# Chapter 14
# "Nothing Makes Sense"

## New Aesthetics of Experiences in Self-organizing Services

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**Abstract** Self-organizing and collaborative activities are increasingly considered as promising alternatives for accessing goods and services responding to ecological and economic challenges, especially since 2008 economic crisis. In line with such currents that give serious appreciation for self-organizing practices, some design theorists have been exploring the role of designers in the emergent context, where people are self-directed actors who organize themselves around their daily needs and problems (Burns et al. 2006; Manzini and DIS 2005; Stephens et al. 2008). However, when designers meet the design intent of improving or developing self-organizing services, they can face interesting limits and even bewilderment. Some design principles, like the use of service and positive user experiences, are understood in a different way in this context, some of which has to do with its non-commercial view of service, some of which with its distinctive culture values. The agency of users here cannot find its place in traditional model that conceptualizes people as users rather than contributors. Important hypotheses of design intent, like development or promotion towards a larger audience, meet resistance from the people. In our chapter, we illuminate these gaps by drawing on a study of a community-based bicycle workshop in Helsinki, sustained by a group of bicycle enthusiasts who voluntarily help people with repair work. Different from conventional bicycle business, visitors need to repair their bicycles by themselves rather than relying on other people or paying for service. Regarding the agency of service users of this workshop, we investigate the situated knowledge and skills that are required for the completion of the repair work and being comfortable in the workshop experientially and culturally. We intend to make the culturally specific norms accountable and to reveal the unspoken rules that govern the behaviours and

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experiences in the workshop, with the comparison to ones in business context. By doing this, we aim to reveal the different notion concerning aesthetics of experience, agency of users, consistency and standardization of services, and articulation of values in the context of a '*progressive*' community. By illustrating its subcultural and self-organizing nature of the community, we suggest designers shall respect their subjective of sustaining subcultural identity within their own norms and rules in the niche. Hence, we further argue that designers shall spread the service model by communicating it to others with a sharing and learning attitude instead of improving the existing structure through vertical integration or scaling up.

## 14.1 Introduction

Self-organizing and collaborative practices are increasingly being considered as promising alternatives for accessing goods and services to address ecological and economic challenges, especially since 2008 crisis. Citizen participation in public services is seen as promising for societal development (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Farrell 2000). A 'sharing economy' that values local community and social capital, like car sharing, suggests a sustainable future that involves still more making, sharing and self-organizing (Schor 2011). In line with such considerations, some design researchers and theorists, like Manzini in Milan, Cottam and Leadbeater (2004) in London and Fuad-Luke (2009) and Botero (2013) in Helsinki, are exploring a new agenda for designers in the emergent design fields, like facilitating people, activating local communities and leveraging bottom-up initiatives.

However, when designers encounter the design intent of these self-organizing services, they often experience bewilderment. Some common assumptions of service design—notions of consistency, cohesion, and optimization in the business sense of this term—do not appear as core values in many self-organizing services. The 'agency of users' cannot find its place with respect to the traditional user model that conceptualizes people as users and service recipients rather than deeply involved actors who organize themselves toward daily problems and needs (Burns et al. 2006; Manzini and DIS 2005; Stephens et al. 2008). Some design principles, like, use of goods or services and user experiences, are understood differently in this context, some of which has to do with its non-commercial view of service, some of which with its distinctive culture values. Important hypotheses of design intent, like service development or promotion towards a larger audience, meet resistance.

In this chapter, we present what is essentially a negative case for service design and its common assumptions about how a successful and effective service should be organized. We try to illuminate how some certain assumptions and design principles—such as agency of the user, user experiences, the use of service, the consistency and standardization of services, and clear articulation of well-defined values—can be understood in a different way by a self-organizing service. We address these questions through a study of a community-based bicycle workshop in

Helsinki, as one alternative form of service relating to bicycles. People can repair and assemble bicycles there by using the workshop's space, tools and recycled spare parts for free. And a group of bicycle enthusiasts, who embrace the spirit of anarchism and mutual help, voluntarily help people with their repair work.

We also engaged in some naturalistic field 'experiments'—something like Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological 'breaching experiments'—in order to reveal the underlying character and guiding assumptions of the workshop. For this we took five regular bicycle users (who had never been to any place that even remotely resembled the workshop) to that shop to repair their bicycle. Like any naïve, first-time visitor to the shop, they had to find ways to make themselves comfortable and 'acceptable' culturally, and to avoid deviant behaviours or negative experiences; that is to say, they had to assign meanings and determine relevancies in this a social situation that decidedly 'breached' their expectations for a service encounter, and decide what actions were then appropriate and normative. In this way, we sought to make the workshop's culturally specific norms accountable and observable, in order to reveal the unspoken practical rules that govern the behaviours and experiences of the people there (Maynard and Clayman 1991).

Through studying the situated knowledge and skills employed during their mundane repair and social tasks in these naturalistic 'experiments', we provide an appreciation of the courses of action volunteers and visitors inhabit in the setting of this progressive community environment. We aim to provide a hard look at what people value in the context of making, sharing and self-organizing. Dealing with a new design space as well as a new use space of self-organizing rather than the consumption of formally-designed goods and services, we intend to expand design principles with a rich societal dimension, instead of mere commercially generated aesthetics, like efficiency, cleanliness or easy to use, or simply as a response to the demands of users and customers. Our study points to further research that can help designers be better prepared with the new design agenda with regard to self-organized services, by revealing user's different interpretations of experiences in service use and the underlying values.

## 14.2 The Workshop and Its People

The community-based bicycle workshop is located in Helsinki, Finland, one of the world's most economically affluent and technologically advanced societies. In Helsinki, public transportation is very convenient for inner city mobility. The level of cycling is rather low and marginal, just like almost all other industrialized societies, albeit with a recent rise among urban youth that has several global and national reasons, both ideological and practical. In Helsinki, there are many types of bicycle workshops, both business and social orientated. All provide repair and assembly services. Some only sell branded-new bicycles, while others also sell second-hand functional ones. In this society, it is rather expensive to get a broken bicycle repaired in a store, as the labour cost is very high; around 60 euros/h, which

is sometimes equal to the price of a second-hand bicycle. There are also some alternative workshops. In summer, a newly opened workshop, located in the most central Helsinki shopping mall, help people to do some simple repair work by lending tools for free. In a local university, a workshop sustained by the student union provides space and resources for students to repair and assemble their bicycles. There, a small membership fee is required and they employ a skilled bicycle mechanic. Due to the city's promotion of urban cycling, recently many short-term pop-up bicycle workshops organized through university student projects have been started.

The one that we are introducing to you in this chapter is *Helsinki Pyöräpaja*, which in English means Helsinki Workshop. It is community-based, initiated and supported by a group of Helsinki bicycle enthusiasts who are skilled bicycle mechanics. As we have stated, it provides resources for people to repair and assemble their own bicycles. Before forming the workshop open to the public, this group of enthusiasts often gathered to repair and assemble 'crazy' bicycles and to have cycle events in an old customs office building, sponsored by the city for squatters as a 'cultural centre'. The workshop was mainly for their own use although they did not turn down anyone who visited to use the place. The community enjoyed the moments of having new people there, teaching repair work, exchanging skills and knowledge, sharing stories and planning cycling events.

After the building was demolished, the group planned to run a workshop open to the public with the goal of "*spreading the happiness of repair and cycling*" and promoting the self-reliance of bicycle users that "*more people can repair their own bicycles*", as the members stated. Supported by Helsinki Board of Youth Issues, who also agreed to provide one-year grant, they found a place with relatively low rent and central location. It is located in Vallila, the central northern neighbourhood of Helsinki, a bit north of the city's famous bohemian and culturally liberal area, Kallio. Vallila used to be a working-class neighbourhood and industrial area, but is now becoming popular among both artists and craftsmen. As Kallio becomes more expensive and mainstream, Vallila is considered the next hub for underground culture in this capital city. The workshop is more or less hidden in the basement of an abandoned factory building in a compact industrial section of Vallila. Various professionals, mostly related to the creative industries and alternatives to the mainstream, use the building; this includes several wood workshops, artistic studios, a hair salon that allows customers to park their bicycles inside, and a bar that stages live electronic and punk music.

The distinguishing feature of the workshop is that it is financially self-sustained to a largest extent by integrating various spare or free (for them) resources; basically, the materials and the spare time of skilled volunteers from the community. All of their services and materials should not be involved in the existing monetary (commercial) system, according to the community's ideology. The rent for the basement is their only significant expense at this point. Two thirds of this cost is covered by the grants from city's Youth Foundation, while the rest is from visitor donations.

The first of these free resources, the materials needed for the shop—which includes tools, bicycles that both are operable and not, and spare parts—come from those that do not have use value (temporally at least) for their present owners/users. Some are donated and others are collected from the trash. These materials can be taken by anyone who needs them, without payment or donation. The circulation of such 'useless' material becomes a kind of informal economy. For outsiders, the first impression of this place is usually that it is a dump. It seems to be filled with junk, largely used and now abandoned parts. Used tires in all sizes hang from the walls. Bicycle frames of various shapes and colours are jumbled up in the corners. Boxes of small parts, such as hangers, brakes and pedals, are piled on the shelves in a muddle. However, if you get closer, you find almost all the repairs that take place in the shop make full use of this jumble and muddle, with the workshop operating greatly relying on the circulation of such 'junk' material.

The second 'free' resource, the time and energy of volunteers, comes from a group of young (and unmarried) Finns, some of whom are facing a crisis of employment and have a negative relationship to the standard work ethic. Some, though appear idle, are actually busy with the activities relating to their interests like cycling or band playing. If they are employed, most are engaged in manual or handicraft-related labour, such as boat mechanic, bicycle mechanic and the fine arts. None of these jobs provides high economic or social status. The average working hours per week for this group is quite low. Without involving themselves in the kind of high-paid jobs requiring close regulation and intensive work, they have a lot of spare time, of which they can have full control. Also, and equally significant, none of the group needs to invest time or energy on marriage or raising children. Thus, being idle in the industrial society, they can 'hang out' in the workshop, doing their own thing and helping others.

Beyond its practical function as a repair workshop, the workshop strongly embraces a distinct ideology. They actively seek minority styles and meanings, which are cycling culture, DIY spirit, and mutual help network, quietly subverting the majority culture and, to some extent, the capitalistic system. The workshop is a place where they attempt to develop a sense of identity that conveys particular subcultural values. The bicycle itself has a long history as an icon of social movements, within its strong ideological meanings, like feminism and socialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and anarchism and environmentalism from the 1960s until today (Horton 2006). The golden age of cycling was after the First World War, when the bicycle became an ordinary utility vehicle and gradually lost its political connation. However, after the Second World War, within the emergency of auto industry and massive popular embrace of auto mobility, cycling faced a dramatic downturn and was marginalized in industrialized world. Bicycles are increasingly perceived as an inferior or secondary mode of mobility, and as such properly restricted to the poor and children (Rosen 2002). But recently, the bicycle is increasingly considered a healthy form of mobility, opposing car culture dominance, and articulating a vision of a sustainable lifestyle.

Apart from cycling culture, members also embrace a system without money. The community members, most of whom have negative relations with work, feel

themselves neglected by social standards in the capitalistic society—although with the public claim that "*the workshop is for everybody*", members are aware they belong to a particular kind of subculture and may be viewed by the mainstream as 'weird'. Believing that most people have gotten used to paying for services and do not want get their hands dirty, they are looking for an alternative. Positioning themselves as "progressive", they believe 'open-minded' and 'curious' people would show interest in going to them, while 'rich', 'conservative' and 'busy' people would not. Although these descriptive words may sound like over-simplified tags, they are all are from members' accounts as they explain who might go to them and who not; by quoting them we mean to show that workshop members honestly know they are providing a rather marginal service that is not very common in 21st century cities and thus challenging for many individuals. One member even uses the word "*afraid*" to describe how some individuals might perceive them.

> Some are afraid of getting hands dirty. Some are afraid of this messy place. Some are afraid of talking to strangers. Some are afraid of exploring new things. Anyway, it is really difficult for some people to come here.

## 14.3 Two Breaching Experiments

As we stated above, for this study we borrowed the idea of naturalistic breaching experiments from ethnomethodology in order to deal with the 'invisibility of common sense' of the workshop (ten Have 1990). Instead of only ethnographically observing people who are already familiar with the workshop, who have previously experienced its particular social situation, we also took five regular bicyclists to the workshop to repair a bicycle, none of who had heard about the place or been to anything similar. Three were men who had some experience with basic repair skills, while the other two, both females, had none. Their usual way of getting bicycle repaired was paying for a professional mechanics or doing it by themselves (or with the help of friends). In this sense, bringing them to the workshop without any prior explanation or introduction, simply asking them to get their bicycle repaired there, just like any other visitor, was meant to breach their social expectations. That is to say, as customers who are familiar with the business services offered by ordinary bicycle repair stores, they are taken to a community-based one with a very different order. Exposed to its unfamiliar scenes, they have to construct meanings of the place that are completely new for them. By contextually transforming and modifying their background understandings and expectancies, their previous knowledge and experiences relating to services and repair work, they necessarily assign meanings or relevance to the new social situation and have to decide what actions are operative and normative. They have to attempt to make themselves comfortable and acceptable, to avoid deviant behaviours or negative experiences.

These 'experiments' were meant to reveal the practical actions through which the subject interprets and defines the new circumstances of the workshop and forms

their action. We particularly looked at experiences like confusion, anger and embarrassment, or excitement and comfort—all products of social interaction with the 'interface' of the workshop and the people. This kind of 'breaching' of normal expectations is aimed at making the setting its cultural norms more accountable and observable, and to reveal the unspoken rules that govern the behaviours of people at the workshop. For the purposes of this chapter, we describe the results of two of these.

### 14.3.1 Lee: "Nothing Makes Sense"

As a brand-conscious consumer, Lee skilfully chooses a limited collection of global well-known brands, featuring both high symbolic value and good quality, to present his social identity. He just bought a 28-inch Raleigh bicycle, an old British brand, from the most prestigious and reliable department store in town, Stockmann, which sells conventional and well-respected brands. About 2 months after his purchase, something about the bicycle went wrong. Since there was a 1-year guarantee, he directly took the bicycle to the department store. He told the service staff that something went wrong, and the service staff promised they would find out the problem and fix it. They wrote down Lee's phone number and promised to call him when it was ready. After about 1 week, Lee received a call saying his bicycle was ready. About the whole process, he was generally content with the service, with no surprises. He thinks this is exactly how the service is supposed to be for customers.

For our study, we gave Lee a broken, 26-inch second-hand bicycle and asked him to get it repaired in *Helsinki Pyöräpaja*. From the very first moment he was involved in this activity, the bicycle brought him an acute sense of embarrassment. He was quite reluctant to carry this bicycle, with its front inner tube broken and most of its parts rusty.

> If I knew it was so crappy, I would not agree to repair it. It looks like it is not used or owned by any human user. It does not have any value.

Even later on, when he was convinced to carry it on the way to the workshop, he was constantly mumbling,

> (…) So embarrassed! People may wonder why this guy is carrying a piece of crap, or they guess he stole it.

Clearly, according to his perception of possessed materials and his means of identity expression, this type of bicycle, with very poor functional quality and negative visual appearance, will definitely not be chosen. This 'crappy' bicycle brought unexpected disruptions of his presentation of social self.

Also, it took him much longer than expected to reach the address. Shown in his iPhone5, the workshop was only several blocks away, within 15-min walking distance. Actually, it took him twice that amount of time. The address was in a narrow and hidden street backside of a building that he missed several times.

Even after he found the address, he had much difficulty in recognizing the entrance. According to his expectations about the entrance of any public or business space, the entrance should appear welcoming, open, or at least recognizable. However, these visual rules did not apply here. There was a metal gate, which was closed and covered with some poor graffiti and small posters. Lee was not sure about anything until he saw a very small poster on A4 paper with an illustration of a bicycle,

> It should be here. But where is the door? If it is this, why is it close? There is no doorbell. What should I do?

Luckily, at that time, there happened to be a man who walked out of the door. Lee asked him if there was a bicycle workshop in this building. The man said yes and insisted on taking Lee to the workshop. Inside of the building was a storage-like place, dilapidated and dim. Following the man, Lee took the elevator to the basement, turned left and right, walked through a corridor, and finally reached the workshop. But the door of the workshop was closed. They knocked on the door hard but no one answered. The man who led Lee to the door told him there was a landline phone inside and that the number was on the door. Lee called—and no one answered.

Standing in front of the closed door, Lee was totally shocked. He had no clue how to react to this unexpected situation. This social scene was completely out of his control, beyond his knowledge. His background understandings and previous experiences did not able him to understand why it would happen. Standing there for a while, slowly, Lee said,

> Why there is nobody now? Do not tell me it is a joke. Nothing makes sense. I felt so relieved now, feeling like finally it ends and I do not need to work anymore. I can throw away the bicycle now.

Standing there, Lee appeared totally bewildered. He realized he had been experiencing such a long uphill journey, through the embarrassment of carrying the crappy bicycle on the street, through the maze of streets in the hidden industrial district. He tried to find some instructions or logic for dealing with this completely unexpected situation, from both his previous experiences and from the situational environment. He failed.

## 14.3.2  Sivonen: "No One Comes to Talk to Me"

Born in Helsinki, Sivonen has been living in this city for all her life. She insisted riding bicycle in summer and taking public transportation in winter. Usually when her bicycle has any problem, she takes it to the nearby local repair shop. She finds it quite convenient that she only needs to take the bicycle to the professional guy even without the need of knowing the problem. After a week when she receives a call saying her bicycle is ready, she goes to pick it up and pays what the mechanic asks.

She does not need to bother to check the bicycle since she pays to get the security and professional guarantee.

This time, the bicycle got a flat. Also, she found the bicycle was getting heavier and heavier to ride. Unlike her prior situations, Sivonen felt it might cost a large amount of money to send to the repair shop to make it lighter to ride, since it easily costs over 100 euros in Helsinki to repair even one or two small problems. She kept it in her basement for a long time, until she got to know about *Helsinki Pyöräpaja*, reading in a local newspaper that this was a bicycle DIY community where people can repair bicycles by themselves and get free help from volunteers. She decided to give a try even though she had never been to similar places or had ever repaired anything by herself. But at the same time, she was very much concerned:

> What if they are creepy guys who just assemble their own strange bicycles? What if there is only one person and he can't help me as much as I need? What if they don't know how to fix it either? What if I am bothering them? What if I do not do it properly, then I fall when I ride it? Can I blame on them? I really don't know.

*Helsinki Pyöräpaja* failed to offer any certainty and consistency to Sivonen, who has familiarized herself with the normal repair store that provides reliable promises and standards about easy social access, low risk of failure, stability and quality of services. Though with suspicion, Sivonen borrowed her friend's car to deliver her bicycle there. When she reached the street, she noticed a metal door with the poster in A4 size of the workshop. The door was open. She walked downstairs to the basement, hearing sound of working tools from one corridor. The door was ajar; there was light from within. She walked into a space fully piled with bicycles and parts of all kinds. Except for recognizing some parts of tires and rims, Sivonen could not make any sense out of the boxes of materials. Four young men were working on their bicycles, three of whom did not notice her coming. One, with tattoo of five capital letters VEGAN in Medieval Gothic font on his right arm, whitewashed jeans, black shirt, one ear stud on the right ear, heard her step in, looked at her, offered a curt 'hi', and before Sivonen said 'hi' back, quickly went back to his work. Sivonen's 'hi' was floating in the air for a while, and fell into pieces without being caught by the guy. She could not tell whether the guy was shy or disagreeable from his short and cold 'hi'. Either way, she even could not tell who the guy was—a volunteer or just another visitor. She insisted on waiting for a while, hoping for some responses from the people there. She had idea of saying 'hello' loudly to everybody, just as when she enters a party where she does not know anybody. But then, when she enters a party, usually everyone is prepared to socially interact with her, and looking and smiling at her. Here, three guys did not appear to even notice her presence, focusing only on their work. And the guy who noticed her certainly did appear welcoming. Later on, she gave up the idea of actively saying hello to people as she thought her 'hello' may interrupt them. This situation was so new and sudden for her. She felt herself entering someone's private place that was unwelcoming. She felt extremely embarrassed to ask for help from a person that she would not pay for. Now the situation even becomes more complicated insofar as

she could not tell who was a volunteer that she could ask for help and who was just a visitor like herself.

This had never happened to Sivonen before. Sivonen is used to solving problems by herself, without the help of others. She has been attempting not to bother other people, including friends and family, as much as possible. Or she uses money as exchange to get other people's services if she cannot do it. In both cases, her social relations with other people are rather clear. Now here at the workshop, as she knew nothing about bicycle repair, she knew she was definitely going to have to take up a lot of time from a stranger who would not get paid. Thinking she would ask for help again and again, she felt so ashamed she almost turned away. She felt she was showing her ignorance and dependence, which could have perhaps been avoided if she learned some basic knowledge from the internet before coming here. Standing there for a while, Sivonen still did not take any action. She looked around, pretending she understood all those bicycle parts. The guy who just said hello was sitting next to her, and noticed her bicycle. He stopped his work,

> Your chain is all rusted.
> Oh yes,

Sivonen immediately took the turn, as she knew how to enter the social interaction,

> (…) that is why it is heavy to ride. Do you know what should I do?

Sivonen felt it much easier to ask for help since the guy initiated the interaction.

The guy gave Sivonen a tool and told her how to get off the chain with it. Sivonen did what she was told. She felt doing it was very natural and comfortable, albeit with her two hands already covered with oil. Then he brought her a box of used chains, telling her how to pick the right one. Very soon, Sivonen installed the chain. And in the same way, Sivonen changed the back tire tube under the guy's instruction.

## 14.4 New Aesthetics of Experiences

As shown in the two descriptions of the scene s of Lee and Sivonen in the workshop, they were facing inconsistency and negligence in terms of some standard assumptions about services, such as easy to use, efficiency, thoughtfulness and desirability. And they generated negative experiences like discomfort, confusion and embarrassment. The 'crappy' second-hand bicycle discredits Lee's normalcy of identity expression as he purchases of decent brand products with desirable qualities. The difficult physical access that took too much Lee's effort upsets him. And his background knowledge does not help him deal with the situation of 'nobody being there' during their opening hours.

For Sivonen, asking for help from people who do not get paid is a break from social norms. Thus, for her the social interaction is embarrassing. With her initial

impression, the workshop appears disorganized with a serious lack of consistency and standardization, and its people are unwelcoming and lack empathy. These service assumptions are in line with the commercially generated aesthetics evolving from the commercial service sectors, such as 'consistency', 'precision', and 'refinement', 'efficiency', and 'convenience'. Such aesthetics of 'comfort' are widely accepted and taken for granted by consumers. However, from a business sense, we argue that small communities like that operating the bicycle workshop may well have different notions of consistency and standardization, and of user experiences and use, all which are embedded within their practices. Some practices of the workshop generate negative experiences for some, like what happened with Lee and Sivonen, whilst others interpreted them positively. We do not intend to romanticize the bicycle workshop, nor elevate them to a noble level. Rather, we learned to deeply appreciate the people for what they are, and the nature and the aesthetics of the place (in the broad sense of this term).

### 14.4.1 Anarchistic Way of Scheduling

As portrayed above, Lee encountered the situation of nobody being at the workshop during the opening hours. However, Lee is not alone. Many visitors feel confused with the volunteers' presence. People continuously leave questions on the workshop's Facebook page—like "*anybody there today?*" and "*from what o'clock to what?*"—even though the notice of opening hours ('open from 4 pm–8 pm') is right there on the page.

There is very limited communication among the members about their physical presence at the site, including who will come and not, and who is there already. No single or formal method is used for clearly and efficiently sharing the information. There is no strict rule for their presence either. It is rather flexible, as members agree that one comes when he or she has spare time or 'feels like' it. This shows members' distinct perception of time and scheduling, compared with the usual scheduling of service in business context. Thus, the fundamental rhythm of 'on time' in industrial society becomes luxurious requirement, or just unnecessary, for them. They refuse to restrict themselves in serious scheduling, commitment to the workshop and responsibility of the visitors. Members are expected to loosely maintain the system with a spirit of anarchism, embracing the principle that everybody does what he or she wishes rather than because of outside constraints, like time scheduling. In this workshop, time is no longer the dictation of the service schedule or precise measurement of labour. To take another example, their closing time, on many occasions it is extended until whenever people get their repair work done for that day or feel sleepy.

For outsiders, this casual way of 'hangout' seems like it should not work at all. But actually it works fairly well. Except for a very few times, we found that during most of their posted opening hours there were at least three members available in the workshop. The members have their ways of arranging their presence, which

simply does not appear explicit for outsiders. The members, who have formed a close social circle as friends, have vague pictures of each other's lives, such as whether someone is busy or socially accessible at this moment. They have a kind of informal commitment between each other rather than any formal commitment to the place. However, the few times of 'nobody being there' certainly appears as an unacceptable problem for visitors who get used to the absolute promise conventional service businesses make concerning their opening hours.

And the members themselves have realized the problem, albeit without much empathy for visitors who have faced the 'nobody there' situation. Regarding the current problem of presence arrangement, it is easily proposed that the use of social media can improve the communication both among themselves and with the public. In their perceived scenarios, volunteers publish their presence information on Facebook in real time, and visitors can check with more sense of certainty. And among volunteers themselves, they can track who is there and not, which would reduce the unpleasant situation of being absent during the opening hours. Nevertheless the volunteers, even though they recognize the problem and are all young people who are heavy social media users, still fail to use social media to manage their presence. They have tried an online calendar where each member marks their presence and plans for this but after some time, they found the calendar rather redundant since they felt they are already capable of being aware, to large extent, of each other's possible presence through much more informal communication. More importantly, the action of formally marking the form brings a sense of regulation and requires more energy and responsibility from the members who consider as unnecessary. Thus, they refused.

## 14.4.2 Reciprocity When No Payment

As the community is not operated through a monetary system and yet needs to be financially sustained in order to at least pay the rent, the value of reciprocity plays an important role when money is absent. When a visitor uses the space and tools, receives advice, or takes spare parts, he or she is expected to bring something back to the community. The 'return' can take various forms that depend on the visitor. It can be the immediate cash in the donation box, a spare part, nice company, the sharing of personal stories or experiences, offering advice to other visitors, or participation in cycling events later on. Anything, material or immaterial, can be regarded as appropriate part in the exchange system, all depending on each individual's will and capabilities. No one will measure the exchange is equivalent or not. Fairness is hard to determine from the outside, like the market price. The exchange is not even based on any agreement (formal or informal) between the volunteer and visitor. There is no rule about reciprocity explicitly articulated anywhere, although a donation box painted with bright colours has been placed in a very visible place. Visitors are expected to somehow understand the reciprocal nature of the workshop, so that they will bring something back to the community

without prompting. However, the visitors most welcomed by the community are bicycle enthusiasts just themselves, who share the same cycling visions and are already equipped with mechanic skills and repair knowledge.

Reciprocity also means a large range of responsibilities that visitors shall bear for goodness of the community. Visitors are expected to take full responsibility for their own repair work than putting themselves in the position of being 'served' by others. It is also seen as the visitor's imperative to be mindful of the presence and activities of other people and the maintenance of the workshop.

### 14.4.3  Self-directed Attitude

As described in our brief comments on the experience of Sivonen, social access to the workshop is difficult for some visitors, especially those most familiar with interaction manners with service employees in a conventional business context. As we have also seen, some visitors find the volunteers rather unwelcoming, which requires much effort to communicate with them. For instance, one visitor found himself failing to manage any smooth of social communication with a volunteer:

> I was disappointed. I was not sure how much that guy was willing to help, or to what extent. He did not show much interest in helping me. He did not appear nice or welcoming. I did not know how to communicate with him. I felt like I was bothering him.

It is rather misleading, however, if we portray the volunteers as not putting themselves in the position of being of service to others. Rather, they take a different approach to offering help. They act only when the visitor asks for help. They do not proactively provide any suggestions or information with regard to repair procedures or behaviours. For instance, if the visitor asks, "*Which tool I should use?*", they will immediately offer the right tool. Equally though, if the visitor chooses to try a series of tools one by one, they will not interrupt the on-going choosing process and try to change any decision that the visitor has made.

Such an approach can be mainly attributed to the way in which the volunteers regard the visitors as self-directed individuals who want and are able to act independently and with a sense of ownership of their own affairs. Volunteers fully believe each visitor has the capability to take full control of the repair process and make autonomous choices, which they call a "*do-it-yourself attitude*". The place is organized in a way that it does not indicate any guidance for behaviours, like welcome greetings 'How can I help you?'. Nevertheless, the lack of guidance is exactly the behavioural norm for the workshop. It leaves considerable space for each individual to interpret the situation and act toward it in their own 'comfortable' manner. In this sense, each visitor's communication and learning depends more on their personal communication skills and attitude.

### 14.4.4 "It Is Not for Everybody": Becoming a Member

Many visitors, including our five subjects and others we interviewed, articulated the problem of the lack of guidance for newcomers, which can make this service quite difficult to use. Clearer and more comprehensive guidance have been proposed to attract more people. Members have realized the problem as well, with some saying things like "*It is not easy to come here. It takes a lot of effort to open the gate, walk downstairs to the basement, cross the corridor, reach here, not turn away, say hello to us, ask for help, and finish the work.*"

But why do not they make it easier for people to come? The question is answered in one member's account:

> There is a similar one in Paris. It is in a much more central place. Such a good location allows more random people coming. They charge 50euro membership fee to use the space and tools. I think it is reasonable that they have this criteria for the access otherwise there will be more random people and it is relatively hard to control.

The members do not see this as a big or urgent problem that needs to be solved, because their current practice has the function of filtering out 'random' people, who do not have shared interests or a self-directed attitude, or who are just not curious or fun enough. People need to be motivated enough to reach the place, by working hard, taking the risk, dealing with uncertainties of all kinds, and not giving up. Take the difficult physical access as an example. As noted, the workshop is not in a commercial area with easy accessibility. Unlike glorious shopping malls located in city centre with convenient geographic access, one needs much more effort to access the workshop site. There is no visible visual material leading one there, except two or three fairly strange looking bicycles exhibited by the wall and several bicycles stored along the corridor, which give one more confidence that the workshop may be right there. But for the conventional commercial context, such information is equally and easily accessible for virtually every customer. In that context, customers, both new and experienced, are all more or less equal. It does not make much difference whether you are there for the first time, or you have been there for many times. The service is designed for easy use the very first time.

By showing the way Lee transformed his effort spent into social capital, we wanted to point out that important meanings and values are in fact deeply embedded in that experience. When asked to propose improvements to the workshop's service, Lee initially pointed out that the location should be easy to access for everybody. However, after suggesting several other improvements, he hesitated. He thought for a while, and then ended up denying his own suggestions,

> It is easy to suggest clearer navigation information to make the place easier to access, but after having been there, I don't think there is a need. Strangely, it brings me a sense of pride. I will not feel special by visiting Stockmann. What I can imagine, say next time if a friend's bicycle broke down then I could bring him there. It would make me more helpful. It is true I suffered finding the place. But (…) it doesn't matter now for me. The feeling of being part of an underground community isn't it more important?

After experiencing the whole process with confusion and frustration, Lee puts 'becoming a member of the community' as priority that he gets more social capitals and community knowledge. When he learns all the rules that do not appear clear or visible for newcomers, he sees it bringing him a sense of pride. He considers the difficult and unpleasant process as a way of knowing and a process of socialization through personal experience. That is to say, the discomfort is transformed into a process of being communally selected, and of differing himself from others in a quite positive way. That is the reason why, in the end, he hesitated to propose to make a better navigation information graphic for this service; because once the information becomes clear, it is equally easy for everyone and his hard-earned knowledge becomes less meaningful. Unlike the conventional business context, the very nature of this community refers to a process of getting more familiar and of learning, a process of becoming not a customer but rather a member of a community.

## 14.5  Agency of the User of Self-organizing Services

In self-organizing services, people who use the service are more self-directed actors rather than customers to be served. They organize themselves toward their own daily needs and problems. They actively participate in delivering the services with more autonomy. *Helsinki Pyöräpaja*, as an alternative form of service, requires a different kind of 'agency' for people to use the workshop, which includes a self-directed attitude with curiosity (and sometimes basic mechanic skills as well). The service of the workshop is not designed to be easy for everyone. Rather, it is strategically targeted to the people who share similar interests or cultural values, or people who are curious or motivated enough so that they are able to reach the place, find the location, call the number on the poster, wait for someone to open the door, take the risk of the possibility of no one being there, and not give up because of the lack of clear visual signs.

As the community claims, it is a DIY bicycle workshop that requires the ethics of self-reliance through completing the mechanic work without necessarily relying on the help of others. The self-reliant attitude, including finding out the problem, solving the problem, looking for the parts, is the most fundamental norm in the workshop. Asking for help without trying hard first is regarded as bothering people. As we observed in the workshop, most of the visitors came and directly started their mechanic work without much in the way of social interaction with the volunteers. One visitor was installing a chain by himself for 2 h without asking for help. He tried and failed and tried again and failed. After trying for 2 h, he finally gave up and turned for help. However, he still carefully chose the way to ask for help in order to show his self-reliant attitude and to avoid showing ignorance. Instead of asking "*How do I install the chain?*" he chose "*Is this the right way to install the chain?*".

As we have repeatedly noted, the fact that volunteers do not actively communicate with visitors and only help when they are asked makes them appear unwelcoming and socially inaccessible to some visitors. However, it can also positively lead to a sense of freedom and autonomy for people who embrace a self-reliant attitude. This is from a visitor's account:

> That place is messy. But chaos makes me feel free. I can do whatever I want. I don't need to ask for permission can I borrow this or that, can I do this way or not. I can decide by myself. And more importantly, those workshop dudes do not act like teachers who tell me about first step and second step. They just leave me there, doing my own stuff.

Here is another example: While some find the volunteers socially difficult approachable, some appraise them as very nice and helpful. When one visitor entered the workshop for the first time, he faced the same dilemma facing Sivonen. Instead of being afraid of bothering people, he behaved in an extremely confident and natural manner. He loudly talked to all the people in the workshop as if he was making a speech,

> Hi, I am Ricardo. I am new here. Could you tell me how to use the place? Thanks.

All stopped their work on hand and listened to him. One girl who stood nearest to him explained how things worked. And other people continued their own work. The idea of bothering people did not come to his mind. However, what supports such confidence is that this visitor had rather clear idea about his repair work.

## 14.6 Discussion

We have provided a description of a self-organizing community, *Helsinki Pyöräpaja*, as a form of alternative service and equally a type of subculture. From the service user's perspective, we have tried to illuminate different notions concerning the 'agency' of the user, user experience, the consistency and standardization of service, and articulation of particular values. This research is built upon discussions about what new roles designers should play when they engage with local efforts at societal transformation. Some design theorists explicitly propose the approach of vertical integration and scaling up of these small 'creative communities' to have larger societal impact, arguing they can grow from the bottom up as 'seeds' of change with minimal impact (Manzini and DIS-Indaco 2005). According to this line of thought, for this bicycle workshop, designers can either suggest integrating it into public services like Helsinki city bike rental services, or promoting it to a larger audience like a more normal business. However, from our study of this workshop, we argue that designers who intend to scale up this service model or integrate it vertically will likely meet resistance from the community members who embrace very different goals. Their main objective is to sustain their particular subcultural identity and communal experience by operating by their own norms in a niche

corner of the city, rather than seeking societal change through targeting the masses or professionalizing or institutionalizing their services.

Hence, instead of improving this community-based service based on its existing structure and culture, we suggest designers leave the community in its own operation and be sensitive to the virtue of its anarchistic and self-organizing logic, which we have seen has different notions regarding many conventional service assumptions. At the same time, designers can communicate this model to a larger audience. Instead of bringing the designer's vision into this self-organizing community, designers shall bring the community's vision to others, describing and documenting this alternative form for an urban service. We expect people who are interested in this model will learn and start their own community, and seek to remain at a local and comparatively very small scale. Thus, it would develop in an organic way with more network thinking rather than as conventional, commercial and bureaucratic-based set ups. When more are emerging, we hope they will have transformative effect gradually although each has minimal impact.

This kind of community-based service raises questions about the approach for designing for services aiming at social change. On the one hand, designers use their visions and thinking to improve the existing professional services of well-established organizations like the library and hospital. They help them provide better services in a more user-centred and empathic way. This approach to top-down services makes the society better by reaching a large audience in a hopefully more efficient and user-friendly fashion. On the other hand, when dealing with bottom-up services like the bicycle workshop, designers can spread a more radical democratic vision that emerges and grows from the below with a sharing and learning attitude that allows people to create a kind of subcultural space, rather than through the system-thinking logics of vertical integration and scaling up.

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