



# Expanding Learning in Participatory Design

## Mapping the Field of Learning Theory and Practice in PD

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### ABSTRACT

This workshop explores learning in Participatory Design (PD). We invite the PD community to reflect on the multiple ways learning can strengthen and expand how we frame and drive participatory design to reflect on how we can expand learning in PD to gain an understanding for the complex system we are all part of, for the interdependence of social, ecological and economic systems. Through this workshop, we will invite participants to address questions such as: What theories and concepts can be used to understand learning in PD? What kind of approaches are used to foster learning in PD? How is learning evaluated in PD? The workshop will bring together members of the PD community interested in these questions, and serve as the basis for developing ongoing and new collaborations around the topic of learning in PD.

### CCS CONCEPTS

• Human-centered computing; • Interaction design; • Interaction design process and methods; • Participatory design;

### KEYWORDS

participatory design, learning, unlearning, ontological mapping

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Learning has always been a central concern for PD [1, 2] and in recent years there has been renewed interest around the concept. Bossen et al. [3] have suggested a more systematic evaluation of learning outcomes in PD processes and Robertson et al. [4] have proposed to foreground mutual learning in the research design of PD processes. Further, DiSalvo et al. [5] argue that it is not enough for PD researchers to briefly reference Lave and Wenger [6] and their work on communities of practice and organizational learning to cover the focus on learning in a PD process. Rather, they encourage a much deeper focus on understanding learning in PD and a focus on ‘the diverse and changing needs of learners (as opposed to sophisticated users)’ [5, p. 4], or what they phrase a “learner centered approach to design” [5, p. 3]. In line with these views, Agger Eriksen et al. [7] foregrounded learning to articulate and trace changes in views, structures and practices that emerged in an infrastructuring process that engaged librarians and policy makers. A focus on how to create environments for mutual learning has also been explored also in Participatory Planning [8]. Across this work is a shared commitment to learning and a recognition that more work is needed to build the connections between the theories and practices of participation, design, and learning within PD. In this PDC workshop, we invite participants to reflect on the theories, practices, and ways of evaluating learning in PD. Specifically, we see the importance of developing more articulated ways to understand, support and evaluate learning in PD processes as a matter of tracing who is learning, how is learning experienced differently, what kind of change emerges through learning, and how can learning help sustain the commitments to democracy that define PD.

Connecting learning to the themes of this conference,—expanding the worlds of Participatory Design—raises questions about how Participatory Designers can engage with diverse kinds of knowledge across these different worlds, and how to support

the varied kinds of knowledge that are urgent in this moment, many of which differ from the dominant forms of learning. This demands capacity to work across contexts and groups who stand in opposition to each other and to nurture the creation of relational commons. In turn, this calls for design practices that foster dialogue and common action across radically different ways of thinking, organizing and doing, and that integrate emotions, rationality and spirituality, as framed by PDC Conference Call for 2022. We see the development of this design practice being tightly connected to an engagement with and problematization of underlying norms that shape PD practices and Participatory Designers' identity and action. As we engage these different kinds of knowledge, we will have to question many of our assumptions about design and participation, in order to be open to new practices and cultures of learning. To be able to learn how to engage with plurality we need first to unlearn what 'good participatory design' is and what a 'good participatory designer' does.

In developing PD community views and approaches to learning we find it important to create a dialogue with other disciplines that have been working also with collaborative learning. Within sustainability science, for example, Norström et al. [9] are proposing a framework to support knowledge co-production among people belonging to different organizations and domains. Organizational learning [10] gathers knowledge and insights from the organizational studies field about collaborative learning. Activity theory and more specifically expansive learning [11, 12] develops a practical theory to engage in transformative learning trajectories both taking into account historical patterns and the collective capabilities to rethink and transform through action.

This proposed workshop is particularly suited for PDC 2022 as it aims at interrogating and expanding the core concept of learning within PD. We expect that the themes of the conference will attract both old and new members of the PD community and we see our workshop as contributing to discussions across different ways to frame and drive PD work. Overall, we hope our workshop can support PD practitioners in strengthening and developing the way they work with learning, both returning to learning as a core theme in PD, while also asking critical questions about learning.

## 2 WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

A primary objective of the workshop is to collectively map how the PD community deals with learning on a theoretical and practical level. Through this mapping effort, we aim to both better understand the range of theories and practices of learning in PD and also identify new directions for understanding, supporting and evaluating learning in PD.

Particularly, we will explore three research questions:

**What theories and views can be used to understand learning in PD processes?:** And more specifically: what do we mean by learning (f.ex. learning about each other contexts; learning about the issue at focus; learning as a matter of changing views; etc.etc) and what are the expectations about learning processes (f.ex. Learning to understand each others' worldviews; learning as an empowering process, learning as means to bring about change in a context etc.etc.)?

**What kind of approaches are used to foster learning?:** How do those approaches change between contexts, such as formal and informal learning environments? And more specifically: who is supposed to learn in PD processes (f.ex. participants, the designer, organizations to which participants belong to etc.), how is their learning similar or different, and how is learning supported through the participatory design process?

**How is learning evaluated?:** What methods and techniques are suited to PD practices? What theories of evaluation fit with the value of participatory design? More specifically: How do we know if and when learning happened, for whom and what supported and hindered such a process?

## 3 WORKSHOP FORMAT

We plan an online workshop organized in two sessions. Participants will be asked to send in a position paper following a specific format (see 1.3). The organizers will read all the position papers in advance and prepare a preliminary 'learning-in-PD' map that will include all the theories (i), approaches (ii) and evaluation frameworks (iii) presented in the papers. This map will be constructed using an online platform so that it can be easily shared and serve as documentation. Prior to the workshop sessions, we will divide participants into groups of 4-5 people. The groups will be created with the goal of including a diversity of perspectives about learning and by keeping in consideration participants' own time zones. We plan a session for Oceania/Asia/Africa/Europe participants and a session for Africa/Europe/Americas participants. The two sessions will have the same structure. Departing from their own work and experiences, participants will develop a collaborative interpretation of the preliminary 'learning-in-PD'-map created by the organizers. They are expected to draw connections, identify challenges and opportunities and ways forward. Then, in a plenum session, each group will summarize their discussions by taking the other participants through a journey and key insights explaining the restructured 'learning-in-PD' map they ended-up with

To make use of the unique structure of PDC 2022 we are planning to collaborate with the Nordic and the North America PD places and particularly to organize a presentation and discussion about the outcomes of the workshop involving local audiences. The specifics of these collaborations will be developed in collaboration with the PD places. Each collaboration may be slightly different, to meet the structure and interests of each PD place. Our hope is this broadens and continues the discussion of learning and participatory design beyond the workshop participants. The engagement with PD places becomes an opportunity to add to and refine the insights from the workshop through conversation with other PD practitioners.

## 4 WORKSHOP SUBMISSION AND RECRUITMENT

We plan to accept up to 30 participants to the workshop. Participants will be selected on the basis of a 2-page position paper sent in by the mid-June, 2022. Participants will be asked to submit a 2 pages position paper. The position paper must include a description of a case and context of a PD process grounding the paper in practice. Each position paper should then engage with at least one of the following themes: a) theoretical framings of learning, b) concrete

approaches to learning, c) ways learning can be evaluated. This structure will enable participants to express what themes of learning are of most interest to them, and in turn, this will inform the groups that we construct prior to the workshop. We plan to notify accepted participants by the mid-July 2022.

We plan to share information about the workshop in our respective networks that cut across different fields and communities: participatory design, urban planning, service design, computing, transdisciplinary research, urban studies, learning sciences. To do so we will create a simple website with the call for the workshop and a set of related publications that inform our thinking on participatory design and learning. This website will then also be used for sharing documentation after the workshop.

## 5 WORKSHOP OUTCOME

We foresee the workshops having multiple outcomes. First, it will bring together PD scholars and practitioners interested in learning and provide the space for them to get to know, and learn from, each other. This gathering is a valuable outcome itself as we believe it can be the basis for collaborations and community building. The workshop will also have material outcomes, in the series of maps created in the workshop. These maps will capture and share insights about learning in PD. They will be shared online to be of use by scholars and practitioners looking to better address learning in their PD projects. Finally, we foresee the workshop as a starting point for joint work and publications about learning in PD. Possibilities for joint writing and the curation of a special issue on the theme of learning in PD will be discussed with workshop participants at the end of the workshop.

## 6 WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

We are a group of researchers that belong to different disciplines (design, social sciences, computer sciences, urban planning) and that work at the intersection of different fields (participatory design, interaction design, urban planning, service design, computing, transdisciplinary research, urban studies, learning sciences.), in collaboration with different communities (civic organizations, from

public organizations to citizens) on different issues (from development of IT solutions, to urban planning, from alternative economics to new public services). We have been all engaged on a practical and theoretical level with learning in collaborative processes and we have been doing this from different views and traditions. We have all extensive experience in organizing and driving workshops online and onsite.

## 7 WORKSHOP SET UP AND EQUIPMENT

We are planning to run the workshop online. We are planning to use zoom and the online platform for workshops Miro.

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