



# Learning labs

Co-creating insights, initiatives and policy

**Documentation  
Learning lab Skåne  
Traineeships**

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Cultural Creative Spaces and Cities  
Region Skåne

## Context

During the fall of 2019, Region Skåne convened an Urban Lab with 40 people/stakeholders from different kinds of cultural actors from the whole region. The lab was part of the project Cultural Creative Cities and Spaces and gathered the participants around common challenges and offered a process for them to co-create knowledge, insights and concrete initiatives. Questions that guided the explorative learning lab process; *How can art and culture play a bigger role in the development of common and public spaces and meeting places? What are the unexpected collaborations, new initiatives and practices that will help us level up the work for a sustainable future?*

One purpose was to develop the actual lab methodology - a strategy suitable for a public regional actor to convene stakeholders to learn, collaborate and act and at the same time use the process to inform and invite broader participation into a policy process.

The learnings from the process resulted in a model called **Learning-lab**. About 60 people participated in the two traineeships that followed. This is documentation on some of the core concepts of a Learning Lab as presented during the traineeships. The purpose is to support people that participated to continue to develop the capacity to convene, design and facilitate co-creative processes.

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- Introduction
- Overview of traineeships
- Starting position: Complexity and co-creation
- Framework for designing Learning labs
- Guiding principles to enable co-creation
- Process design phases
- Shifts in positions

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## About

This documentation is written by David Ershammar. It builds on two traineeships hosted by him and Jesper Høk as part of Region Skånes part of the project Cultural Creative Spaces and Cities. the purpose is to support people involved in the traineeship to continue to learn. It is not intended as a standalone guide.

Project lead was Ola Jacobson, Region Skåne.

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## Traineeship 1

The first traineeship took place in spring 2020 in Malmö. It was a one-day event that gathered about 25 people. The purpose was to:

- Offer a place for peer-to-peer learning on the process that opens up for participation, unleash creativity and lead to results
- Support participants capacity to lead co-creative processes with stakeholders within culture, art, city planning and community development.

Among the questions the group worked with was:

- How can we present non-linear results in a way that satisfies the linear logical systems we report to?
- On whose terms do we meet, can we meet on equal terms?
- How can we involve citizens in the process, and create conditions for successful collaboration?
- Where do I as a leader, find support and inspiration to co-creative processes?



## Traineeship 2

The second traineeship was an online peer-learning process with three workshops during fall 2020. About 30 people participated.

- September 8
- October 6
- November 12

Examples of questions that participants worked with.

You can find many of the concepts and models used during are traineeship in the following pages.

How are ways we can include, adjust the process to difference. Specifically people not used to "our" kind of process?

How create space that makes it possible to express fears when there are power differences?

How can we enhance the possibilities that eventual outtakes from codesign processes are being implemented or thought of by participants

What are criterias for when to use co-creation processes and when not to?

How do you motivate people that are "forced" to be participants?

How do we go to next step? The implementation phase (after the process-and of course keeping the process open)

**1. Facilitator dilemmas**

- How do you open up to create processes around the "big questions" (sustainability).
- How do we best manage expectations or arise in people engagement?
- When do you change from trying to co-create to conflict resolution or assert more control?
- How to decide when negativity is an important problem to focus on?
- How to motivate engagement?
- How can we design that citizen participation becomes some sort of learning and really bring it into processes.
- How do you facilitate participants feeling lost?
- How do we motivate leaders, directors and chairs to invest time in co-creative processes?
- What are the best methods for documenting learning and goals.
- When decide when negativity is a problem?
- How do you adapt your design and methodology to the needs of the participants even recognizing that your usual "approach" might actually be the problem.
- How do you motivate people that are "forced" to be participants?
- Sometimes people do not take on a role as participant - important to place agency and responsibility

**2. Open up for a new future**

- How do you facilitate discussions about their future needs
- How to get people onboard?
- How do you envision the future?
- How do you ask questions for the future?
- How to find community partners

**3. Diversity and power**

- How to deal with language/communication challenges within participatory processes?
- How to reach participants outside our normal network?
- How do you inspire co-creation when not in charge of the agenda?
- How to navigate policy that hinders co-creation?
- How can we overcome dependency relations and dare to be critical?
- How are ways we can include, adjust the process to difference. Specifically people not used to "our" kind of process?
- Good to base the process on the personal experience and perspectives "what's your challenge?"
- How to find common grounds for different stakeholders?
- How create space that makes it possible to express fears when there are power differences?
- How help people to understand more about each others perspectives to understand roles and perspectives.

**4. Outcomes, decisions, next steps**

- How to use the outcomes of the labs responsibly
- How can we design that citizen participation just becomes some sort of tokenism, and really bring it to into processes
- How do we go to next step? The implementation phase after the process-and of course keeping the process open?
- How do you turn input into insight
- How can we enhance the possibilities that eventual outtakes from codesign processes are being implemented or thought of by participants
- How do you actualise the insights (connect input with output)
- How to facilitate bridging the gap for participants from idea to policy?
- How do you actualise the insights (connect input with output)
- How can we create better forms for decision making?
- How do we create change when we are all in a never ending process - get the feeling to falling around?

**5. How work with resistance?**

- Are there Tools for the case that perhaps the co-creative process is a threat to the hierarchy
- Warm-ups? Ice-breakers? Tools for breaking down institutionalized language and power dynamics?
- How to work with resistance from the linear organisations. Hierarchy clash.
- Designing process of learning labs
- How can actors initiate co-creation processes who are not in power positions?

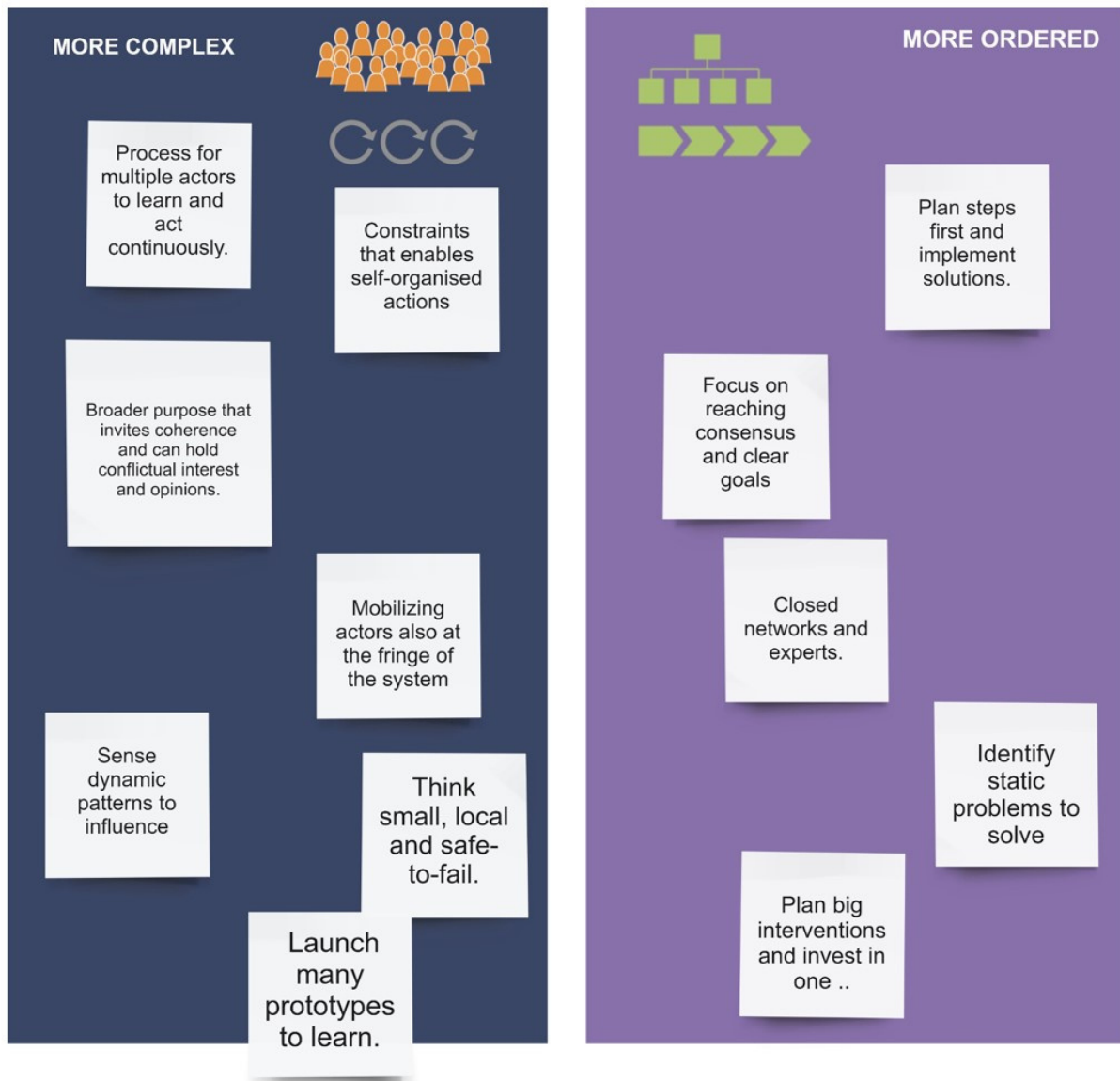
# The starting position: Complexity and co-creation

In recent years the awareness that the structures - the way we organise, plan, make decisions and strategise does not match the complexity we as individuals and our institutions experience today. The interconnectedness, ambiguity and speed of change require us to adapt and develop the way we govern and support change.

The design of a Learning lab rests on understanding that society and organisations to a large extent are complex adaptive systems. And, that challenges are complex and have to be dealt with accordingly. In this section, we describe the underlying logics and some characteristics of a strategy fit for complex challenges.

We describe that by making distinctions between two sorts of systems. Describing a context, an organisation or a challenge as a system and part of a system inform us how to act. The theory of understanding human system as a complex system is rich, and in this section, we choose to be inspired by the work of Dave Snowden's work on the Cynefin model, first published in A Leader's Framework for Decision Making, Harvard Business Review, November 2007 but and has developed over the years.

## Two different set of responses



To the left are characteristics of how to organize in an unordered system where the result is depending on many parts of the system, so many considerations to make that it is not possible to predict the outcome. We know in hindsight what worked and what did not work. We could call that a living system or a complex adaptive system.

To the right are characteristics of an ordered system, where we can predict outcomes of our interventions. We know by earlier evidence what works and not. This can be described as a linear system when a cause leads to a predictable outcome. We can call that a mechanical system that is fit for obvious or complicated challenges.

# Shifts of position

Convening and hosting a Learning Lab is to create a space for the type of qualities that complex challenges require. Often it means shifting position from traditional roles fit for more ordered systems to roles more fit for complexity.

From expert ideas and solutions to recipients...



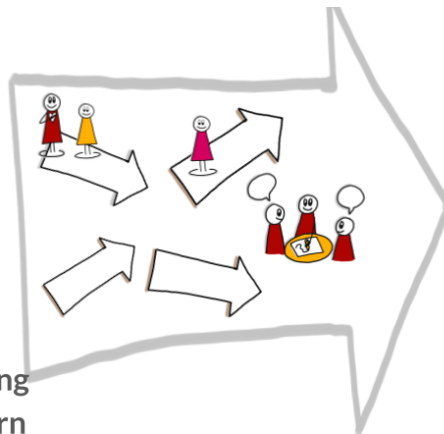
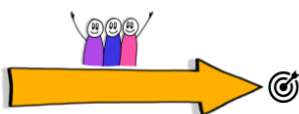
..to invite to a platform for co-creation.

From giving answers...



..to supporting learning with questions.

From consensus and shared goal...



...to "messy coherence" - creating space for diversity to meet, learn and act in the same dictions.





## Framework for Learning lab

- Three principles
- Four process design phases

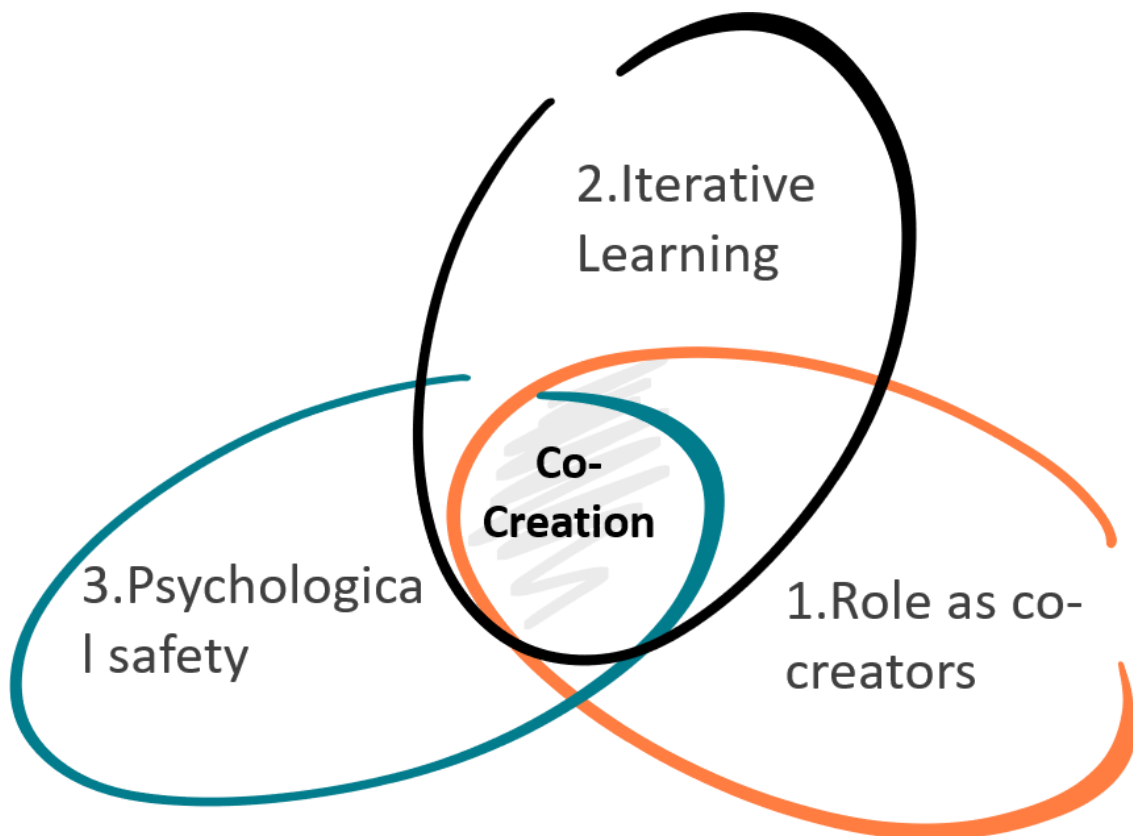
We consolidated our learnings into a framework that can offer support when setting up co-creative processes with an aim to deliver a wide set of result.

# Principles to enable co-creation

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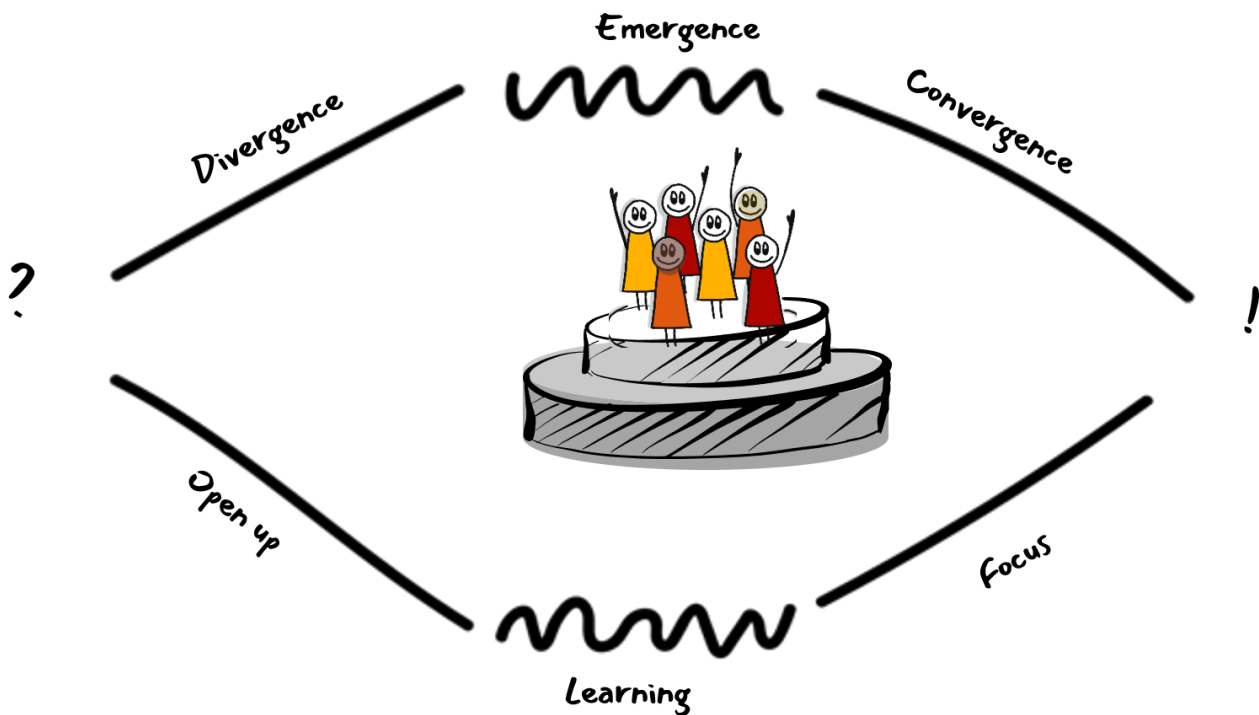
The Learning lab is driven by three working principles. These principles guide how the lab is structured and what methods and practices are being used.

When these principles come alive through leadership and methods it opens up for quality co-creation.



# 1. Role as co-creator

Inviting the participants as co-creators requires a clear process. We operate with three different phases in the process - divergent, emergent and convergent. Each of these phases is different, and it is important to know where we are in the process and what is needed in each phase.



In the divergent phase, there is as yet no clear goal. This is a "goal-seeking" phase where asking the right questions and a clear shared purpose gives the collective direction. If you close the divergent phase too soon, the level of newness or innovation will be less. Ideally, a group will stay in the divergent phase until new solutions and a shared direction is seen by everyone.

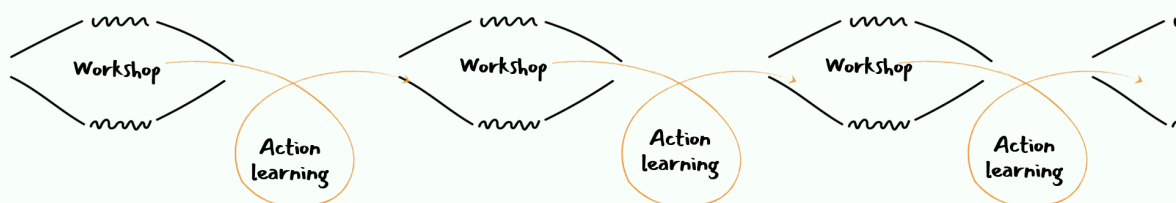
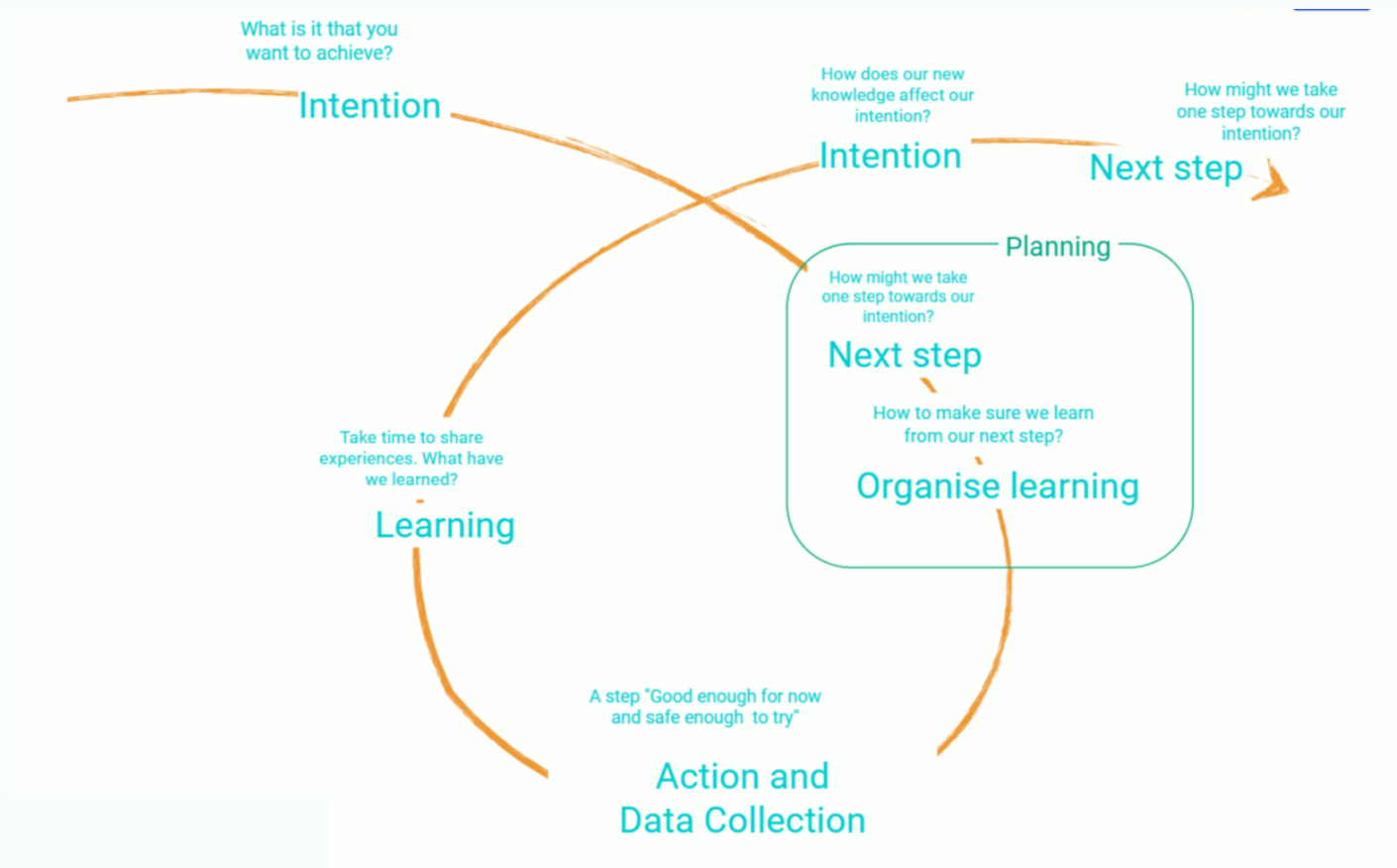
Divergent thinking typically generates alternatives, has free-for-all open discussion, gathers diverse points of view and unpacks the problem."

The emergent phase is often known as the 'groan zone'. It is the phase where different ideas and needs are integrated. It may require us to stretch our own understanding to hold and include other points of view. We call it the groan zone because it can feel like an uncomfortable stretch – but it is also the phase where the new solutions are discovered.

The convergent phase is goal-oriented and focused, linear, structured and usually subject to time constraints. It is focused on getting results and may require quick decisions. Convergent thinking means evaluating alternatives, summarising key points, sorting ideas into categories and arriving at conclusions.

## 2. Iterative learning

In a Learning lab we organise the workflow so that each session focus on supporting the participants to find their challenge, explore, learn, setting a new intention and finding their next step towards the intention. The purpose of this step – or small action – is to create an experience and gather data about if, and about the direction or possible solutions for the intention.



Key is to support participants to act, test and idea or explore their questions between the lab sessions so that they come back more informed and experienced to the next session.

Over time, this "action learning" makes it possible for participants to being adaptive and change direction during the process. This principle could be expressed as taking actions that are "Good enough for now, safe enough to try – emphasising that the main purpose of the action is to probe, test the idea, and create insights to inform the next step.



### 3. Psychological safety

Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

In psychologically safe groups, members feel accepted and respected. Working with collaboration and complex challenges is not an easy ride. Diverse perspectives and interest are invited creating tensions. That is why we need to focus on supporting the group build trust and relationships that match this complexity



## Process design phases

We have mapped out four phases to support setting up a lab. The phases are mapped in sequence but it is important to notice that it does not mean it is always a linear process. Taking steps back, addressing questions, tasks in an "earlier" phase is also normal.

**1.  
Foundation  
- Pre-work**

**2.  
Invite  
Mobilise**

**3.  
Co-  
creation  
process**

**4.  
Build on  
results.  
Harvest**

# 1. Foundation - Pre-work

- Secure mandate and process-space
- Form core design team
- Clarify purpose and plan for a wide set of results

One task in first phase is to clarify the purpose and identify what is the wider set of outcome we wish for. In the example of Learning Lab Skåne we identified results for both individual, project, organisation and the field. And for each of these “layers” the aim to support, learning, action, relationships and policy-creating was relevant.

- Individual and collective learning. Supporting participants to make sense and draw conclusions, and act in their own practice and context.
- Stronger relationships and networks. For complex challenges, better relationships are a result, making better work possible.
- Collaborative action. Every session focused both on overarching challenges and at the same time local action, not getting stuck in the important larger issues but rather Input to the Cultural Strategy 2021-2024 of Region Skåne. A conversation about structural challenges and general themes gave an important input in the policy process.

We believe that this design with the outcome at many levels contributed to the positive response from the lab participants; Individual, inter-relational, strong focus on collaborative action while at the same time harvest learnings and insights and input to a policy process.

## A wide set of results

### Layers (for whom)

- Cultural field/community in Skåne
- Partnerships
- Organisations
- Project Creative Cities and Spaces
- Individual

### Types (what kind)

- Learning
- Action
- New concrete initiatives
- Relationships - Community building
- Courage and individual capacity building
- Test lab-method
- Policy > Regional Cultural plan

## Purpose for Skåne-lab

- To support key actors to **co-create knowledge and concrete initiatives** so that art and culture can play a bigger role in the development of common and public spaces.
- **Create input** to the Regional Culture Strategy 2021-2024, a policy initiative that gives a direction and makes priorities for Region Skåne in the field of art, culture and regional development.
- **Test Learning labs** as a means for a public regional actor to support action and policy development.



## 2. Invite Mobilise

- Set invitation questions - generic challenge
- Secure diversity that mirrors the complexity
- Invite participants as co-creators from the start
- Visualize process and results

The next phase is about connecting and inviting the participants. Visualise the process and wished-for outcomes, that supports clarity and commitment.



**How can art and culture play a bigger role in the development of common and public spaces and meeting places?**  
*Generic challenge for Learning lab Skåne*

### 3. Co-creation process

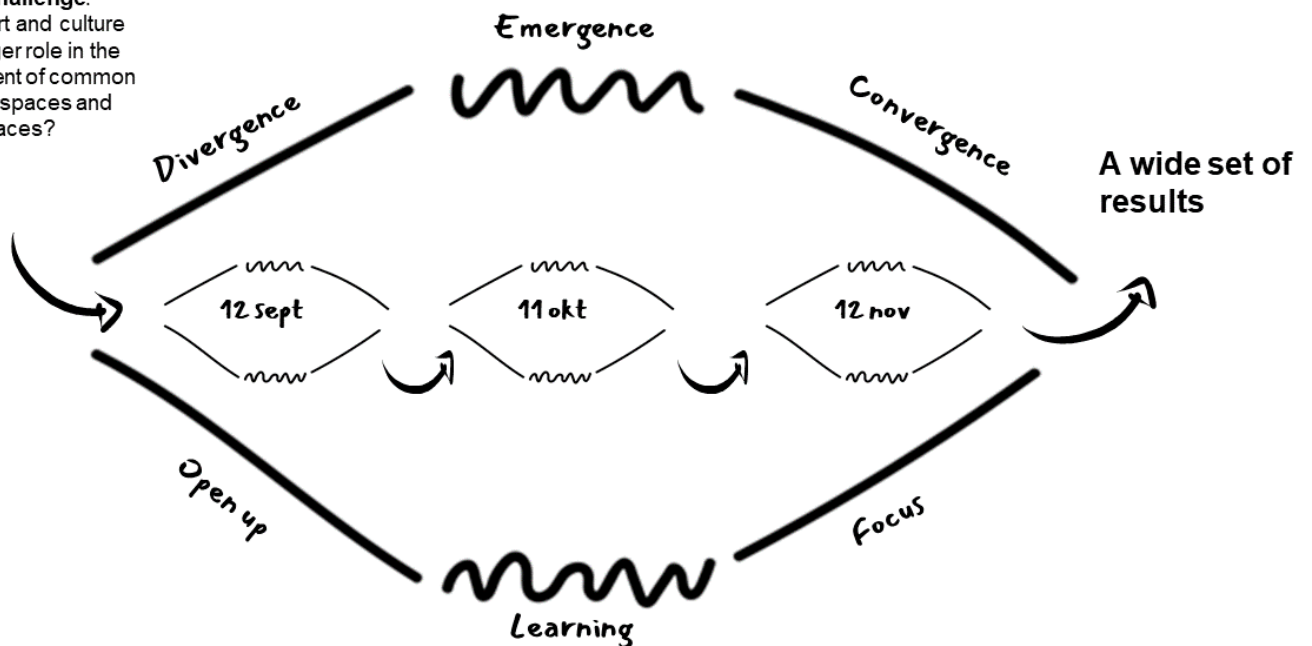
- Contact before content
- Create space for co-creation - specific challenges
- Support learning over time, build on the results.
- Process facilitation and harvesting of results

The next phase is about the actual co-creation process, supporting participants to finding their challenges, meeting others, learn together and expand understanding. From this understanding the process supports participants to converge, making strategic choices and propose next steps.

#### Learning lab Skåne overview

**Generic challenge:**

How can art and culture play a bigger role in the development of common and public spaces and meeting places?



For the co-creative process thinking and methods from [Liberating Structure](#), [Design thinking](#) and [Participatory Leadership](#) were used.

# 4. Build on results. Harvest

- Emphasize everybody's responsibility and lead by example.
- Document and support acting on results for different purposes and stakeholders
- Disseminate results
- Plan for follow up > next step

## Results - some examples



**Initiative and collaborations**  
 Five co-creators started a new collaborative project "Play for democracy" - involving children in the making of the new city hall of Ängelholm > 2,5 mkr.

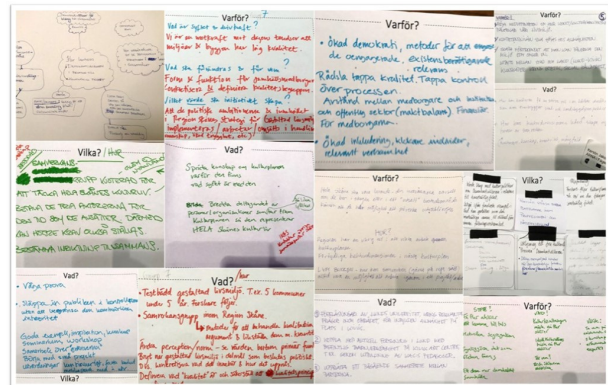
**Initiative**  
 Region Skåne and others are driving a new capacity building initiative on "Desiged lived environment"

**Individual**  
 "I now have a stronger wider network - great to meet other cultural worker so focused".  
 "Inspiring and engaging. I learned alot."  
 "Exciting method"

**Policy**  
 Concrete input to Region Skåne Cultural plan 2021-2024

**Methods being used**  
 The methodology have already being used in another dialogue-processes with cultural sector and covid response.

Find multiple ways to take care of the wide sets of results from the co-creative process. Invite all to harvest the results of the co-creation process



# Concluding words



The Learning Lab model was tested and created by Region Skåne's part of the project Cultural Creative Spaces and Cities project. The project has been all about saying yes to change and new ideas. But, not just any change but change and new ideas that arise from the needs and challenges that we identify together - between different levels and sectors in society.

It's about being open to believing that someone else might have a solution for my problem. It's about being open for new partnerships BEING part of the solution. It's about being open to knowledge and experiences that others have.

It is also about letting this dialogue and openness influence policy, priorities and resource allocation.

Of course, we believe that different forms of culture are the base, goal and purpose for most people - it is what gives us meaning in life, some would say. This project is also about finding ways to let culture being a vital part of shaping our cities and societies.

To quote the Policy analysis of the Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities project: "The overall objective is to understand policy-making as an ecosystem, where cultural representatives and public servants come together and work in non-competitive, horizontal, and collaborative ways to provide solutions to urban problems. As with an ecosystem, every actor has a role in balance with others."

Learning Lab is a strategy that helps put those words into practice supporting actors to learn and co-create.



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