THIRD PLACES

10 principles to navigate
the new trend of Creative and Productive Hubs
in **real estate** and **urban planning**

CENTRINNO

Introduction

The term **Third Places**, coined by the American urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his book "The Great good place"[1], indicates those hybrid places that are neither home nor work, situated in between the public and the private space. According to Oldenburg, these places play a key role in the definition of civil society, democracy and civic engagement. Today the term is used as an umbrella concept to identify hybrid spaces that enhance collaboration between heterogeneous actors, as well as places of innovation and productivity, adapted to the knowledge and digital economy era.[2]

Creative and Productive Hubs (CPHs) are a new generation of independent, community-led Third Places that bridges the traditional corporate world with the emerging social innovation ecosystems in the city. Based on previous experiences of urban participation processes, independent coworking spaces, fab labs, third places and living labs, CPHs bring together communities of changemakers from the creative industries with the maker movement into a unique recipe of a mixed and hybrid program. CPHs host activities and users ranging from knowledge workers to craft-mans and food professionals, and are able to create a local, circular and resilient ecosystem with a positive impact - social and economical - in the city and the territory.

The first prototype of a Creative and Productive Hub was developed in Paris by Volumes (volumesparis.org), which later grew into a **global consulting agency** committed to supporting the emergence of such innovation hubs in the world through research, training and consulting services.

Since 2015, this first prototype (nowadays re-branded as Volumes Lab) has hosted some of the most vibrant communities of the Parisian social innovation scene and powered a number of initiatives that later grew into independent organizations, including the first Foodlab in Europe, an independent Makerspace, the Fab City Grand Paris NGO and the cooperative Oasis 21.

In 2019, Volumes started replicating its model with the opening of new hubs in Paris (the third and latest of which is the Fab City Hub Paris) and supporting real estate companies and architects to develop and integrate such models in their projects across France and Europe.

In 2020, Volumes started the European Project Centrinno, in which it provides research and consulting services for the implementation of 9 Fab City Hubs in Europe, both in large agglomerations (such as Barcelona, Milan and Paris) but also smaller cities (such as Tallinn and Zagreb) and remote areas (Blonduos, in Island).

---

1. For details, check reference n.1 in the last section of this document.

2. From *"Tiers lieux. Et plus si affinités"* - For details, check reference n.8 in the last section of this document.

Context

Third Places such as Creative and Productive Hubs have proven to be effective enablers in the context of 4 different trends that are emerging in urban development and real estate:

- **urban regeneration**, an approach based on reuse and revitalization of neglected or abandoned cultural and industrial heritage through spatial, social and economical innovations;

- **productive cities** and regions, a strategy based on the relocation of productive activities within cities that support the creation of locally productive ecosystems and circular economies;

- the **15-minutes city** urban model "in which most daily necessities can be accomplished by either walking or cycling from residents' homes";*

- **digital nomadism**, an exponential trend in which a growing portion of the world population is able to work remotely and live from anywhere in the world, using internet and other technological tools.

This report is intended to be a starting point for architects, real estate operators, public institutions, researchers, social entrepreneurs and changemakers who want to understand this new typology of innovative and hybrid places and navigate these emerging trends.

IN THE PICTURE

Photo from the whitepaper of CENTRINNO, a research project focused on industrial historical sites under transformation. It will showcase the potential of these cultural landscapes to become new and inclusive hubs of entrepreneurship for city residents while fostering sustainability.

WHITEPAPER AVAILABLE AT CENTRINNO.EU

The 10 principles

The 10 principles presented in this report are formulated based on Volumes experiences in developing and running operations of Creative and Productive Hubs for social innovation, complemented by the research conducted in Centrinno.

The 10 principles encompass a set of founding concepts to get oriented on what CPHs are in the complex context of third places and innovation hubs and some orientations on how such initiatives should be approached or initiated.

Principles from 1 to 4 mainly revolve around the vision of CPHs and their potential relations and partnerships with local stakeholder (including public institutions, educational organizations and private companies). From principle 5 on, paths are given to understand how such hubs can be created, especially in relation to strategies to deal with the community involved or to be involved (5 to 7). Finally, principles from 8 to 10 focus on the space and the facilities of such hubs.

The 10 principles presented in this report aims to sketch answers to the following questions:

• **What** is a Creative and Productive Hub (CPH) ?

• **What** is the right mindset to adopt before starting to create a CPH?

• **How** should one develop a vision for those hubs in relation to other actors, makers, institutions and private companies?

• **How** should CPHs relate to their communities?

• Is a **physical space** needed to start the project?

• How can such a project **maximize inclusivity**?

• How should the hub's operating team collaborate with the users and its **communities**?

• What are the challenges related to physical space and fabrication **facilities**?

• How should those facilities be **managed** or designed?

• Are productive facilities such as **fab labs** or **foodlabs** meant to replace traditional production or rather used to re-skill local communities?

1

Hubs are ecosystem activators

An ecosystem can be defined as a community of living organisms interacting with its environment as a system. Thanks to these interactions, each ecosystem sustains its own equilibrium and allows a thriving life for its organisms.

Similarly to natural ecosystems, CPHs are designed and structured as platforms that **catalyze interactions and facilitate connections and collaborations** among the different actors that are active in the urban environment and in the territory. This role of concentrators of urban interactions is crucial in the purpose of building momentum toward more inclusive and circular economies in cities.

Their spatial organization enable these interactions on a physical level, but CPHs also provide a series of intangible assets that go beyond their physical dimension and turn them into "intermediaries for value productions"*****. These intangible assets manifest in the organization of activities and public events for large and diversified audiences, and in moments of conviviality and free exchanges among professional and non-professional actors; it is the reason why event curation is a pillar activity in CPHs.

Through both those tangible and intangible assets, CPHs are **ecosystem activators** for their capacity to connect a physical space to its surrounding communities and, from there, develop projects and initiatives that are embedded in the local context.

IN THE PICTURE

The foodlab in Volumes, first prototype of a shared kitchen open to citizens and entrepreneurs.

PHOTO BY STEFANO BORGHI

---

* From "The rise of coworking spaces: A literature review." - For details, check reference n.4 in the last section of this document.

2 Hubs give access to local ecosystem of social innovation

Local ecosystems, as mentioned before, encompass a diverse range of agents including makers, activists, entrepreneurs, private companies, and institutions. These actors are, by nature, distributed at the city and regional level and their capacity to make a positive impact at the urban scale is highly dependent on their interaction and their distributed character. However, their distributed character also makes those ecosystems appear as intangible and difficult to grasp and to access for newcomers.

CPHs are a fundamental interface to connect with these distributed urban ecosystems, a sort of **access gate** to enter them. As entry points to the local innovation ecosystem, CPHs can also guarantee a link to the global ecosystem and connect with visitors coming from abroad, strengthening the g-local dimension of the community.

Opposite to traditional innovation hubs or incubators, CPHs do not aim to concentrate in a unique physical space all the stakeholder, facilities, projects and initiatives, polarizing in this way certain areas of the city and depriving others. Instead, they act as a **physical device to access the richness, variety and geographical distribution of communities, actors and projects**.

In that regard, physical space is transformed from container to device, similarly to what the internet revolution brought to the use of computers, converting them from machines to store data and information into devices providing access to data that is distributed in a network.

IN THE PICTURE

International consortium meeting for the Reflow project on circular economy and distributed fabrication.

PHOTO BY QUENTIN CHEVRIER

3 Hubs enable urban resilience

CPHs are not standardized and do not have a simple model that can be replicated everywhere. Their structural, organizational and functional aspects are predominantly hybrid, complex, non-hierarchical and manifest a sort of resistance to categorization according to predefined models.

This is also reflected in their space planning and the programs of their activities: **as spaces they often have a flexible configuration and a function that is not fixed, maintaining a high level of adaptability to unplanned situations.** While the observer could confuse this with a lack of clear design intentions, those characteristics are instead voluntarily embraced and define even the core values of such hubs.

By behaving as complex organisms, CPHs are **able to stay open to the emergence of new needs, new projects, new spatial reorganization**, and in the end, perform as resilient structures to fast changing and hazardous environments. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019, resilience has been a hot topic for the entire world, and some of the hubs analyzed to producde this report have proven to be **"able to adapt" ***.

IN THE PICTURE

Citizens and makers working together at WoMa fablab to produce face shields during the covid-19 emergency of 2019.

PHOTO BY QUENTIN CHEVRIER

" Able to adapt "

*

This is the motto of <u>Darwin</u> in Bordeaux, largest social innovation hub in Europe.

4 Hubs create space for innovation to happen

In the previous principle, hubs have been described as flexible, hybrid and fluid structures with respect to their programs, their spatial organization and the set of actors involved.

These features confer to hubs a potential to **act as in-between areas**, functioning as playgrounds for experimentation and prototyping of unusual assemblage of actors and functions. CPHs cope with the challenge of making space for such buffer zones, sometimes in areas where the real estate market is the most expensive, especially in large cities. Such **buffer zones** often also respond to the emerging need of **traditional organizations (schools, municipalities and private companies) to access unconventional spaces that trigger innovation.**

CPHs can then be an augmented space for traditional institutions, serving as extensions and facilitating openness, networking and thinking - literally - outside of the box. Through this dynamic, CPHs attract key stakeholders who are crucial to driving change in the city, and they can build collaborations with them; namely with **private companies** (which are likely to use the hub for innovation seminars and team buildings), **educational institutions** (for learning experiences, peer-to-peer education, and residency programs for students), **governmental institutions** (providing them with a safe space for dialogue with citizens). By attracting this diversified range of actors, expertise and methodologies, CPHs are living laboratories to imagine innovative and sustainable urban models.

IN THE PICTURE

Experimental tasting event with food designer Yuan Yuan.

PHOTO BY STEFANO BORGHI

5

Community first !

A community is a social space in itself, and cities are built and transformed by people's actions and interactions, every day and continuously. "Cityness" "is the very nature of urban environments to continuously reshape the ways in which people, places, materials and affects are intersected" **.

Nevertheless, large-scale and top-down planning practices often fail to grasp the complexities of the communities and to provide spaces that are meaningful for citizens and that respond to their changing needs.

To avoid falling into this top-down approach, a CPHs usually emerge from the bottom and by instigating dialogues amongst actors: citizens, makers, activists, entrepreneurs and local authorities.

This is the reason why the first step to create a CPHs is to build a community, and this is often done through event curation and programming. In most of the cases, a CPHs start after a series of events and community gatherings that then convert into a temporary or permanent space for these communities. Those curated events create the conditions for a debate about the needs for a space, instead of designing the space beforehand.

IN THE PICTURE

Volumes in Paris started with a series of weekly gathering for entrepreneurs around drink and food.

PHOTO BY STEFANO BORGHI

* From "City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads" - For details, check reference n.5 in the final section of this document.

6 Give space to local communities

Yoga classes open to citizens, taking place in the main room of Volumes in Paris, during hours when the space is not commercialized.

PHOTO BY STEFANO BORGHI

As indicated in Principle Four, CPHs are buffer zones especially when situated in dense and highly optimized urban environments, and they can become powerful spaces for expression and debate for citizens. CPHs can give voice to the citizens in different ways:

- serving as spaces and platforms for gathering informal, neglected and marginalized communities;
- allowing such communities of citizens to meet, expand their contacts and reach out to entrepreneurs, makers and private companies;
- provide a space for dialogue between citizens and local institutions. In some cases, those hubs can become real spaces of friction, where existing tensions and conflict are expressed and addressed

This **space of expression** can sometimes represent a first step towards constructive collaborations to find common solutions.

Following what could be called a chronotopic scheme, where the usage of spaces - *topos* - is differentiated based on several time layers - *chronos* -, CPHs can give free access to space and facilities to such communities at specific times, usually in the evening or during the weekend, when they are not occupied by other commercial activities. By embracing this inclusive approach and by giving space to citizens and local communities, CPHs behave as **sounding boards and launching platforms for bottom-up initiatives at the city level.**

7 Empowerment over control

If Principle Five focuses on how communities are a first step to set up a CPHs, and Principle Six focuses on how a CPH should open its doors to citizens, Principle Seven is directed to the attitude and positionality of the operational team of the hub, once it has opened to public.

Such hubs are complex by nature. Administration, communication, community building, governance facilitation, facilities management : running a CPHs can often be overwhelming, while human and financial resources are limited.

The solution is to install a philosophy of cooperation with the users and the community of the hub.

So instead of centralizing and over-managing all the details, which would also lead to weakening the sense of belonging of the community, the managing team can take a **facilitator approach to let processes and projects happen among members,** while keeping a global overview of the activities to ensure a coherent vision of the project.

Where there's nothing, everything is possible.
Where there is architecture, nothing (else) is possible. **"**

The City of the Captive Globe, Rem Koolhaas (1972).

IN THE PICTURE

Presentation of Fab City Hub during the construction works. Leaving a portion of the space without a predefined destination makes that it can be adapted to emerging needs of the communities after the opening, during the so-called prefiguration phase.

PHOTO BY STEFANO BORGHI

8

Adopt an incremental approach, avoid over-design

Principle Five presents community building as a first, preparatory step to set-up a physical space for the hub. Once the physical venue of the hub is determined, a similar vision can be also expanded when it comes to physical space design. This is what principle 8 is about.

Instead of following a linear waterfall approach, where the space is fully planned and designed in advance, **an incremental approach can leave space for real and situated needs to emerge from the community.**

Along this line, Pritzker Prize Architects Lacaton & Vassal claimed that in architecture "sometimes the answer is to do nothing". *****

In CPHs, an incremental approach can be implemented using the 80/20 principle for space design: you can temporarily leave 20% of your square meters under-designed, only with basic furniture and without a predefined specific destination. This will allow the community to come up with real needs for it (a laboratory for professional photography, a special meeting room, a coffee bar, etc…).

---

* From The Guardian www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/mar/16/lacaton-vassal-unflashy-french-architectures-pritzker-prize

9 / Think facilities as tools for social learning

Similarly to coworking spaces, shared space and facilities (ranging from meeting rooms to desks, from internet connection to printers, from digital fabrication labs to shared kitchens or textile manufacturing machines) are at the core of every CPH; the philosophy of such hubs aims to go beyond the functional aspect of such shared facilities to make them tools for social connection, education and conviviality.

Shared office spaces of CPHs do not aim to replace traditional office buildings; instead they are laboratories to explore the edges of the new trends in work and collaboration. Similarly, fab labs or makerspaces that are often parts of CPHs are not intended as industrial production sites that will take over the manufacturing capacity of the traditional artisans and industries. Instead, those labs are intended to be more of a **cultural space for creative and productive activities**, in which production facilities do not have the mere function of manufacturing products for consumption; those facilities are instead means for innovation, re-skilling, citizen empowerment, social connection and conviviality.

CPHs have proven capacities to transition cities to more circular, inclusive and productive models: they foster a distributed productive system by connecting with local manufacturers using dedicated platforms such as Make.works [1] or similar; they create and promote new narratives and cultures about the productive, regenerative city by inventing new business models, production methods, new materials and by creating awareness through workshops and events like repair cafés and dedicated meetups. CPHs **foster innovation by taking the production facilities out of the factory** in a place where communities, public institutions and private companies are merged and can elaborate innovations. Finally, as it has been proven during the pandemic, they can prototype and produce new products very quickly with a "viral design" [2] approach, out of the constraints of the traditional factory.

IN THE PICTURE

A machine 3d printing face-shields, during the covid-19 emergency. Digital fabrication machines served to gather citizens and professionals in fablab to work together during the lockdown.

PHOTO BY QUENTIN CHEVRIER

---

1. https://make.works
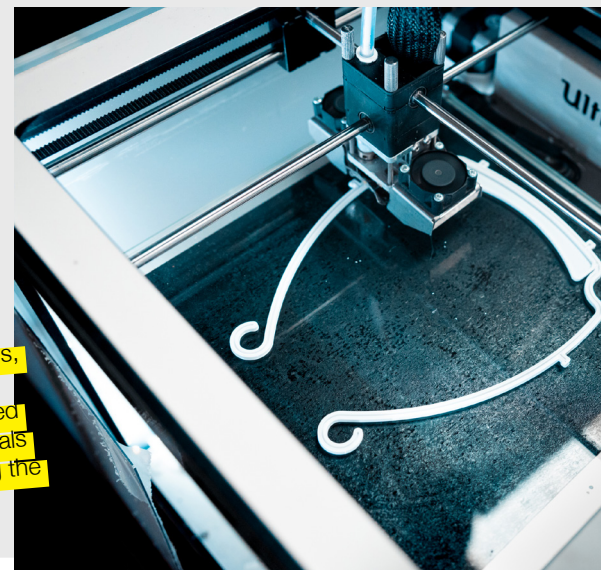
2. From "Viral Design" - For details, check reference n.7 in the last section of this document.

10 Think hubs as multi-layered spaces, both physical and digital

Internet massification substantially affected the way we interact with the world. The very concept of space is reconfigured by this revolution and redefined as a complex system of relations between layers, being the physical and the virtual the most important of those.

CPHs are designed using as a baseline this framework of complexity and interconnection between those layers.
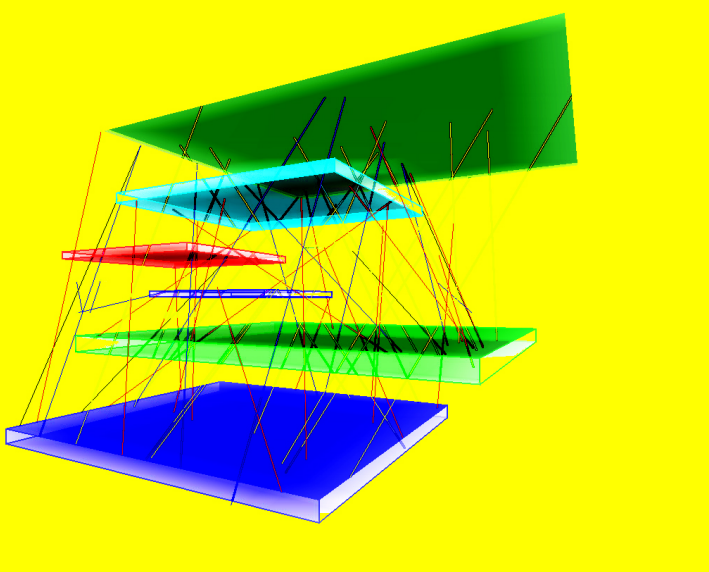
These places aim to deeply integrate the design of the tangible with the design of the intangible through 3 different dimensions:

• **Internal communication:** the physical spaces for interaction and conviviality can be augmented by digital communication platforms for members of the hub (Slack, Mattermost, Discord or similar) [1]

• **External communication:** social networks, online campaigns and events are tools to give visibility to projects and initiatives, attract newcomers and finally expand to local and international communities

• **Space management:** the complexity of the space usages with different services (coworking, digital fabrication, shared kitchens, meeting rooms), different products (memberships, price plans, flexible and fixed desks), different publics (NGOs, citizens, freelancers, makers, SME, big corporations) requires a digital management tool highly integrated with the physical space (Nexudus, Cobot, OfficeRnD, etc).

This integration of physical and digital space relates to the idea that the internet, originally created as a technology to bring close to what is distant, allows one to **explore and connect with its own closer environment at urban and territorial scale.**

* For more info, check reference n.9 *"Hyper - local Internet»: la nouvelle dimension des espaces publics des nos villes?"* in the final section of this document.

Credits

References

1. The great good place: cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community.
Oldenburg, R., 1999. The great good place: cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

2. Creative and productive hubs journal
https://centrinno.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CENTRINNO_D3.1_Creative-and-Productive-Hubs-Journal_final-version.pdf
(Amato, D. e al, 2021) reference list :Amato, D.; Kalathas, G.; Vlachopoulou, C.; Cingolani, F.; Fontana Valenti, C.; Kühr, W.; Armstrong, K.; Diez, T.; Guy, J.C.; Munoz Unceta, P.; Brouwer, N.; Ritter, F. (2021) Creative and productive hubs journal. Deliverable D3.1 CENTRINNO Project.

3. Urban aperture
https://urbanohumano.org/urban-apertures-porosity-as-a-new-model-for-hybrid-public-space-2/
Cingolani, F.; Di Siena, D. (2016) New paper: Urban aperture. Retrieved 24 March 2021, from the link above.

4. The rise of coworking spaces: A literature review
http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/rise-coworking-spaces-literature-review
Gandini, A. (2015). The rise of coworking spaces: A literature review. Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization, 15(1), 193–205.

5. City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads
https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203892497
Simone, A. (2009). City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads (1st ed.). Routledge.

6. Strategy and chronotopes: a Bakhtinian perspective on the construction of strategy narratives
https://doi.org/10.3917/mana.165.0593
Vaara, E. & Reff Pedersen, A. (2013). Strategy and chronotopes: a Bakhtinian perspective on the construction of strategy narratives. M@n@gement, 5(5), 593 - 604.

7. Viral Design
https://distributeddesign.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/This-Is-Distributed-Design-Book-2021.pdf
Viral Design. (N.d.) (2020), Retrieved from the link above.

* The following references are only available in French *

8. Tiers lieux. Et plus si affinités
Burret A., 2015, Tiers lieux. Et plus si affinités, Limoges: FYP Editions, 176.

9 Hyper - local Internet»: la nouvelle dimension des espaces publics des nos villes?
https://issuu.com/immaginoteca/docs/ima_090611_imaginario_hyperurbain2
Cingolani, F.; Di Siena, D. (2009). «Hyper - local Internet»: la nouvelle dimension des espaces publics des nos villes?.
Retrieved 24 March 2021 from the link above.

10 Dreamhamar: Construction d'une communauté autour d'un espace physique et gestion des systèmes complexes en architecture participative
http://dnarchi.fr/experimentations/dreamhamar-construction-dune-communaute-autour-dun-espace-physique-et-gestion-des-systemes-complexes-en-architecture-participative/
Cingolani, F. (2012). Dreamhamar: Construction d'une communauté autour d'un espace physique et gestion des systèmes complexes en architecture participative - DNArchi. Retrieved 19 March 2021, from the link above.

Work with us

VOLUMES is a global innovation laboratory committed to support the emergence of Creative and Productive Hubs in the world through consulting, training and research.

Our skills range from real-estate innovation, digital technologies, urban and rural regeneration, heritage revitalization, social innovation, circular economy, sustainable food and digital fabrication.

We do provide online and onsite consultancy and training, everywhere in the world, and we organize learning expeditions to Paris and Europe for organizations and entrepreneurs that want to visit and discover the most influential social innovation hubs of the continent.

Tell us how we can help at hello@volumes.media -

Volumes SAS
78 rue Compans, 75019 Paris
hello@volumes.media

VOLUMES .