

# YOUTHPASS LEARNING AGORA REPORT

REPORT WRITTEN BY  
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# ABOUT YOUTHPASS LEARNING AGORA



Youthpass Learning Agora was a seminar implemented by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, together with the French and the German Erasmus+ Youth in Action National Agencies from 12th–16th May 2015 in La Rochelle, France.

It brought together 35 participants, from 21 countries, working in the field of education and training, in order to explore the conditions for the creation of motivating centres for learning or learning environments.

The seminar was designed to reflect a classical Greek “Agora”: a market place where people come together to talk, to share, to gossip and exchange the latest news and of course where they can learn things, taste, try out, experience and reflect.

In the span of 3 days, participants joined in the Agora, looked at the learning environments from many different perspectives and through many different lenses, they challenged and were challenged conceptually and practically, gained insights and reflection and raised even more questions.

The seminar was hosted by the French Erasmus+ Youth in Action National Agency and the group was well taken care of by Gilles Baccala and Isotta Ianniello. The process was facilitated by Rita Bergstein (SALTO T&C RC) and Mark Taylor (France), graphically recorded by Torben Grocholl (Austria) and documented by Snežana Bačlija Knoch (Serbia).

# ABOUT LA RÉSIDENCE – CLUB LA FAYETTE: OUR PHYSICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

[WWW.RESIDENCELAFAYETTE.ORG](http://WWW.RESIDENCELAFAYETTE.ORG)



Given the nature of the seminar, the venue was very carefully and purposefully chosen to provide an inspiring learning environment.

As introduced by our host, Gilles Baccala, La Résidence – Club La Fayette is a special place, very relevant for Youthpass Learning Agora. It is run by the largest and oldest organisation in France that was founded in the 19th century by a group of high school teachers who thought schools did not provide enough learning opportunities. This led to the birth of Popular Education.

The Résidence was named after young general Lafayette, who was the main person in charge of helping the American Revolution in the 18th century.

Besides its engaging history, the venue was very generous to us in terms of the large, simple and functional indoor working space (which was suitable for both plenary discussions and small group work). Further it had plenty of outdoor space for enjoying both conversations during breaks and working on various exciting tasks. Of course, no space is perfect, so we could have done with a bit more natural light in the work room, a more inspiring ambiance in terms of wall art and furniture, and carpets would have been nice. However, these minor shortcomings just contributed to our discussions about learning environments and served as an inspiration to think about potential changes. As part of the programme, a visit to the well-known Aquarium and Médiathèque in La Rochelle were planned. Due to a public holiday, it was however not possible to explore the Médiathèque as a potential learning environment, but we did squeeze in a short visit to the Aquarium. :)



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

Although this report is based on only a three-day event, it had a huge well of discussions, inputs, insights, reflections, models, drawings and photos to draw from. This fact is reflected in the diverse content and length of this report.

This report is based on the facilitators' and experts' materials, reports from the working groups, personal observations, and reflections and responses to questions posted on the International Youth Work Trainers Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/649891225069091/>. In addition, a lot of insight and reflection came from the individual and group interviews done with our two facilitators, the participants' focus group, one of the experts and our graphic recorder Torben Grocholl.

## THE REPORT HAS FOUR DIFFERENT PARTS:

- 1 Background of the seminar and birth of the idea;
- 2 Key moments throughout the days, captured mostly during the sessions;
- 3 Key questions and reflections, captured in non-formal and informal parts of the seminar;
- 4 Impressions and follow-up conversations.

Like the main working room in the Résidence La Fayette, this report was enriched by Torben's state-of-the-art posters, together with the photos of different activities.

This report is less of an evaluation and assessment of what happened during the seminar and more of a collection of key insights and questions that will hopefully help in paving the "yellow brick road" of exploration of learning environments in the future.

And one final note: This report was conceptualised by a person who has been facilitating learning of young people in Europe (and beyond) for some time and who is very passionate about learning environments. This may have contributed to the quality of this report, but at the same time may have heavily influenced the perspectives offered. Hopefully it is a little bit of both :)





# ABOUT THE AUTORS

## The author: Snežana Bačlija Knoch

**Snežana** is a freelance trainer and facilitator, passionate about facilitation of non-formal learning and creative possibilities it brings along. She has been active in the European youth work field for the past 15 years. She is motivated by diversity of thoughts, values and beliefs and inspired by travelling, playing, cats and clown noses. Oh, and a lot of questions! Her curiosity about learning environments came after exploring many of them and realising that they can be facilitator's best friends. If only they know how to embrace them!



## The facilitators: Mark Taylor and Rita Bergstein

**Mark** freelances as a trainer and writer and plays ukulele from his current base in Strasbourg, France. Empowering learners is his passion. Commitment to the recognition of non-formal learning led him to contribute to the development of Youthpass and be a member of its Advisory Group. He is involved in the via Experientia consortium which sets out to expand experiential learning and research. A founding member and now editor of Coyote magazine, he is also editor of the Tools for Learning magazine.



**Rita** lives in Cologne, Germany with her family. She is working for SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre since 2005 – with the main focus on Youthpass and recognition of non-formal learning, since 2012 she is focussing more on quality development of youth work, with actors such as trainers and youth workers as a core. She has a background as trainer, facilitator, social worker and project manager at national and international level for more than 15 years. She is interested in people, books, music, systemic thinking, learning in its various dimensions, and transformation...



## The graphic recorder: Torben Grocholl

**Torben** Grocholl, born 1984 in Berlin, is amateur artist, flâneur, procrastinator, entrepreneur, daydreamer and doodler. He has studied Political Science and Communications in Vienna and Copenhagen. Currently based in Graz/Austria, Torben is working as freelance trainer and facilitator in the European youth field and beyond. He is passionate about creative facilitation, inspiring learning environments and the power of visual language.

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# BIRTH OF THE IDEA

“What is fascinating for me is the way that the little spark actually has changed. I mean, the flame, as it’s grown, has become a very different flame than the one I expected. And I am very happy about that.”

Mark

When Rita first posted the call for participants somewhere in the Facebook world, reactions were immediate! Either expressing the excitement and the desire to take part in it or wondering what is actually meant by “learning spaces”. And since Youthpass Learning Agora was the first event of its kind, it was expected that it would raise excitement, questions and perhaps even doubts. So, when starting with this report, I thought it was important to understand how the idea came to life. And who better to ask than Rita and Mark, who were there from the beginning. This is what I found out:

Youthpass Learning Agora, which we (the team and hopefully some participants as well) got very passionate about in La Rochelle, grew to become very, very different from the original idea. Originally, it was supposed to create an inversed world in which Youthpass would be THE most recognised process and certificate for learning and where we could explore what would have to change to reach this goal.

And then, instead of changing the world (at least in an imaginary way) what changed was the focus of Youthpass Learning Agora. While sitting in the first preparation meeting in Cologne and trying to answer the question “What have we done in Youthpass so far and where is the gap?”, Mark, Gilles and Rita very quickly realised that the gap referred to understanding which types of environments promote learning. And if environments do not promote learning, how should they be changed?



“If you look at any of the Youthpass publications, you’ll see a lot of references to ‘you must make a safe learning environment’ and ‘you have to make the stretch zone as attractive as possible’. But that’s it. None of the publications really say anything more about it... in a schematic way. And, I think we saw the opportunity with this activity to really explore how learning environments can be improved and what needs to be done to achieve that.”

*Mark*

Another aspect of it was to try and focus on **empowering learners, by using self-directed learning and seeing what this means when you really put it into practice**. Not analysing it, but describing what conditions support it best, and then widening the analysis to different target groups as well, especially the target group of young people left behind.

**THE KEY QUESTION THAT REMAINED AFTER THE INITIAL CONVERSATION:**

- What would you have to adapt and change in the so-called learning environments in order to help those young people who are not usually empowered?

## AND WHY AGORA?

“Agora is a meeting place, where people come together, exchange ideas, develop these ideas further and see what can happen to these ideas. We are open to what we find here and then we want to make it useful for our context – international youth work.”

*Rita*

And while understanding the context in which this brave new world of learning environments should start to be explored, **there were quite a few questions that Mark and Rita wanted to explore themselves.** Here are just a few to help us get into the mood for the rest of the report:

**RITA:** What are all the learning moments and can we as facilitators pinpoint them?

**MARK:** How an environment is constructed or used creates a spirit that plays a big, big role in how people feel empowered to actually try to learn things. So how does your environment give to you that spirit to try things out?

**RITA:** We cannot control when learning happens. So the only thing that we can create – with all good intentions – is a good learning environment. But what are “good” intentions, what is a “good” learning environment?

**MARK:** When researching before the seminar, I could see quite a lot of websites that have, you know, wonderful, amazing buildings, with beautiful red sofas and things like this, where young people can stretch out. But is that really what’s needed?

# KEY MOMENTS THROUGHOUT THE DAYS

This section of the report covers the three days of Youthpass Learning Agora to try and capture key activities, insights and conversations that happened during the sessions. It follows the flow of the process, without necessarily going step-by-step through the programme.

## DAY 0

### DISCOVERING OUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Ok, not really part of the official programme yet. But, as a process of setting the foundations for the seminar, it certainly deserves to be here.

“Wow, this is a very nice place!” is something that most people said when arriving at La Rochelle, but also when they settle in at Résidence La Fayette. This time, in the light of the topic of our seminar, it is worth asking what this actually means. What is so nice about this place? Is it the fresh ocean air? The abundant greenery? The outdoor swimming pool (not available to us until the last day)? The friendly staff? A lot of separate spaces for team preparations? Or is it just a gut feeling? These and many more questions will be asked and re-asked in the upcoming three days.

#### **WHILE WALKING AROUND, SWEARING AND DISCOVERING NEW ASPECTS OF THIS LOVELY PLACE, THE NEW QUESTION ARISES:**

- Is Internet a necessary part of the learning environment?!  
And if so, why?



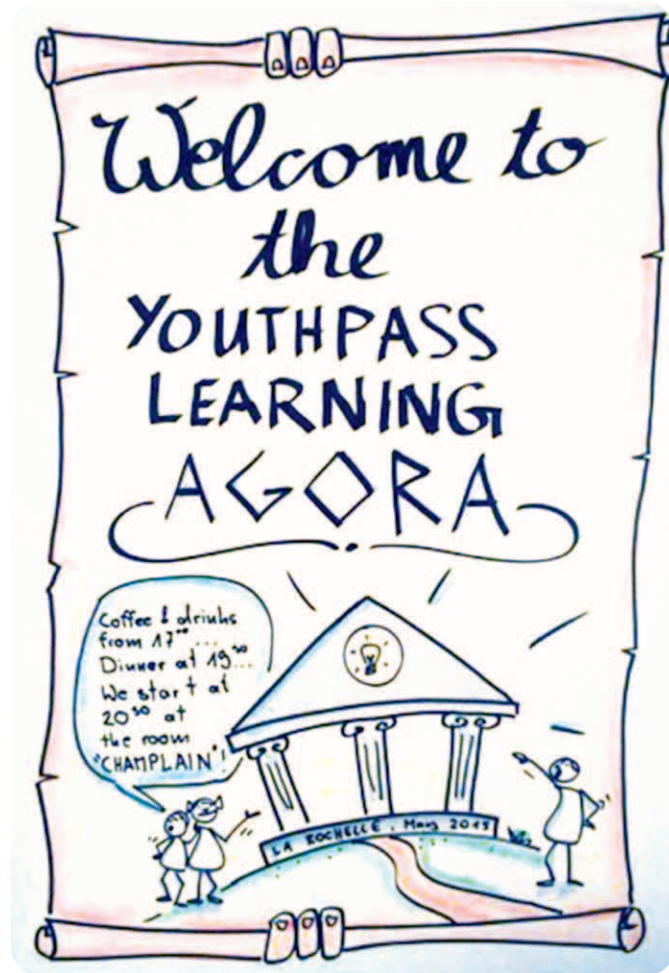


Source: <http://pandawhale.com/post/25590/maslow-pyramid-20-now-with-wifi>

## AND THE YOUTHPASS LEARNING AGORA BEGINS

With the “Name and a Gesture”, ice breaker so familiar to some and totally new to others, Youthpass Learning Agora kicks off. The work room, rather empty and sterile (and often avoided by the team during preparations), starts to come to life. The roles are introduced and participants are invited to contribute both to graphic recording and documentation, followed by the rules of the venue.

Ah wait; there are also some welcome drinks – another regular element of these kinds of events. They certainly help facilitate ice-breaking conversations among those participants who are able to stay awake until the wee hours, after a long day’s trip to La Rochelle. And for the others, it is time to say goodnight.



## DAY 1

### WHO IS HERE – AND WHY DON'T WE GO OUTSIDE FOR THIS BIT?

“The Youthpass train has been on the road already for a while.”

*Rita*

“Welcome to alien-land. You can learn things differently here.”

*Mark*

After the official opening of the seminar and repeating names and gestures, following the initiative of participant Alexandros, the group moved outside to continue discovering who is who. Some participants couldn't wait to get out, while others were not so quick – putting a layer on or taking a layer off, running towards the sun or running away from it.

While going outside for an activity is always very exciting, it certainly has its challenges that need to be kept in mind. Be it unfavourable weather conditions (depending on which person you ask), various audio-visual distractions or simply too much stimuli that takes away the attention from the actual work. In any case, the little patch of green in front of the working room seemed to be quite a good place for the getting-to-know-each-other activities.

In discovering (and testing) personal space(s) and exploring the connection between space and time, we moved onto “Sociometer”, to gain insight into the participants' professional background and to begin to understand their link with the learning spaces.

## QUICK SNAPSHOT OF THE GROUP



In addition to exploring the different experiences that participants have in the learning context, which can be seen in the tag cloud above (with youth exchanges taking the lead), one of the questions was related to the previous experience in facilitating the Youthpass learning process. Nine participants stepped into the circle and besides sharing their contexts were very eager to discuss their experiences and challenges.

The question “Why don’t we go outside for this bit?” stuck and it kept coming back in team meetings and team interviews. Along with liking the idea of taking things outside, the question “Why didn’t we think of it ourselves in that particular moment?” stayed with us. Of course, changing and exploring different environments was always part of the plan for the seminar, but in this very moment someone else, someone from the group, thought of it first. And one of the reflections of the team was that, along with one million things to think about as a facilitator, it is hard to also focus on the environment. And I wondered if that is true for thinking about learning environments in general. Do they, as was the case with the birth of Youthpass Learning Agora, come to mind only after we have dealt with all the other aspects of the learning process?



### QUESTIONS RAISED DURING AND AFTER THE SESSION:

- Is changing the environment (going outside, in this case) always necessary in order to provide a stimulating learning environment?
- When is the “right” time to go outside? Do the benefits of going outside (always) outweigh the challenges?
- What makes outdoor environments so attractive to certain participants and rather challenging for most facilitators?
- How can we as facilitators make sure to include – and remember – environment on our list of essential learning elements?

### LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN ARCHIVE BOXES

“Excuse me, could you hold this learning environment for me please?”

*Mark*

As a stimulating intro to the subject, participants were given one archive box each and the following instruction: Please develop a learning environment that is best for groups of learners (in 45 minutes). As different stationary was brought in, the space started buzzing. Some people were busy with scissors, some with colourful pens, some with strings and glue, some with leaves and branches and some with just a pencil. Some worked inside, some outside. Some sat on the floor, some sat on a chair. Some stood, some kneeled.

Expectedly there were 34 completely different boxes. But even more than that, there were 34 different concepts. It seemed there were not even two understandings of the learning environment that were the same. There were participants who created **replicas**

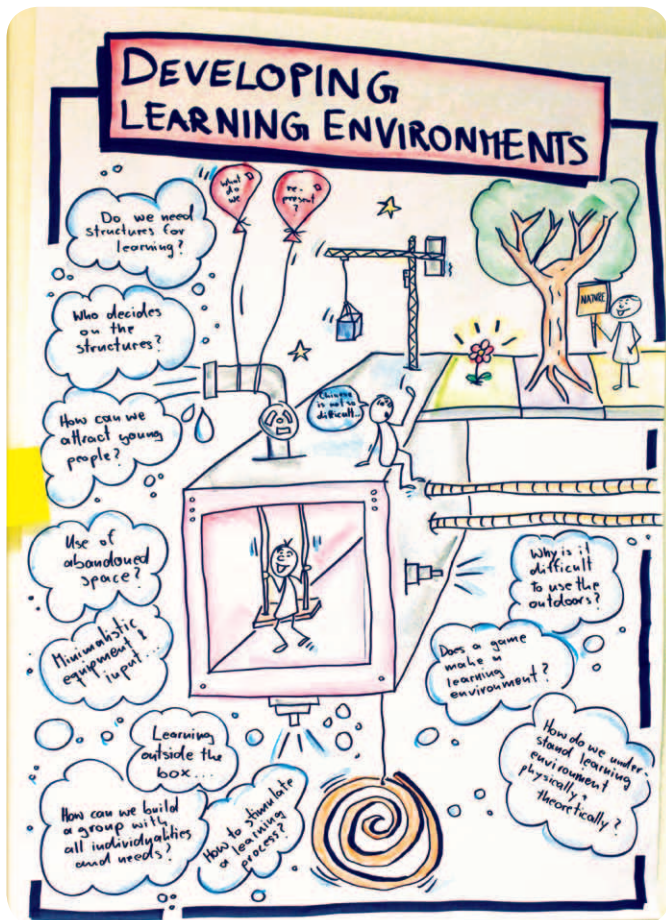


of physical spaces: positioning chairs, paintings and flat-screens in the box. Others wrote down aspects and principles that are the most important for them when it comes to learning environments: transparency, balance, flexibility, etc. A number of participants recreated nature. Some captured essential concepts of learning: for example, the importance of the challenge and the 'stretch zone'. One participant developed a training method on how to design learning environments with a particular group of participants. This diversity was captivating and challenging at the same time, and made a lasting impression on us throughout the seminar.

One aspect of this diversity also came from the struggle of conceptualising learning environments and choosing which aspects to focus on: physical, social, psychological, philosophical?

After the participants created their environments, they formed groups and showed each other what they had created. The environments were later displayed as a gallery of boxes. The participants revisited them throughout the seminar in order to see what changed (if anything) in their understanding of learning environments.





Some of the key elements discussed in the groups were captured on Torben's poster.

### QUESTIONS CONNECTED TO THIS SESSION (IN ADDITION TO WHAT YOU CAN FIND ON THE POSTER):

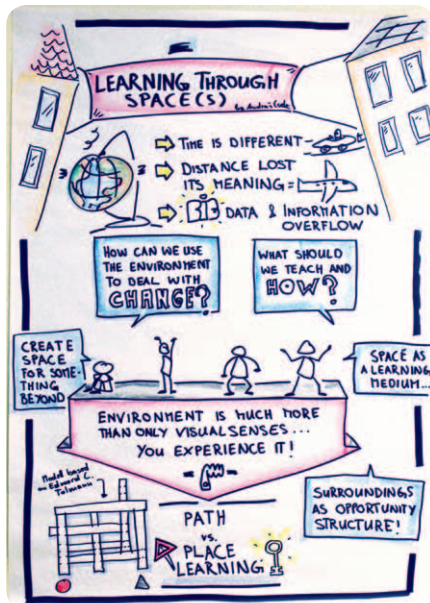
- With so much diversity when it comes to understanding learning environments, how can we expect to find "ideal" solutions?
- Or to put it more positively: How can we make sure to include all different understandings of a learning environment and make the most of these?
- If 45 minutes and simple boxes generated so many ideas, what could be achieved if the participants were given ample time and space to (re) create their learning environment?

## LEARNING THROUGH SPACE(S) WITH ANDRÁS CSEH

“Space is democratic, spaces are hierarchic.”

András

András Cseh is an award-winning architect at *CZITA Architects*. He teaches architectural design at *Széchenyi István University* in Győr, Hungary. His research programme, *Pre Architectura* focuses on spatial education for children and young people. In both his professional and educational work he aims at creating *stimulating spaces* which empower both those participating in the construction and the users of the created spatial environments. He participates in *social architecture programmes*, architecture education workshops for *university students, children and youth*.



The afternoon with architect András Cseh consisted of interesting inputs and activities that stretched our minds, hearts and bodies. And most of the important moments were captured in the drawings above.

András first gave an introduction to learning spaces from an architectural point of view and then touched on what changes have moved learning environments or learning spaces into the focus in recent years.

Among the things he mentioned as **reasons for us being so interested in learning spaces** were:

- We don't need classrooms to learn
- Technology offers new possibilities for learning
- There are more possibilities nowadays in finding alternative spaces
- Emphasis on creativity
- The needs of learners and facilitators are changing

The increased interest in learning spaces is closely tied to the following **new trends**:

- Fast-paced changes in technology and society lead to new needs
- Notion of distance changed, there are new ways to overcome physical distance
- People feel “oppressed” by information overload
- Super computers will soon manage to model the whole world. And while the human mind is the most important ingredient for super computers, intuition and orientation is missing, hence it is essential to understand learning spaces better in order to provide the missing links

## BECOME...



In the first activity that left quite an impact on the group – and in particular on the facilitators – participants were asked to use their bodies to:

- become a point – the smallest thing
- become a one-dimensional line
- become a 2-D thing
- become a 3-D thing
- become a 4-D thing (with movement in TIME)
- take as much space as they can

This activity allowed participants to explore their role and place in the space (being a space within a space), which is further elaborated under [key questions and reflections](#).

Related to this, András pointed out that the circle the group was sitting in earlier had a lot of empty space between participants, adding: “When space becomes emptiness”. As an alternative to this, he showed the picture below. (Osani tribe plays, Zaire, Congo)

## CREATING THE SPACE



*Perry Grone via Unsplash*

Next, unlike when creating the space out of archive boxes, the participants were given one piece of white A4 paper and no other materials. Their task was to make a space, without any additions, just with the paper. Then they were asked to make something (in a size of their choice) that would symbolise themselves and to then place it somewhere in that space.

When asked whether they feel they succeeded, only one person said yes. Two thirds of the participants found it challenging to think about spatial solutions. One of the comments from the group was that “We need to discuss principles of learning in order to discuss spatial solutions”. András explained why it was so difficult to build learning spaces: “Because we are not used to being asked about it”.

## WALLS AND DOORS

Here, all participants, apart from two volunteers, were asked to form a circle facing inwards, like one big circular wall. However, the wall had four doors, each made up of two people. The doors were supposed to be inviting, but not obvious. They were not supposed to talk, should have neutral posture and facial expression, but still be more inviting than the rest of the circle. The two volunteers were briefed separately and therefore did not know who was acting as a “door”. Once the volunteers came into the room, they were asked to enter the circle. Their task was to find a door (not by trial and error, but by trying to feel the invitation) and pass through it.

This activity had multiple rounds and different volunteers had different experiences. Some went through the doors quickly, while others took longer. Mark was in the last volunteer team and he could not find the door. He tried to sense the invitations and it turned out that they were not clear enough. This all went on for quite some time and soon it made the whole group feel uncomfortable. The activity was stopped – as soon as he finally found a “door”.

It was quite an intense activity, even from the observer perspective. Many impressions were generated in connection with learning spaces, but also with the role of the facilitator. The impressions of this activity stayed with a lot of us throughout the seminar. In addition, the question “How do we make ourselves and spaces more inviting?” remained with the group and is also further elaborated later in this report.



### TURNING THE SPACES INSIDE-OUT/OUTSIDE-IN

In the following activity, participants were asked to carry their chairs onto the pier across the street from the Résidence La Fayette and place them where they thought they could best learn. They spent some time on the pier, reflecting on their choice of position. They did not share their thoughts with the other participants, so their reflections remained personal food for thought. Afterwards, some of the participants mentioned that they would have liked as such more time on the pier.



### INSTANT SPACES



With a big piece of pink cloth the group created instant spaces that were:

- open
- closed
- a labyrinth
- closed to the Sky
- open to the Sky

After this, the participants picked up their chairs and went back to the work room. The input that followed after the activities was focussed on exploring different spaces around the world in a quest for inspiration to help design own learning environments. Most of these spaces were buildings or other large spaces, and while finding it very inspiring and creative, participants struggled a bit to find connections to their own realities.

There was one particular example that András used that created a lot of discussion, the example of two kindergartens below.





He first introduced the one on the left (Home Office Furniture Design) and asked the participants what their impression was. Some of the thoughts shared were: social interaction, structures/limits the imagination for playing, mental and physical stimulation, space offers different levels, too obvious as an environment, space where people learn how to take risks, 360 degrees exploration of yourself.

Then András introduced the example on the right (“Woods of Net”, Hakone Open-Air Museum, Japan, by Tezuka Architects + Toshiko Horiuchi Macadam) and asked the group **which of the two playgrounds they find more stimulating**. After the initial excitement with the second playground, participants also shared some concerns about it: it’s not ideal for shy or introverted people, there is no variety of spaces, it’s artificially designed, etc.

András was very surprised with the reaction and the fact that most of the group went with what he referred to as the **formal** option (referring to the first playground). He also said: “You can give a child anything and they will get creative and turn it upside down. Imagine if you give a child something amazing?”

The other elements of the input were **practical examples from András's experience** in working with different communities, including groups of children and poorer communities, exploring **the use of public spaces**. A lot of participants connected **with it from the perspective of an activist** and found a lot of practical insight into how to work with the needs of the community and create spaces that people will use and feel ownership of. And while this is certainly also relevant for learning environments, the participants were left to further ponder on their own how to apply this in practice.

A great deal of insight and reflection come out of this session. It stretched participants in all possible ways and at the same time generated a lot of resistance among the participants. This was partly due to the meeting of the two worldviews based on the different professional angles. András, on one hand, presented an architectural view of space and, while incredibly insightful when it comes to the importance of environments for community learning; his insights were sometimes too abstract and too ambitious for those working with young people with limited resources and within limited conditions.

### QUESTIONS CONNECTED TO THIS SESSION:

- How can we use an environment to respond to/accompany change?
- If we are used to and familiar with a certain environment, does that make it “formal”?
- Does structure limit imagination for playing/learning? Or do strict rules sometimes stimulate creativity?
- Can the quest for alternative and creative spaces sometimes overwhelm people and thus backfire?
- Can a learning environment be too obvious or too predictable, regarding the room choice, how the chairs are arranged, the equipment presented, etc.? And if so, how does this setting reflect on the learners?
- Does it make sense to simulate environments that already exist in nature (for example, pillars created to resemble trees at Kanagawa Institute of Technology, <http://www.archdaily.com/66661/66661>)?
- Is it perhaps not about judging whether an environment is good or bad, but about focusing on how to create the diversity of spaces that we need?
- How can we use public spaces as learning environments?

### SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Like in many other international activities in non-formal learning contexts, Youthpass Learning Agora also included more and less spontaneous evening programmes. At the end of the first day, proposed by the team, we did something called “Passions and metaphors night” in our working room. Only a few participants were ready and/or willing to offer something, but we still had three distinct spaces within the environment, all gathering fairly keen groups of people. One was a brief, but inspiring introduction into the world of Ukulele; then there was an advanced and enhanced story-cubes circuit (<https://www.storycubes.com/>); and last, but not the least, a very exciting (and loud)

card game for language learning! The evening had a bit of a reluctant start, but slowly it gained momentum. And as it did, the environment started to transform. Each space had its own dynamic: ukulele had an attentive and thoughtful feel to it; storytelling with the cubes was very intense and focused, while the language card game generated a lot of excitement. Altogether, they created a warm and cheerful atmosphere that made for another learning environment in which passions and metaphors come first. To be honest, we did not really stop to reflect how the same environment can provide for such a different vibe, but it surely felt and looked like we were somewhere completely different than during our daily sessions. Perhaps that's something to be thought about in another Agora...

## DAY 2

### LIFE SKILLS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR WITH BRIGITTE LUDMAN

“In fact, they had all what they needed inside themselves, but they didn't know it.”

*Brigitte*

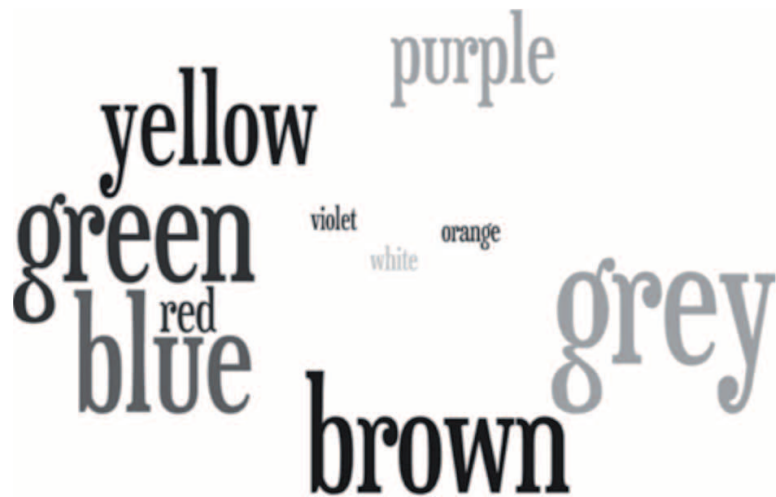
Brigitte Ludmann considers herself first and foremost to be a learner. In 1981 she created the first chess school for children in France. Soon after, she was officially academically recognised as a trainer and training designer with a thesis on chess and education. Brigitte spent 10 years (from 1984 to 1994) working locally in a youth organisation for homeless young people. Since then, she has been working in European programmes



(Council of Europe Youth programmes/ Youth for Europe / Youth in Action/ Leonardo/ Grundtvig/ Erasmus+). She is the director of Youth Express Network (YEN, <http://www.youthexpressnetwork.org/>), where, working at the European level, Brigitte has been involved in formal and non-formal education initiatives and questions for 24 years.

Brigitte started by introducing herself or doing something that she called a personal presentation: Where do I come from in this field? She felt that it is essential for all participants to look at their own background to understand what their relation to learning environments is, but also their connection to working with young people. That's why she told a story of her struggles in childhood, of going to a school where a language was spoken that she did not understand, of her days back at university, her passion for chess, her work with socially excluded people and her experience of being a mother of three girls, with very different learning needs.

Afterwards she asked the participants to think of a colour that best represents how they were in school. See an overview of the colours beside:



## THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

The next part of the session was based on the moment in the Wonderful Wizard of Oz in which Dorothy meets Scarecrow (who claims he has no brain), Tin Woodman (who claims he has no heart) and Cowardly Lion (who claims he has no courage).

Then, the participants were asked in what way they can relate this to the subject of this workshop.

Some of the insights resulting from these small group discussions were:

- Courage, heart and brain are the things to be developed in the learning environment. They also represent a holistic approach to the learning process (the most important aspects of it).
- Often people don't recognise their skills and abilities (often because of lack of recognition in the society), so they go somewhere else to get that recognition.
- It is important to find a balance between the formal system (knowledge and qualifications) and entrepreneurship (creative, qualifications not mandatory).
- Each other's deficiencies are compensated by the team, working together. "Polis ("city" in ancient Greece) existed to protect people from their individual insignificancies".
- Dorothy as a facilitator of learning, but also as a peer learner (she is looking for home).
- The "yellow brick road" in the Wizard of Oz is a learning path.
- The Wizard represents expectations from a trainer/teacher.

Brigitte wrapped up this part by saying: "Young people with fewer opportunities are like the characters of the Wonderful Wizard of Oz: Scarecrow wants a brain, Tin Woodman a heart, Cowardly Lion wants courage. In fact, they had all what they needed inside themselves, but they didn't know it".



A scene from "The Wizard of Oz" with Jack Haley, left, Judy Garland, Ray Bolger and Bert Lahr; Credits: Turner Entertainment / Warner Bros. Entertainment; Profiles in History.



## WHAT PREVENTS YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES FROM LEARNING?

According to Brigitte, the main things that prevent young people with fewer opportunities (YPFOs) from learning are:

### FEAR

- of the unknown (going out of the comfort zone, the neighbourhood, the village), lack of courage/imagination
- of losing identity (being different from family and friends)
- of succeeding against or not responding to, for instance when parents have negative opinions about them
- of feelings of betrayal, the fear of succeeding where parents and friends failed! Not feeling safe enough to go ahead

### “I CAN’T”

- negative opinions about themselves, lack of self-esteem

### INVISIBLE BARRIERS

- given by the environment
- affecting young people so deeply that nobody recognises them (including those working with young people)

## WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES NEED FOR THEIR FUTURE?

### HOPES AND DREAMS

- to believe that they have a future
- to allow themselves to dream of another life than the one sketched out by teachers or parents. To think out of the box
- Which skill or attitude? Imagination, creativity

### COURAGE

- the courage to hope and dream, to dare to do new things
- Which skill or attitude? Courage

### SELF-ESTEEM

- which sometimes is seen as arrogance
- Which skill or attitude? A positive approach to themselves

### ENJOYING LIFE

- it's the foundation – heartfelt laughter
- Which skill or attitude? A positive approach to life

### FEELING SAFE

- Having enough confidence in themselves and in their environment, family, friends and community to feel free to change and move ahead



For each of those aspects, Brigitte had an inspiring story of a young person she has worked with in the past, which very much helped all of us feel the strong connection to reality. In her script she also wrote: "All these desires or non-desires, good or bad experiences, emotional states, beliefs and values, feeling, etc. are part of the inner readiness to learn."

## IN WHAT ENVIRONMENT DO YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN BEST?

"Going alone abroad, but with strong coaching. **Going out of the box in an invisible bubble.**"

*participant of the Youthpass learning agora*

- In a **safe environment**, where they are not judged, ranked, or in the spotlight. Where they can speak openly and try new things.
- In a place where the **cultural differences are not just recognised, but given value and used in the learning process.**
- In a place where **everybody counts as an individual**, where the content and the method are centred on the needs of each and every learner. In order to reach everybody, it is necessary to combine methods in order to meet the diversity of needs and learning preferences. Very often young people with fewer opportunities who were rejected by the formal system are very attached to these formal forms.
- In a place where everybody is able to learn and **everybody can contribute to a collective learning process** = mutually interactive learning, including the trainer.
- In a place where it is possible to **think out of the box, to make new experiences and to learn from these experiences.** This may sound like a contradiction to "the safe learning environment", but in fact you simply need to find the right balance between the two concepts: new experiences, which bring you out of the box and a safe learning environment (e.g. supported by coaching).



After a lot of questions and insights, the participants had gotten a good picture of Brigitte Ludman and her activist, youth work perspective. At the same time, the perspectives were perhaps not as new as the ones of Andrés. The two perspectives completed each other very well, with Brigitte placing the learners (from disadvantaged groups) and the facilitators inside of the space. One of the things she said in her presentation was: “Every person is a space within space! You bring your things in the environment”. And she did bring a lot of her experience and through that a very unique presence to the room.

As Mark said during the final reflections: *I think this Brigitte input, I think it will have more consequences than we know now.*

### FEEDBACK FROM THE GROUP: THE FACILITATOR APPEARS

After Brigitte’s session, the participants were asked to go back to the boxes they made and see if they would change anything now. Then they were asked to share their thoughts in learning trios and then give a brief feedback in the plenary. **There were no major changes apart from one that was shared by a large number of participants: the facilitator suddenly appeared in/on the boxes.** One participant even said that there had been no room for the facilitator in the box before, but now they would make room.

#### QUESTIONS:

- How important is our personal background and life journey when choosing and creating learning environments for ourselves and/or others?
- What are the specific elements that we must keep in mind when creating environments that are intended to facilitate learning for young people with fewer opportunities?
- How do we create environments that ensure a holistic approach to learning (head, heart and hand)?

- If barriers for learning often come from the outside/other people, how far do we need to extend learning environments to include and reach out to those who create barriers to learning for young people?
- How do we ensure safety in the learning environments, but at the same time empower young people to make new experiences? Or how do we enable young people to “go out of the box in an invisible bubble”?
- How do we find space for the facilitator in the learning environment? Is it given to them? Do they claim it for themselves? Do they have to “earn” it?

## VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In the last session of the day, the group was given the task of discovering virtual learning environments. A topic that sends a lot of those working with young people (in particular youth workers and trainers) deep into the stretch zone. However, there is an increased recognition of the importance of virtual learning environments and this session was an attempt to gain at least a brief insight into them.

Rita and Mark shared a first list of virtual environments, which the group completed. The final list was as follows:

- Games and gamification
- E-learning
- MOOC
- Blended learning
- Online tools – learning badges
- Social networks
- #Hackathon
- Web Quests

Participants had to decide which of the environments they would like to explore and contribute to. Then they were asked to:

- 1 Collect and share experience
  - a. What virtual environments are currently available?
  - b. What are the benefits and the risks?
  - c. What is the relation between physical and virtual environments?
- 2 Choose three key points regarding virtual environments to bear in mind for learning environments

## KEY POINTS

The points below are not exhaustive. They are a list of first key insights that would need to be further elaborated.

## GAMES AND GAMIFICATION

- Advantages: user-friendly, fun, user creation/engagement

## E-LEARNING

- Advantages: you make your own rules, you don't waste time, no personal barriers, no time limits, whenever and wherever you can study and or work, no professional limits, no one can disturb you
- Disadvantages: no colleagues for exchange and support, no rules, no obligations, can't feel school atmosphere, you don't have anyone to talk to in case you need help, no trainer is in the room with you, can be confusing, you don't solve your doubts by talking to others

## MOOC

- Advantages: free for all, flexibility, online assessments, raises employability, all you need is an Internet connection, fast, new skills, easy, reaches large numbers of people at once
- Disadvantages: not in real time, no Internet = no MOOC, cheating is made easier, no face to face interaction, drop-out rates are high, no commitment + no motivation = no learning

## **BLENDED LEARNING**

- Affects pedagogical practices and methodological approach
- Challenges the relation between content and medium
- Forces a balance between learning and outcomes (responsibility of facilitators and learners)

## **ONLINE TOOLS**

- Advantages: learning outcomes/recognition, simple, visible, interactive, higher volume for Public Relations

## **SOCIAL NETWORKS:**

- Sharing information; everywhere, everything, anytime; informal; raising awareness about issues and ideas

## **#HACKATHON:**

- NGO activists, designers, developers, community creating web apps and platforms for social good
- Advantages: Networking – combining different skills; Fast response to real needs; Big outreach of the outcomes; Availability – mobile apps

## **WEB QUESTS**

- Like a role playing game (quests + roles)

In addition to the outcomes of the session, here are Eda's insights and observations from the open agenda regarding the question: **What kind of virtual environment would suit each person's needs?**

- The ideal virtual environment: Easy to use DESIGN/rich resources
- SOCIALLY CONNECTED: All social media channels should be compatible so that it can reach a wider audience (public)
- EXPERTISE: Experts from different areas should be involved considering various levels of expertise and experiences, different opinions play an important role

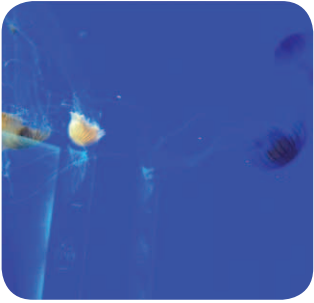
- DATA: The platform should keep all the information related to the user whenever s/he leaves the programme, it should send notifications, etc.
- DATA: The platform should not be designed as a onetime entrance place, but should be interactive
- GLOBAL/LOCAL. Elements to attract users from both
- User-friendly target group needs plenty of resources

This session generated a lot of discussion (particularly in the small groups), which shows that virtual environments are something that is very connected to learning in all aspects of one's life. That said, the discussion seemed overwhelming for the participants, since the outcomes were fairly general and went in many different directions, so a lot of insights and questions remained open. What was quite clear, though, is that **this particular topic needs a lot more than one session in the programme**. And while most of the topics included in this seminar deserve an entire seminar of their own, perhaps virtual environments need this sooner rather than later. In particular because there seems to be quite an ambivalent relationship to virtual environments in non-formal education. On one hand they are recognised as an integral and beneficial part of our learning realities, at the same time there is quite a lot of avoidance when it comes to harnessing their potential for different educational activities. This implies that it would potentially make sense to **include the virtual component in the next activities regarding learning spaces and explore blended learning in more depth as well as the environments** it includes.

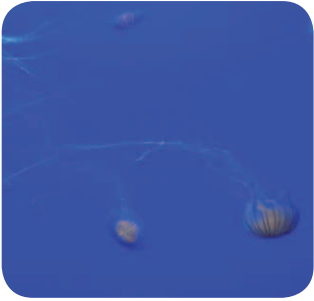
#### QUESTIONS:

- Given that we are online so much, why are we struggling to “understand” virtual learning environments?
- How do we use quick pace of virtual learning environments for our own benefit and adapt them to our needs?
- How do we make social networks fit with learning? Which competences do we need to acquire in order to be able to critically approach social media content and decide what should be included in our learning environments?
- Is blended learning the way to go? Would it allow us to exploit the benefits of both virtual and residential learning environments?

## A FEW “FREE” HOURS IN LA ROCHELLE: WITH THE FISH, BY THE FISH AND THROUGH THE FISH



Although it was not possible to officially explore either the Médiathèque or the Aquarium as learning environments, that did not discourage the team to organise a regular visit to the aquarium, change the setting for the afternoon and investigate the learning potential of this magnificent place. Although generally not a big fan of animals in cages, tanks, etc., I have to admit the visit was pretty inspiring. That said, it made us regret even more that we were not able to really explore it as a learning environment and see how they use it for educational purposes (and they do!). While wandering around the Aquarium, most of the conversations I was part of were related to fish and other amazing creatures in the tanks and whether it is ok to have the fish in the tanks. Oh, and the famous La Rochelle Aquarium dance of the jellyfish pictured above! But I could not help wonder what other kinds of learning “events” could take place in the Aquarium? And whether such a strong atmosphere always calls for the conversation about its elements?



Some of the participants did not join us at the Aquarium because they don't believe in keeping animals for entertainment. (I guess they are more loyal to their beliefs than I am). So, if we had had the chance of exploring the Aquarium as a learning environment, they would probably have joined us, but I don't believe they would be appreciating the environment very much. This is an obvious case, but what about other environments? Are environments ever value-free? And to which extent can we work with those values without putting someone in an uncomfortable position?



After the Aquarium, participants went to further explore La Rochelle and the team had a quick walk and then a meeting to plan the next day. We decided to through the “crazy Youthpass session” out of the programme in order to give an overview of the unexpectedly great number of things covered in the previous two days and to give another chance to the marriage between architecture and youth work and learn from and with András as much as possible.

With that out of the way, the team could move to the... seafood dinner! Well, when in La Rochelle... :)

### QUESTIONS:

- If we use an environment as tourists, does that prevent us from using it as learners at the same time?
- Is it possible to use an environment for any kind of learning or does an environment always direct the learning? And what about strongly themed learning environments (like the Aquarium)?
- Are environments ever value-free? And to which extent can we work with those values without putting someone in an uncomfortable position?



## DAY 3

### HOLE IN THE PAPER AND WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In order to get participants back into the spatial and environmental mood, Mark kicked off the last day with the “Hole in the paper” warm-up. Each person made a hole in their paper and walked around the room, **peaking through the hole until they find a**

perspective that they consider the most interesting. Then they stuck the paper, with their name on it, to that place. Then, they went to explore other people's perspectives, but also showed others their own. There were quite a few papers stuck to Torben's posters, different windows in the room and the Map of Europe. Then there were others on the tree, ceiling, balloon, EXIT sign, the centre of the room, the floor, on the inside and outside of doors. This was a nice, energising warm-up that allowed participants to explore their environment from another perspective. Who would have thought there were so many intriguing spaces in our work room?

As an intro into the final day, Torben and I had the task to make a summary of the key insights (from our perspective, of course) of the past two days. That was not easy. So many things had come up during the different activities and conversations that it was, once again, hard to believe that it had only been two days. The poster below is the result of our late night summary.





## A BIT MORE ABOUT THE SPACES WITH ANDRÁS CSEH

“The space which is good for everything is mostly not good for anything.”

András

### RECONNECTING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT, THE GROUP AND THE PROCESS

András started his session by reconnecting with the group, the room and the process. He asked the participants to form a line, sitting shoulder to shoulder on their chairs, facing the wall where he was giving his presentation. The line stretched over the whole length of the room. On the wall in front of the participants were: the projection of András's presentation (at the left end), the flipchart board (in the middle) and the boxes with learning environments (at the right end). More or less, everyone had some part of what András used to assist him in his interactive presentation in front of them. This setup was not convenient when trying to see elements of the presentation (which was full of interesting examples); however, it did provide material when exploring different aspects of the space (light, perspectives, etc.) and András was continuously moving in the space.

He tried, based on his reflections and personal insights, to build upon the two previous days and at the same time provide as many practical examples and hints from his rich experience in working with the communities and learners.



## THE INFLUENCE OF SPACES

He started by raising the topic of the influence of spaces and provided the example of prisons, which are in most of our countries strict places full of rules, where employees are not allowed to change anything when working with the inmates. And if “people are treated like trash” (in the space and from the space), how do we expect them to come back out and not take revenge? Then he also gave the example of prisons in Norway, where the focus is not so much on punishment, but on integration. András followed this with something to be taken into account when thinking about learning environments: How do we treat people (with the spaces provided)? What do we offer young people?

## HOW TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE

When asked how to involve young people in creating the learning environment, András provided a few practical tips:

- Use a model before making the real thing. Make a mini-model and then analyse and adapt it with the young people. Then also possibly make a big model, in the real size, made out of cardboard boxes and pallets.
- He emphasised the importance of architectural education for children

### “THE DRAGON SQUAD” EXAMPLE

András presented one example from his work in communities. His team was invited into a poor Hungarian village where only three families had family members who had work. The entire community were given 3m<sup>3</sup> of wood and were asked to make something for the community. The first step was to **carefully analyse the needs and the social background of the community**. This village had no running water in the houses, the little pool of running water in the centre of the village was their meeting place and there was no playground for kids. They also had a local legend about a dragon. They needed to show **flexibility in providing different possibilities, making the space multifunctional**. In the end, they made a

dragon next to the pool of water with a lot of involvement from the members of the local community (for better or worse).

After it was made, the locals formed a “dragon squad” to prevent each other from stealing wood which could have been used for heating and cooking. “I would steal it, but I wouldn’t allow my friend to do it.”

The dragon is still there after two and a half years, although it was supposed to be taken down after half a year.

This, and some other examples, once again **strengthened the connection between activism, public places and community engagement**. Here, the group was really after practical tips on how to best involve young people in the process of creating learning environments. Andrés provided us with quite a lot of practical advice:

### **SOME PRACTICAL TIPS:**

- Every building starts with the location: if possible the interior should be connected to the exterior, to public spaces. It is important to use the elements that enhance the space as much as possible, as well as to neutralise the disturbances.
- It is very important not to block people’s view of the outside (not seeing the weather changes, etc.).
- Light, doors and toilets: Although they seem basic, they are not easy to get right. Done well, they can really set an inviting tone.
- If there is only one space, the room can be softly divided with curtains and pillars (KAIT Workshop, Kanagawa Institute of Technology, Japan, by Junya Ishigami) and then put canvas between them for exhibitions.
- The spaces can be separated by light (darker and lighter spaces) or by colour (of the walls).
- If possible, create separate spaces for individual work vs. group work, while trying to integrate it into the same place.



- If possible, it is important to provide sheltered spaces for “introverts”.
- Light for writing should come from the left and not directly onto the writing surface.

This second session by András definitely established a stronger connection between him and the group and managed to break some of the inhibitors of interdisciplinary cooperation. Participants asked a lot of questions and the discussions continued both during the open agenda and after the sessions. And while there were a lot of practical talks and shared ideas on how to work with learning environments in the limited time and with limited spaces, my impression was that this was **more relevant for long-term work with young people in a designated space, rather than for short-term educational activities of any kind.** And while many of the tips and tricks could be applied in educational environments used for short-term activities as well, there are still a lot of unexplored aspects to be opened for the future.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

- Can we get the same response when creating something in a community and when trying to set up a learning environment with and for young people?
- Can we approach designing learning environments that are there to stay in the same way like those that we create for short-term learning experiences?
- How much should we “bother” with learning environments that we are in only for a short while?

## OPENING UP THE LEARNING SPACE – OPEN AGENDA

“Each question could be a topic for a new seminar.”

*Fatih*

### TOPICS SUGGESTED:

- How can we encourage young people to design a learning environment?
- We have been talking about learners' needs, but what does a facilitator need for good learning?
- How do you build a learning environment that would support self-directed learning and learning to learn for the Youthpass process?
- What is your experience for getting better recognition of Youthpass in your country?
- How can we motivate young people to use Youthpass? And the business sector?
- How can we make/convince government/ministries to recognise Youthpass? Methods, strategies to use
- Can we use different kinds of exercises to help mentors improve Youthpass sessions?
- Youthpass learning process
- What are useful definition and components of the term “competency”?
- How are learning processes affected by learning spaces? Are there suitable spaces for specific competencies?
- Where to start: physical space, social space, participants, programmes, and the facilitator's role?
- How can one manage to guide the learning process of different target groups?
- Thoughts on “ideal” learning environment for my specific job.
- Learning in conflict/buffer zones. How to attract learners?
- What could change in this environment (e.g. in this room)?
- How can we control outside learning environments?
- Difficulties of working with people with different skill levels (e.g. in a language)
- Learning process (focus on the process rather than on the space)

- What exactly do you do, and can we help each other create our own learning environment?
- How can we use site-specific theatre and urban interventions as learning methodologies in youth work?
- To what extent can online learning contribute to the democratization of the learning process?
- “Official” evaluation without grades?
- What is the learning environment and what should it be?
- What kind of virtual environment would suit each person’s needs (e.g. age, gender, purpose, culture)?
- What is the biggest barrier for learning environments?
- Where does a learning environment start and where does it end?
- What is informal learning? Where does formal education start? What is your favourite learning method?

There were quite a few conversations that did not take place, which was not surprising given the number of topics initially proposed. Please find below a brief overview of key topics discussed.

#### **KEY INSIGHTS AND QUESTIONS:**

- Should the facilitator be involved in the learning process?
- At what age should we start grading?
- Does grading motivate students (in the short and long term)?
- How can we ensure the focus is on learning and not just on getting good grades?
- Introducing different options/ways of evaluating performance and learning (e.g. tests, presentations, projects...)
- How can we connect virtual and real environments?

- How much is Youthpass recognised?
- How to promote the value of Youthpass?
- How can we make young people think of their learning space?
- What question can we ask young people about learning spaces?
- How can you connect a model with learning needs?
- How do we select our environment based on the learners?
- Can we arrange the environment, even if it was selected by others than us?
- Flexibility so that each learner and the trainer feels comfortable.
- Change the way learners interact when we cannot change/select the environment
- For a dialogical environment, trainer needs to be on the same level with trainees
- Responsibility for the process of learning and creation of outputs and results should be shared by both participants and facilitators in any learning process
- This could be done by giving greater role to participants -> enabling them to organize and lead workshop sessions on their own
- Participants could also have more stake in deciding on the timetable and programme -> adjusting sessions in a way that corresponds better with their learning habits and needs
- During learning sessions -> principles and key points could be implemented right away, through learning-by-doing
- Most importantly: making better use of the knowledge and experiences of the participants, using it as a starting point
- Cultural and socio-economic background of the participants? What if a group is too homogenous?
- Use blended learning methods
- Really take each individual in the group into account

## **SUMMARY OF THE PARTICIPANT'S INSIGHTS FROM THE OPEN SPACE THAT COULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:**

- Plenty of things to choose from
- Possibility to take part in more discussions
- Possibility to divide the groups and make groups within groups
- Allows to go deeper in subjects
- Possibility, but also danger of remaining alone
- More personal interaction and facilitating learning from each other
- Short time for activities stimulates learning, but also prevents to get to conclusions
- Chance to create little spaces
- Different working environments
- Safety and comfort of being in smaller groups, results in more sharing and sharing imperfections

The open agenda was incredibly fruitful. There were almost as many topics as participants. And although some topics did not seem instantly connected with learning environments, in the end they all did. Which led me to think that **in non-formal learning everything is strongly interlinked and influences each other**. And that **learning environments are an even broader topic than I initially thought**. And, indeed, each of the topics of the open agenda could have been a seminar of its own. Take “grading” as an example. When this topic was mentioned I wondered how it could be connected to learning environments. But reading through the topics, I realised that grading has a great impact on how safe and secure the atmosphere around young people actually is.

It was obvious that most of the participants really enjoyed this part of the programme. One of the reasons for this was its open nature. And although open space is a method, I think it is also an environment in itself. **It opens up the usual environment and allows participants to choose and create their own**. Even if that is for a brief moment in time.



# KEY QUESTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Starting on page one of this document, many questions have been asked. Some throughout the text, others highlighted in boxes at the end of a chapter. So, you may be thinking: **MORE questions?! Well, not really more in terms of quantity, but more in terms of depth. This segment will focus on the questions and reflections that were highlighted both in the session and in the interviews and which the participants dealt with more extensively.** That doesn't mean the questions are answered, but that they simply needed a bit more space in the document.

**SO, LET'S START.**

## WHAT MOTIVATED US TO EXPLORE LEARNING SPACES AND HOW DOES OUR BACKGROUND INFLUENCE US?

“I spent a lot of time at university, struggling. I think that's also important to know. I studied really, really long and I never enjoyed studying at university. But, I've never been able to step out (of the studies). I think that is important to know about me as a learner.”

*Torben*

In the focus group, the participants were asked the above question first. There is no better way to introduce the participants than to allow them to share a little bit about their background connected to learning spaces:

**MARTIN HARRISON:** Martin currently manages a healthy eating project in Stoke-on-Trent, UK. It's a country-wide project called "Food for life", where he works with children and young people between the age of 3 and 18 to promote healthy eating habits. He organises and delivers training for teachers as a part of "Youth Health Champions", an accredited qualification for young people. Martin's background, however, is in nature conservation. He is a **forest school leader** and has been working with different target groups: from 2–3 year olds to adults. In the archive box activity, **Martin modelled an outdoor environment** influenced by the late 90s Scandinavian school model which is about holistic learning. The space is outside and is about breaking free of the constraints of a building or classroom. According to Martin, this is an environment suitable for developing social skills, skills that you might not hone in a classroom situation.

**UKU VISNAPUU:** Uku is a **trainer in the youth field**. He lives in Estonia and at the moment he is training a number of youth workers who want to start implementing the Youthpass process outside of the Erasmus+ network. He has a broad interest in learning environments and has his own patterns of thinking about them. "I have my own established routines and my own reflected values and ways in which I do my own learning environments and how I do my mentoring. I think these kinds of meetings (like the Agora) can either broaden this understanding or they can just be a good way to get out of my own box." Uku has a somewhat **abstract understanding of the learning environments and highlighted for us some principles and values** which he finds essential for the learning environment. For example, he opened one of the windows on his box, which represented **transparency**.

**CAROLINA TENTI:** Carolina works as an **EVS tutor (supervisor)** in an Italian association that works with the Erasmus+ programme. She works as a tutor for both sending and hosting projects. At the moment her team is hosting four volunteers and she is the person in charge of giving them tasks and working with them throughout their activities. She thought Youthpass Learning Agora would be useful for her job. Carolina's learning environment model focused on **the comfort and stretch zones**. For her, any kind of a learning process starts out of a comfort zone. Thus, her model showed a comfort zone (placed outside in nature) with a

rock that needed to be broken in order for the learner to stretch him or herself, moving out in to the world and learn things.

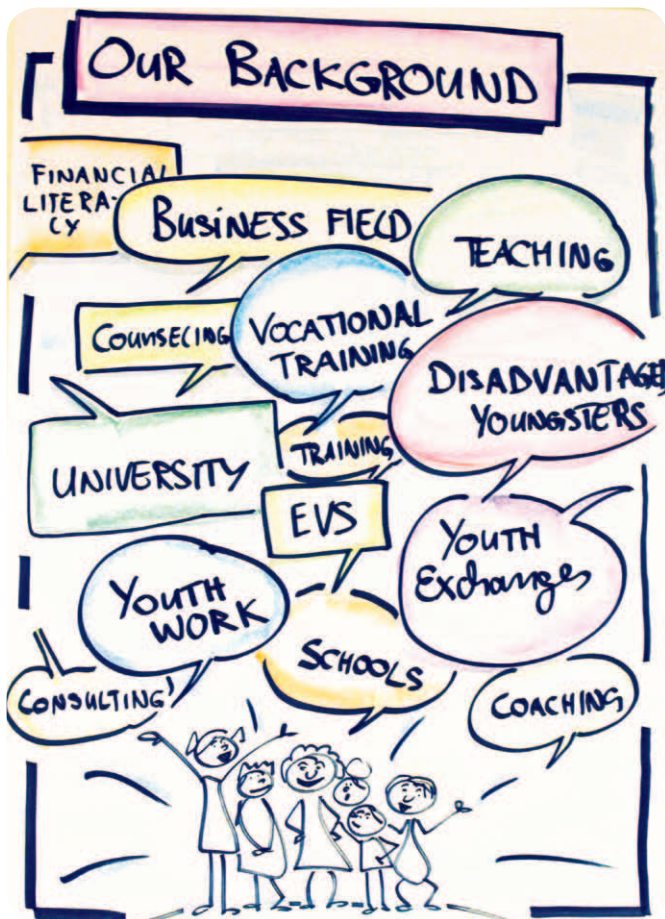
**EDA CABBAR:** Eda works in media (marketing and PR) in a capital markets association in Turkey. They audit investment companies and banks, but they also have a social impact project on financial literacy. Eda **manages this financial literacy project** – an online learning project that uses social media – developed for people aged 18 to 40. Her main motivation to come to Youthpass Learning Agora was because, in her experience, it is hard to get people attracted to financial topics online. People seem unwilling to dedicate time to online learning if the material is not funny, if it is not entertaining. When talking about her archive box, the first thing she said was: “I am not good at creativity.” What she created was an attempt to **make a common place boring classroom more attractive**. She made a model of a classroom, but more open, with a number of art pieces and different corners: a library corner, a technology corner. This made the space more interactive, more arty.

**TIINA SOINI-IKONEN:** First, Tiina graduated from the University of Tampere (Finland) as a **youth worker**. Later she did her PhD in educational psychology, researching preconditions of transfer in learning processes. She stayed at the university and now mainly works as a **researcher**. She would like to: “do a little bit of youth work in the future and would like to build the connection, the bridge between formal education, university education even and the different kinds of learning environments”. She is also part of the company called “Aretai”, a training and consulting company that accompanies various consulting processes, also in the private business sector, but that also implements the EVS training cycle in Finland. According to her, she ended up at the seminar because none of her colleagues could make it and she kept wondering whether she was in the right place. When it comes to her learning environment model, she said she took it very literally in terms of creating a learning environment for the group. She did not think of the physical environment at all, but about a particular group, the first question being: what are they learning? To figure out what the group’s shared learning goal should be, she developed a **small method and process for generating ideas**.

Interestingly enough, when interviewing Torben (the graphic facilitator) and later Brigitte (one of the experts), they both **insisted on including different segments of their personal, educational and professional lives, because they felt they were essential in understanding their answers concerning learning environments**, for example Brigitte's passion for chess or Torben's struggle at university. And just by reading brief snapshots of the background of Tiina, Eda, Carolina, Uku and Martin, it becomes clear that very different experiences got them in touch with the topic of learning environments. And just **as their backgrounds are different, so are the learning environments they conceptualised and created** during the archive box activity. Not only most of their elements were different, but conceptually

how they understood the task was very different as well. And what was quite visible was, in most of the cases, **a direct link between each person's background and the learning environment they designed**. Therefore, it seems that similarly to how facilitator's learning style influences the programme content, facilitator's preferences influence the way they design learning environments. Ok, this is not really a revolutionary insight, I admit. But it is good to have this insight visually represented through the participants' models.

This is Torben's poster of the "Sociometer" that Rita did with the group on the first day. You could already see the word cloud of it and here it is again in a different format. It captures all different profiles and backgrounds of the people that were part of the Youthpass Learning Agora (or at least those elements of their backgrounds that the participants wanted to share). Each participant has their own distinct background which is filled with different experiences in and with a variety of learning spaces. And they all bring something new to the table when creating the learning environment. And while that should be nurtured for sure, I wonder **how much we are aware of how we impose our own preferences regarding spaces on the target groups we are working with?**



### QUESTIONS:

- Can we talk about generic learning environments that are good for everyone?
- To which extent are we aware of the influence that our background has on the learning environments we work in and provide for people?
- Is it possible to provide environments that are suitable for everyone?
- How do we ensure that we have enough flexibility and different spaces so that everyone can be stimulated and empowered?

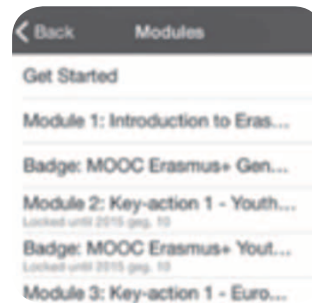
## WHAT MAKES A GOOD/EMPOWERING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

“For me, an empowering learning environment is that one that inspires me, to stay there, to feel that atmosphere, a place where the light is pleasant, the view (choose if you want to see or not, curtains down or up) is beautiful, comfy and cosy space, the temperature is “good”, there are places for people to post their pieces of work on the wall, room enough to move, jump or run (but it is not that big that you may feel too exposed or unprotected). It is a place where I would feel safe and willing to share with others. It is a place where you want to go deeper in your reflections or your inner emotional world, a place definitively that I could associate with DISCOVERY :)”

*Diego (via Facebook)*

When thinking about what makes a good/empowering/stimulating learning environment, the dilemma we kept coming back to was: **what do we mean by this?** Are we still “allowed” to think in terms of the process and the role of the facilitator or do we focus “just” on the physical environment? Or do we also focus on the psychological, the philosophical, and the spiritual aspects? We didn’t find any real answer to this question, but it was one of the pillars of the seminar and a lot of conversations revolved around it...

... including the conversation online. We asked our colleagues who were not able to join us at the seminar to contribute to the discussion via Facebook and send **us photos of their preferred learning environments**. The collage of their photos is below, while their answers are integrated in the overall analysis.



**ALTHOUGH SOME PEOPLE UNTIL THE END REFUSED TO FOCUS ON THE PHYSICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, THERE ARE STILL SOME ELEMENTS THAT CAN BE EXTRACTED:**

**OUTSIDE VS. INSIDE.** Many learning environments that were talked about or created in the archive box referred to nature and the outdoors. There was the feeling that nature removes constraints, gives learners freedom and offers them a lot of opportunities to learn life skills. At the same time, it puts people in the stretch zone and in that way facilitates their learning. This was also enriched by András's examples regarding public spaces. At the same time, the majority of environments that people had in mind were indoors, which is partly due to learned experience and partly because the limitation makes changes easier and more detailed. Many people mentioned that the indoor environment needs to be routed in the outdoors, needs to have a connection to its surroundings. This particular aspect will be elaborated under one of the following aspects.

**ADAPTABLE.** One thing that most of the people agreed on was that environments need to be adaptable as much as possible to meet the different needs of the group and the different needs of the process. The environments cannot be designed with only one idea in mind. It is also connected to different facilitators' and learners' preferences when it comes to learning environments.

**BASIC NEEDS.** Focus on the basics. There were a few elements regarding physical elements that everyone (or at least those who accepted the physical side of it) agreed on: the space should be light, be large enough, there should be no loud noises, it should be clean (no smells coming from the toilets), etc. However, as Tiina summed it up: "I mean, come on – who would say: it has to be dark, small and ugly?"

**OTHER LOGISTIC CONSIDERATIONS.** Some participants focused on other elements of their well-being that are connected to basic needs, e.g. the quality and quantity of food or the need for designated smoking areas. A great example was given that shows just how important logistics is – if done properly – in the overall learning environment, contributing to everyone's well-being. Isotta (French Erasmus+: Youth in Action National Agency) played an essential part in empowering and stimulating the learning environment

for both the team and the participants. From running around finding the boxes and glitter before the seminar, to taking care of travel arrangements, accommodation and food needs (and even providing plasters for blistered feet), all the way to taking photos, being cheerful and chatting with everyone: Isotta's organisational talent was an essential element of creating an environment ideal for learning.

**COMMON VS. INDIVIDUAL.** Some participants mentioned that it is good to have multiple common spaces, e.g. a common room where everyone can meet, but also common spaces for eating and hanging out. At the same time, for example Uku said that for him it would be important to have individual spaces and timeslots to withdraw, to work, eat or spend some free time alone. He said: "Previously, I needed to explain to people what is wrong with me that I am sitting alone."

**THE SMALL DETAILS.** When talking about the indoor spaces, sometimes conversations turned to the smallest details: uniformed or different chairs, wall art, flowers and sweets in the room, bookshelves, floor types (wooden vs. carpet), scented oils, nametags provided for people, etc. And although these are small details that not everyone could agree on, the participants were quite passionate about them.

#### **EXAMPLE FROM TIINA: SCHOOL RENOVATION PROJECT IN TAMPERE**

In this school project we have been building the learning environment with architects and teachers. The entire spring we have been having these discussions and conversations about the physical learning environment and now I really don't know anymore. You sit down and think: ok, what does it mean to build a good learning environment under all these conditions and to still try to think outside the box? In the school project in Tampere, the existing building will be renovated and a new one will be built. Some very nice ideas came from the teachers. There was a science park idea for the garden. It will have no walls, just a roof. It will be possible to do all kinds of things there: experimenting with water, getting one's hands dirty, spilling things. The teachers hope they will have a "dirty" space, a space where kids can get dirty and don't have to worry about it. And there will also be a lot of plants. It's a nice idea and it's just a physical space, but the nicest thing is that



all of the teachers were so excited about it. And not just the science teachers, also language teachers: “Oh, I can bring my class here and we can learn English while talking about the plants and we can do...” So it seems it’s a space that unites the teachers and inspires them to think about new pedagogical practices, which is great. With the teachers I’ve really been encouraging them to think about what kind of spaces they would need to have more collaborative planning of lessons, e.g. through the collaborative design of the learning environment. They had been complaining that they didn’t have the time or space to think about this together, so I pushed them and said that now is the time to say what you need and what kind of space would be best (to stimulate collaboration).

### **IN TERMS OF “OTHER” OR NON-PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT, HERE ARE SOME OTHER ASPECTS:**

**CHALLENGE VS. SAFETY.** This was perhaps one of the most common conversations. It will be elaborated on later in this report.

**OPENNESS/NO CONSTRAINTS.** Whether talking about the outside or inside, having no constraints in the physical sense was seen as significant elements of a good learning environment.

**HOW MUCH SHOULD WE BE IN CONTROL?** Right in the first interview, Rita reflected on her experience of parenting a four-year-old child and tried to draw parallels to learning environments in non-formal education. And the question that was raised was: How much can I control the learning environment? And then Mark continued: “And there has to be, in any learning environment, space for craziness, for real you-are-not-in-control. And that’s one of the toughest things. I mean, if you look at the way we packed the programme for the first day... is that because we are really concerned about the learners in there, or is it because we are scared of losing control of the process? I don’t know. I mean, we’ve cut some things out of it, as we’ve been going along, but it’s very, very difficult. Because, if we take it seriously that different people learn in

different ways, then we have to be able to be open to attempting to provide learning opportunities which we ourselves don't like. And how far do you see that happening? If you examine your own practice, if you examine the practice of other people, how far do they allow learning processes to happen which they think are not about learning? If you place the learner at the centre, where within your environment is that learner's voice about what they want? Uku also described, as one of the central elements regarding his environment, the concept of "chaordic" leadership, or the balance between chaos and leadership: Somewhere in the middle (when chaos and order overlap: chaord) there can be: co-creation of our group environment, co-creation of new learning, exploration of new topics and synergy and fun.

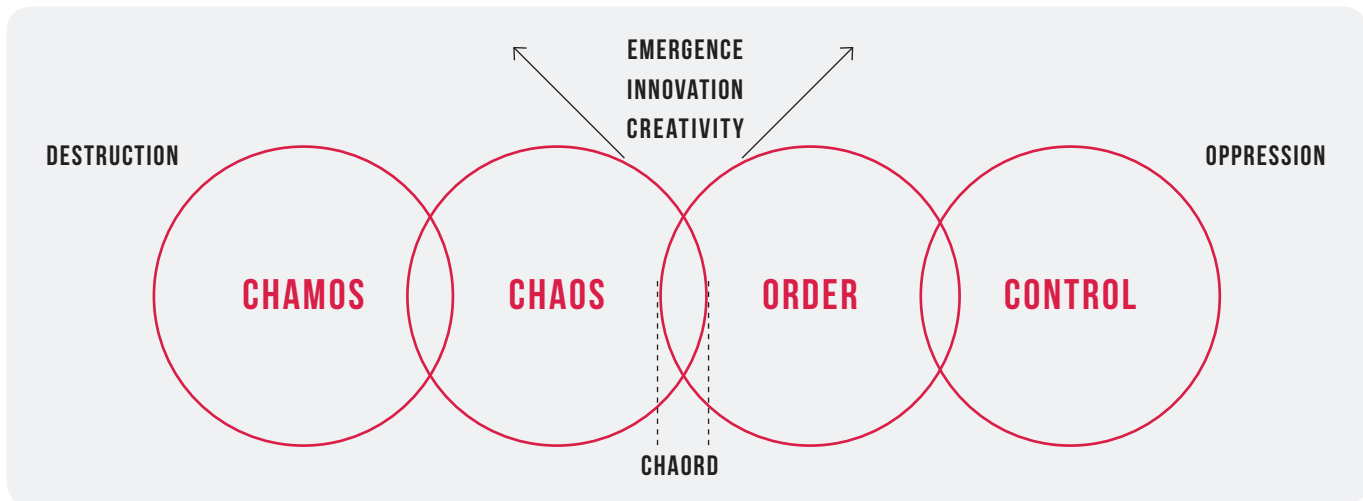


Image from: <https://plus.google.com/+LauraGibbs/posts/LW92HknT4Xl>  
(Uku drew on the box the four words inside the Venn)

**REPUTATION OF THE VENUE.** Regarding this, Martin gave an example: "When organising the award ceremony for what I do, I only have a certain amount of money, but I am always aware that I want to demonstrate what the awards are for, but to link it with the location as well. So, the location is a refurbished Bottle Kiln factory in Stoke-on-Trent. It's like a big brick building in the centre of town and there are only seven of their kinds left.

It's been refurbished and I am using it for the award ceremony because it fits, and I think it is really important that the place fits. Another example was our own venue, La Résidence – Club La Fayette, which reflected the importance of informal and non-formal learning in France and as such was a perfect environment for our topic.

And then there was Brigitte who insisted that **there are no common elements for learning environments**: "I don't think (there is anything in common), because for every person it's different. If I took what is ideal for me, it would be like in Ancient Greece, walking with the teacher in nature. The learning preference is really personal."

## HOW TO PROVIDE SAFETY IN PREPARATION FOR THE CHALLENGE?

"Being able to support every individual. To cater to different needs and learning strategies – having tried them and having failed with them, too. Providing space for feedback loops of different kind and width. Having the resources to adjust for everyone individually to stay in the stretch zone as long as possible, even if it moves in space and dimension (which also means to provide space for recreation), etc."

*Eike (via Facebook)*



Regardless of whether people think there can be "one size fits all" learning environments and what aspects they think are important in the learning spaces, there are still personal preferences and things that are more important than others. When asked **what one thing in the learning space they could and would not live without**, it boiled down to two things: **providing safety and comfort vs. providing challenges – opportunities to jump.**

**MARTIN:** “You have to feel safe and comfortable, feel that you are able to contribute or take part. So, the settings and the space have to be right. That’s quite basic, but I think it’s important. If we have some problem with the place or whatever, I think it’s really important to be able to address it. Otherwise you will not get to the next bit (in the process), will you?”

**CAROLINA:** “For me, it’s the opposite. It is the, let’s say, jump in to the nowhere. The challenge. Because it is this that makes you learn, makes you grow.”

**EDA:** “I think I would say comfort. If I don’t feel secure in an environment, I wouldn’t focus on learning things. I would feel really insecure, so I wouldn’t concentrate on the subject. Just one thing that really matters is feeling secure.

**UKU:** “I am happy with both the challenge and this (comfort).”

“The ideal learning environment for me is a place where I can speak out my silliest thoughts without being judged, but being supported and challenged in following, exploring and getting excited about these thoughts (however silly!). This place can be anywhere, beautiful, ugly, quiet, busy..”

*Mieke (via Facebook)*

Although comfort, safety and security dominated in the answer, challenge was also always there. And it makes sense, since we need to cater to people’s need to be safe, fed and accepted in order to help them put their shoes on and go out in to the world. Simple, isn’t it? Of course, when asked **how to actually do this** and what the elements are that need to be provided in the learning environment in order to have this balance, it was not possible for people to give immediate, simple and clear answers, neither during the seminar, nor online. Not in the team, not in Torben’s drawings, not in my notes. I suppose this question will stay with us for the next steps of exploring learning environments.

## YOU ARE A SPACE WITHIN A SPACE. SO WHERE ARE YOU?

“For me a really important factor for creating an empowering learning space is the Trainer being fully present and aware of the significance of the moment in time when this learning is happening and giving positivity to that moment. In my view, learners ‘feel’ that energy and it can be empowering. Otherwise I always try to have a learning space where it is possible to have a group experience (plenary or otherwise) where people can make eye contact.”

*Dermot (via Facebook)*

As one of the elements of learning environments, the question of the role and place of the facilitator has been mentioned a number of times. In fact, the first time was during the first conversation with Mark and Rita.

**RITA:** “I think I am still passionate about the facilitator, who has a central role.”

**MARK:** “Not the learner?”

**RITA:** “The learner, yes of course. But, in being somebody that facilitates and supports learning processes of others, if I consider myself as a learner as well and consider the other learners as facilitators of learning. So, it’s a two-way process in manifold ways. But when preparing an activity, of course it’s the facilitator who initiates.”

It continued with Andrés asking the group to place themselves, as facilitators, somewhere in the space. And after Brigitte’s session, they spontaneously started including facilitators

in their learning environments in the archive boxes, the importance of the facilitator in the space having been emphasised through the session.

But in terms of the positions of the facilitator in the space, perhaps unsurprisingly the answers were as varied as the learning spaces:

**MARTIN:** “I didn’t feel a need to put myself in, because it’s a big space and there was no relation to whatever else is there from where I am, so I can move to wherever it is appropriate.”

**TIINA:** “When thinking in general, movement is quite important. It’s important to move and important that everybody has an opportunity to do some kind of movement.”

**CAROLINA:** “I was a little bit shocked because I don’t know how to put myself or someone, a human being, in a closed space. It’s not my concept. It’s not the concept that I start with.”

**MARK:** “Well I made a little thing with a roof, so I am happily under the roof of learning... in the space, at the moment. Ready to jump if necessary.”

**RITA:** “For me it’s a bowl, with no roof, and I put a very 3-D person in, and this is how I understood it. And of course I had to find a place where people can stand, which for me was mostly middle-ish – whatever you can take out of this.”

**BRIGITTE:** “Inside. Among the people, I mean, as a co-learner. Because I am unable to develop any idea alone. If I am in communication with the people, I can develop a lot of things. Even if they don’t talk. But I need to have some kind of interaction.”

But the position of the facilitator was not the only thing; it was also how we capture the space and how much we are aware of it. Mark: “I mean you are part of the space, which is a space too – you are space within a space. And you can choose to be a point; you can

choose to be one-dimensional, two-dimensional, three-dimensional, four-dimensional and maybe even more-dimensional, within that space. And everybody else is doing the same thing. I kind of like that very much because that reflects very much also on gives another dimension to the idea that everybody is a different type of learner, has a different way of learning things." Rita: "I also create the space and the environment with my presence." And while this was quite a topic in the team, perhaps because of the role the team played in this seminar, it did not seem to resonate much with the participants. Still, it is certainly a topic to be revisited in future discussions.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

- Can we talk about generic learning environments that are good for everyone?
- To which extent are we aware of the influence that our background has on the learning environments we work in and provide for people?
- Is it possible to provide environments that are suitable for everyone?
- How do we ensure that we have enough flexibility and different spaces so that everyone can be stimulated and empowered?

## **CAN WE DISCONNECT THE LEARNING SPACE FROM ITS OUTSIDE ENVIRONMENT?**

At the end of the seminar, the focus group analysed the environment we were in to see what the aspects were that supported learning and what the ones were that could be improved on. And it was immediately clear that for them the learning environment was the whole La Fayette, but also La Rochelle. And this once again confirmed this connection between the inside and the outside environment, how they complement each other and in many ways need to be coherent and send the same message.

This was also reflected by Rita, after András's first session: "I also felt that the very strong part was when creating buildings to think about the inside as well as the outside. If you reflect on this in terms of space that you deal with in learning contexts, the question is: "What is outside, what is inside – and how does it relate in specific moments."

But the person who insisted on the importance of rooting the space in the outside environment was Brigitte. With her background as a historian, her strong belief was that everything is related to culture and history. What works well in one place does not necessarily work well in another, and she could not see any one model that could simply be transplanted somewhere else.

#### **EXAMPLE FROM BRIGITTE: THE "EXACT" REPLICA**

In the organisation that Brigitte works for (L'etage), there is a place for young homeless people. They have a restaurant where these people can come and eat. They did not open the restaurant because these young people were starving, but instead because in France, according to Brigitte, if you want people to meet, you do it around food. Some years ago a social worker from Sweden spent 20 days there getting to know this French project. Three years later, Brigitte went to Sweden and the social worker told her that she had started this new organisation and that she had totally been inspired by what she had seen in France. Brigitte: "And she brought me to a place and it was totally different! I didn't recognise it. And she said: I did it like you do! And it was so different! She took our main idea or the main feeling, but she adapted it to meet the Swedish needs and culture." Are you also wondering what the aspects were that she took from her time in France? In Brigitte's words, it was a place that looked like a flat, where social workers could meet with young people in kind of a family atmosphere. It looked nothing like the restaurant gathering young people that the French organisation was using! The Swedish organisation was replicating the concept of a HOME. In both cases, young people were welcomed like in a home.



**BRIGITTE:** “So I think the place... the learning needs are also related to the story, to the way, the culture. I think it’s like a language. Often the space is like Esperanto, so not connected to culture. And I think a space that could be great on the Canary Islands would be meaningless in northern Finland. Because the place has to be adapted. Not only to the needs of young people, but also to the surrounding nature and to the surrounding culture.”

Brigitte was the strongest in expressing her thoughts about the connection between the learning environment and its surroundings. Since we did not spend much time on this topic, perhaps it is yet another issue to be picked up in the future.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

- Besides being aware of the outside environment, how much can we actually influence the connection between the inside learning environment and its surrounding?
- Are there really no transferrable elements of the learning environment?
- When we talk about culture of the place, isn't sometimes the culture of youth work or non-formal education stronger than the “culture” of the place?
- And if that's the case, are there any recognisable elements in this particular culture?

## HOW DO WE MAKE ENVIRONMENTS MORE INVITING?

One of the most impactful activities of the seminar was “Doors and Walls”, done with András on the first day. And while there were a lot of things that are perhaps still waiting to be processed from the activity, there is one question that remained very strong: How do we make environments more inviting?

Here are some proposals that were put forward during the seminar:

**PROVIDING AN OPEN ACCESS.** This point came with the understanding that, while providing the open access is important, it is also quite essential that someone starts using the space. And when that one person starts, other people see what is going on and the momentum gets going.

**MAKING SURE THAT IT IS OK TO SAY NO.** “I understand my role as a facilitator to make offers: people can accept it or use it, or not. And maybe (my role is) to invite, and to invite again, but at one point it is also fine if the group decides that this is not something they will accept.” (Torben)

**BEING AWARE WHEN WE ARE NOT MAKING ENVIRONMENTS INVITING.** “And unconsciously, how do we sometimes make them not inviting? And how (do we sometimes not) find the keys to people? To a certain extent, you can only unlock the door that wants to be unlocked.” (Mark)

### **EXAMPLE FROM BRIGITTE: OPENING THE DOORS WIDELY, GUIDING PEOPLE THROUGH THEM AND SUPPORTING THEM ONCE THEY ARE IN.**

Brigitte has a friend who is an opera singer. He made a proposal once to invite a whole group of young people (16–20 years old) to come to the opera. And after Brigitte explained to him that they will not just follow an invitation, he started visiting them every week for six months to slowly introduce opera to these young people, through stories, through scenes. And after those six months they brought

the young people to the opera and they really enjoyed it a lot. In one of the scenes, when the dragon comes on to the stage, one girl jumped from her seat and shouted: "Oh, be careful! The dragon, the dragon!" Immediately, some other members of the audience started complaining about it. After the performance the opera singer went up to talk to these people and said: "You know that in the times of Mozart, in the opera, people were shouting, flirting, smoking... even worse things that I will not talk about here, but it was really lively, just like these young people." So, he not only gave the possibility to the young people, but he opened the doors widely: working with them before, guiding them through the door and then protecting them when they were inside.

## IS AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Being in an international seminar and exploring learning environments, it came quite naturally to reflect on international settings as a significant learning environment type. And although, in international youth work, intercultural learning and learning from diversity are some of the most cherished processes and are considered beneficial by default (at least in institutional discourse, but not only), it was interesting to hear quite a few aspects that people saw as not so supportive of learning. A lot of things were touched upon, but it was not possible to develop in-depth discussion at the time. So the quality of international environments for learning remains to be taken up in the future.

## **BENEFITS OF AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT:**

**“LEAVING FOR LEARNING”.** A person leaves their normal place (whatever it is) and goes somewhere different where s/he may or may not know people. In this way they can experiment and try out different parts of their capacities and capabilities, which they probably didn't even know about before. Mark: “If somebody says to you: So, what are you? You might even say something like: I'm a trainer. And then nobody will question that, because they will take it at face value: “You are a trainer, so train me, baby!” Or: “I'm an artist.” “Then paint something.” “Ok, I'll paint something.” Because none of your friends were there to say: “You can't do that! Can't do that! Can't do that!” And there is less likelihood that that little devil on your shoulder will go: “Don't do that, don't do that, don't do that.” So I think that kind of thing is very important in international youth work, even more than just travelling within your own country.

**MEETING THE DIFFERENCE. RITA:** “And then of course it starts with my background, how I grew up, which concepts and definitions I have in mind ... when I meet other people from other contexts and other regions. They might use the same terminology, use the same words, but having different understandings behind, this questions me and how I work. And that reaches different levels for youth workers, for experts and for young people...”

**FEELING THINGS ON YOUR OWN SKIN.** One thing is to watch people from around the world and their life situations through your computer or your TV set. It might even be considered easier. But if one actually gets in touch with people, one might start thinking about oneself in a different light.

**RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER OF THE EVENTS.** The residential character of different mobility projects is a holistic learning environment, which is a big advantage in international contexts: living together, eating together, socialising together.

**STIMULATING LANGUAGE LEARNING.** This mainly refers to learning English, but interestingly enough it was mentioned by a native English speaker. Half joking, but half acknowledging that this kind of environment makes them reflect on their language and the way they speak.

## **DOWNSIDES OF AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT:**

**NOT FULLY FOCUSING ON THE TOPIC.** Tiina: "I've been learning about learning here also, but I think I've been mostly learning about other things. If I wanted to learn about learning, I would maybe choose a learning environment where I don't have to think about internationality so much. Because you have to focus quite a lot on just speaking, understanding, people coming from such different backgrounds... ."

**SUPERFICIALITY OF DISCUSSIONS.** Connected to the previous point, it was mentioned that struggling with language sometimes leads to superficial discussions and conversations, which would be avoided if done in a national context. Uku: "If a group is very heterogeneous, especially in terms of language use, then the superficiality of activities is kind of inevitable. In our learning trio there was one person who could barely say anything apart from her pre-recorded talk, whichever topic we tackled. So, in one part it was a bit of a frustration and in another part it was: oh, let me see this as a learning challenge how to facilitate our trio. And still the frustration won over."

**INTENSITY.** An international learning environment tends to be very intense. Uku: "Lots of things are happening; there is very little time to actually reflect, to actually go deep. So it's a bit like we are standing on this train and then it arrives (at the terminal) and there weren't enough stops (along the way). And when done in a monocultural group, then it is easier for people to actually say "stop", they are not afraid of offending other cultures. They can be better in steering the group process."

**SLOWER PROCESS. CAROLINA:** "We can feel that this process of international environment is a little bit slow. The fact that we are all from different backgrounds, so different needs, different perspectives of the things etc. creates this big, big, big machine, big human resource, like we are here, now. And that makes it work a little bit slow."

### QUESTIONS:

- Is our general assumption that international environments are beneficial for learning appropriate? Could they also sometimes be a burden for the group and the process? How do we confront this risk?
- It seems that people either have very positive or quite negative views of international learning environments. How do we deal with this polarisation?
- How do we make sure that learning about diversity does not take away from learning about the topic?
- Are we generally more “ourselves” and able to assertively express ourselves in national or international environments? How does that impact on our learning?

## WHAT IS THE PLACE OF GRAPHIC RECORDING IN THE SPACE?

Just as being in the international seminar naturally imposed the reflection on the benefits and downsides of it as a learning environment, the presence of the graphic recorder and participants' interaction with him made it one of the elements of the analysis with the focus group, but also meta-analysis with Torben.

**THE INSIGHTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP** were overwhelmingly positive when it comes to the impact of graphic recording in the learning environment. Here are some of the impressions:

**IT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO TRY IT THEMSELVES.** Martin in particular, but other people as well, said that they would like to try graphic recording in their own work, because it is one of the things which can easily be an influence in the environment, but it

enriches it a lot as well. He felt that it fit well in the physical space and it motivates people to try and experiment with it themselves.

**NOT SO LIMITED BY MONEY AND CONSTRAINTS.** Given that there were quite a few frustrations with different constraints in arranging the learning environment during the seminar, one of the insights was that graphic doesn't require a lot of financial support, and it makes a great contribution to the environment.

**FILLING THE SPACE.** Carolina's view of the space is that it starts empty, but then the graphic recording was one of the things that fills it.

**GENERAL FACILITATION AND GRAPHIC FACILITATION COMPLEMENTED EACH OTHER.** As Uku pointed out, it was important that unlike some previous experiences he had in the past where the graphic recorder was detached from the group; in this case Torben's work was well integrated in the process.

**MAKING SURE PEOPLE ARE ALLOWED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE VERY SAME SHEETS.** There was a feeling that this was missing in this seminar. Torben's posters were rounded off units and it was not easy to come and contribute. Uku: "But here I didn't want to intertwine with my different style to the sacred art. So I did sketch in my book, but I didn't give my input to the group. Maybe there are different methodologies, but my reserved mind prevented me from even challenging this idea that I might go to the real artist's paper and ask to have a go."



As for **Torben's meta perspective**, here are the key insights in his own words:

I think it (graphic facilitation) just adds an extra layer. It is playing another channel – a **more visual channel**. And I really have the impression that it **really opens up creativity**, when people see that there are a lot of things, a nice flipchart... Even if you only write “Welcome” on a flipchart, it already **shows appreciation**.

#### **EXAMPLE FROM TORBEN: FOUR SENTENCES THROUGH DOODLING**

“I realised something when I did a training now for the second time. On the first or the second day, there is one exercise people in small groups should come up with a definition. Normally, I am not very strict in giving super clear instructions: e.g. you have 30 minutes, one definition, maximum four sentences, including the following elements. In the example we had six groups, and to my surprise none of them wrote a sentence. Instead, they all created models and drawings. I think this would not have happened if they had not already been in an environment in which they were already models, drawings, visual elements. But I liked it; even though they should have come up with four sentences, but it's still OK.”

At first **graphic recording contributes to creating a nice, safe and friendly environment**. And then on the next level, it contributes to the learning, probably in many ways. **People meet in front of the poster, they start talking about it**. Something develops in the room, which has something to do with what they actually worked on. So people get into discussion, or ideally people go into reflecting, into looking at the poster, discussing what is on the poster – this way **they may discover new things, they are more likely to get the bigger picture of what is going on**.

Graphic recording stimulates discussion and reflection about the learning process or **meta communication**, which is essential in learning.



It can be seen as an inclusion tool. Having a group in mind that has language barriers, or that does not have one common language, then graphic recording has quite another impact. Imagine if you only have oral input and you are struggling with language and you don't have a clue what direction things are going and you are lacking this moment when you see: Yes, I got it right. Graphic recording helps contextualise what I've heard.

Given that graphic recording is a fairly new trend in the youth work field at least, there is still a lot to be explored regarding how it fits in the learning environment and how it can be used best for the benefit of the learners. But, at least for me, it was quite impressive to see how it really adds an extra layer to the environment and helps the learning process in many different ways.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

- How do we ensure that graphic recording does not take the attention away from the process happening in the room?
- On the other hand, what are possible ways in which graphic recording could be integrated directly in the learning process and not only serve as a parallel process in the background?
- Is there a potential danger that the graphic recorder will direct which parts of the content will remain in the process, by so visibly and suggestively capturing it for the group? If so, how can we prevent this from happening?
- How can we ensure interaction of the group with what is being recorded? How can we encourage them to contribute, regardless of their artistic skills?
- Being perceived as creative and artistic, what are the ways in which graphic recording could attract even those who shy away from creative and arty expression?

## WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO THINK ABOUT THE SPACE?

And after all the insights from the sessions and different reflections from the interviews, this question still remained, without any answer in sight. And perhaps as we get closer to this answer, it will also be easier to design empowering and supportive learning environments.

In the meanwhile, here is a snapshot of the online conversation:

**NIK PADDISON:** “I don't know why is it so hard to think about spaces?”

**MIEKE NEVEN:** “Hmm, I have been thinking about it a lot, and I have come to the conclusion that for me the space created by the trainer(s) and the participants together is the “real” space. I have learned a lot in so many places, but real insights came through conversation, inspiration and feeling supported. Also, so much learning in our field happens after the event, after the initial input, during the time in which we put what is learned into practice and during the time learning is digested. The space is important and there are some minimum standards: e.g. daylight, large enough to hold a circle and break-out groups, good acoustics, good air, good temperature, preferably to have nice aesthetics. After those basics it will come down to personal preference – I like to work in a more natural setting, with little distractions, usable outside space. (...)I would love to say that we need to be in nature, that we need amazing inspiring places, but our trainings are so short, so intense, so oriented on the people present, that the space might not be as important as we think!”

**NIK PADDISON:** “Is it also a bit like the 8th trainer competence – many different things combined but not anything specific, but something that varies according to the trainer(s). You can have a physically ideal perfect learning space, but it does not mean learning will take place!”

**BUZZ BURY:** “Has there been no mention of Star Trek? ‘Space, the final frontier?’”

**GISELE EVRARD:** “That is a weird question (to me...). Is it really hard to think about spaces? Isn't it simply the one we have (as a group for instance), the one we're in? No matter how it is and where it is. Every space is unique and at the same every space is made of a lot of other spaces. I prefer to think about energy/ies than spaces; that is for me much trickier to think about...”

**MIEKE NEVEN:** “Yes, maybe it is BECAUSE we are used to have a clear learning space (school etc.) that we find it hard to realise that the space is created there and then!”

**EKATERINI PROKOPIOU:** “Fully agree! The space can be created practically anywhere and under any circumstances, having the right trainer/facilitator and the flexibility and willingness to make the best happen with the participants....”

**BUZZ BURY:** “Some spaces we discover, and others we create. Some we find we love, and others we find we hate. Some spaces need to be filled, while others work better empty. Some spaces work better on your own, but others need people a plenty.”

**ZORA CSALAGOVITS:** “It might be hard to think about learning spaces because the needs can be really different + our projections are also there. I agree with those who wouldn't put the focus on the actual space but on the energy of the group :)”

**EIKE TOTTER:** “As long as we have to work in a real world it might be good to know how what we do is possible where we do it. As the same with who we do it with. I like to drive a Ferrari from time to time but would avoid (using) it when I am moving into another flat. If for whatever reason the booked room has a pillar in its centre, I'd rather integrate it into my plans than change the architectural statics.”

## IMMEDIATE IMPRESSIONS OF THE SEMINAR: DID IT RESPOND TO THE NEEDS?

“You have a multi-sectorial input and you have a multi-sectorial public.”

*Mark*

The last interview with Mark and Rita focused on the first impressions regarding the seminar. There was an overall feeling of being overwhelming, a mixture of tiredness, met, unmet and surpassed expectations, trying to link past, present and the future, but mostly **trying to get our heads around what on earth happened in the past three days!** But the most important question remained: **what will come of all this in the future?**

**MARK'S FIRST COMMENT:** “It’s funny, what keeps repeating in my brain is what Rita said, which was: they gave it their all. Basically, I think we exploited the participants in the nicest possible way to provide a lot of seeds for the future.”

**RITA'S FIRST COMMENT:** “I can also say now just how naïve we were before the seminar. Because we had a rough idea how learning environments should be addressed as a topic, but what I can say now – after having worked with an architect – is that it gave a direction which I didn't expect.”

### **AFTER THE FIRST COMMENTS, MANY MORE FOLLOWED:**

**THE SEMINAR WAS FULLY JUSTIFIED.** Although different areas, new areas, unexpected areas opened, they just confirmed the need for the seminar, but also for further exploration of learning environments.

**PANDORA'S BOX WAS OPENED,** but a lot of things were left unwrapped. Plenty of excitement and possibilities, but it was just a first step. And as exciting as it was, it was also at times frustrating to just scratch at the surface.

**CROSS-SECTORIAL COOPERATION.** As Mark said, the seminar provided a multisectorial input for the multidisciplinary public. And this widened the perspectives, but also challenged the thinking.

**SOME THINGS WERE NOT ADDRESSED AS MUCH AS WE WOULD HAVE LIKE TO.** Among them: philosophical, psychological and societal understanding of spaces and the specific needs of young people.

**SOME THINGS WERE NOT DEFINED. RITA:** “On purpose we didn't define what we understand by learning, we didn't define what we understand by different contexts of learning. We did this consciously. And in certain moments I thought: dear me, would it maybe have been better to have a common ground, or not?”

**VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS DID NOT DELIVER.** There was a feeling of dissatisfaction with the exploration of virtual environments. There was a need to tackle the topic in more depth in the future.

**THERE WAS NO OPPORTUNITY GIVEN TO “PLAY” WITH DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS. MARK:** “Because, ok, we had graphic facilitation. Yes, we had a documentarist changing the given also, but we didn't use the environment very much at all, in terms of challenging it.”

**NO REAL ANALYSIS OF THE GIVEN ENVIRONMENT. RITA:** “What we didn't do: using it as a learning environment in itself and critically reflecting on it.”

**RITA'S CONCLUSION:** “So, we raised a lot in terms of expectations and questions. But I am fine with this, I can live with this.”

# FOLLOW-UP

## THINGS TO TAKE HOME

It's hard to believe that it was only a three days seminar. And admittedly, it is early to think about the implications of the new area on everyday work at home. And of course there are a lot of restrictions and constraints regarding what can be applied in real life. Still, the reflection is still worth doing. There are quite a few significant things to squeeze in our luggage for our trip back home.

**TIINA:** "Actually yesterday, and I don't know if it has any connection to Youthpass, when we were talking about the blended learning environment, it clicked: **its blended learning!** I have been thinking that's a practical thing to do, to organise the course in such a way. But now I have a name for it: blended learning environment. I think we should have thought of it as a whole and as a learning environment we have been creating... And I think also thinking about the project in the school in Tampere, we haven't been talking about it in that sense – **what keeps the pupils, the students, coming back?** Ok, they have to come, it's a school, but what keeps them come back to certain places there, certain spaces, certain themes... if it is not always the physical environment."

**UKU** "Seeing this strange Japanese working environment, with those pillars, which kind of make the people there, at least in my interpretation, alert... **I think it kind of provoked me to think: How can I use the working environment in such a way?** The environment doesn't have to be dangerous, that you will hit your nose if you go around, but (it would be great) to put some alertness cues in... What I (as a loud extrovert that may not naturally think in terms of an introvert) started to think about more regarding this is that **introverts might need a bit of a shelter**, say, a special chair that swings a bit, where they could be in a bit of cocoon."

**MARTIN:** “And rather than just having a normal set-up, I could instead think more about how the space could be helpful, rather than just moving stuff in the venue the way I am allowed to. So, yeah, just thinking a little bit more about it.”

**CAROLINA:** “Before this seminar I never thought about a spaces and environments such as learning environments. For me, the concept of space is particularly difficult to think about. But it could also be an open space. So, new implementation of this new concept.”

## ALL THE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE

### AND WHAT WILL RITA AND MARK TAKE HOME?

**RITA:** “Community dimension of learning environments. This is one big one... For me, another reflection was that I started really rethinking the role of the facilitator in this process. I have the feeling that there is something unexpected in it... for me.”

**MARK:** “I realise this comes up from time to time, but (for me it was) key competences, whether there is one about spaces. I don't know how to define it at the moment, but in terms of really making it something which people need to consider in terms of where they are, why they are (where they are), in that particular space. And what happens if they get out of it and jump into something completely new? And what happens to the young people they work with, what happens with the communities that the young people are part of? So that for me is a whole new thing. Cause there is nothing in our key competences for Lifelong Learning, which addresses this even implicitly.”

## AND WHAT WILL THEY TAKE HOME AND APPLY TO THEIR WORK?

**MARK:** “To a certain degree. I think a lot of what we missed (during the seminar) is the work that we have to do afterwards. This is about **the categorisation. What should you look for in the creation of learning environments?** And we have hints here, here, here, here, here and we have to put that together. And that’s the challenge, as far as I can see, for the future.”

**RITA:** “The seminar definitely clarified the importance to **work further on this topic.** By reflecting on spaces and environments but also on the link with recognition. And it is worth to think of a publication, since we found big potential here!”

## AND WHAT IF WE WERE FREE TO DREAM?

With the last grains of energy, our last reflections were about the ideal next steps, the steps that could happen if there were no constraints:

**PUBLICATION, PUBLICATION, PUBLICATION.** A publication came to the forefront, as a meta reflection, and as part of SALTO’s role to give impulses in the field.

**RECOGNITION AND VISIBILITY.** The next steps should go in the direction of linking the topic back to visibility and recognition, and the next seminar should be dedicated to this topic.

**VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS.** It would be important to further highlight and explore the virtual dimension of learning environments, to go to the reflection level and possibly link virtual and residential learning environments in the next steps.



**LONGER SEMINARS.** Whatever the focus of the next seminar, it should be at least four days long in order to provide opportunities for people to really deal with these topics.

**RE-EXAMINING OWN ENVIRONMENTS.** Within the framework of longer seminars, participants would need enough time to experiment with ideas how to improve their spaces back home and create new spaces different.

**TRANSFORMING THE SEMINAR INTO TRAINING COURSES.** Really training people regarding this topic. Perhaps putting it into practitioners' hands and letting them develop projects and programmes.

This list seems surprisingly realistic. This may be because Rita and Mark were too tired to go crazy with ideas or because there are possibilities out there that can really set these things in motion. The shared impression of the list was that some more “meat” is missing. So, we decided to try again: **Ok, if we could really dream? No constraints! Promise!**

**PLAYING A ROLE WHEN PLANNING EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES.** In other words, making sure that thinking about learning environments goes beyond occasional seminars or even (blended) courses and starts being something that trainers and facilitators have on their mind when sitting in those team meetings. And even when having absolutely no voice in choosing learning environments, at least thinking of how they can adapt and transform them and what kind of impact learning environments have on work with groups.

**THINKING ABOUT POSSIBLE “STANDARDS”.** What if we could influence the learning environments where our educational events (in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action context to begin with) take place? What first steps would need to be taken?

**INTRODUCING A NEW COMPETENCE.** Too soon? Perhaps. But if there were an additional competence for youth workers/facilitators/trainers that involves learning environments, what would it encompass? Being aware of the environment? Being able to use the environment? Being able to incorporate it into the learning process?

**RAISING FACILITATORS' AWARENESS THAT THEY THEMSELVES ARE A SPACE.** Helping the community of facilitators (in structured or less structured ways) reflect on their role and impact as a space within a space. Trying to reach understanding of how we shape ourselves first – as an environment/space – before moving to the physical environment where we work.

**CREATING LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT.** Exploring how we can achieve that learning environments in the narrow sense (work rooms, training centres, etc.) make the most out of the community environment.

**DEVELOPING STRONGER MULTIDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION.** Working with architects, community leaders, landscape developers, IT specialists, photographers and other professionals in creating more holistic spaces.

Once you manage to let go and start dreaming, you never know where the dreams will take you! For me, the ultimate dream at the moment is that there would be learning environments so versatile and flexible that we could adjust them to a particular moment, a particular topic and a particular group of people. Too ambitious? Maybe. But then again we have only just started seriously exploring learning environments, and only time will tell what the next chapters of Youthpass Learning Agora will turn out to be. So, stay tuned – and reflect on all the exciting learning spaces around you. Oh, and don't forget to dream!

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