my undergraduate studies at Linnaeus University and during my semester abroad in Ecuador, sharing became a significant part of my daily life. The social and cultural differences I experienced in the past five years while living in different countries/environments fascinated and inspired me to dedicate my bachelor thesis to examine the ways in which we can share and collaborate.

Background

Collaboration, being the central topic of research in this thesis, has been in an area of concentration in the emerging field of ‘design for social innovation’. The contributions of Ezio Manzini, designer, design researcher and founder of DESIS network, has acted as an inspiration and has been a point of departure for the research of this design project. Design for social innovation, being a diverse and new area of research, intends to design for social change towards sustainable development (Manzini, 2014).

The great design issue that society as a whole must face is this: how can we move towards a society where expectations of well-being are separated from acquisition of new artifacts? How can we enable people to live well consuming (much) less while regenerating the quality of our habitats? (Manzini, E. Jegou, F, 2005)

Collaboration falls under the umbrella term of design for social innovation, as a means for developing society through participation and engagement as well as providing sustainable solutions and scenarios to the everyday lifestyle of individuals. The written and practical work of this design project aims to explore the possibilities of cultivating collaboration within urban neighbourhoods, as a means for sustainable development. A designerly approach is taken in this project using design methods that focus on practice-led research. To outline the delineations of this project I recognize the complexity of the overlapping fields. Therefore the literature review will focus on sustainable approaches to the subjects of design, society, economics and environment. Conducting an empirical study through explorative research and designerly interventions investigates how, where and what we can share. The locality of the interventions take place at Linnaeus University campus in Växjö, Sweden. This location is chosen as fertile ground to conducting research, exemplifying the cultivation of collaboration in high-density housing within urban neighbourhoods. The results of this design project enabled me to apply my educational background in design for social innovation and visual communication to encourage the cultivation of collaborative lifestyles in urban neighbourhoods.
The Economy and Ecology Disconnect

We have inherited a vision of “the economy” as a distinct sphere of human activity, marked off from the social, the political, and the ecological, as a domain of individualized, monetized, rational-maximizing calculation. This economic sphere rests upon and utilizes an earthly base of (often invisible) ecologies that are swept up into its domain to become “resources,” passive inputs for production and consumption measured primarily by their market value. (Gibson-Graham, J.K., Miller, E., 2015)

This dualistic ‘modern’ thinking has paved the path to the anthropocene that we currently find ourselves in – a concept which many scientists conclude as the beginning of the geological period where human activity has had a significant impact and altered the Earth’s climates and ecosystems (Edwards, L. 2015).

Western consumerist driven culture has resulted in the exploitation of the earth and its ecologies creating social inequalities where individualism and the possession of material goods drive us (Hedren A., Bradley K. 2014). The current linear economy depletes and abuses natural resources when extracted, shaping them into products and generating waste. This unsustainable cycle could be “productively replaced by a restorative model in which waste does not exist as such but is only food for the next cycle” (MacArthur, E., 2017). Although our development of technologies has allowed us to take many great steps to improve human life on this earth, it has also allowed us to believe in a dualistic view of society and ecology – that we humans and our activities are somehow separate and inconsequential (Gibson-Graham, J.K., Miller, E., 2013).

Consume = Sustain?

As our consumption patterns of material goods are drastically increasing, the earth and its ecologies are in a vulnerable state (Commoner, 1990). Forms of sustainable consumption have been on the rise, encouraging humans to be mindful and ‘think green’. However, at the current rate of consumption it is said that “99% of the stuff we run through this system is trashed within 6 months” (Leonard, A., 2010).

Linear consumption models allow consumers to buy cheap and buy often with marketing strategies such as planned obsolescence, and micro-seasons. Sustainable products and services largely remain marginalized due to the price, accessibility, and a lack of awareness, making it difficult for people to make the switch. The take-make-dispose culture is so ingrained in western culture that “disposability is synonymous with convenience and a metaphor for freedom” (Botman, R., Rogers, R., 2010). Consumerism has shaped our everyday life that locks us into unsustainable behaviours (Botman, R., Rogers, R., 2010). Even though we live in a society with others, we have focused on individual desires rather than relationships. “Our own communities, now largely anonymous, are often tuned in more completely to the media than to the people around them.” (Thorpe, A., 2007). The dominance of visuality and materialism in our society prioritizes consumption and ownership above engagement and connection to others, a basic human need we all strive for: When we engage with others we are absorbing and establishing communication - a real connection of doing, being and interacting. “In addition, by connecting people, we find ways to meet their need for meaning in a less materially intensive and less commercial way.” (Thorpe, A., 2007). This has resulted in breaking into a new dimension of empathy and understanding of others, giving the opportunity to show that we humans are intrinsically-connected and we have much more in common than we think we do. The social and cultural sustainability that takes place at a local level allows connecting with others to form meaningful communities, therefore acting as a catalyst for change.

Reduction of consumption has been considered as an alternative to the social and environmental issues caused by consumerist culture due to its potential to prevent unnecessary use of precious natural resources. “Interventions aimed at reducing consumption will be most effective if they can bring about higher-level changes in the socio-economic-cognitive system — i.e. by changing cultural values and worldviews” (Brown, P.M., & Cameron, I. D., 2000). Reducing consumption encompasses many alternative economic models and requires us to direct our attention to improving the transition towards these models. Redistribution markets maximize the life cycle of existing underutilized goods to be redistributed, promoting collaborative systems, adding additional loops to a closed cycle and often prioritizing access to goods over ownership (Botman, R., Rogers, R., 2010). The environmental aspects of sharing, in its many forms, are explored through this design project as a sustainable alternative to the current environmental threats the world is facing due to overconsumption.
Commons, Collaboration and Sharing

Forms of sharing and collaboration have been present ever since humans existed; since we’ve had access to food, divided land, and lived in societies organizing and sharing resources and responsibilities. The “tragedy of commons” depicts a story of ‘the commons’, resources that belong to all of us, such as lakes, forests and land becoming depleted due to privatisation and state control (Hardin, G., 1968). What about the societies that managed to preserve their common resources? Elinor Ostrom, a political economist whose work focuses on the governing of the commons and collective action, concluded that local and self-organized forms of governing sustains common resources. She stated that it was through a holistic perspective that fostered the preservation of the commons which allowed the decisions such as rules, distribution and appropriation of these commons to be made collectively and locally (Ostrom E., 1990).

As we have developed so have “systems of organized sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping across a communities of peers”, otherwise known as collaborative consumption (Botsman, R., Rogers, R., 2010). Although sharing and collaboration have been an integral part of society, collaborative consumption, along with other alternative economic models, are part of the modern movement called ‘sharing economy’. There is no denying that the platforms for sharing have changed drastically, from market place bartering, to notice boards in every common area, to now more popular digital platforms where you can rent formal garments for a wedding for example. These forms of sharing, most of which are being seen in urban contexts in western countries, certainly differ from ‘the commons’ where survival or perhaps economic reasons were the leading factors. Many are following this trendy form of sharing, straying away from redistribution, and continuing to operate as capitalist economies driven by profit and growth.

How can we allow this new form of modern or urban “commons” to operate in a sustainable way focusing on reducing consumption of new products and redistributing more of what already have? “Sustainability is commonly defined as the balanced use of social, environmental and economic capital, so as not to compromise the ability of future generations to survive and thrive” (Sherin, A. 2013). Environmental, social and economic sustainability can be a leading factor for more collaborative and peer-to-peer practices. Collaboration can enable us to “move away from a hyper-individual culture that defines our identity, and happiness based on ownership and stuff, toward a society based on shared resources and a collaborative mindset” (Botsman, R., Rogers, R., 2010). Collaboration allows individuals to take matters into their own hands, for whichever values —be it ecological, social or self-interest— unintentionally empowering, inspiring and enabling others around them to take part. It is vital that we begin to live collaborative lifestyles because it not only provides the opportunity for reduced resource use, the coming-together of “ordinary citizens in peer-to-peer practices that can incrementally transform the economy” (Bradley, K., Hedrén, J., 2014), as well as enabling people to build and strengthen relationships within communities, generating social capital.

“Helsinki TimeBank” in Finland, exemplifies how the concept of commons has resurfaced and has enabled citizens to use “currency as commons”. With over 3000 members, this project acts as a local economic currency through the value of time: Members, not limited to individuals but also organizations and businesses, are able exchange services and goods that are valued by time: one hour equaling one “Tovi”. The strong ecological, social and economic values are put first, recognizing the equality and reciprocity of people’s time. Members are able to offer goods and services such as language lessons, home-grown vegetables or perhaps a logo design. Everyone’s time, no matter what the work, is valued and of equal worth. The work is then remunerated in the currency of the TimeBank through an online system (Stadin Aikapankki, 2013). The principles of this collective connects people in a hyper-local context, strengthening community ties and enables a participatory culture that stands for economic justice. Helsinki TimeBank is an example of how the sharing economy can play an important role in economic, ecological and social livelihood.
As urban populations are increasing, “by 2050, 70% of the world’s population will be urban” (United Nations, 2014), there is a high demand for sustainable alternatives to take place. Despite the increasing populations resulting in people living in close proximity to each other, urban areas continue to be developed with a focus on individuality rather than collectivity. Reaching out to others and asking for help is often considered a sign of weakness or failure therefore creating a barrier to building relationships with others and even with oneself. Seeking help rather shows willingness, determination to overcoming an issue, promotion of self-awareness and self-confidence — admitting that one is worthy of receiving help. “In collaborative lifestyles anchors of commonality give people permission to collaborate, form new social bonds, and break down emotional barriers and stigmas we often have around sharing or asking for help.” (Botsman, R., Rogers, R., 2010). Furthermore, solutions that are made hyper-local generate social capital in neighbourhoods while allowing redistribution of goods, time, space and skills to be shared fluidly and easily.

An urban context has been chosen for this design project in order to investigate the possibilities of collaborative lifestyles. The primary stakeholder for the project are urban neighbourhoods, specifically high-density housing. Apartment buildings are a prime example of individualistic lifestyle where collaboration can be easily implemented due to close locality to others therefore making the coming-together of neighbours very convenient. The secondary stakeholder, overlapping with the primary, is focused on the western world, those with high consumption rates, idling capacity and a lack of community. The finalized project intends to be an example for this audience to implement collaborative lifestyles. These stakeholders are chosen as being fertile ground where sustainable change is needed and can be implemented. This design project intends to explore the everyday practice of collaboration and its potential of activating a network in urban neighbourhoods. Through practice-led and theoretical research, I will speculate on the potential for activating networks in urban neighbourhoods through the sharing of household items.

Pumpipumpe is the collaborator that I will be working alongside with throughout this design project. Although based in Zürich, Switzerland, Pumpipumpe operates globally as a non-profit association that “stands up for a conscious use of consumer goods and aims to improve social interaction in urban neighbourhoods’ (Pumpipumpe, 2015). Pumpipumpe offers an alternative consumption model based on building a local network in neighbourhoods through the sharing of household items. Currently, Pumpipumpe offers stickers of household items that users are able to adhere on their mailbox allowing neighbours to see what kind of items they are willing to lend to others.

Pumpipumpe has also developed a digital map where users who order stickers are anonymously placed on the map to show what kind of household items can be borrowed in a user’s area. This gives users a much better and simpler perspective of what items are available in their neighbourhood and beyond. This way a physical tour through the user’s city is not necessary in order to find the item they need. However, an address is being provided and users are required to ring a neighbour’s doorbell and come to a sharing agreement.

Pumpipumpe currently offers individuals — or anyone with a mailbox — the sticker set online as well as at some re-sellers. Pumpipumpe leaves it up to individuals to decide how they borrow and lend from their neighbour, whether its a continuous or one-time borrowing, lending or trading of items. They are also offering a “supporter kit” which allows a user to purchase 10 sticker sets at a discounted price in order to share with others in their neighbourhood making creating a network of sharing much more effective.

Pumpipumpe offers a much more appealing and positive approach to those involved in my research. Together with Pumpipumpe I will be exploring the possibilities for promoting collaborative lifestyles through practice-led research resulting in a toolkit for Pumpipumpe users who wish to be activists or supporters in their neighbourhood.
This section outlines the methods that will be used in the design process to explore the possibilities of collaborative lifestyles in urban neighborhoods, specifically in high-density housing. The following research methods will be put into practice in locations around Europe, focusing on middle and high class lifestyles in order to align with a target group Pumpipumpe and I have identified. To continue more concrete research, I will be conducting interventions in student housing in Växjö, Sweden.

**DESIGN PROCESS & METHODOLOGY**

Exploration

My research starts by exploring and collecting data on existing platforms for collaboration and sharing through a photo study and personal inventories. The aim of this exploration is to find out: what do we share, where do we share and how do we share? This exploratory research is focused on people living middle to high class lifestyles in Europe.

**Photo Study**

The photo study method is used to document existing and potential places and spaces for collaborative consumption. Through a visual archive I have been able to identify the qualitative aspects of each platform such as how they are being used or if they are even being used. This analysis is an effective way to distinguish the current state of collaboration as well as see potential areas for interventions. Photo studies provide “the designer with visual, self-reported insights into user’s behaviours and priorities” (Martin B., & Hannington, B. M., 2012).

From the observations, focusing on notice boards and physical spaces, I have been able to come to several conclusions on how a somewhat ‘public’ space such a notice board can be used and how it is currently being used. The observations showed me that personal notices are quite rarely placed on physical notice boards and that specifically on Växjö’s university campus, personal notices on physical platforms are nearly non-existent. Personal notices themselves have moved to digital platforms such as Facebook groups and other social media Apps where people are able to share, sell, lend, borrow and offer variety of goods and services. I recognize the advantages that digital platforms have for sharing to a wide range of people beyond local neighbourhoods to a more global context, however these digital platforms do not address the disconnect we have in our urban neighbourhoods, specifically in high-density housing. I visited several locations and noted a general lack of any type of notices in of the ones I did observe they consisted mostly of advertisements. Furthermore a survey conducted at Linnaeus University campus showed that 87% of people do not converse with their neighbors beyond saying “hello” therefore indicating a lack of social engagement between residents. The photo study helped me conclude that apartment complexes are a fertile ground for change and for the implementation of interventions that promote collaborative lifestyles.

Linnaeus University Campus, Växjö, Sweden
Personal Inventories

Personal inventories is a method that is used to investigate idling capacity—otherwise known as the power of underutilised goods that unlock value and potential. “This method is useful for revealing people’s activities, perceptions, and values as well as patterns among them” (IDEO, 2003). Personal inventories method has allowed me to see and understand the relevance or irrelevance of personal belongings in individuals’ lives from the perspective of the owner. By understanding the role that an object has in someone’s life, I can appropriately create a responsive system based on idling capacity to promote collaboration. This will directly speculate on the materialistic and individualistic society that we currently live in.

I have conducted personal inventories of five different individuals living in five different European countries. These individuals vary in age and lifestyles, from teenager to middle-aged parent. The result of ‘personal inventories’ proved to be very successful in identifying ‘idling capacity’. The personal inventories of the five people I interviewed revealed that there is a huge potential for the redistribution and sharing of material items. I asked participants to open their closets, drawers, or cupboards and identify the significance and frequency of use of their items. The results showed that every participant was willing to share, lend, and/or even donate items that they ‘rarely used’ (i.e., once a month, a year, or even never). Three of the five participants identified items that they never use and no longer felt a need to own. The relationship the participants had to their items were not as meaningful as I had expected. Is this due to the consumer-driven culture that continues to push new products that we don’t really need or products that provide only short-term satisfaction? These questions could be a research topic on its own. Nevertheless, the conclusions from this research suggest to be supportive of the concept of idling capacity as the individuals are open to sharing even when they have different lifestyles from the mother with a young child owning a home full of items to the university student who identifies as a minimalist.

Interventions

“An intervention is the act of intentionally seeking to shift the status quo of a scenario, situation or system” (Acaroglu, L. 2017). A series of designerly interventions were conducted as a basis to the practical research for this thesis. The interventions were conducted in neighborhoods, specifically in student housing in Växjö, Sweden. As a designer I aim to be a facilitator and investigate opportunities and possibilities for collaborative lifestyles to be implemented as well as create a seed of change for collaborative practices such as allowing residents to engage in sharing of household items by introducing Pumpipumpe’s mailbox sticker method.

While conducting these interventions, friction arose in many different forms. The intervention had to take the cultural context of student housing located in small Swedish city into account. Individualistic lifestyle is very much present as all apartments are one-person studio apartments with little to no common areas. It is also an unspoken Swedish rule that before leaving your apartment you make sure the hallway is clear to avoid talking to neighbours. Ironically enough, before setting out to plan these interventions I received an email from the housing company warning all residents not to leave any items in corridors or entrance ways as this posed a fire hazard or they could face a fine. Previously students would leave unwanted items such as furniture for others to take. After several failed attempts to contact the housing company to offer a new design solution and explaining the possibilities of sustainable development I saw this setback as a point of motivation. I began to focus on using existing areas, looking at the architectural influence of a building and making new, temporary areas for interventions.
Notice (me) Board

Using the knowledge gained from the previous research methods, I posted a note on the notice board in my building to personally test out if someone would be willing to lend me a household item: a power drill. The result concluded that either no one had one, was willing to lend me one or it may have been too intimidating for residents as a first intervention. Realizing this, I set out to use a ‘proposal wall’ or ‘graffiti method’ on the notice boards in apartment complexes to ask residents what household items they would possibly be willing to lend to their neighbours and what items they would like to borrow (Martin B., & Hannington, B. M., 2012). Residents were able to anonymously answer on the poster board by placing stickers under the 7 listed items, which were chosen from Pumpipumpes’s selection of stickers and are also items that most students are likely to have. They included: tables and chairs, a power drill, games, a kitchen mixer, a grill, a baking pan, and a bike. The posters were distributed to 8 different buildings at Linnaeus University campus, some placed on notice boards, inside elevators and others on walls within the building. The posters received generous feedback from residents with over one hundred responses. 47 household items were willing to be shared and over 56 items were in need to be borrowed. The result, as well as the posting of the poster itself, proved to be an effective method to engage residents without demanding too much effort and planting the idea of sharing between neighbours in their minds. The results of this method suggests that notice board interventions can be an effective way to engage neighbours.

Neighbourhood Party

The last intervention I planned was a party for my neighbours in my apartment building. This was an important part of my design process as it was a chance for me to act on the values that I stand for in regards to building community within neighbourhoods. Written invitations to a party were handed out in everyone’s mailboxes and posters were put up in the building as well. The party was to take place in an open space next to the entrance of the building. I set up this space as a living room using second-hand furniture that was to be given away for free by myself and others. This location was chosen as it would directly act as an intervention for anyone passing by or entering the building, therefore giving the opportunity to ask anyone passing by to join the party. The setting would give a humorous aspect to the party that would help lighten the mood as well as allow neighbours to have a comfortable place to chat and get to know each other.

The result of this intervention was quite unusual to what many would expect from an open-invite and everyone-is-welcome kind of student party. Many would assume a party like this would attract lots of people and could easily get quite out of hand. The cultural context of this research proved to be much more important than I had first considered. It is important to note that I myself, am not Swedish, I am used to socializing with people of different international backgrounds and this evening brought my curiosity for Swedish culture to a new level.

I had gathered a few neighbours who I was already friends with to help me set up. While setting up for the party - playing music and laying out snacks – many people passed by. When asked if they would like to join the party we were continuously turned down. Out of the 80 people living in my apartment building, only 2 residents showed up and stayed throughout the party. I had always considered the cultural context and the general notion that Swedish people are reserved, often seen as shy and sometimes even considered unsocial but this was still quite a surprise for me. Unfortunately this lead to not being able to do many of the activities I had planned for this event. I eventually ended up asking more of my own friends, most of them international students, to join the party. Even though there were only two “real” attendees I was able to get some insight from some of the Swedish friends who attended as well as the many people passing by to ask “why not?” Interestingly enough, everyone thought the party was a great idea and the space that
we set up really transformed the atmosphere in the building. One girl passing by commented that “if I was backpacking or traveling around I would love this kind of party, but here in Sweden, we don’t do this kind of thing” and that only in an international space would she feel comfortable joining. Two Swedish friends commented that they felt Swedes may feel intimidated by an English-speaking party.

I did have a conversation with the two “real” attendees who were both very quiet and shy to answer my questions. They were happy to be part of a setting where they could meet new people since they had no other plans for the evening. When asked further about how they would feel about sharing, especially household items, they said they would be happy to lend their items to people, but only people they knew. When asked if they would lend their bike for example to me, now that they had gotten to know me a bit, they both answered that they would be willing to do so. Although the opportunity to get to know others was provided at this party they felt it was a strange thing to do along-side the idea of lending/borrowing household items.

As the party was coming to a close I handed out a petition I had created for circulation around the university campus. The petition advocated for the housing companies to support the sharing of five household items by allowing tenants to leave unwanted items in entrances and hallways for the taking. As previously mentioned, the housing companies threatened to fine people for leaving unwanted items. This however motivated me to create change and propose a dialogue to come up with a joint-solution that would be acceptable to the housing company while serving the needs of the community/environment. After handing out the petition I realized that a different approach would actually need to reach a larger audience. Using the digital platform of the “Växjö Campus” Facebook group would target more people and therefore have a larger impact. Due to the time constraints that my design project has, this petition became an initiative for the context can be an effective tool for developing new interventions that activate and engage network of citizens.

Perhaps then the chances of creating and implementing a system of household item sharing would be much greater. The most valuable observation from these interventions is that the social and cultural context is an extremely important factor that needs to be considered in future interventions. When looking at cultivating collaboration in neighbourhoods the approaches are endless however, designing and considering specifically for the context can be an effective tool for developing new interventions that activate and engage network of neighbours. This then can lead to the sharing of household items. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the intention of these interventions was to prototype ways to engage neighbours. Although not all interventions were successful, the valuable reflections from each experience will be taken further in my design process.

Results

Reflections and Realisation

Reflecting on my research, the most valuable point I take with me is that there is no clear-cut answer on how to cultivate collaborative practices. Rather, my research suggests that there are countless reasons and approaches out there to engage citizens to collaborate. In order to provide solutions on how to cultivate collaboration in urban neighbourhoods, one must have an in-depth understanding of the system they want to bring about change in. This was a particularly important reflection for my last intervention hosting a party for my neighbours. In search for success I hastily hosted a party without considering the interests and the background of the people I tried to reach.

The realization of my project stems from this experience along with the theoretical and practice-led research I conducted. What if I could tie together the reflections and the knowledge I have gained from these experiences into guidelines to help others begin to cultivate collaboration in their neighbourhoods? A toolkit would provide guidelines, rather than rules, based off of the design methods and interventions I used and prototyped for cultivating collaboration in my university campus neighbourhood in Växjö, Sweden. To summarize the research I have done in the form of a toolkit would allow the impact of collaboration to be made on a larger scale, reaching more people than just the neighbourhood where I conducted research. A toolkit would particularly be useful for Pumpipumpe users who are located around the world as it would enable them to generate new possibilities with a toolkit in their neighbourhood and build communities based on collaboration. A toolkit would be a seed for change and bring forms of collaboration and sharing to their neighbourhood.

“A community-oriented toolkit is a replicable enabling solution conceived to support different groups of people in recognizing and applying a collaborative organization idea by adapting it to the specificity of their own context” (Manzini, 2015). Toolkits offer a strategic and holistic approach to problem-solving that reflect on the notion that “one size fits all” is ineffective, rather that the context of today’s problems are extremely diverse, complex and ever-changing. This often suggests the importance of the user’s role in the design process, involving them along with other individuals to imagine solutions that are relevant and practical for their locality. Manzini describes toolkits as a way to assist users towards a goal, such as collaboration, with giving the user the freedom to use tools or guidelines as they wish, offering a “do-it-yourself approach” (Jégou F., Manzini, E. 2008).

The knowledge I gained from the practical research allowed me recognize the variables that need to be taken into consideration, meaning that in order for individuals to cultivate collaborative lifestyles, the individuals themselves must take the role of researcher, designer or activist. The capability approach, a philosophical and economic approach coined by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen from a design-led perspective focuses on increasing the capabilities of users as part of the design process. The user’s active subjects in the process, voicing their needs and wants as well as creating and designing for favorable solutions (Nussbaum, M., Sen, A. 1993). The toolkit I have designed, titled “Collaboration is Cultivation”, empowers individuals to unlock the resources in their locality and to carve the path to collaboration. Moreover, I did not simply want to assume the capabilities and resources that user’s may or may not possess in their neighbourhood, risking the information given in the toolkit to be inapplicable and not sufficient. By providing individuals with a toolkit they are able to follow the open-ended guidelines and appropriately apply it to their neighbourhood. Considering my collaborator, Pumpipumpe, I wanted to address their need to provide their supporters and users with information to promote the value of cultivating a neighbourhood by beginning with the sharing of household items. With this in mind, I concluded that in order to cultivate collaborative lifestyles a toolkit would provide the opportunity to express the reasons and give guidance on how to approach collaboration as well as introduce Pumpipumpe’s service to neighbourhoods.
With the realization of this toolkit I had to make many considerations and work around certain requirements that would allow the toolkit to be user-friendly and accessible. Considering that Pumpipumpe operates internationally I decided that the toolkit needed to be accessible online in order to maximize use. In order to make this possible the toolkit is available in a digital and physical format, with the digital format being a PDF document and the physical being printed on paper. Users and visitors of Pumpipumpe’s website would be able to access the information online in the toolkit and also print it out as a physical version. The size of the document would be home-printer-friendly, meaning that the document is simply printed on A4 or A3 paper. Additionally, the physical toolkit would be provided complimentary to individuals who buy the Pumpipumpe Supporter Pack which includes 10 sticker sets at a discounted price.

Collaboration is Cultivation - An Activist’s Guide to Cultivating Collaboration in Urban Neighbourhoods

In order to maximize the use of this toolkit it needs to be designed to be multi-purpose and easily distributable. A zine or fanzine, short for magazine, is a method of self-publication of words and images which is usually reproduced with a photocopier in order for it to be easily distributed. Zines often emphasise giving a voice to topics that are considered taboo in the media by using strong text or imagery to convey a idea or message (Art Matters, 2009). The topic of collaborative lifestyles cultivating sustainable change aligns with this notion. Therefore the toolkit is called “Collaboration is Cultivation - An Activist’s Guide to Cultivating Collaboration in Urban Neighbourhoods”. Using a “one-page” zine format would allow to utilise both sides of the paper, one side being a poster and the other being the informative tools.

A Poster Manifesto

The poster would act partly as a visual and text-based manifesto for the joined values of Pumpipumpe and this project, as well as being visually-eye catching to show the potential collaborative lifestyles have in urban neighbourhoods. The manifesto approach is chosen as an effective way to communicate that “we are in the need of new stories to face the contradictions of our times and to imagine alternative future” (Manifesto for Transformative Social Innovation, 2017). The manifesto-style poster gives a ‘call’ to action where as the contents of the zine, on the back page, give guidelines or tools for action. The title or slogan “Collaboration is Cultivation” states the motives behind the publication along with additional text to suggest concrete examples on how to cultivate collaboration. The text is written in a block style, similar to a fine-print therefore intriguing the viewers to take a closer look. The illustrations depict a scene from a utopic apartment complex, where neighbours are sharing, collaborating, communicating and helping each other. The aim for the poster was to communicate visually to the user a simple, inspiring positive perspective of collaboration in urban neighbourhoods.

Starting a conversation with your neighbour. Lending your ice-cream maker to your neighbour. Giving your baby’s outgrown clothes to your neighbourhood’s newest mom. Asking for help. Hosting a neighbourhood gathering. Baking your neighbour some cookies. Starting a community garden. Giving your neighbours Pumpipumpe stickers. Sharing your yield from your apple tree with your neighbours. Watering your neighbours plants while they’re on vacation. Sharing a vacuum cleaner with your next-door neighbour. Borrowing your neighbours tent for your camping trip instead of buying a new one. Using your building’s public space to benefit the community. Asking your housing company to support collaborative lifestyle. Start a “sharing shelf” for free items in your neighbourhood. Having shared facilities. Using the notice board to communicate to your neighbours. Taking your neighbour’s dog for a walk for them while they’re gone to work.
The Tools

The contents of the zine, or the back-page of the poster, serves as an “activists guide”, providing the guidelines to cultivating collaboration and activating a network in urban neighbourhoods. As discussed previously these tools are based on my research methods, particularly the interventions, where I gained knowledge on how to best engage others to participate. These guidelines are catalysts for collective action, empowering individuals to be the activist engaging with others in their neighbourhood and cultivate collaboration. The simple guidelines, advocate change and provide small to large scale actions that individuals can take in their neighbourhood. Pictured are the 9 guidelines featured in the zine.

1. Share a street-sharing event talk. Pick an all-inclusive set of knowledge areas, for example, bike sharing or bus sharing. Kick this up in your neighbourhood, perhaps in collaboration that you live or work. For more see www.pumpbikes.com.

2. Navigate urban collaboration: detailing on ways to navigate and cooperate, for example in a bike sharing project. Urban collaboration provides both the sharing and the cooperation, enhancing the potential for positive outcomes and collective benefit. It can start as simple as a group. It is all about sharing.

3. Did you know there are huge environmental benefits to sharing and collaboration? For example, bike sharing can reduce traffic congestion, pollution and noise. Urban collaboration can reduce the overall carbon footprint and positively impact the environment and the community. It can start as simple as a group. It is all about sharing.

4. Let all cities have their own “public space”. Building a culture of sharing and collaboration that are the values, traditions and culture of the community. Building a culture of sharing and collaboration that are the values, traditions and culture of the community.

5. Let your neighbour know you care! Take a moment to introduce yourself, your name, where you live and what you are all about. It can be as simple as a smile and a wave. It can start as simple as a group. It is all about sharing.

6. Take a falls Stranger helping Hand. The act of helping others can foster a sense of community and strengthen relationships, it can start as simple as a group. It is all about sharing.

7. Build on the culture and community, and collective. The act of helping others can foster a sense of community and strengthen relationships. It can start as simple as a group. It is all about sharing.

8. Collaborate and join groups, such as a community forum or a community garden. It can start as simple as a group. It is all about sharing.

9. Put this poster in a way on your notice board. It can start as simple as a group. It is all about sharing.
How-to

The toolkit “Collaboration is Cultivation” acts a multipurpose tool for users, providing instructions on the tips and guidance for cultivating collaboration. Users are able to access the toolkit in the different ways mentioned in the beginning of the section, but primarily through Pumpipumpe’s website. The intention is to create a page on Pumpipumpe’s website where visitors are able to ‘Take Action’ and receive information on how to cultivate collaboration through the toolkit. As pictured, instructions are given for each step from downloading, printing, cutting, folding and distributing the physical toolkit. “Collaboration is Cultivation” empowers neighbours to take collaboration into their own hands, work within their local context and begin to build a network of neighbours utilizing the different tools. They also become a useful resource for potential Pumpipumpe users by informing others of the benefits a collaborative lifestyle has in creating a real network within neighbourhoods.

Do you want to make a difference in your neighbourhood? Are you feeling like there is a lack of community in your building? Or are you maybe dreaming of some sort of utopia community that only seems possible in another world? Well, look no further! With our free resource to “An Activist’s Guide to Cultivating Collaboration”, you can get tips, tools and useful information on why and how collaboration and sharing should be an integral part of our neighbourhood communities.

This multipurpose guide can be used in several different ways - activist’s choice! Read it like a booklet or put it up as a poster. After you’ve read it, put the tips to action. Post it on your building’s notice board or put it into your neighbours mailboxes. Distribute the guide around your neighbourhood and start cultivating collaboration!

What are you waiting for?

AN ACTIVIST’S GUIDE TO CULTIVATING COLLABORATION

Download

Click on one of languages that you wish to have your guide in. Your download will automatically start.

English  Deutsch  Français

Print

Simply print off your guide at home. The file can be printed in either A3 or A4 size. In the printer dialog box select the setting “16” under “Page Sizing and Handling”. Remember to select double sided or manually print the other side.

Fold

With the poster side up, open your paper into 6 sections by folding in half along the length. Fold twice in half along the width.

Cut

Pinch the two center sections up. Using scissors, make one cut along the center fold. Then fold the paper lengthwise and press out the center cut that it looks like a plus sign. Continue to fold over the sides into a booklet.

Distribute

Now you’re ready to take action! This multipurpose guide can be used in several different ways. Read it like a booklet or put it up as a poster. Be the activists and distribute the guide around your neighbourhood. Post it on your buildings notice board or put it into your neighbours mailboxes!
The contribution of my work, this written thesis along with the realization of my toolkit “Collaboration is Cultivation”, aims to act as a catalyst for sustainable change which empowers individuals to be activists for collaborative practices and promote sharing in urban neighbourhoods. The toolkit is an important contribution to my collaborator Pumpipumpe. With the implementation of the toolkit a physical touchpoint is created for Pumpipumpe’s users that enables an additional interaction with the service as opposed to just the mailbox stickers. The toolkit gives existing and prospective users the ability to learn about the core value of collaboration that Pumpipumpe has, and how to implement it. It provides the opportunity for their users to take on a different role, to take action, to implement Pumpipumpe in their neighbourhood.

The toolkit’s guidelines brings a new dimension by allowing Pumpipumpe’s service to be much more reconfigurable and customizable. “Today they [designers] find themselves in a world where everybody design and where, as we have seen, their task tends to be to use their own initiatives to help a variegated array of social actors to design better” (Manzini, E. 2015). With the help of the toolkit users can design desirable outcomes for collaboration in their neighbourhood and follow a creative, explorative process. The tools provided in the toolkit act as guidelines as they are opened ended and require user not to just simple follow steps but to define and analyse their context, the issues or create they may be facing in their own neighbourhood. My intention was not to simply provide a guide that follows a “one-size fits all” approach but rather for the user to discover and learn what makes their context and their locality unique. This allows for much deeper analysis, providing better understanding in order for them to then explore and prototype opportunities for collaboration. My aim is to enable users to “recombine what already exists, without waiting for a general change in the system” and become collaborative citizens that will bring sustainable change to their neighbourhoods (Jegou, F & Manzini, E. 2008). This is a valuable aspect to Pumpipumpe as their users are located all over the world in different social and cultural contexts.

The focus on the environmental and social sustainable aspects that collaboration results in is also communicated in the content and material of the toolkit. Pumpipumpe was lacking material and information to give to user’s on the topic of sustainability. Now, with the implementation of the toolkit, it can attract and interest individuals and other groups who are also advocating sustainability. The toolkit provides users with additional cases for action in order to reduce the environmental impact and build social capital in their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the toolkit not only acts as starting point for activating neighbourhoods but also for further development, starting a dialogue with user’s on how they approach cultivating collaboration, perhaps initiating a campaign or movement.

My role in this project is to be the designer and facilitator who provides the tools that enable others to take action. As a designer, I am building and contributing knowledge to the emerging design discipline of design for social innovation. I provide a ‘conversational prompt’ to stimulate a reaction from potential users through the manifesto poster which depicts a utopic scene of what urban neighbourhoods could look like. The toolkit, as a whole, acts an ‘experience enhancer’, a touchpoint for design activism, enabling user’s to prototype and anticipate possible futures for their neighbourhood (Manzini, E. 2015). I believe as designers it is our responsibility to “become active agents in the transition towards sustainable ways of living” (Manzini, E. 2007). I am proposing a toolkit that along with the service of Pumpipumpe can cultivate collaboration in order to develop urban neighbourhoods into ones that are socially and environmentally sustainable. By designing a toolkit I aim to inspire other designers to act as facilitators in complex social contexts where the user’s needs are prioritized over quick fix solutions. The local context, such as urban neighbourhood is understood best by the residents themselves. By providing guidelines designers are able to empower the user’s to work in the local context to provide solutions and scenarios for change.

As a globalized society our relationship to others continue to operate globally rather than locally, resulting in communities of anonymous individuals living in close proximity such as those in urban neighbourhoods. The potential of the coming-together of neighbours explored through this design project exemplifies methods and practices in which collaboration can be implemented in an everyday dimension for sustainable development. The research question throughout this project asks “how might one cultivate collaborative lifestyles in urban contexts to foster a sense of community and lessen the environmental impact caused by overconsumption”? My design project suggests that through the toolkit “Cultivation is Collaboration”, individuals can unlock and activate the potential of their neighbourhoods. The given guidelines, as opposed to one-fix solution, encourages individuals to become activists and design their own desired future. The notion of these micro-practices restores the potential in simple cues such as getting to know one’s neighbour, or lending and borrowing household items, as well more large-scale practices such as starting a dialogue with one’s landlord or developing common spaces within neighbourhoods. Cultivating collaboration requires a systematic understanding of the locality which requires the individuals to build on the social and cultural context in order to effectively implement collaborative practices. The social capital that is built through collaboration can lead to the emergence of new forms of development that are unique to the location of the neighbourhood imagined by the residents themselves. Moreover, the environmental benefits that sharing, borrowing and lending of household items through Pumpipumpe’s service enables the practice of a new consumption model that lessens the environmental impact caused by overconsumption. This alternative model sheds light on the unsustainable aspects of our current system and the impact the consumption of new material items has on the environment that sustains us. Collaboration, in its many forms, has the potential to activate a systemic change that can break down the fundamental pillars of the individualistic and unsustainable lifestyle and behaviours that urban societies bring. With the implementation of collaboration towards a hyper-local community and alternative consumption model, collaboration acts as seed of sustainable change for urban neighbourhoods to grow from.
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