

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AS VALUE CREATORS:

Exploring participatory knowledge
creation with the Lapinlahti community

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Master's thesis for Master of Arts (Art & Design)
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Abstract

In the neoliberal economic system value-extraction is more highly rewarded than value-creation, and only things with a price are accounted for in the usual metrics (Mazzucato, 2018). The underlying ideology of never-ending growth, competition and the monetized idea of value has permeated all levels of society (Harvey, 2005; Hickel, 2020) resulting in damages to communities, society and planetary systems. In order to find more socially sustainable ways of living, it is worthwhile to try and understand how communities could promote resilience on an individual and societal level, and what non-monetary value this could create.

The general aim of this thesis is to explore how resilient communities can sustain spaces for livelihood practices that are alternative to those provided by a capitalist state, or situated on the margins of capitalism. The objective was to explore how early-stage participatory research and design methods can be used in a design research process for learning together with a community and understanding how they promote resilience and create non-monetary value. By researching and making visible what non-monetary value resilient communities create, neoliberal ideas of value and success are called into question.

A literature review provides an overview of the four key topics of this thesis: 1) value, 2) care, 3) the commons and commoning, and 4) community resilience.

The Lapinlahti community was used as a case study of a resilient community in Helsinki as they have persevered throughout the years, despite their existence being under constant threat, through means of resistance, adaptation and transformation, all the while retaining their identity and core values.

The research methods used draw from social design and participatory action research, and included semi-structured interviews and a participatory workshop. The aim of this methodology was to create knowledge together with the community, instead of extracting knowledge from them.

The findings suggest that resilience and non-monetary value is created through various commoning practices, i.e. managing a common resource for collective benefit, and through care provided by the community. The most important form of value the Lapinlahti community creates is well-being, which becomes apparent through the experiential knowledge of community members. These findings call to question neoliberal values, because they show that Lapinlahti's success was not born out of financial growth, but through resilience and commoning.

Keywords community, resilience, commoning, value, participatory design, social sustainability

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Chapter 1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The ideological baggage of capitalism, in which success is measured in terms of growth and competition is rewarded over collaboration, is problematic for communities and individuals alike (Hickel, 2020). A successful person in the currently dominant view is someone with a steady income and is moving up the career ladder until they retire. Neo-classical economic theory, which governs how the majority of governments worldwide operate, is based on the idea that individuals make choices based on maximizing their own utility, which means benefit or happiness (Mazzucato, 2018). Hence, it can be argued that capitalist societies promote individualism, because people living in them are dependent on their jobs and income for survival, leaving little time for things like active citizenship, creative expression, having community engagements, or caring for family members, leaving individuals highly vulnerable.

However, using the words of two critical scholars interested in alternative ways to reckon value, “life does not exist without community as a process of connection-amidst-difference, without being-incommon” (Gibson-Graham & Miller, 2015: 3). Individuals emerge from socialites, communities, or “co-evolving associates”, and not the other way around as is often thought. In order to find more socially sustainable ways of living, it is worthwhile to try and understand how communities can promote resilience on an individual and societal level, and what non-monetary value they create.

This thesis focuses on the Lapinlahti community as an example of a resilient community in Helsinki. They are based in Lapinlahti, an old psychiatric hospital in the center of Helsinki, surrounded by a beautiful green park and the sea. The community was originally formed around a common cause: to salvage the deteriorating historic buildings and its surrounding park and repurpose this unused resource for the benefit of the people of Helsinki, especially those in most need. The Lapinlahti community manages this resource for collective benefit through various commoning practices. Today it is a hub for arts, culture and mental health. They provide rehabilitative work opportunities for people who could not be employed elsewhere due to mental health issues or other reasons. Lapinlahti is one of the few non-commercial spaces in Helsinki that is open for everyone. The main building is open to the public every day of the year, and the community organizes various free events, activities and services. The area is in public ownership by the city of Helsinki, but the community largely manages the upkeep of the real-estate. (Laaksoharju et al., 2022)

However, their existence has been under constant threat. The city has been planning on selling the property to private investors because the current activities in the area do not generate much income to the city, and

the historical building requires maintenance and renovations which are highly costly (STT Info, 2020). Despite this, the Lapinlahti community has persevered through means of resistance, adaptation and transformation, all the while retaining their identity and core values.

Figure 1. View of Lapinlahti (Welp, n.d.)



Figure 2. Band performing at Lapinlahti (Leppikangas, n.d.)



1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The neoliberal economic system has caused, and continues to cause, destructive damages to society and planetary systems. The hypothesis of this thesis is that communities and their commoning practices can act as a beacon and demonstrate ways to live well and help heal these wounds.

The general aim of this thesis is to explore how resilient communities can sustain spaces for livelihood and commoning practices that are alternative to the forms provided by a capitalist state, or situated on the margins of capitalism. By researching what non-monetary value resilient communities create, I aim to question neoliberal ideas of value and success.

The objective is to explore how early-stage participatory research and design methods can be used in a design research process for learning together with a community and understanding how they promote resilience and create non-monetary value. This approach provides the community with more agency over the research process, data, and other outcomes produced, and facilitates a collaborative research process.

Research questions:

1. How could early introduction of participatory design approaches contribute towards building resilience and commoning in community driven centers for culture and well-being?
2. How can resilient communities and commoning strengthen resilience and bring non-monetary value to individuals and local society in Helsinki?
 - a) How can this be a means of questioning neoliberal values?

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2. Literature review provides a theoretical background and introduces the four main topics of this thesis: 1) value, 2) care, 3) the commons and community, and 4) community resilience.

Chapter 3. Case and context introduces the Lapinlahti community in Helsinki as a case study of a resilient community, after which it explains the context and motivations behind the research topic and chosen case study.

Chapter 4. Approach and methodology begins by introducing the methodologies of this thesis, which are social design and participatory action research, and explaining their relevance to the thesis topics and why they were chosen. Next, it goes over how participatory design methods were used to conduct research together with the Lapinlahti community members. This consisted of two main parts: semi-structured interviews and a workshop.

The chapter ends with an overview of the ethical considerations that were taken during the study.

Chapter 5. Results provides an overview of the findings of the semi-structured interviews and the workshop, presenting key themes and discrepancies.

Chapter 6. Discussion reflects upon the research findings in relation to the thesis aims and objectives, and evaluates how these findings contribute to answering the research questions. First, the value of participation is discussed. Second, the various forms of non-monetary value created by the community are reflected upon. Third, the ways in which the Lapinlahti community supports resilience on an individual and community level is evaluated, and the problem with glorifying resilience is discussed. Finally, the implications are addressed, raising questions and a call to action.

Chapter 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides the theoretical background and introduces the four main topics of this thesis in relation to the research questions: 1) value, 2) care, 3) the commons and commoning, and 4) community resilience. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview of these highly complex topics, but to summarize the key issues and theoretical frameworks that are critical to the research questions and the specific scope and context of this thesis.

2.1 VALUE

This section takes a partial view on the topic which focuses on highlighting the problematic aspects of the neoliberal ideas on value, and offers alternative views which are helpful in understanding value and value creation in the context of communities and social sustainability.

Neoliberalisation has intensified the political role of monetary and financial accounting in a relatively short time, starting from the 1970s, in almost all countries around the world. These principles underpin most official political, administrative, and educational institutions that exist, affecting all levels of society right down to our ideological conceptions of value and how we think and operate in the everyday, even though these ideas come from the economic realm. (Harvey, 2005)

According to Elke den Ouden, the concept of value can be understood from four different perspectives: economy, psychology, sociology, and ecology. The most holistic understanding of value is the ecological perspective, as it recognizes that humans are part of a larger system which is this planet. It encompasses relationships between people, as well as the relationship of people and their surroundings. (den Ouden, 2011)

However, in modern-day Western societies the general understanding of value is dominated by the economic theory of value, but the concept of value is much more complex than the perceived worth or desirability of objects. An alternative view is the *relational* theory of value, which recognizes that value is born through a process of interactions between beings and entities, and is not something static that can be measured with just numbers. (Bollier, 2017)

In capitalist economies, value-extraction is rewarded more highly than value-creation. Unlike in the past where the price of things was determined by their value, in neo-classical economics value is determined by price. The price of things is determined by the equilibrium point of supply and demand, which is based on the assumptions of people's preferences, the assumption that individuals (aka consumers) and

companies make decisions based on maximizing utility or profit. This has resulted in the use of metrics (like the GDP) which only measure things with a price. This is highly problematic because as a result, for example natural disasters or pollution actually increase GDP, while staying home to care for yourself or a family member decreases GDP. If a system does not recognize that activities which fulfill basic human needs create value, there must be something deeply wrong with it. Leaders, decision-makers, researchers and academics in capitalist societies need to be questioning what is value and who or what creates it? What other forms of value exist besides the kind that generates monetary gains, and how is it created? (Mazzucato, 2018)

To start answering this question, we should first understand that even though in Western capitalist societies, the economy is usually seen as a system separate from the social and the ecological, it is in fact dependent on ecological ‘resources’ and social interactions, and all three are inextricably enmeshed (Miller, 2019). Without acknowledging this, we cannot create truly holistic solutions to today’s wicked problems like inequality, poverty, biodiversity loss and climate change. Unless we understand the full scale and complexity of problems, the solutions will remain surface level or only address part of the problem. Design research methods such as field research, collaborative design, and creating systemic descriptions of data, can be useful in gaining a deeper, contextual and empathetic understanding that goes beyond just data analysis (Koskinen et al., 2011). These are vital elements to “addressing the growing crisis in collective well being around the world” (Botero, 2013).

J.K. Gibson-Graham’s Diverse Economies Iceberg (Figure 1) illustrates how the lion’s share of all value created in an economy is invisible. It shows that the things that are usually accounted for in the GDP and other dominating value metrics (such as wage labor, commodity markets, and capitalist enterprise), are actually sustained by these invisible forms of value creation (such as communities and care) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Diverse Economies Iceberg (Community Economies Collective, n.d.)



There are alternative metrics to the GDP, for example the World Happiness Index, Bhutan’s gross national happiness (GNH), Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), OECD’s Better Life Index, etc. None of these metrics are fully reliable though, as they generate very differing rankings and are subject to the bias of what indicators are considered to bring value (i.e. income, life-expectancy, corruption, etc.) (Julier & Hodson, 2021). Many of these rankings correlate with the economic welfare of countries’ citizens, suggesting that the metrics assume that economic welfare brings happiness. This assumption needs to be problematized in order to shift materialistic neoliberal ideologies. Of course we should continue to strive to improve economic welfare in countries where people struggle to meet their basic needs, but this should not be the only way to attempt to improve well-being. Furthermore, as Julier and Hodson point out, these rankings promote competition and performative actions among nations, missing “complex, multi-speed, open-ended unfolding of everyday practices that produce value” (Julier & Hodson, 2021: 99-100). They introduce the idea of using territories and temporalities as starting points to thinking about value, meaning that we recognize “the changing kinds of value that take place in different locations and times”, instead of placing spatial or temporal constraints, like what is the best country to live in at a given year

(Julier & Hodson, 2021: 100). As Kaika proclaims, we must “stop claiming that global socio-environmental equality, social welfare or value creation can be reduced to indicators” (Kaika, 2017: 94).

2.2 CARE

“... the idea that you could build a society that assumes every adult is a person with primary care responsibilities, community engagements, and social commitments. That’s not utopian. It’s a vision based on what human life is really like.”

(Fraser & Leonard, 2016)

We all depend on care, it is essential to our well-being, yet it is not valued in our current economic system. Since social reproduction has been separated from economic production, care is being commodified in the same way as natural resources are being exploited.

“The current, financialized form of capitalism is systematically consuming our capacities to sustain social bonds, like a tiger that eats its own tail. The result is a **“crisis of care”** that is every bit as serious and systemic as the current ecological crisis, with which it is, in any case, intertwined” (Fraser & Leonard, 2016).

In that matter, one cannot ignore the inherently gendered nature of the issue, due to the fact that care work has been historically performed mainly by women, as Fraser explains: “the gendered separation of social reproduction from economic production constitutes the principal institutional basis for women’s subordination in capitalist societies. So for feminism, there can be no more central issue than this.” (Fraser & Leonard, 2016) This illustrates how the work of women has historically been taken for granted, and not included in economic value metrics. As a result, the majority of care work is unpaid. A report by Oxfam estimates that the monetary value of unpaid care work globally for women is *three times* that of the world’s tech industry (Coffey et al. 2020). However, this unpaid care work is completely invisible in current metrics, and includes care provided by families, friends and communities. This can mean helping out with daily chores or tasks, providing emotional support and a feeling of belonging or meaning. These may seem like small things, but having social support is key to our mental well-being (Laaksoharju et al., 2022; THL, 2021; Mieli, 2022).

In Finland, the economy is managed by the state to a certain degree

and care is partially socialized, but it is still a capitalist state which, like many other countries, is struggling with a shortage of care workers (i.e. nurses) (Keva, 2023), due to wages not matching the harsh working conditions (Tevameri, 2021). Coupled with an aging population, this places a high demand for state-provided care (ibid.). This has resulted in an absurd situation where the district court has banned nurses from striking (Muhonen, 2022), effectively saying that the work of nurses is seen as important enough for the government to force them to work, but simultaneously not valued enough to pay them a decent wage.

The mental health care sector, especially, is under pressure in Finland. Only half of people who suffer from mental health problems receive necessary care. This is problematic because ineffective and inaccessible health care services create inequality. Common risk factors for mental health problems include having a parent with mental health problems, poverty, addiction, and belonging to a minority group. These are things that often accumulate and are transgenerational, which is why access to care is so crucial when it comes to combating inequality. Investing in preventive methods and low-threshold, early-stage care are effective means of relieving pressure on the health care sector, and these are services that are usually provided by the third sector, also known as the charitable, non-commercial sector. (Mieli, 2022; Mieli, 2023)

Fortunately, there seems to be a growing interest in forms of enterprise and initiatives that are productive and create value but not in the conventional capitalist sense. An example of this is Finland's new HYTE (health and well-being promotion) strategy, which aims to strengthen preventive care methods and increase equal access to health and social services (THL, 2022). One way to achieve this is to strengthen cooperation between the public sector and the third sector (THL, 2022), because it has been recognized that the third sector plays an important role in promoting health well-being, for example through combating loneliness, education, physical and outdoor activities, peer support groups, crisis support, etc. (THL 2023). Most importantly, third sector organizations provide opportunities for participation and active citizenship for those whose voices are usually not heard, and an opportunity to belong to a community, which creates social capital (ibid.). This is all very promising, as it suggests a growing awareness of the notion that well-being cannot be achieved via capitalist enterprise or commodity markets alone.

2.3 THE COMMONS AND COMMONING

A concept and practice which challenges the current value theory and provides exciting opportunities for creating alternative economies outside of the capitalist market system is the commons. Simply put, the commons are things that no one owns and are shared by everyone (Bollier, 2014).

Traditionally, theory on the commons has focused on natural resources, i.e. water and land, but it has expanded to include non-material social and cultural resources as well, i.e. information, intellectual property or shared culture itself, known as the ‘new commons’ (Singh, 2017). By expanding the commons, we can improve the welfare purchasing power of people’s incomes and decrease inequality, as it makes resources more accessible to those who cannot afford to pay for them in the private market (Hickel, 2020).

According to Silke Helfrich, “in a commons, value is an event. It is something that needs to be enacted again and again” (Bollier, 2017). Dimitriou explains that the commons involve “a common pool of resources (understood as non-commodified means of fulfilling people’s needs), a community to sustain them, and “commoning” as a verb, which is the social process that creates and reproduces the commons” (Dimitriou, 2020: 241). To help us understand what is meant by this social process, Bollier explains “the social practices and norms that help a community manage a resource for collective benefit” (Bollier, 2014). “Commoning relates to practices that enable our livelihoods” (Poderi et al., 2022), and might include community gardens or other collectively run spaces, or free cultural events and services which support well-being and learning. These are the kinds of things that create value. This means that communities can act as safety nets and support systems through sharing of resources and volunteering, and can provide a feeling of belonging and kinship. As Dimitriou states, “a familiar private space does not entail a community, the commons does.” She explains that a community is more than just a group of people, it is born from “interactions, assemblies, and sharing.” (Dimitriou, 2020: 249)

“the commons are not only the practices for sharing in an egalitarian manner the resources we produce but are also a commitment to the fostering of common interest in every aspect of our lives and political work. [...] Activists advocate thinking about commoning as a set of generative practices that support sustenance and enhancement of life” (Singh, 2017: 753)

In the modern-day West, our understanding of the commons is often based on Garrett Hardin’s theory on the ‘tragedy of the commons’, which assumes that individuals will inevitably exploit the commons for their personal benefit, and hence the commons should be privatized or controlled by the government (Hardin, 1968). This theory does not take into account the fact that humans have successfully managed the commons for thousands of years before the invention of property litigation mechanisms, and has been disputed by many scholars since (Poderi et al., 2022).

Understanding the commons and commoning through a *relational* ontology (also the indigenous ontology) is key to resisting Western neoliberal ideologies of individualism and privatization, as it “displaces the human, its rationality, and its agency over the world from the center of discourse”, and defines all beings as “inherently interdependent” (Poderi et al., 2022; Singh, 2017). Indigenous peoples around the world have kept this knowledge alive to this day, as they often embrace a “sense of ‘being-in-common’ with the rest of the world” and view the commons “as a source of sustenance of life that needs to be nurtured with relations of care” (Singh, 2017).

There is a growing body of research within participatory design on the commons as an objective, and commoning as a way of doing design, as well as “emerging practices of creating new commons, especially in the global North in spheres such as open-source software, urban gardens, and the reclamation of cities” (Singh, 2017). Examples of this include the Active Seniors case in Finland, a project where designers worked collaboratively with an association of seniors to develop a communal housing arrangement and a digital intranet, or ‘life management system’ (Botero, 2013), as well as Jegou and Manzini’s (2008) explorations on how creative communities create social innovations through ‘collaborative services’, i.e. car-sharing, bicycle self-repair workshop, and home nursery, with the support of designers.

2.4 COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Capitalism has brought many threats to our societies and ecosystems, and in order to survive these threats we must think of ways to improve resilience within them. The UNSDG defines resilience as:

“the ability of individuals, households, communities, cities, institutions, systems and societies to prevent, resist, absorb, adapt, respond and recover positively, efficiently and effectively when faced with a wide range of risks, while maintaining an acceptable level of functioning without compromising long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and well-being for all.” (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2021: 3)

Resilience has become somewhat of a buzzword, due to the ongoing discourse regarding climate resilience and especially after the Covid-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2023; Vataja, 2021). The 2022 IPCC report recognizes the importance of climate resilience in improving “well-being for all” and that social justice and climate issues are interwoven together (IPCC, 2022). This thesis focuses only on community resilience, but it is important to keep this connection in mind because strong

community resilience is needed now more than ever as we are faced with multiple environmental challenges that are threatening the integrity of various planetary systems which we rely on (Steffen et al. 2015).

Katy Wright (2021) defines community resilience as the “collective ability of a social group to ‘sustain its well-being in the face of challenges’ and/or cope with or recover from stresses”. She categorizes resilience under four different types:

- Resistance – “holding the line”
- Bounce-back – “getting back to normal”
- Adaptation – “adjusting to a new normal”
- Transformation – “owning a need to change”

As research demonstrates (Hickel, 2020; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Dimitriou, 2020), people are more vulnerable in individualistic societies, and communities can provide resilience because its members take care of each other. Communities have the possibility of being more autonomous as they can have various sources of resources. They support more sustainable ways of life by improving well-being and equality, as members are more motivated to contribute to helping others, because by doing so they benefit from it as well through reciprocity (Nowak, 2012). Maintaining a peer community within a hostile capitalist order requires that the community “create membranes to capture value from the dominant system, but then to filter it and use it in different ways” – i.e., through collective decision making and social solidarity, not through the market logic of money-based, individual exchange (Bollier, 2017). In this way, communities can create non-monetary value through livelihood and commoning practices that are alternative to those promoted by a capitalist state. An example of communities creating non-monetary value through care is the case of Nicoya, one of the poorest parts of Costa Rica. Nicoya has surprisingly high life-expectancy rates because they have strong communities. “In fact, the poorest households have the longest life expectancies, because they are more likely to live together and rely on each other for support” (Hickel, 2020: 183).

2.4.1 RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN FINLAND

There are many examples of resilient communities in Finland which create value outside of, or on the fringes of, the capitalist system. This thesis focuses on the case of Lapinlahti, which will be introduced in section 3. Case and context, but I will briefly introduce two other examples: Legioonateatteri in Tampere, and Kalliolan Setlementti in Helsinki.

Legioonateatteri is a social theater and non-profit association in Tampere, which focuses on preventing young adults from becoming marginalized or excluded from society and supporting their mental health through theater practices. Unemployed 18-28 year-olds can join Legioonateatteri’s

theater workshop through public social rehabilitation services. The goal of Legioonateatteri's practice is to strengthen the participants' interpersonal skills, agency, confidence, and skills to cope in everyday life. The theater productions take a political stance and provide the participants/actors with an opportunity to join societal discourses and become more active citizens. (Järviluoma et al., 2021) I have personally witnessed the impact the theater has on people's lives. I have many friends who have gone to Legioonateatteri, all of whom have said it was life-changing in the best sense. This thesis was originally going to use Legioonateatteri as a case study, but was changed due to practical issues.

Another example is Kalliolan Setlementti (aka Kalliola), a non-profit registered association in Helsinki, which is a community center with the purpose of increasing well-being and fellowship by providing various social services (i.e. rehabilitation services, employment services, dispute mediation), activities (i.e. language cafes, hobby groups, activities for youth), volunteering opportunities, courses through their adult education center, and open community spaces. Their target audience are people in vulnerable positions, i.e. the currently or formerly incarcerated, unemployed, and other marginalized groups. (Kalliola, 2023)

Lapinlahti, Legioonateatteri and Kalliola are all community-led, non-commercial spaces which focus on improving well-being and resilience through practices of commoning and civic action, and by enacting these collaborations create value. Most rehabilitation service schemes focus on getting the 'user' back into full-time employment as fast as possible. This typically happens by providing them with (usually low-effort and low-wage) work 1-4 days a week, and the 'rehabilitation' comes from increasing their hours incrementally (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus, 2023). This is because if you are not making money and paying taxes, you are seen as 'inactive' and an expense to society. Lapinlahti, Legioonateatteri, and Kalliola on the other hand provide holistically rehabilitative services to those in need with a focus on increasing well-being through care, instead of focusing on financial productivity. (Järviluoma et al. 2021) (Kalliola, 2023) (Laaksoharju et al. 2022)

These examples, and countless others that have gone unmentioned, go to show that *we already know* how to live well outside of the capitalist systems, and we already know what brings value to society and how to create it. **There is nothing new about these cases. What is new is that these forms of livelihood practices have become 'radical' and can be seen as forms of 'resistance' because the system we live in makes it increasingly difficult for them to exist.**

Chapter 3.

CASE AND CONTEXT

3. CASE AND CONTEXT

This chapter introduces the Lapinlahti community in Helsinki as a case study of a resilient community, and explains the context and motivations behind the research topic and chosen case study.

Figure 4. Illustrated map of Lapinlahti (Pro Lapinlahti mielenterveysseura ry, n.d.)



“Lapinlahden Lähde is a community that creates societal impact by means of arts, culture, sustainable entrepreneurship and supporting mental wellbeing. Lapinlahti community employs 400 people annually and serves at least 130 000 customers per year. The organization hosts events, provides services and volunteering opportunities, and supports active citizenship. The services and events provided by Lapinlahden Lähde target vulnerable and marginalized groups and individuals, especially those suffering from mental health issues and loneliness.” (Nieminen et al., 2022)

Loneliness is common among various demographics in the city of Helsinki (Hyry, 2022), such as single parents, immigrants, unemployed, and others who find themselves lacking a community or people around them to care for them. Lapinlahti aims to provide the kind of support and care that a community can provide to those who need it the most through things like rehabilitative work and volunteering opportunities, free events and activities, and by simply providing a free and open space to spend time in. Lapinlahti is focused on arts and culture as a means of supporting and creating well-being. (Laaksoharju et al., 2022)

The community was originally formed around a common cause; to salvage the deteriorating historic buildings and its surrounding park and repurpose this unused resource for the benefit of the people of Helsinki, especially those in most need. In the case of Lapinlahti, the commons are the real-estate which they manage through various commoning practices and use to organize free and open events and services for the common good. The community's activities, plans, goals, and decisions, are guided by their mission statement and core values (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Lapinlahti's mission statement and core values

MISSION	VALUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening mental well-being through mental health work, arts, culture, employment and social entrepreneurship. • Fostering positive mental health and a safe and inclusive, physically and culturally valuable space. • Promoting and strengthening vivid arts and cultural life. • Promoting social entrepreneurship and activism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusivity • Transparency • Sustainability • Responsibility • Boldness • Flexibility • Meaningfulness

Lapinlahti has been using participatory processes since the beginning through various projects and in the way the organizations are managed. Examples of this include:

- Tilajakamo operates as a cooperative.
- Pro Lapinlahti and Tilajakamo have democratically elected boards.
- In 2020 the Future Lapinlahti-project invited people to participate in the future visioning on Lapinlahti.
- The Lapinlahti community actively collaborates with other organizations and institutions.
- Weekly community meetings
- Employees and volunteers have a say in how and when they want to work, and what kind of tasks they want to take on.
- Gathering feedback from attendees and users
- The Lapinlahti Ohjausryhmä (steering group), which coordinates internal communal activities and external communications, is open for all active community members to join.

Almost all of Lapinlahti's events are open for everyone and free of charge, and anyone can participate in organizing them. Community members are being actively offered opportunities to participate.

One of the main threats to Lapinlahti, as with most non-profit organizations, is the dependency on outside funding, which means they have to continually fight for their existence and prove their worth to funders. Because the upkeep of the old building is very costly for the city and they do not receive much monetary income from it, there have been plans to sell to private investors. In 2019 the city launched a competition for the best idea for how to develop the area. The winner was the multinational investment company NREP with a plan which included turning the main building into a hostel and museum, as well as building a new hotel in the area. (STT Info, 2020) The plans were scrapped thanks to the political activism and resistance of the community and the wide public support they received (Bäckgren, 2020).

3.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

In the spring of 2022 I worked with Lapinlahti on a project for the Creative Sustainability program's Capstone-course. Lapinlahti wanted to reach vulnerable groups better with their events, activities and services in order to increase their societal impact. Our solution was to create a community network of the various organizations working with similar target groups in Helsinki. As a student of the Creative Sustainability program, I am interested in trying to understand complex sustainability issues and create solutions for systemic change, which the program provides tools for. Systemic change is achieved by addressing the root causes of complex societal issues (rather than symptoms) and requires the involvement and cooperation of multiple actors. Deeper levels of transformation usually require shifting underlying mental models. (Meadows, 2008) Hence, questioning neoliberal ideas of value is an important aim of this thesis (see 1.2 Research objectives and questions), because this can be seen as a potential catalyst for systemic change.

Chapter 4.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

4. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the methodological approach and methods of this thesis.

Section 4.1 introduces social design and participatory action research, and explaining their relevance to the thesis topics and why they were chosen.

Section 4.2 goes over how participatory design methods were used to conduct research together with the Lapinlahti community members. This consisted of two main parts: semi-structured interviews and a workshop.

Section 4.3 provides an overview of the ethical considerations that were taken during the study.

4.1 METHODOLOGY

Social design and participation

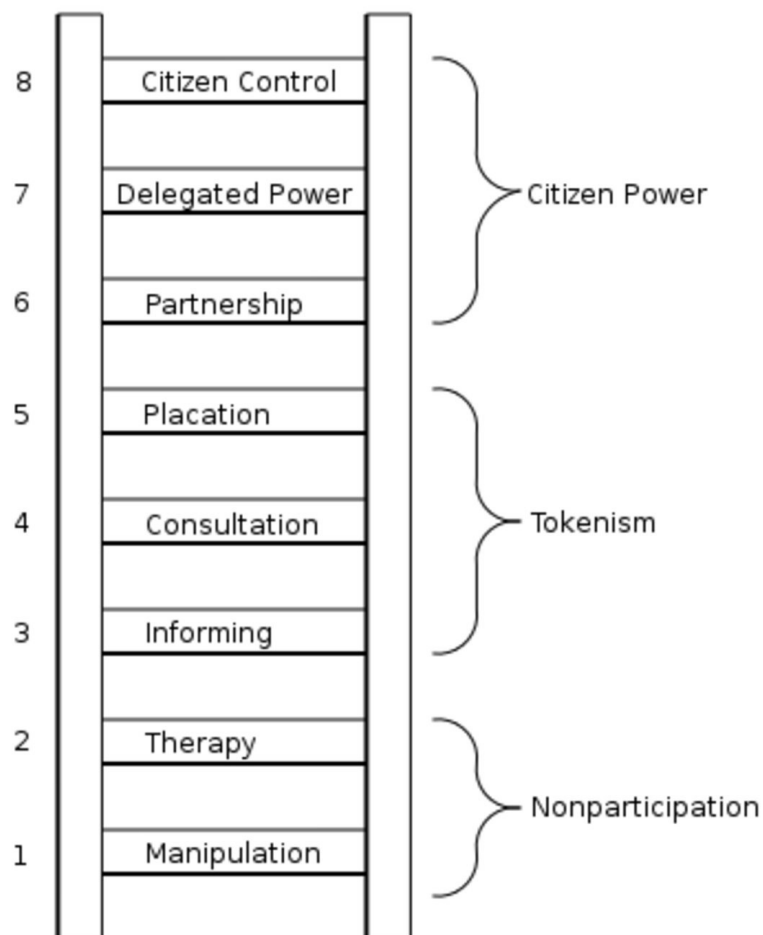
Social design generally means using design methods to create social change, often within fields like policy, healthcare, and other public services. It often involves cross-disciplinary work together with various stakeholders, and often takes place at a localized, grassroots level (Armstrong et al., 2014). Some notable figures in the field include Ezio Manzini, who has worked in the field of design for social innovation and sustainability, and Victor Papanek, who was a trailblazer in socially responsible design and author of one of the most popular design books of our time, *Design for the Real World* (1971). This being said, their work stands on the shoulders of many unnamed persons and communities who have been working on these issues for generations.

The value of social design practices is difficult to evaluate or measure because “a social design project instigates a conversation and relationships that can be on-going beyond the ‘life’ of the project itself”, as described by Pelle Ehn (Armstrong et al. 2014: 19). Another reason is that there is no clear universal definition for value or for design, as explained by Julier and Hodson. Traditionally the value of design has been measured through economic terms, but this approach provides a very limited understanding of its impacts, ignoring various “entanglements with multiple influencing factors”, ripple-effects, and “more experiential indicators that may be better understood through qualitative approaches and articulated beyond numbers” (Julier and Hodson, 2021).

Armstrong et al. describe social design as being inherently participatory in nature: “Although all designing can be understood as social, the term ‘social design’ highlights the concepts and activities enacted within

participatory approaches to researching, generating and realizing new ways to make change happen towards collective and social ends, rather than predominantly commercial objectives.” (Armstrong et al., 2014: 15) Since participatory methods are essential for social design practices, they are also essential for this thesis. Participatory methods enable forming a deep understanding of the needs, challenges, hopes, and dreams of the stakeholders and user groups, and the relationships between various actors. In order to design sustainable solutions/proposals, one must ensure that it serves the people and promotes democracy and equity. This thesis focuses on a community which serves a particularly vulnerable group, which is why it is especially important to ensure the research process enables them to gain agency. But participatory methods in itself do not guarantee this because there are different levels of participation, as Arnstein illustrates in her ‘Ladder of citizen participation’ (1969), varying from manipulation to true citizen control. At its worst, it can be used to legitimize harmful policies. The aim of this research is to reach the ‘Citizen power’ end of the ladder (Figure 5), where power is redistributed to those who are usually left out of decision-making processes. Arnstein describes this as “the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society” (Arnstein, 1969).

Figure 7. Ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969).



Participatory action research (PAR)

The key methodology I will be using is participatory action research (PAR). Simply put, PAR is a combination of the development of theory, or understanding, and action, or practice, through a participatory process, “whilst remaining grounded in experience”, with the aim of contributing towards “increased well-being [...] of individuals and communities; and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet.” (Kagan et al., 2008: 2) It is a collaborative process between the researcher and the participants (ibid). In PAR, the researcher becomes involved in the change process, working closely with relevant stakeholders, facilitating and planning change, and reflecting on the process (Simonsen & Robertson, 2012). This supports the idea that “design is supposed to be an exploration people do together, and the design process should reflect that.” (Koskinen et al. 2011: 83).

Another reason why PAR was found suitable is that it does not require having a fixed hypothesis or research question to begin with (Muratovski, 2022). Instead of having my own pre-formed goal for the thesis or attempting to prove my expertise as a designer, the aim was to ensure the empowerment of the Lapinlahti community and allowing the participants to guide the research and design process by involving them from the very early stages of the process through early-stage participation and joint problem-making. This requires accepting uncertainty and messiness, as described by Jeremy Till (2005), and letting go of the conventional idea of design as a problem-solving exercise, and instead as a ‘sense-making’ process. PAR is an iterative approach which requires the researcher to go through a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, but there is no predetermined way in which these cycles should unfold (Kagan et al., 2008; Muratovski, 2022). This means PAR “cannot be described in advance or fully controlled” (Kagan et al., 2008: 17), which makes it suitable for the aims of this thesis.

Bang & Vossoughi (2016) “explore the ways in which [participatory design research] is beginning to shape a newer generation of research epistemologies [which] may be essential for expanding our fundamental knowledge of learning as well as developing theory that can help create sustainable and transformative social change.”

Measuring things like well-being through numbers and rational/ logical methods does not give us a true understanding of its value and the value it creates, and hence research into it should be conducted through alternative means. This is why the knowledge and experiences of the community members is the most valuable form of data, and the kind of knowledge gained through this methodology is qualitative and experiential. Experiential knowledge is the “practical involvement in/attentive interactions with given situations”, and it “resides as a

multifaceted feeling in the body as a whole, in one's interactions with the world" (Dohn, 2016). Design provides tools for harvesting this kind of knowledge. Instead of *extracting* knowledge from the community, I hope to learn, or *create* knowledge, *together* with the community.

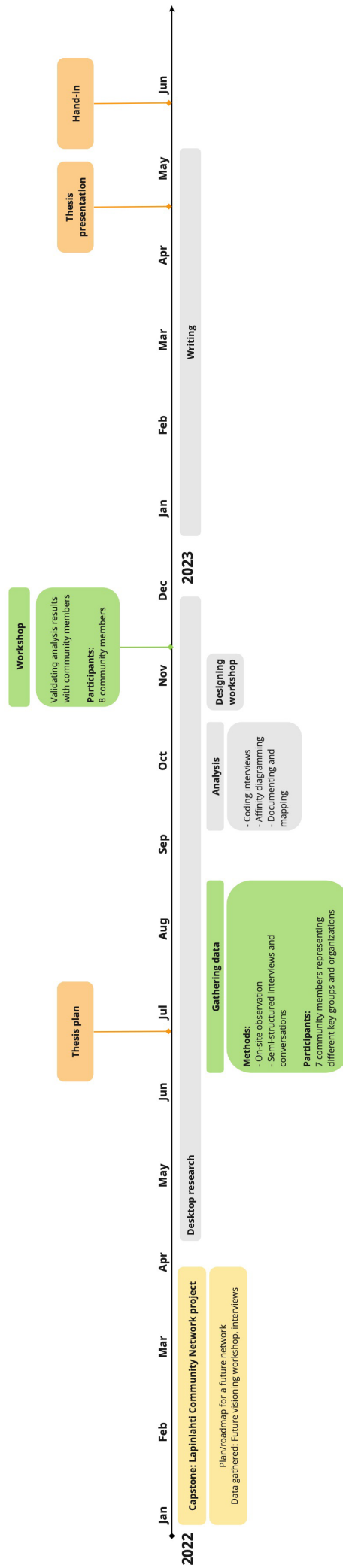
4.2 METHODS

This section provides an overview of the methods used to gather and analyze data during the PAR process. This phase spanned from June to November of 2022, and consisted of 1) participant observation, 2) semi-structured interviews, 2) thematic analysis, and 3) a workshop (see Figure 8).

Facilitation played an important role in implementing these methods, for which I drew from Isaacs' theory on how to "think together" through dialogue. This is achieved by listening to others without resistance, respecting others with different viewpoints, suspending our opinions, and voicing our own authority, leading to reflective and generative dialogue which fosters creativity (Isaacs, 1999). These methods are central to participatory action research, where the purpose is to work together with various stakeholders, creating knowledge collaboratively and 'making sense' instead of extracting knowledge.

I will further elaborate on these phases and the people involved in the sections that follow.

Figure 8. Thesis timeline



Participant observation

Participant observation is an ethnographic research method in which the researcher immerses themselves in the daily lives of the participants, allowing the researcher to observe how they behave and interact in their natural surroundings. Participant observation differs from naturalistic, or direct, observation in that it involves interaction between researcher and participant (University of Toronto, 2019; Muratovski, 2022). I chose this method because it allowed me to observe the culture and environment of Lapinlahti while also facilitating interactions. I gathered observations in Lapinlahti while spending time there for interviews and the workshop by taking field notes and reflecting on them later. The field notes served as a supplement to other data and helped form a more holistic understanding of life within the community, as it enabled me to record thoughts, impressions and initial ideas on things like what kinds of spontaneous interactions happened (Schwandt, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to involve community members in the research process, gather qualitative data, and gain a deeper understanding of the kinds of commoning practices taking place, and how the community members understand value and resilience. I chose to use semi-structured interviews because I wanted them to be flexible and conversational in nature, following the collaborative approaches of Till, Isaacs, Miller, and others.

I conducted 7 interviews with various members of the community, all of whom had been in Lapinlahti for 6 years or more. The interviews were documented using an audio recorder and note-taking. I asked the interviewees about their personal experiences in Lapinlahti and how Lapinlahti supports resilience and well-being for them and the community at large. The interviewees had varying roles within the community, and came from the following organizations:

- Tilajakamo
- Lapinlahden Lähde
- Pro Lapinlahti ry
- Kahvila Lähde
- Alvila
- Entrepreneur and tenant of Lapinlahden Lähde
- Mieli ry

Thematic analysis

Instead of analyzing the data by myself, I wanted to involve the community in this process by organizing a workshop. This would ensure a wider representation of views and a more democratic process for knowledge creation. This being said, analyzing all of the data in a workshop would have been too laborious and time-consuming, so I decided to conduct an initial analysis by myself in order to reduce the data for the workshop (Roulston, 2013).

For this I chose to use thematic analysis because it allowed for the flexibility required for a participatory research approach. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 6) Thematic analysis can be conducted in various ways. I already had quite specific research questions for which I was conducting the analysis, so I chose to use a ‘theoretical approach’ in which the analysis was driven by my specific theoretical interests (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 12), and within a constructionist framework in which the focus is on theorizing the “socio-cultural contexts [...] that enable the individual accounts” instead of focusing on the motivations and psychologies of individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 14). Following Braun and Clarke’s phases of thematic analysis, I first transcribed the interviews and read through them, making notes of my initial interpretations in order to familiarize myself with the data. I then started color coding the text according to themes that appeared in multiple interviews, going back and forth between the different interviews and the themes. I created a table to track which themes came up in which interview.

One risk of this method is that researchers may ‘force’ data into their hypothesis by only looking for things that support their preconceived ideas. In order to avoid this risk, I followed Roulston’s strategy of deliberately searching for discrepancies in the data which challenged or went against my hypothesis (Roulston, 2013). These discrepancies were used as discussion points in the workshop and allowed for critical reflection of the themes that emerged.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS PHASE 1

Research question:

How can resilient communities and commoning strengthen resilience and bring non-monetary value to individuals and local society in Helsinki?

a) How can this be a means of questioning of neoliberal values?

METHODS/ACTION

RESULTS/INSIGHTS

Literature review

- To understand how value has been defined and measured in the past and present
- To understand community resilience
- To understand commoning and its benefits

Participant observation

- To observe the culture of Lapinlahti

Semi-structured interviews

- To understand how the community members understand resilience
- To understand the kinds of commoning practices taking place
- To understand how the community members perceive value

Thematic coding

- To find the key themes and discrepancies in the data
- To reduce data into a more digestible form to present to the community members

Interview analysis workshop

- To involve community members in the analysis of the data
- To validate my initial analysis/coding

Challenges

- Perception of value is often subjective and context-driven, and communicating it verbally can be limiting
- The complexity of the topics addressed goes beyond the level of depth that can be achieved via these methods and within this scope

Benefits

- Seeing that the community has strong shared values which contest neoliberal values and ideologies
- Understanding the value of the open non-commercial space Lapinlahti provides for local society in Helsinki
- Learning about institutionalized livelihood practices which are situated at the fringes of capitalism

Workshop

Muratovski explains that in PAR the “distinction between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ [...] may not be so apparent, [...] and a sense of teamwork needs to prevail. [...] Throughout the study the findings are being fed back to the participants” in order to build trust (Muratovski, 2022: 248).

I chose to conduct a workshop because it allowed me to involve the community members in the analysis phase of the research and to validate my initial analysis of the interview data. This was especially important because after reflecting on the results of the first cycle (semi-structured interviews), I realized that most of the participants from interviews were in leadership positions, or had some level of authority in the community due to their long history at Lapinlahti, representing a very narrow group of the community.

In order to ensure the research is democratic and relevant (Muratovski, 2022), I wanted to involve community members who were not in positions of authority in the workshop. The participants were recruited by the CEO of Lapinlahden Lähde and the director of Pro Lapinlahti.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS PHASE 2

Research question:

How can early introduction of participatory design approaches contribute towards building resilience and commoning in community driven centers for culture and wellbeing?

METHODS/ACTION

RESULTS/INSIGHTS

Literature review

- To understand participatory methods within design
- To understand resilience in the social context
- To understand commoning and its benefits

Participant observation

- To observe different social dynamics within the community

Semi-structured interviews

- To involve community members in the research process
- To understand how the community members understand resilience
- To understand the kinds of commoning practices taking place

Thematic coding

- To find the key themes and discrepancies in the data
- To reduce data into a more digestible form to present to the community members

Workshop

- To involve community members in the analysis of the data
- To validate initial analysis and coding

Challenges

- Uncertainty
- The complexity of the topics addressed goes beyond the level of depth that can be achieved via these methods

Benefits

- Gaining a deeper understanding of the community, its values, challenges, and history
- Learning about the various micro communities that Lapinlahti is made up of
- Seeing how the community provides care for its members on various levels

Beneficiaries

- These methods (will hopefully) empower the community in learning more about the value they create and/or how to demonstrate it
- Other communities can learn about useful resilience-building methods

4.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were central to this thesis, due to the use of participatory research methods, and the personal nature of the topics discussed (i.e. personal values and experiences within the community).

When contacting interview and workshop participants, I informed them about the use of the research data. In the beginning of the interviews and the workshop, I explained again how the data would be used. I stated that only myself and my thesis advisor would have access to the data, that the participants could withdraw from the study at any point, and that their words would be anonymized before being shown to anyone else. I then asked for verbal agreement to these terms and for consent to be recorded. The verbal consent was recorded on audio. In order to build trust, I told participants about my history with Lapinlahti and my motivations for the study, refrained from using expert terminology when introducing the research topic, and encouraged participants to ask questions if anything felt unclear. I provided participants with my contact details in case they had questions or changed their mind later. (Muratovski, 2022)

Additional ethical considerations were taken for the workshop, because it was photographed and it was a group setting. I stated that photographs with the participants' faces visible would not be published, and that they could opt not to be photographed at all. I also gave the option to opt out later via email in case they were not comfortable doing so in front of the group. I then asked for verbal agreement to these terms and for consent to be recorded and photographed. The verbal consent was recorded on audio. We collectively established safer space guidelines at the beginning of the workshop to ensure everyone would feel safe and respected. At the end of the workshop the participants could give written feedback anonymously, or via email.

During the interviews and workshop, I focused on treating participants with respect and empathy. If something was said that could have been interpreted in multiple ways, I checked that I had understood them correctly instead of making assumptions.

Chapter 5.

RESULTS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and the workshop, presenting key themes and discrepancies.

5.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

For the thematic analysis of the interview, I created a table (Table 1) to keep track of what themes came up with each interviewee. This allowed for a more critical analysis of the results.

Table 1. Themes that emerged in each interview

	Lapinlahden Lähde	Tilajakamo	Pro Lapinlahti	Kahvila Lähde	Tenant and entrepreneur	Mieli ry	Alvila
Embracing diversity	X		X	X	X	X	X
Low-hierarchy organization	X	X	X	X	X		
LL enabling social connection	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Care of community members	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reciprocity among members		X		X			X
Benefits of surrounding nature	X		X		X	X	X
Benefits of an institutional structure	X	X	X	X			
Filling gaps in public services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Non-commercial space	X	X	X			X	
Freedom for creativity	X	X			X		
Need for money				X	X		

It became apparent that all interviewees viewed Lapinlahti as a resilient community and that the community supports and promotes resilience of individuals.

Forms of non-monetary value that Lapinlahti creates according to interviewees:

- **Social connections**

This means feeling seen and heard, having a sense of community, and the forms of care that this provides. This is enabled through things like free events and services, open door policy, collaborations, Lapinlahti's core values (see section 4).

- **Surrounding nature**

Interviewees felt that being surrounded by a green park and the sea had a positive impact on their mental and spiritual well-being.

- **Preserving Lapinlahti's historical legacy as a psychiatric hospital**

The community aims to preserve the old real estate and the legacy of Lapinlahti for future generations as well.

- **Freedom and autonomy**

Freedom of expression, freedom to do what you like (as long as it adheres to Lapinlahti's values).

- **Equality and low hierarchies**

The community treats everyone as equals regardless of their title, socio-economic status, ethnicity, abilities, age, gender, etc., creating a feeling of safety. Low hierarchies enable community members to have more autonomy over their daily activities.

- **Diversity**

Lapinlahti is a place that allows people from diverse backgrounds to meet, promoting empathy and equality, and enabling people to learn from each other.

- **Openness**

Anyone can come and spend time freely without having to spend money, and the doors are open every day of the year.

- **Culture and creativity**

Arts and culture are regarded as a vital part of mental health care and in promoting well-being.

Discrepancies:

- Over the years Lapinlahti has increasingly adapted to fit existing societal and economic structures by creating an institutional structure to operate in, and by bringing in businesses (though highly selectively).
- Some hoped that Lapinlahti would develop and grow in order to reach its unused potential, some only hoped to sustain it as it is.
- Some interviewees didn't feel a sense of community with the whole of Lapinlahti, but people in leadership positions only spoke of the community as a whole in a purely positive light
 - People in leadership positions didn't seem to be so aware of, or worried about the same issues, as those in positions with less authority (i.e. money, how many people know about Lapinlahti)
- Monetary value is viewed as secondary by everyone, but also as a necessity and some named 'making more money' as their greatest hope for the future of Lapinlahti.
- Participants value the organizational/institutional structures that have emerged because things run more smoothly, but at the same time they value loose structures because it enables freedom and creativity

A unifying theme of these discrepancies is **development and success**. It was present in all subjects related to those in Table 1, and it was a topic that each participant touched upon when asked about their hopes for the future of Lapinlahti. This topic is central to this thesis, as it reveals the tension between what the community values and what success means to them, and the realities of existing within a capitalist society which forces them to worry about things like money, image, and legitimacy gained through organizational structuring.

Since my aim was to reduce the data into something more digestible for the workshop participants, I narrowed the list of themes down to four, combining some similar themes and discarding some that were irrelevant to the research questions and would not generate much discussion. The four themes were: 1) care, 2) non-commercial space, 3) filling gaps in public services, and 4) development and success. I then selected 5-6 quotes from the interviews for each theme to present in the workshop.

5.2 WORKSHOP

The workshop was held in Lapinlahti with 8 participants and lasted for 1,5 hours. I attached the four themes on post-its on the wall with the relevant quotes clustered around them. To start off I introduced myself and the thesis topic. Then I facilitated a warm-up activity where I placed random objects on the floor around a piece of blank paper. Each participant then took turns introducing themselves, choosing one object, and saying what they wanted to bring to the workshop (i.e. curiosity), and moving the object onto the paper. I chose this activity because it mobilizes people physically and mentally while also being a quick and efficient way to do introductions. The next step was to collectively establish safe space guidelines, which I felt was important to ensure the participants would feel like they could speak freely.

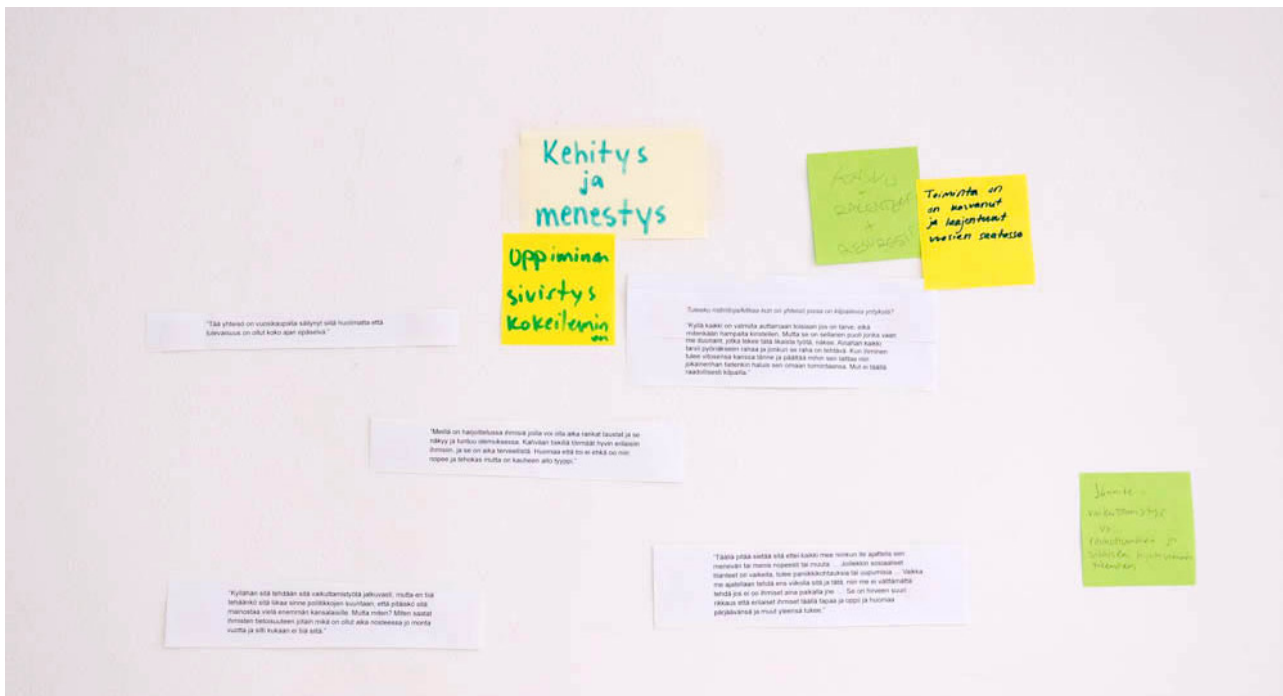
For the first task, I posted the four themes on the wall and clustered the selected quotes around them. I asked participants to read through the quotes and write comments or additions with post-its. I also presented the following questions to prompt them to think about the topic through their own experience:

- What has the Lapinlahti community brought to you to feel resilient or empowered?
- What do you do in the community to help build resilience for you and/or others?
- Is there something you disagree with or is missing?

Figure 9. Workshop participants reading through the data (Seppänen, 2022)



Figure 8. Participants' comments to the themes and quotes (Seppänen, 2022)



After that I facilitated a discussion based on the comments made. The discussion largely validated a lot of what had been said during the interviews. Participants valued the opportunities the community provided for various livelihood practices that they would not get elsewhere. They also valued feeling safe and supported in the community.

One discrepancy that came up was the question of whether Lapinlahti should truly be open to everyone (including corporations) due to the high risk of gentrification which they are battling against. Another discrepancy was the tension between outreach work and in nurturing internal well-being, as limited resources don't always allow to focus on both equally. For community members, Lapinlahti feels like a safe bubble separate from the rest of the world, but this should not lead to disconnection or hinder the willingness to change when needed, or work towards inclusion of others.

Figure 10. Refining themes in the workshop (Seppänen, 2022)



The next task I had planned was to re-evaluate the themes, but the discussion flowed into this naturally so presenting this as a new task was unnecessary. The themes remained the same, but the wordings were improved and some more nuances were added. This was mainly to clarify what was lost in my initial translation from English to Finnish.

The refined themes were:

- Filling gaps in public services, collaborating with public service providers, and civic action
- Care and peer-support
- Development and success (experimenting and learning)
- Non-commercial space

Chapter 6.

DISCUSSION

6. DISCUSSION

This chapter reflects upon the research findings in relation to the thesis aims and objectives, and evaluates how these findings contribute to answering the research questions:

1. How could early introduction of participatory design approaches contribute towards building resilience and commoning in community driven centers for culture and well-being?
2. How can resilient communities and commoning strengthen resilience and bring non-monetary value to individuals and local society in Helsinki?
 - a) How can this be a means of questioning neoliberal values?

First, the value of participation is discussed. Second, the various forms of non-monetary value created by the community are reflected upon. Third, the ways in which the Lapinlahti community supports resilience on an individual and community level is evaluated, and the problem with glorifying resilience is discussed. Relevant quotes from participants were selected to support the discussion. Finally, the implications are addressed, raising questions in need of attention, and a call to action.

6.1 PARTICIPATION

This section focuses on answering research question 1.

As stated in section 3. Case and context, various forms of participation are already happening in Lapinlahti. In this sense I did not introduce anything new to the community. This research is contributing to a process that already exists. That being said, it has become clear that participatory processes are central for commoning practices to take place, and resilience is born from those commoning practices. As in the case of the Lapinlahti community, managing and sustaining the area and its various services is done collectively for collective benefit. This is what attracts people to it and motivates them to fight for its existence, because it belongs to everyone. This is even stated in their slogan: “Kaikkien Lapinlahti” (Everybody’s Lapinlahti).

In section 4.1. Methodology, it was stated that an aim of this thesis was to allow the research and design process to be guided by early stage participation and joint problem-making. However, these methods did not have a significant impact on the direction of the research, but instead validated my hypothesis and research throughout the process. This is probably due to the fact that I already had quite a deep understanding of the community due to past work with them during the Capstone-course. Participatory approaches allowed for researching non-monetary,

relational, and ecological forms of value, which become apparent through the experiential knowledge of the people living in the community (more of this in the following sections 6.2 and 6.3).

6.1.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Limitations

The limitations of qualitative and participatory research methods in general are that the data produced is subjective, and only represents the individuals who participated, which can lead to unnecessarily biased results. I attempted to minimize this by seeking out participants representing a wide demographic in terms of their role in the community, background, age, etc. Additionally, the iterative nature of PAR allowed for reflecting and validating results throughout the process.

For some, feelings and personal experiences can be difficult to express verbally, and the only tool used was language. This was addressed by facilitating the interviews and workshops as dialogues, which allowed for more flexible communication. Secondly, conducting participant observation allowed me to make insights based on other factors beyond language, such as how participants behave and interact in the context of Lapinlahti.

Reflections on the workshop

The feedback from the participants was very positive, suggesting that they enjoyed and valued the experience. One comment said they wished there was more time, and another comment said they hoped more people would be involved in these discussions. One participant said the workshop strengthened their ideas about Lapinlahti, and another said they enjoyed learning about the ideas and opinions of other participants. From the feedback I also learned that the instructions were not so clear to everyone, as someone wrote that they were unsure how to comment on the quotes. This would explain why there were not as many post-its on the wall as I had hoped. Perhaps this could have been improved either by giving more clear prompt questions, or by facilitating a preliminary warm-up discussion before leaving participants to work individually. I also suspect that it might not have come naturally for the participants to question text that was typed, printed and presented in a workshop setting, because some may not have ever participated in discussions around these topics before, or the data may have come across as too 'credible'.

What I felt was most successful about the workshop was that the participants spoke a lot about how they feel about Lapinlahti. This suggests that they felt safe in the workshop, and also that the value of communities like Lapinlahti is not something that can be measured via conventional tools, i.e. monetary terms or existing metrics of happiness or well-being

which focus on peoples' standard of living. It could be argued that the discussion was steered towards feelings because many of the prompt questions were about personal experiences, but these questions could have easily been answered in a more pragmatic way, and it is still not very common in the Finnish culture for people to share openly about their feelings to strangers, especially in a workplace setting.

6.2 VALUE THROUGH COMMONING

This section focuses on answering research question 2.

The community was originally formed around a common cause: to salvage the old psychiatric hospital and its surrounding park and repurpose this unused resource for the benefit of the people of Helsinki, especially those in most need. The Lapinlahti community manages this resource for collective benefit through various practices, and through this process of commoning they create value.

The interviews and the workshop revealed that the most important form of value Lapinlahti creates is well-being, which is produced through the following:

- **Social connections and the forms of care they provide**

“I felt from the people who were here, they were also the ones who were searching what was lost from them, and I felt that connection with them. Even though we would not speak I could feel it, because I belong here, and this is family and this is home. This became a safe bubble. Growing up in a third world country you are accustomed to harshness. Somehow when you come here you become soft. Sometimes when the harshness comes you want to escape to a safe bubble and I came here.”

(Workshop participant, 14.11.2022)

Social connections can mean meeting people, participating in activities, feeling a sense of community, or simply feeling seen and heard by someone. This is the most important category as it came up in every conversation I had. The value of social connections does not come from the amount of people you interact with daily, but from feeling accepted and respected for who you are, and from reciprocal relationships. This is vital for our well-being, yet it cannot be measured in numbers.

- **Diversity and low hierarchy**

“Here you have to tolerate that things don’t always go as planned or happen as fast. ... For some people social situations can be challenging, panic attacks and burn-outs happen. ... It’s a huge wealth that different kinds of people meet here and learn, and they notice that they can manage, often with the support of others.”
(Interview with community member, 3.8.2022)

Treating everyone as equals and enabling different kinds of people to meet promotes empathy and creates a feeling of safety. When mental health issues are not treated as a taboo, people can be their authentic selves without shame and gain confidence in themselves and trust in others.

- **Surrounding nature promotes mental and spiritual well-being**

“The nature provides an opportunity to improve well-being and one’s relationship with nature. The Ruoholahti and Kamppi area is so urban with lots of concrete, so for many people this is a place to breathe.” (Interview with community member, 3.8.2022)

Many likened Lapinlahti to an oasis in the city, providing an escape from the urban surroundings to relieve stress.

- **Openness, accessibility and non-commerciality**

“You can spend the whole day here without spending any money. You can view exhibitions, sit in the park, even the cafe doesn’t require you to buy anything.” (Interview with community member, 5.8.2022)

There are not many places in Helsinki that are free and open to everyone, especially ones that are indoors. Because of the long cold winters, outdoor spaces, like parks, are not very accessible for most of the year. There are some public non-commercial places, like libraries and places of worship, but they often cater to specific demographics. The community sustains this space even though they get no monetary gain from it.

- **Culture and creativity**

“We wanted to save a beautiful old building and make it accessible to the people of Helsinki. There are hundreds of poor artists and people working in the arts and culture who have a dire need for workspaces, and we came up with the idea to bring these two together. ... Offering affordable workspaces to those who need it is clearly beneficial for the art scene, but also for audiences. When the threshold to make art is lowered, the arts & culture becomes enlivened.”

(Interview with community member, 26.7.2022)

Arts and culture have been regarded as a vital part of mental health care and in promoting well-being in Lapinlahti, and was an integral part of care back when Lapinlahti was still a psychiatric hospital. The community supports the arts and culture by providing and managing studio and exhibition spaces. Lapinlahti is also a place that enables collaborations between various artists and/or practitioners. Although the spaces are aimed for the underprivileged, a lively arts and culture scene benefits everyone. Lapinlahti’s creative environment also fosters a culture of experimentation and learning.

These examples of value creation are not recognized in current indicators because they are not extracting value or have a price. In fact, according to monetary indicators Lapinlahti could even be seen as a waste of resources or a burden to the city of Helsinki.

In Lapinlahti it is understood that these non-monetary forms of value creation are what sustain the monetary value (not the other way around) and that in fact the economic, environmental and social are not separate, but interdependent and enmeshed (Miller, 2019) (see Figure 3). For example, the Lapinlahti community would not exist without the *place* into which it was formed in order to salvage and repurpose it for the people of Helsinki (see chapter 3.). The *social* practices of the community enable them to manage the place for collective benefit, and the organizational structures which, among other things, operate their *economic* resources were created to enable these social practices. The economic, environmental and social spheres are all enmeshed under a common mission (Figure 6) to promote well-being.

When considering how to create well-being and social change, we must take an ecological value perspective and understand that value is relational instead of a static quality of an object (den Ouden, 2011; Bollier, 2017). As we learned in section 2.3, value is something that needs to be enacted again and again (Bollier, 2017), similarly to how the Lapinlahti community is creating and reproducing a commons through continuous cooperative

practices (Dimitriou, 2020).

These forms of value become apparent through experiential indicators, by listening and observing how people feel and behave in context. This also becomes evident in the language that participants use when describing their experiences. When asked how the Lapinlahti community supports their well-being, participants often spoke about how the place makes them feel instead of the concrete impacts on their daily lives. This could suggest that well-being is perceived as a *feeling* instead of something tied to your standard of living.

6.3 RESILIENCE

According to the results of this thesis, Lapinlahti supports resilience on an individual and community level.

Individual level: Care provided by the community supports resilience

“Coming here I felt somehow free. Whenever you come here your mood improves. The atmosphere and setting makes you want to do your best. You can notice that people appreciate your work and it makes you feel good. I had difficult periods in my life and I started here with a pay subsidy and this was a gentle landing back to working life. [Lapinlahti] brings a softness so that I could easily build myself up again after those difficult times and [enabled me to] calmly take agency of how I will build my life. [Lapinlahti] has produced an environment that supports my mind and well-being.”

(Workshop participant, 14.11.2022)

Lapinlahti provides job opportunities for people who might not otherwise be ‘employable’ in the job market, with a focus on rehabilitation rather than on increasing the efficiency of the organizations. It is a place that embraces people’s differences and where you are allowed to make mistakes and fail. This enables people to heal and build resilience.

Community level: Resilience is born from the necessity to:

- **resist privatization & neoliberal policymaking and value ideals**

“When the city proposed to build a 5-story luxury hotel in the park, the community became even more unified in the face of an external threat. We launched campaigns, gathered signatures, organized a demonstration and were active in many ways, and managed to overthrow the plan. We didn’t turn against each other, or become paralyzed or surrender.”

(Interview with community member, 5.8.2022)

“The [Tilajakamo] cooperative is a ‘flat’ organization that is volunteer-run, enabling us to keep rents at a reasonable level. During the Covid pandemic we have been able to remain flexible in the face of crises, for example when it comes to collecting rent. We have managed to make it work with our finances so that we don’t have to be dealing with collection agencies first-thing.”

(Interview with community member, 26.7.2022)

The Lapinlahti community has persevered through many hardships by means of resistance and commoning. They have learned from these hardships and improved their resilience along the way, i.e. by evolving their organizational structures, lobbying and increasing public awareness of the place.

- **resist inequality (and to support those who are in need)**

“We do a lot of things that the municipality or city should be responsible for doing or providing, like free toilets ... and upkeep of the place. ... There are high-quality free activities: various lectures, park activities, groups, game nights, nature activities, and immigrants are also catered to in the Miitti-project.”

(Interview with community member, 22.7.2022)

This exemplifies the kind of civic action that the community does for the collective benefit of everyone, not just the community itself, and the ways the community fills gaps in public services.

Lapinlahti challenges neoliberal ideas of success in that it has not grown more profitable, but more resilient, through which it is able to have a greater positive impact on society. According to the *UN Common Guidance*

on *Helping Build Resilient Societies*, the top 2 principles for resilience building are: 1) Leave no one behind and reach those most in need and at risk in a gender-responsive manner, and 2) Ensure equality, non-discrimination and a human rights-based approach (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2021). It can be argued that the Lapinlahti community promotes resilience on a societal level by aiming its free events, services, spaces, and opportunities to practice forms of active citizenship, towards marginalized people and people in vulnerable life situations – and supporting the most vulnerable members of society increases equality. Lapinlahti is also a place that connects people from different socio-economic backgrounds and nationalities, which is important in a time when society is becoming more polarized (Dufva, 2020). (Laaksoharju et al., 2022) Furthermore, questioning neoliberal values is important because challenging current mental models around individualism, and the idea that success equals growth, can be a potential catalyst for systemic change (see Meadows, 2008).

The problem with glorifying resilience

Policies focusing on improving resilience can be problematic though, as it often means forcing communities to deal with more suffering in the future instead of addressing the root cause of that suffering, and can often be a symptom of “abandonment and responsabilisation” of those communities (Wright, 2021; Kaika, 2017). Additionally, having sustainability policies that aim to strengthen resilience while policymakers continue to push neoliberal agendas creates a paradoxical situation.

When discussing resilience, we should be directing our attention to the underlying issues that are causing the need to be resilient and resist. This is about addressing the root cause of issues instead of just the symptoms, which is also a key focus of the Creative Sustainability program (see section 3.1). In this sense, Lapinlahti and other resilient communities can act as “living indicators, as signposts of what urgently needs to be addressed and where.”(Kaika, 2017: 99)

“Potentially, the methods forged out of dissensus can lead to instituting alternative means to tackle global socio-environmental inequality. These emerging imaginaries of people and environments being and working in common may offer far more efficient, direct and effective ways of addressing access to housing, healthcare, education, water and clean air in urban settlements than any set of indicators or techno-managerial solutions can offer.” (Kaika, 2017: 99)

Lapinlahti has been forced to fight for its existence since the beginning, and this ongoing state of resistance is not sustainable forever, as it is incredibly consuming of resources and energy. As one interviewee explained, being in a constant state of uncertainty makes it difficult to

dream or plan for the future. At some point, they are bound to fall to one side of the knife's edge; either they evolve and find stability through new ways of resilience, or they will be taken over by the forces of the capitalist market systems.

6.4. SPELLING IT OUT: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cities and municipalities should be learning from communities like Lapinlahti instead of making them fight for their existence. As this thesis is being written, the city of Helsinki has yet again proposed selling half of Lapinlahti to private investors and transforming 34% of the old hospital building into a hostel (Helsingin kaupunki, 2023). The city of Helsinki must recognize that the monetary gains from such a deal are not worth jeopardizing the future of a community which has the potential to create much more value to the city in the long term than any business operation could.

This research contributes towards making this value visible and giving it legitimacy, and provides the Lapinlahti community with a tool for communicating this outward. I hope that the community also benefited from the participatory process of creating this knowledge, as it provided an opportunity for self-reflection, which has the potential to create a stronger sense of identity and confidence.

That being said, there already exists an abundance of research and case studies just like this one, showcasing the value produced by resilient communities like Lapinlahti. But this alone is not enough. This knowledge should translate into action. As Kaika states, we should not only be paying attention to how these communities are resilient, but in the conditions and underlying issues that are forcing them to be resilient (Kaika, 2017). We know neoliberalism is problematic, and that there are alternative ways to live, so why are we still having these conversations and debates? Is it because we are looking at the wrong kind of data? Isn't it time to finally step up and start *acting* accordingly?

Chapter 7.

CONCLUSIONS

7. CONCLUSIONS

The general aim of this thesis was to explore how resilient communities can sustain spaces for livelihood and commoning practices that are alternative to the forms provided by a capitalist state, or situated on the margins of capitalism. By researching what non-monetary value resilient communities create, I aimed to question neoliberal ideas of value and success. The objective was to explore how early-stage participatory research and design methods can be used in a design research process for learning together with a community and understanding how they promote resilience and create non-monetary value.

The Lapinlahti community was used as a case study of a resilient community in Helsinki. The research was conducted together with the community via participatory processes, which included semi-structured interviews and a workshop. The findings suggest that participatory processes are central for commoning practices to take place, and resilience is born from those commoning practices. Participatory approaches allowed for researching what non-monetary, relational, and ecological value the Lapinlahti community creates through its commoning practices. The most important form of value that the Lapinlahti community creates is well-being. This becomes apparent through the personal experiences and feelings of the community members, which reminds us that *standard of living* is not the same as *quality of life*.

Based on the data, it seems that the main problems the community faces are external threats regarding financing and the lease and upkeep of the property. It also seems that the community is very unified in their values and goals. It is evident that the various commoning and livelihood practices, and forms of resistance, are what make the community resilient and support the resilience of its members. It can also be argued that the Lapinlahti community supports resilience on a societal level as well, because by aiming to reach the most vulnerable and those most in need, the community promotes inclusion and equality.

These findings call to question neoliberal values, because they show that Lapinlahti's success was not born out of financial growth, but through resilience and commoning. They also show that resilience and well-being of community members is not something that can be measured via traditional metrics and indicators. This is important because challenging current mental models around individualism and the idea that success equals growth can be a potential catalyst for systemic change (see Meadows, 2008).

This research contributes to the field of social design and participatory design, and makes visible the value that Lapinlahti community creates, providing tools for the community to communicate this externally and

prove their worth to the city of Helsinki. This becomes apparent mainly through verbal testimonies of community members, which provides only a limited understanding of the topic. Further research is needed to gain more comprehensive ways of understanding and communicating non-monetary value and experiential knowledge. As stated in section 6.4, a significant body of research that challenges neoliberal ideas and policies has not amounted to the level of action that is needed. Hence it is important to conduct further research into systems and in understanding how to change them (Meadows, 2008).

It is important to recognize that the complexity of the topics discussed goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead of providing perfect answers to the research questions, this thesis points in the directions where that complexity lies and reveals questions we should urgently be asking. Promoting resilience is not enough – we need to be looking at the underlying problems that are forcing people to be resilient.

“If we are looking for real smart solutions and real social innovation, here they are – in the methods, practices and narratives these movements [and communities] institute, and in the alternative ways they establish of managing the commons.”

(Kaika, 2017: 99)

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