

Coworking as The Great Good Place for Design Learning. An Exploratory Framework

The Great Good Place: Coworking como espaço para aprender Design Uma framework exploratória

Mendes, F. Duarte, C. Tschimmel, K.

UNIDCOM/IADE - IADE, Universidade Europeia

IADE - IADE, Universidade Europeia

FEB/ID+/Mindshake - Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto / Instituto de Investigação em Design, Media e Cultura / Consultancy in Creativity and Design

Retirado de: <http://convergencias.esart.ipcb.pt>

ABSTRACT: In this paper we explore a conceptual framework based on three lines of thinking/work from Patrick Cohendet (*Underground/Middleground/Upperground*), Ray Oldenburg (*The Great Good Place*), and Fred Garnett (*Heutagogy or Self-determined Learning*). To demonstrate the relevance and feasibility of our proposed concept, we review the key factors and definitions of these authors and their work. Although not a theoretical framework, the present paper aims to help us map a part of our research work within the context of the Doctoral Programme in Design at IADE / Universidade Europeia, which triangulates Coworking, Design Learning, and Heutagogy or self-determined modes of learning. Ultimately, the aim is to generate new evidence on how such a model of *Coworking Design Learning* can benefit and better suit contemporary Design learners.

KEYWORDS: Design Learning, Underground-Middleground-Upperground, Coworking, Heutagogy, The Great Good Place.

ABSTRACT: Neste artigo, exploramos uma estrutura conceptual baseada em três linhas de pensamento dos autores Patrick Cohendet (*Underground / Middleground / Upperground*), Ray Oldenburg (*The Great Good Place*) e Fred Garnett (*Heutagogy or Self-determined Learning*). Para demonstrar a relevância e a viabilidade da nossa proposta conceptual, revisitamos os principais fatores e definições destes autores e dos seus trabalhos. Embora não constitua uma *framework* teórica, o presente trabalho tem como objetivo ajudar a mapear parte do nosso trabalho de pesquisa no contexto do Programa de Doutoramento em Design do IADE / Universidade Europeia, que triangula Coworking, Aprendizagem de Design e Heutagogia ou modos autodeterminados de aprendizagem. Em última instância, o objetivo é tentar produzir novas evidências sobre como um modelo de aprendizagem de Design baseado em espaços de Coworking pode beneficiar e adequar-se melhor aos actuais alunos de Design.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Design Learning, Underground-Middleground-Upperground, Coworking, Heutagogia, The Great Good Place.

1. Introduction

Since the lead author is a designer, a Coworking space founder and operator, a Design teacher, and a Ph.D. Design student, we collectively found ourselves right in the middle of a challenging situation. At the beginning of the Doctoral programme, we decided that it would be useful to research and investigate the bridging of possibilities between Coworking spaces, as new “work & learn” spaces, and the myriad of new models for Design learning.

Surprisingly, the first searches and reading for our investigation showed evidence of a lack of relevant literature connecting both fields, i.e Design Education/Learning, and the Coworking global movement.

That is not to say that there is a lack of interest in Design Education issues. On the contrary, Design Education is an ubiquitous theme in virtually all *call for papers*, conferences, discussions and practice in the Design field. Recently, Ken Friedman addressed the challenges of Design and Design Education fields in a lecture at Ullman School of Design (Friedman, 2019). Friedman identifies a volatile new world made of diffuse “boundaries between artefacts, structures, systems, and processes” adding that, consequently, designers have now to design to “ever-shifting needs, requirements, and constraints”. Accordingly, this new ever-shifting world demands new approaches to the way we teach and learn to design, for such a complex and unstable society. In conclusion, Design Education issues are all the rage but it seems that the field is much more concerned with inner solutions than attentive to an entire new array of Design Learning modes and models, mostly from outside of Academia and Higher Education in Design. Friedman’s lecture couldn’t be more poignantly explicit, as this abstract proves:

Design is a discipline, a field, and a profession. Inherently interdisciplinary, often focused on a future that does not yet exist, the work of design involves solving problems for multiple stakeholders in a complex changing world. Designers also seek to create and to invent. Educating people for the design field today involves the legacy of the past and the challenges of the future. Comparable to medical education at the start of the 1900s or business education in the late 1950s, design education is a practical art and an emerging science that requires the full resources of the modern university at a time when the university itself faces extraordinary demands. This lecture examines questions, proposes possible answers, and considers problems that will not be easy to solve.

In short, the two final phrases in this citation perfectly summarise the dimension of the problem in Design Education. A new “modern university” is required. Moreover, Design and its Education will have to use its “full resources” or even find new ones to keep pace with what is happening outside Academia.

Following the same line of thinking, it is observable that small and large operators in Design Education’s wide area of influence are proposing new rapidly

installed approaches and solutions that probably better answer the work market demands. Such new educational projects often arise from the so-called Creative Class and its entrepreneurial ecosystem. Their practice modes are grounded on their responsiveness to new and challenging problems or just instant opportunities. Ezio Manzini describes these projects in a hopeful manner as opposed to the still enduring neo-liberal political system. The author points out the individual and social character of these projects at the same time (Manzini, p.9, 2019), flourishing from open and collaborative groups, driven and vibrant communities or from small-scale nano-companies, startups and other social impact new projects.

Moreover, given the wide spread of Design methodologies, and the adoption of Design Thinking into so many fields and industries, it is truly surprising that the number of books on Design Teaching is so small (Davis, 2017). Equally scarce is the literature on the Coworking movement, mainly due to its informal genesis, although the last years have seen an exponential increase in more relevant literature from researchers and scholars from interdisciplinary fields. A good starting point is the Coworking Library (<https://coworkinglibrary.com/>) ('Coworking Library', n.d.).

Perhaps the most challenging problem we have been facing since our initial research work was choosing either an existing theoretical structure for our thesis or designing a new conceptual and exploratory one. It is important to point out that this is a common problem among doctoral students, and that this paper aims to reinforce the difference between theoretical and conceptual exploratory frameworks.

Ultimately, we decided to approach three concepts related to our first exploratory studies grounded on the field within we have been operating since 2010, i.e. the local Coworking scene and its fast-growing global movement. Firstly, we looked to better understand how the Design Education field is mapped nowadays, tentatively identifying its connection with new learning approaches, and the broader social contexts of our times. To illustrate this, Cohendet's trilogy *Underground*, *Middleground*, and *Upperground* (Cohendet, Grandadam, & Simon, 2010) seemed to fit our purpose. Additionally, two other concepts grabbed our attention. *From Access to Content to Context* is a free and independent line of thinking from Fred Garnett's *The Heutagogy Archives* (Garnett, n.d.) investigating new learning processes, and new learners. Finally, we needed to find an angle from which to fit the Coworking movement within this research, and for that purpose, *The Great Good Place* (Oldenburg, 1999) is an unsurpassed classic on the *third place*, a term coined by the author back in 1989. Oldenburg identifies three core factors in the *third place*: open and free access to all; users as [social] levellers; and what he calls "free conversation".

2. Coworking Design Learning. An Exploratory Conceptual Framework.

2.1. What is a Conceptual Framework?

A Conceptual Framework is used as a lens to observe and understand a particular phenomenon – within a given research project – from the point of view of other researchers (Maxwell, 2012). Such a lens provides a map to the researcher's studies and its inter-connections in line with the research project.

2.2. Theoretical vs Conceptual Framework

Although not absolutely consensual, many authors agree on making a distinction between theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Wikipedia is not an usual reference when it comes to academic work and design research but we venture to transcript here the first lines of the 'Conceptual framework' entry as it specifically addresses our need for an overall picture:

A conceptual framework is an analytical tool with several variations and contexts. It can be applied in different categories of work where an overall picture is needed. It is used to make conceptual distinctions and organize ideas. Strong conceptual frameworks capture something real and do this in a way that is easy to remember and apply. ('Conceptual framework', 2019)

Maxwell notes that a conceptual framework differs from a theoretical framework. In fact, while a conceptual framework maps the researcher's intentions and knowledge on a given problematic, a theoretical framework embodies other researcher's theories aiming to explain particular phenomena (Maxwell, 2012).

Therefore, a conceptual framework consists of an interconnected range of concepts within a less formal structure as opposed to more formal existing theory which in our case we found less applicable. Moreover, because conceptual frameworks often result in empirical observation and intuition, we found it more in line with our current research work.

The immediate purpose of this paper is to organize and clarify the three concepts presented here, finding the relevant relationships between them. We aim to build a context for interpreting further study findings and observations. Finally, we are looking for theory development that is at all levels relevant to Design practice.

2.3. Coworking as "The Great Good Place"

According to Oldenburg, a *third place* is neither a private domestic space (home) nor an institutional place (formal institutions) but a community space, shared and used by all as an escape from home and work (Oldenburg, 1999). Nonetheless, the author notes that the *third place* is not merely what remains from those two other spaces. In fact, it is the *neutral ground* kind of space where individuals have free and open access; a non-hierarchical mode (individuals act as *levellers*); a *home away from home* with free conversation. Coupled with this common and neutral ground are two other key factors Ray Oldenburg found mandatory in establishing a vibrant and lively *third place*, i.e. *regulars* (people keep returning to the place) and a playful mood.

Nonetheless, Oldenburg doesn't include Work at the *third place* although it is now absolute evidence that Coworking, as conceived at the beginning of the 21st century, is exactly the merging of those two dimensions – work and the community place, the *third place*. Significantly, Oldenburg's seminal book was written the same year as the advent of the world wide web (1989) before Work got dematerialised after access to the Internet, portable devices, wifi, hi-speed bandwidth, etc. In short, work has become something we can do whenever and wherever we want, although we won't address here the societal problems this change of paradigm will cause to the way we live in the near future.

In reality, Coworking is much more than just sharing a workplace with others. It is now understood as a global and complex social phenomenon (Waters-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley, 2016) including work, learning, and other human activities. Furthermore, Coworking spaces are taking over, changing, and challenging the way we work; the way creative workers interact; and how space and place relate to these new ways of working (Brown, 2017).

2.4. Heutagogy – From Access to Content to Context

Fred Garnett was a member of London's team at Erasmus+ Project *The Origin of Spaces* (<http://originofspaces.com/>) with the goal of producing an online toolbox to *share existing know-how and explore new practices related to coworking ecosystems*. ('Origin of Spaces - Innovative practices for creative clusters',

n.d.). Other teams included the cities of Lisboa (Portugal), Bilbao (Spain), Pula (Croatia, and Bordeaux (France). In Lisboa, the team gathered LX Factory and Coworklisboa (founded in 2010 by the first author of this paper).

Garnett's work deals with heutagogy (or self-determined learning), and self-determined learning places in a context-based future post web 2.0 pedagogic model (Garnett, n.d.). Heutagogy can be described as self-directed learning as opposed to Andragogy which is student-centered learning (Halupa, 2015). The heutagogical model of learning is primarily based on the learner and its own particular context (Hase & Kenyon, 2000). These authors suggests heutagogy learning models would contribute to *a far more creative approach to learning, no matter what the context*.

Therefore, heutagogy can be seen as the most appropriate pedagogical strategy to face future challenges in Design learning. According to Hase "[...] knowing how to learn will be a fundamental skill given the pace of innovation and the changing structure of communities and workplaces" (Hase, 2000).

2.4. Underground / Middleground / Upperground

Underground / Middleground / Upperground is a theoretical framework originally proposed in 2010 by Patrick Cohendet (Cohendet, Grandadam & Simon, 2010). The author suggests an *Anatomy of the City* based on three levels or layers contributing to a creative feed of knowledge between those three levels. This section describes Cohendet's system, exclusively based on his original article.

The *Underground* is the level of the individuals, including the actual creative workers, remote workers, digital nomads, and independent professionals. In contrast, the *Upperground*, on top of these three layers, comprises the level of all the formal institutions, companies, services, etc. Finally, the *Middleground* connects the two previous levels, aiming to identify communities.

At the *Underground* level lives everyone and everything that is not based on formal relationships or organisations. These actors have a strong connection with art and culture, nourishing their identity and lifestyle. In contrast, this level and its players feed up the corporate and formal world of the *Upperground*, establishing new trends in art, urban culture, sports, fashion, gaming, etc. As a result, the *Middleground* is a mediation field, in between the levels above and below, that connects the formal and the informal world. Accordingly, Coworking spaces belong naturally to the *Middleground* as mediating spaces between formal and informal dimensions like Work, Leisure, and Learning.

2.5. Coworking Open Design Learning - An Exploratory Framework

Based on a merging between the three presented concepts from Cohendet, Garnett, and Oldenburg, we present an exploratory and ongoing conceptual framework towards a Coworking Design Learning model based on a context-based heutagogical approach. The main purpose of such a framework is to map our research work. Our quest is to pursue and make available new knowledge for new Design Learning strategies grounded on how coworking spaces nurture their communities, and how those spaces are in fact learning spaces based on self-determined modes of acquiring knowledge.

These are times of transdisciplinarity where a learner gathers knowledge from all sorts of sources, breaking any formal barrier between work, learning, home and community (Middleton, 2018). In spite of this context, Design at Higher Education is still struggling to keep the pace with profound and diffuse changes brought by these new learners. Andrew Middleton calls these new learners the *nomadic learners*. The author recalls the lack of strategies from the University to address these new learners demands and to propose non-formal spaces to learn.

In 2015, Ezio Manzini proposed a new Design definition which we believe integrates that emerging notion of the necessity of collaboration at all levels in the Design field. Manzini refers to "all the involved actors". This sentence now includes all areas of knowledge, defining new roles for "the design experts", probably as catalysts of the mentioned "open-ended co-design processes":

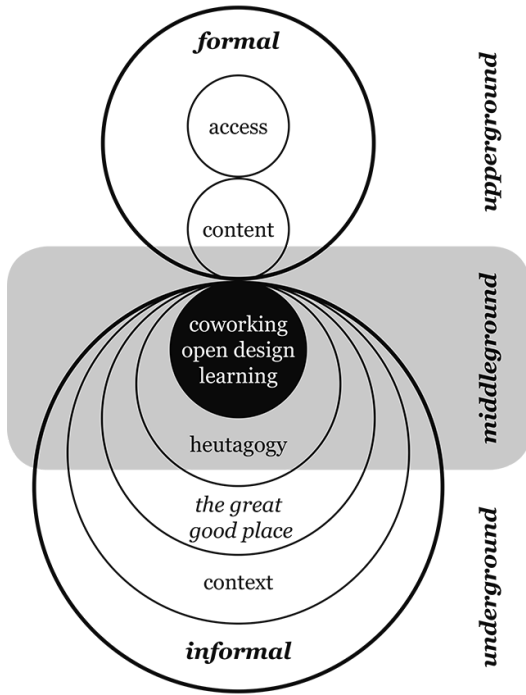
Design is a culture and a practice concerning how things ought to be in order to attain desired functions and meanings. It takes place within open-ended co-design processes in which all the involved actors participate in different ways. It is based on a human capability that everyone can cultivate and which for some – the design experts – becomes a profession. The role of design experts is to trigger and support these open-ended co-design processes, using their design knowledge to conceive and enhance clear-cut, focused design initiatives. (Manzini, 2015, p.53)

The proposed framework embodies the foundational three layers from Cohendet adding the conceptual work from Garnett and Ray Oldenburg at the core level of this system – the *Underground*. We aim to describe in detail each layer towards a better understanding of the entire system.

The proposed framework embodies the foundational three layers from Cohendet adding the conceptual work from Garnett and Ray Oldenburg at the core level of this system – the *Underground*. We aim to describe in detail each layer towards a better understanding of the entire system.

As can be seen in fig. 01, this framework is based on the trilogy *Upperground/Middleground/Underground* originally proposed by Patrick Cohendet. It also includes Garnett and Oldenburg concepts at the *Underground*. Although the *third place*, as presented by Oldenburg, would logically fit into the *Middleground*, we believe it is today a transition between the *Underground* and the *Middleground*, i.e some *third places* never migrate to the *Middleground*, keeping their original self-determined nature, while others embrace the mediation with the formal world above.

Fig.1 — Coworking Design Learning Conceptual Framework.



Source: Authors

At the present time, Design Education is still a matter of the formal world of the *Upperground*. More and more experiences and models are being tested worldwide but, one way or another, the majority of these experiments end up at the formal level of the learning institutions. Conversely, the core factors of the *Underground* are the openness of the place; its levellers, i.e people who guarantee the spirit of the place; and a sense of freedom to bring any issue, content or idea to the place. Furthermore, in a time of complexity and uncertainty, learning has to shift from simple access [to education] to content [being taught] to context [first we shape the context, then the context shapes us] (Garnett, n.d.).

As a result, what sometimes start at the *Underground*, coming from the individuals' creative class, is then absorbed by the formal institutions without the mediation offered by the *Middleground*. Coworking spaces are *Middleground* by nature; places of mediation between individuals; between work and learning; between formal and informal; self-determined to its core. We propose a simple four quadrants diagram to illustrate the relative position between formal/informal & open/exclusive design learning spaces and schools in fig.2.

Fig. 2 — Formal / informal and open / exclusive design learning spaces and schools.

	Formal	Informal	
Exclusive	Q1 Classical Exclusive Design Schools	Q2 Private Exclusive Design Schools	Exclusive
Open	Q3 New Formal Design Learning Schools	Q4 Open Collaborative Design Learning Spaces	Open
	Formal	Informal	

Source: Authors

Conclusions

Coworking spaces – as a new evidence of merged spaces between work and learning – are in the *Middleground* field proposed by our exploratory framework based on Cohendet's concept, while Higher Education Schools in Design still operate in the *Upperground*, disconnected from the new trends coming from the base of this framework, the *Underground*, its actors, and players. Our studies and research points to the need of an important shifting in Design Learning Spaces [both physical and human] migrating from the formal world to a more informal one, one better connected to the creative class nowadays nourishing the two levels above.

We also anticipate, and look for validation, that an heutagological model based on learning Design at Coworking spaces will be the natural space for the new designers required to deal with new and complex problems. All things considered, such a designed space to learn Design would embody a sense of learning in a self-determined way, together with peers and professionals.

To summarise, we expect this exploratory work to help us validate the assumption that new self-determined learning strategies in Design are needed to prepare new designers to the new complex problems of this world.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Professor Manuel Laranja for introducing us to the *Underground/Middleground/Upperground* and for the inspiring years of work on Erasmus+ project “The Origin of Spaces”, all together with five cities in Europe (London, Lisboa, Pula, Bilbao, and Bordeaux). We also offer thanks for the invitation to co-author an article on *Sustainable Creative Cities*.

We also extend our thanks to Fred Garnett for all the inspiration and insightful conversations we had since the day we first met in Bordeaux. Getting to know about heutagogy was truly transformative to our research project.

A preliminary version of this paper was published in DDC’19 Conference in: Duarte, E. (Ed.) (2019). *Design Doctoral Conference’19: TRANSformation. Proceedings of the DDC 6th Conference*. Lisbon: IADE, Universidade Europeia / EDIÇÕES IADE. ISBN: 978-989-8473-27-1

References

- Brown, J. (2017). Curating the “Third Place”? Coworking and the mediation of creativity. *Geoforum*, 82, 112–126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.04.006>
- Cohendet, P., Grandadam, D., & Simon, L. (2010). The Anatomy of the Creative City. *Industry and Innovation*, 17(1), 91–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13662710903573869>
- Conceptual framework. (2019). In Wikipedia. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Conceptual_framework&oldid=884224197
- Coworking Library. (n.d.). Retrieved 16 April 2019, from Coworking Library website: <https://coworkinglibrary.com/>
- Davis, M. (2017). *Teaching Design – A guide to curriculum and pedagogy for college design faculty and teachers who use design in their classrooms*. New York: All-worth Press.
- Friedman, K. (2019). Design Education Today - Challenges, Opportunities, Failures. Chatterjee Global Lecture Series.
- Garnett, F. (n.d.). The Heutagogy Archives. Retrieved 16 April 2019, from The Heutagogy Archives website: <https://heutagogicarchive.wordpress.com/>
- Halupa, C. (2015). Pedagogy, Andragogy, and Heutagogy. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-8571-0.ch005>
- Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (2000). From Andragogy to Heutagogy. *Ultibase Articles*, 5(3), 1-10.
- Manzini, E. (2015). *Design, When Everybody Designs – An Introduction to design for Social Innovation*. London: The MIT Press.
- Manzini, E. (2019). *Politics of the Everyday*. England: Bloomsbury.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative Research Design – An Interactive Approach*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Middleton, A. (2018). *Reimagining Spaces for Learning in Higher Education*. Palgrave.
- Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The Great Good Place. Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (3rd ed.). USA: Da Capo Press.
- Waters-Lynch, J. M., Potts, J., Butcher, T., Dodson, J., & Hurley, J. (2016). Coworking: A Transdisciplinary Overview (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 2712217). Retrieved from Social Science Research Network website: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2712217>

Reference According to APA Style, 5th edition:

Mendes, F. Duarte, C. Tschimmel, K. ; (2019) Coworking as The Great Good Place for Design Learning. An Exploratory Framework. *Convergências - Revista de Investigação e Ensino das Artes*, VOL XII (24) Retrieved from journal URL: <http://convergencias.ipcb.pt>