

Reimagining Social Innovation Platforms

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the potential of digital platforms to enhance the practice of Design for Social Innovation (DSI), envisioning platforms as space with potential to inspire, support, and connect projects of positive social change, and the people that work on them, regardless of size and scale. Expert interviews, desk research, and case analysis revealed that while there are platforms that support DSI, they still have barriers to community initiation of, and involvement in, projects whose interventions will directly impact their communities. In response, this thesis proposes a conceptual design of a platform that weaves together social innovation projects across communities and initiatives — reimagining mutual, peer-based support for community led efforts. The platform prioritizes support for grassroots projects, helping community members create the positive change they'd like to see in their communities. The outcome is a prototype that communicates the value of platforms as a space for inclusive collaboration and knowledge-sharing across initiatives and communities, exposing new opportunities for the growth of Design for Social Innovation as a practice.

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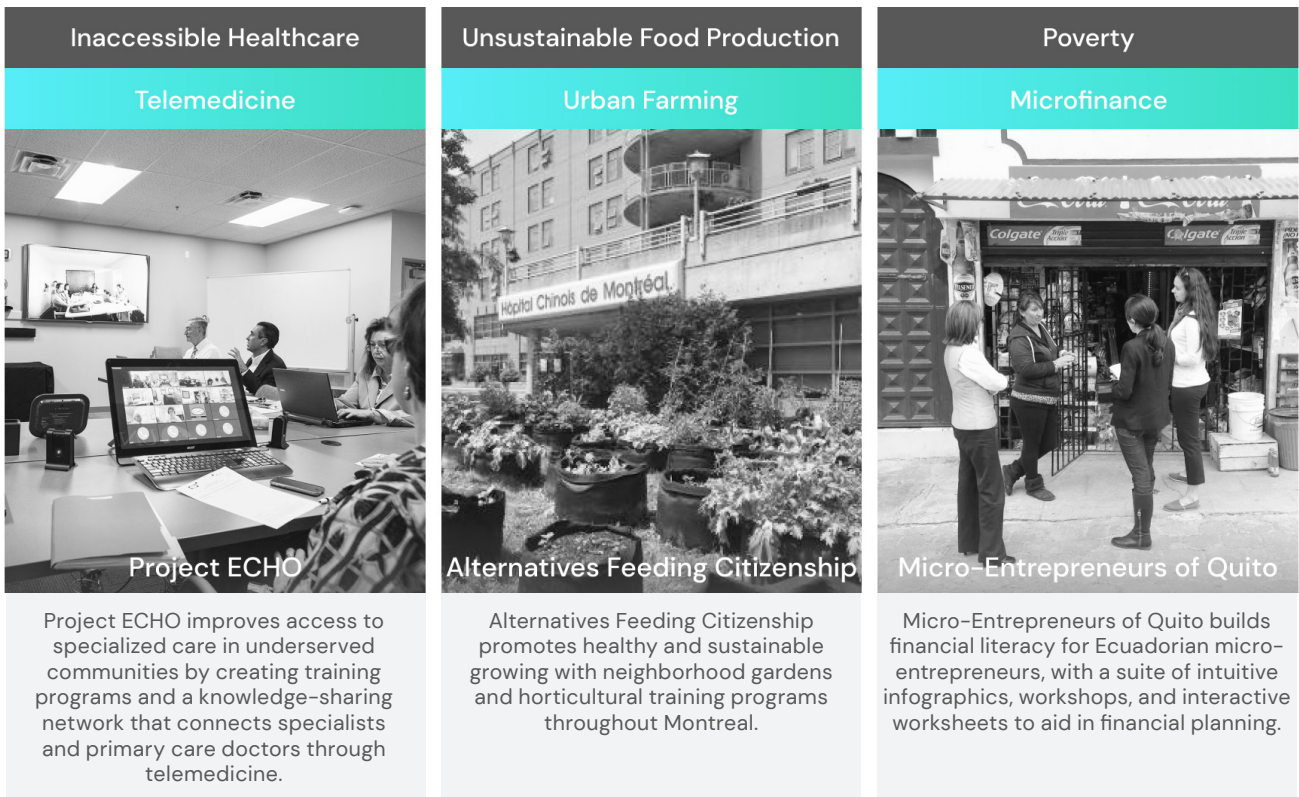
INTRODUCTION

Many of the most challenging problems facing our society today are inherently social in nature. Inaccessible healthcare services, unsustainable food production, and poverty are just a handful of examples of wicked problems experienced across the globe. There is growing consensus that technological innovations alone are not capable of overcoming these complex social problems – social innovations are necessary (Howaldt & Hochgerner, 2018, 17).

Social innovations are new social practices that aim to meet needs in a way that is more effective, efficient, or sustainable than existing solutions. In other words, they are new ways of thinking, doing, and being from which social change emerges. Design for Social Innovation (DSI) is a practice that aims to tackle complex societal problems by making new social innovations more probable, effective, long-lasting, and scalable. In addition to a focus on positive impact rather than profit, projects and initiatives are not client-driven and typically involve a diverse range of stakeholders with differing goals and perspectives. The ultimate aim is to meet social needs, as well as catalyze systematic, scalable change (Holtgrewe & Millard, 2018)

Design and designers are uniquely equipped to bring value to social innovation work. From design practice, they bring skills in: understanding and framing problems, and collaborating with many types of

Figure 1: Three examples of wicked problems, social innovations that aim to address them, and Design for Social Innovation projects that offer unique design interventions.



stakeholders, including communities. They also follow an iterative design process to ideate and envision alternative futures, and practice systematic thinking.

In recent years, the complexities of collaboration with many actors has led to experimentation with digital platforms as valuable spaces for engaging in DSI efforts. This is because platforms create a central, accessible space that facilitates communication and engagement among users; enable knowledge-sharing within the platforms users, and externally; and they're scalable and can easily integrate with current or changing technology.

I was drawn to this subject matter for my thesis because of my passion for the intersection between design and people, DSI's challenging problem spaces, and the potential for design to create a positive impact on the human experience. Rather than starting a social innovation project of my own, or contributing to an existing one, I wanted to design something that might enhance the practice as a whole, through principles and tools that could be applied across DSI efforts. I began aiming to design tools for designers, but after finding through research the prevalence of barriers to community initiation and involvement in DSI projects both within practice and on platforms, as well as the opportunity to connect local projects with larger visions, I decided to shift my audience to community members.

These findings culminated in an overarching vision statement for my project: How might we create a collaborative platform that inspires, supports, and connects projects of positive social change, while prioritizing community involvement?

The final outcome of my work is the conceptual design of a platform that weaves together social innovation projects across communities and initiatives and reimagines mutual, peer-based support for community-led efforts.

BACKGROUND

Design for Social Innovation (DSI) has emerged as an approach to creating positive social change in response to complex problems. With its focus on addressing systemic issues and promoting inclusivity, the field of design as a valuable tool in the collaborative and complex processes of DSI. In recent years, there has been a notable rise in experimentation with platforms as a strategy for collaboration among diverse stakeholders in Design for Social Innovation projects, facilitating knowledge sharing, co-creation, and collective action towards sustainable and equitable outcomes.

Social Innovations

The first definitions of *social innovation* were loose and imprecise, most closely related to the socialist revolution and social reform in the 19th century. As the term *innovation* began to evolve into the economic-technological definition we are familiar with today, social innovations became more associated with intentional transformations of society through problem-solving. The late 20th century brought a new definition that describes social innovation as the adoption of new behaviors or practices, as part of sociologist William F. Ogburn's theory of social change (Howaldt, 2018, 89).

Social innovations are now defined as new social practices that aim to meet needs in a way that is more effective, efficient, or sustainable than existing solutions. In other words, they are new ways of thinking, doing, and being from which social change emerges. Social innovations emerge in response to the unmet social needs of people, and are often intertwined with the goal of more (and not just ecologically-) sustainable futures. Murray et. al (2010) tie the emergence of social innovations to gaps in support from the private and public sectors, in order "to meet social needs which can be neglected by traditional forms of private market provision and which have often been poorly serviced or unresolved by services organized by the state" (10).

What differentiates social innovations from social change or other types of innovation? Social innovations bring about social change through *intentional* actions and goals to meet needs and approach problems. According to Howaldt & Hochgerner, "an innovation is social to the extent that it is socially accepted and diffused in society... and ultimately becomes institutionalized as new social practice" (2018, 17).

Efforts have been made to further classify social innovations. Rabadijeva et. al characterize social innovations by type: repairing, modernizing, or transforming current social practices (Rabadijeva et. al, 2018, 86). Other researchers have investigated social innovations at varying levels of impact — *social demands*, *societal needs*, or *systemic change* (Holtgrewe & Millard, 2018, 70). Avelino & Wittmayer coined the term "Transformative Social Innovation" to describe social innovations that contribute to transformative social change by challenging, altering, and replacing institutional boundaries of traditional sectors (2018, 47-50).

There is growing consensus amongst practitioners and the research community that technological innovations alone are incapable of addressing the complex "wickedness" of social problems and societal challenges — social innovations are necessary (Holtgrewe & Millard, 2018, 70).

The Intersection of Design and Social Innovation

As the understanding of social innovations evolved, as well as their importance in approaching complex societal challenges, practitioners and researchers began to see intersections and opportunities with design.

The latter half of the 20th century brought Victor Papanek’s book “Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change” (1971) which played a pivotal role in inspiring designers to address social issues. Papanek argued that design should prioritize the well-being of all people, especially those who are traditionally marginalized or underserved. He urged designers to recognize their social and environmental responsibilities and use their skills to create meaningful solutions for real-world problems, sparking a shift in the design community toward socially-conscious practices and the concept of design for social change.

Built upon Papanek’s landmark argument that design can be a powerful tool for positive social transformation, and the resulting shift in priorities and values within the design field, the *social design movement* emerged. The social design movement increased awareness within the design community and tangential fields of the “impact design has on understanding and framing problems and finding solutions in collaboration with communities, influencing societies and the wider environment” (Rizzo et. al, 2018, 66).

Also shifting was growing acknowledgment of design’s value as a strategic, problem-solving activity within non-traditional design domains, such as business, marketing, management, and education. Muratovski highlights the role of design as a “strategic resource beyond the corporate sector... as an agent of positive change” (2015, 132) as well as a catalyst for “disruptive innovation” (2015, 119).

In 2013, with his groundbreaking book “Design, When Everybody Designs,” Ezio Manzini introduced the concept of Design for Social Innovation as a field of action for expert and non-expert designers

Figure 2: Five examples of DSI projects, sourced from Amatullo, M., Boyer, B., May, J., & Shea, A. editors of *Design for Social Innovation: Case Studies From Around the World* (2021).

Project Name	Location	Description
Edmonton Shift Lab Collective 1.0	Canada	Confronting systemic racism against Aboriginal people, immigrants, and refugees by starting with housing.
Paths to Inclusion Vienna	Austria	Advocating for people living with disabilities through the co-design of new services.
Yala Food Market	Thailand	Prototyping solutions for food systems in Thailand by integrating a local and global approach.
Financial Literacy for Microentrepreneurs	Ecuador	Supporting microentrepreneurs with tools for building financial literacy, sensitive to cognitive scarcity and time constraints.
Every One Every Day	United Kingdom	Building participatory infrastructure for local residents to shape their neighborhoods through mutual aid.

to collaborate on social innovation initiatives to see larger social transformations (Manzini, 2013). The increasing acknowledgement of design as a meaningful approach to social innovation over the last handful of decades has culminated in the defined practice of Design for Social Innovation.

Design for Social Innovation

Design for Social Innovation (DSI) is a constellation of design activities that support social innovation, which, as a practice, aim to make social innovations more probable, effective, long-lasting, and scalable (Manzini, 2013). DSI is not a new discipline or isolated concept, but rather a blending of existing practice and research traditions. It is tangential to social design, social entrepreneurship, and service design.

Characteristics

Design for Social Innovation (DSI) practice is fundamentally different from commercial or for-profit design practice. In addition to a focus on positive impact rather than profit, projects and initiatives are not client-driven and typically involve a diverse range of stakeholders with differing goals and perspectives. The ultimate aim is to meet social needs, as well as catalyze systematic, scalable change (Holtgrewe & Millard, 2018).

Stakeholders

Due to the complexity of the challenges it aims to address, DSI efforts commonly involve diverse, cross-sector stakeholders. DSI projects typically include community members, government organizations, nonprofits and NGOs, private sector partners, donors and foundations, and practitioners from design, research, strategy, policy, and more (Butzin & Terstriep, 2018, 79).

Community Members: These are the people who are directly affected by the social issue being addressed by the project. They can provide valuable insights into the problem and nuances of the community, co-create and offer feedback on potential solutions.

Funding Source: These organizations provide financial resources to initiate, sustain, grow, and scale projects. May also collaborate to pool resources and coordinate efforts towards achieving shared goals.

Designers/Researchers/Practitioners: A range of professional contributors that can provide insights, expertise, and data to support the project and its objectives, and develop design interventions that address the social issue.

Partners: These organizations may have a vested interest in the issue and can provide resources, expertise, and connections to help support the project.

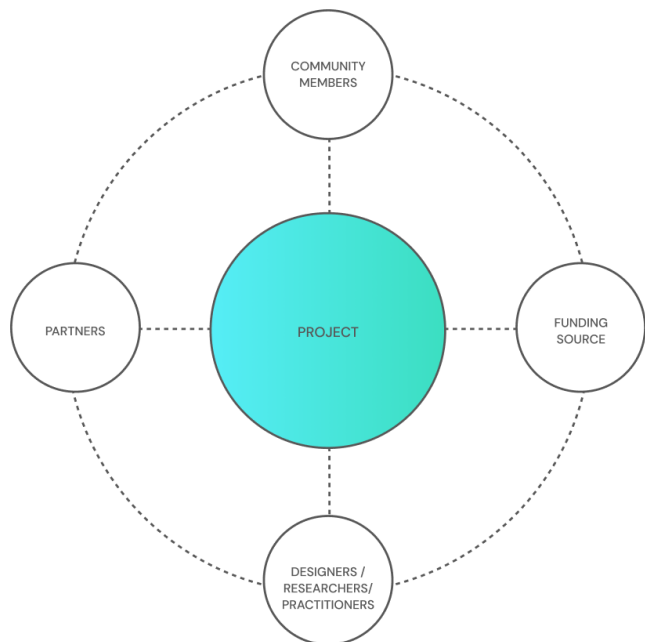


Figure 3: Types of stakeholders involved in DSI projects.

Methods & Approaches

Design for Social Innovation overlaps with Participatory Design (PD) — both are highly dynamic, often nonlinear processes that involve creative, proactive, and complex co-design activities (Manzini, 2014, 65). Researchers and practitioners alike have noted that PD and co-creative methods that directly involve community members are integral in order for DSI design interventions to be relevant, meaningful, and positively impactful within the community. As Howaldt & Hochgerner state, “involving target groups and empowering beneficiaries, increasing their capacities to meet social needs and giving them ‘agency’ is an indispensable component of SI” (2018, 17). Selloni & Corubolo (2017) echo this argument, stating that social innovation refers to “the empowerment of users, who are no longer considered as consumers ‘but as central actors of the development of the service itself’... [their involvement] viewed as a method of triggering social innovation” (777). Researchers note the importance of active participation of community members throughout the design process, rather than merely consulting them at discrete points (Chick, 2012, 55), and the designer’s role in “enabling stakeholders to take part in the co-design process” (Tjahja & Yee, 2022, 135).

Design thinking methodologies are now commonly applied to DSI efforts. The adoption of design thinking has extended beyond its traditional focus on enhancing private sector products and services. It is now applied to tackle complex challenges and fulfill social needs, leading to the development of social innovations that blur the boundaries between the public, for-profit, and non-profit sectors (Selloni & Corubolo, 2017, 778). Mulgan highlights the characteristics of design thinking that bring value to DSI: it assists in the understanding and development of new perspectives, applies systemic thinking and visualization techniques, makes use of rapid prototyping, and has a user-centered approach (2009). Docherty echoes these and other values of design thinking to the innovation process, while highlighting the need to thoughtfully consider the ultimate purpose of a design intervention, its delivery, and proper support for its implementation (Docherty, 2017, 720).

Existing Theoretical Frameworks

Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up *Top-down* refers to the approach where the project is initiated and driven by established organizations, institutions, or government entities. In this model, the project is typically guided by a specific agenda or strategic objectives set by the initiating entity. The stakeholders involved often include policymakers, funders, large organizations, and experts who have the resources and authority to shape the project’s direction and outcomes. On the other hand, *Bottom-up* involves projects that are initiated and led by grassroots movements, communities, or individuals directly affected by the social issue at hand. In this model, the catalyst for the project comes from the community or the people most impacted by the problem, who take ownership and actively participate in designing solutions.

Incremental vs. Radical *Incremental* social innovation refers to small-scale, iterative improvements within existing systems or structures. It involves making gradual adjustments to existing processes, products, or services to address specific social or environmental issues. *Radical* social innovation involves transformative, disruptive changes to prevailing systems. This type of social innovation challenges the fundamental assumptions, norms, and structures that perpetuate social, economic, or environmental issues. It often requires developing new models, reimagining alternative futures, and implementing unconventional approaches to address root causes to bring about fundamental change. Researchers argue that both incremental and radical innovation are necessary and interconnected (Manzini, 2014, 57).

Designing For and Designing With Manzini identifies two modes of operation for expert designers in DSI. *Designing for* communities relates closely to the role designers traditionally play, in which they observe the needs and behaviors of an intended audience and create solutions for products and services. Manzini argues that designers might still step into this role in the community-centered processes of DSI in order to develop enabling artifacts and collaborative services as design interventions. *Designing with* communities requires a “new set of design skills that promote collaboration among diverse social actors to construct shared visions and scenarios, and combine existing products and services” (2014, 62).

The Roles of Designers Designers can take on a variety of roles in Design for Innovation projects. Tjahja & Yee identify four roles in “Being a Sociable Designer: Reimagining the Role of Designers in Social Innovation” (2022, 137).

- Designers as *main agents* who bring their design expertise to direct creativity and innovation
- Designers as *intermediaries* who facilitate or translate stakeholders ideas, and bridge the gap between different perspectives and expertise
- Designers as *advocates* who use their skills and influence to encourage design processes, strategies, and activities
- Designers as *futurists* who focus on the sustainability of initiatives long-term and future stakeholders

Distributed Networks & Ecosystems Researchers have proposed the value of connecting discrete DSI projects: “linking concrete local activities with far reaching visions that ultimately bring people together, awakening the best in them by articulating a common meaning in the great and small things each of them were able to do” (Manzini, 2014, 59). Other researchers have highlighted the concept of ecosystems as strategies for “enabling empowerment, co-creation and citizen involvement for social innovation... in grass-root, bottom-up, and spontaneous movements” (Domanski & Kaletka, 2018, 210).

Platforms

The Rise of Digital Platforms

Digital platforms can be defined as online infrastructure that facilitates interactions between users. In the commercial sector, there has been a rise in the platform business model, spurred by the technological and cultural landscape created by mobile devices. Two-sided marketplace platforms such as Airbnb, Lyft, and Etsy meet users’ supply and demand for products and services within a closed system, with the platform responsible for the structure and facilitation of such interactions. In general, platforms provide value to their users by coordinating many stakeholders (Katsamakos et. al, 2022, 1). Platforms can also experience network effects, in which the platform’s value increases as the number of users increases, which in turn spurs a positive feedback loop, attracting more users to join due to the increase in value (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017, 141).

Collaboration Platforms and Innovation Platforms

Many types of platforms exist, including service platforms, communication and networking platforms, crowdfunding platforms, education platforms, and collaboration platforms. Shortly after the emergence of smartphones and well into Web 2.0’s shift to participatory online experiences, Nambisan identified

three types of digital platforms for collaboration — exploration, experimentation, and execution (2009, 47). These platforms assist collaborators in problem definition, creating and testing potential solutions, and building and sharing the design intervention, respectively. Nambisan also defines the qualities of successful collaboration platforms — a network-centric perspective that aids in the development of skills in diverse collaboration, modularity for cost-effective flexibility, and established metrics for success defined by all stakeholders.

Building on the concept of collaboration platforms are platforms that aim to catalyze innovation through collaboration — innovation platforms. Edlemann & Grobbelaar define an innovation platform as “a group of individuals who intend to stimulate learning and change through collaborative participation” to approach complex challenges (2019, 1). Innovation platforms aim to engage all stakeholders, creating a space conducive to non-linear, emergent approaches that can lead to innovation.

Design for Social Innovation Platforms

Mirroring the rise of platforms in other sectors is the increase of experimentation with innovation platforms, and specifically, platforms focusing on Design for Social Innovation. Their digitally robust nature, ability to support peer-to-peer connections and collaborative value creation, as well as their capacity to collect and widely distribute knowledge make digital platforms valuable to DSI (Pulford, 2018, 214).

Facilitate Collaboration Platforms create a central, accessible space that facilitates communication and engagement among users, which helps address the complexities of collaboration with many cross-sector stakeholders experienced with DSI.

Enable Knowledge-Sharing Because platforms are centralized, they create an accessible repository of information that enables knowledge-sharing across geographical and time barriers.

Scalable Because platforms are digital, they can easily scale and integrate with current or changing technology. Flexibility in structure and capability complements DSI’s complex, non-linear process that involves diverse collaboration activities across process stages.

DSI platforms are able to link cross-sector stakeholders — the community, private sector partners, government organizations, donors, facilitation organizations, and NGOs — and facilitate a diverse range of engagement practices, from visioning and planning to shared learning and conflict management (Edlmann & Grobbelaar, 2019, 3-4). In addition, platforms have the potential to create connections between different types of actors within social innovation efforts — *developers* who translate problems into potential solutions, *promoters* who act as partners in innovation processes, *supporters* who disseminate social innovations, and *knowledge providers* (Butzin & Terstriep, 2018, 78-79).

Design researchers have highlighted key considerations for successful DSI platforms. Seravalli (2011) notes that enabling platforms, such as those for DSI, must be deeply rooted in specific context in which they are operating, value local stakeholders and resources, and operate with a degree of indeterminacy, allowing stakeholders to initiate their own activities after design has concluded (5-6). Platforms, as “innovation ecosystems” should also create opportunities to integrate partners from across sectors to diversify funding sources, expertise, and community engagement (Dhondt et. al, 2018, 76).

RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

I focused my research on Design for Social Innovation (DSI) practice and DSI platforms through literature review, expert interviews, desk research, and case analysis.

Design for Social Innovation Practice

Method

I conducted 8 semi-structured expert interviews via Zoom with design practitioners about the current challenges within DSI practice, tools, and opportunities for the growth of the practice. Because my original project direction aimed to create tools for designers working on social innovation projects, I recruited design practitioners from across sectors focusing on Design for Social Innovation, social impact, or socially-driven design. The practitioners represented a variety of sectors, including: private practice, nonprofit organizations, design firms, government departments, academia, and professional design organizations.

Insights

Analyzing interview transcripts from the expert interviews revealed commonalities across practitioners' experiences. Many of the challenges faced in DSI practice overlap with those of commercial or for-profit design practice, but with added complexity of the involvement of many stakeholders, collaborating with often marginalized or disadvantaged communities, necessary balance of structure and agency, the systemic nature of social problems, and inherent power dynamics.

Figure 4: Sample Questions from the semi-structured expert interview protocol.

Question Type	Interview Question Samples
General	How did you first get involved with practice in DSI? What has been the nature of your involvement on DSI projects? What do you enjoy about the practice?
Roles in DSI	What are the typical roles held in DSI, as well as their related activities? What are the relationships between roles? What are each role's challenges?
DSI Process	What is the typical process for DSI efforts? Which activities are conducted at each stage? What stages are designers involved in? How is community involved?
Tools & Methods	Which tools or methods did your team employ for collaboration and community engagement? Have you used innovation or DSI platforms?
Case Studies	Can you describe a successful DfSI project you've been involved in? What elements made it successful? Can you describe an unsuccessful project?
Opportunities	What are your thoughts on the future of DfSI practice? Are there any areas of opportunity you find most promising?

The following challenges were commonly cited within expert interviews as being the most prevalent and difficult problem spaces faced in practice:

Cross-Sector Collaboration Successful design interventions that arise from DSI initiatives balance bottom-up support from the community as well as top-down support from structures and organizations, meaning that collaboration must involve cross-sector stakeholders — government organizations, advocacy groups, policymakers, private firms, sponsors and donors — as well as local citizens. Engaging this many stakeholders from diverse sectors that operate in very different ways, exposes a complex challenge.

Consensus Building off of the complexity of collaboration with many diverse, cross-sector stakeholders is the challenge of ultimately reaching consensus between all. Stakeholders often have differing and conflicting goals, constraints, and perspectives that they are advocating for on behalf of their groups and organizations. In addition, as opposed to traditional client-based work, there is often no one ultimate decision-maker, and rightfully so; meaning that decisions must instead be reached collaboratively, balancing feasibility amongst all parties.

Limitations to Community Input & Co-Creation As previously discussed, directly involving communities is integral to responsible, ethical, and effective design interventions. However, making community participation inclusive and embedded within and throughout the project process is a challenge. It can also be challenge-ridden in terms of practice, as designers navigate new roles as facilitators and co-creators, while also balancing when to step in as professionally-trained designers. This challenge is mirrored in research by Komatsu et. al, who highlight “contradiction between the idea of social innovation as a kind of bottom-up process and that of design as a process of design-driven innovation” (2016, 2019).

Capacity-Building for Implementation At some point in the process, the design intervention must be implemented within the community. Case studies and expert interviews reveal that successful, as-seamless-as-possible implementation involves community members actively taking part in embedding the design intervention into their communities. As a result, designers and other collaborators must inform, build capacity, and guide community liaisons, facilitating the implementation rather than leading it themselves. Building the capacity of community members also enables them to adapt the design intervention over time in response to changing needs, goals, and culture shifts, even when original collaborators may not be present or involved anymore. This challenge is mirrored in research by Meroni et. al, who argue the value the importance of making initiatives “self-sufficient and the community ‘competent’... by creating the condition for the innovators [community members] to be autonomous and committed enough to take the initiatives further” as they continue to adapt over time to changing needs, goals, and challenges (2013, 4).

Engagement with Networks or Platforms Though most practitioners use collaboration tools and platforms to engage in their design practice, no interviewees had engaged specifically in social innovation platforms. Most cited the reason being that their place of employment has already embedded other tools, or they were generally unaware of the existence of social innovation platforms. Through the conversations, the majority of practitioners exposed limited knowledge-sharing with other practitioners or organizations conducting projects addressing similar social issues in other communities and locations.

Focus

From these findings, I found the challenges exposed in community involvement and cross-sector collaboration to be most interesting, as well as the apparent gap in knowledge-sharing across projects for social change. Coupled with the value of platforms reflected by literature review, I began to focus on DSI platforms and their ability to address these challenges and opportunities.

Design for Social Innovation Platforms

Method

In order to better understand the current landscape of Design for Social Innovation platforms, I conducted a case analysis to highlight the competencies and shortcomings of three types of DSI platforms:

OpenIDEO is a platform for generating ideas and collecting prototype feedback. The platform only supports selected initiatives with sponsor backing, so project diversity and knowledge sharing across projects is minimal.

UNDP's Thailand Social Innovation Platform (SIP) is designed just for communities of Thailand to collaborate on a portfolio of connected region-specific initiatives. For these projects, the platform supports the entire project lifespan.

Hylo connects groups and networks working on social change projects in a common community. Teams and project collaboration are open only by invitation, and the platform focuses on communication and resources-sharing within teams.

I selected each of these platforms because they are each unique amongst one another in their goals, approach, and audience — while representing at least one other similar platform in the landscape. Before engaging in competitive analysis of DSI platforms, I established four standards of comparison.

Design Process Activities: The range of process stages, and the correlated design activities, that the platform supports.

Openness: The platform's accessibility to the general public and/or platform members.

Knowledge-Sharing: The degree to which knowledge and resources are shared across projects, initiatives, and teams on the platform.

Initiative Diversity: The number and range of initiatives with varying visions, goals, and impact areas that the platform supports.

Case analysis helped to explore the landscape of current DSI platforms and led to the discovery of gaps in capabilities.

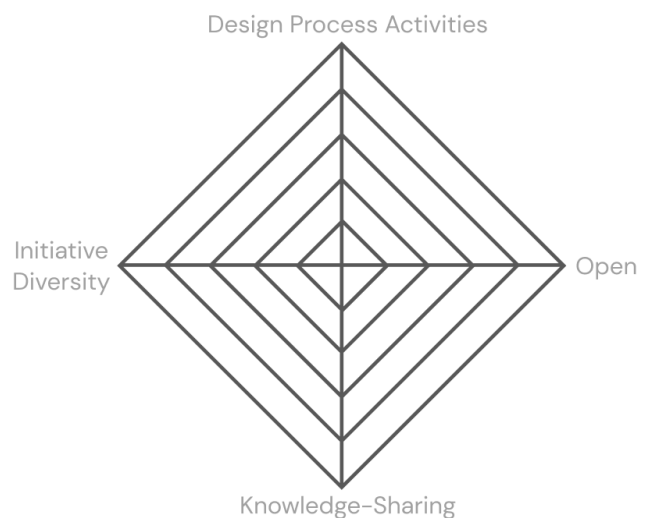
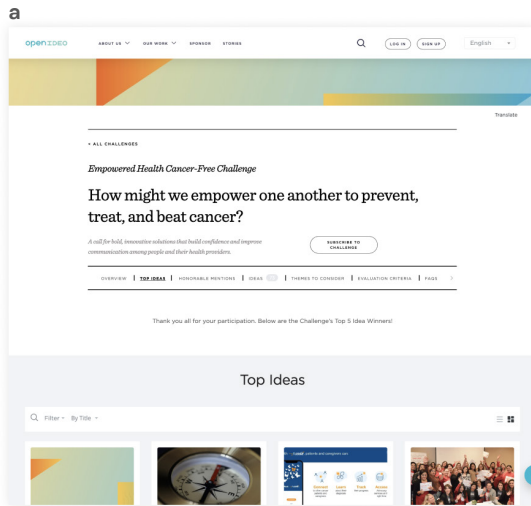
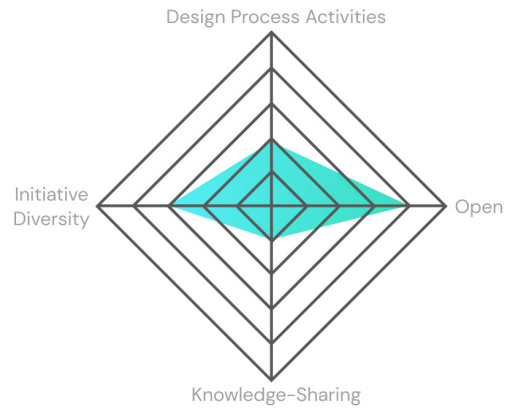


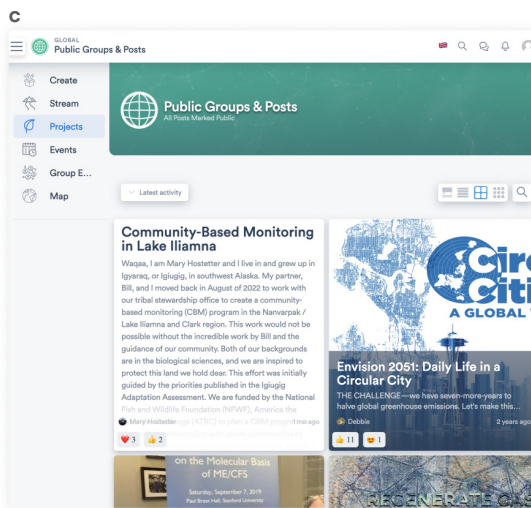
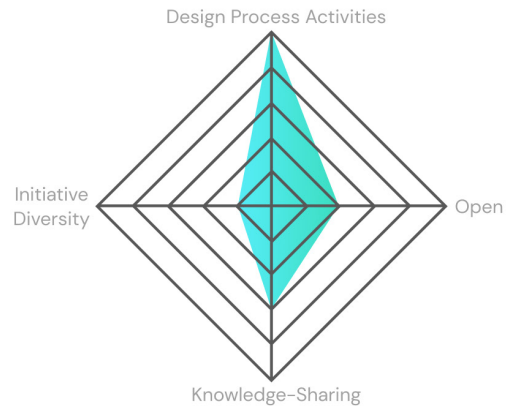
Figure 5: Standards of comparison for differentiating competencies of existing DSI platforms.



OpenIDEO
Open Innovation & Idea Management



UNDP SI Platform (Thailand)
Region-Based Collaborative Workspace



Hylo
Communication & Resource Network

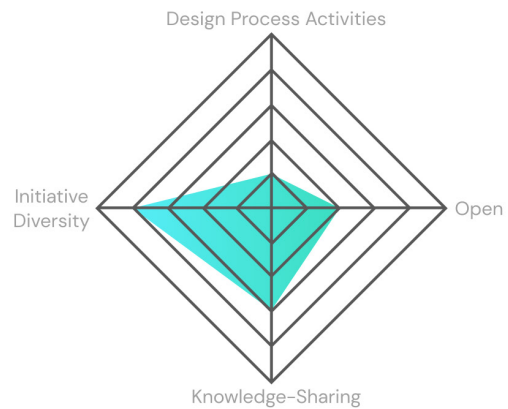


Figure 6a-c: Radar charts visualize DSI platforms' level of competency in each of the comparative variables.

Insights

Four main themes arose from analyzing the landscape of current DSI platforms:

High Resource Cost Platforms take time, money, and expertise to build. Funding and other support from sponsors and partners is already a challenge for groups to overcome, just to cover their most basic needs and activities.

Favor Large-Scale Initiatives In part due to the high resource cost, large-scale initiatives are generally the ones supported with platforms. These larger initiatives, by nature, are often focused on a single, specific social problem to tackle.

Support Focused Activities Most existing DSI platforms focus on supporting a single, or minimal range, of activities within the process of seeing a DSI initiative from end-to-end, such as idea generation or prototype testing.

Barriers to Involvement Platforms that do enable “open” collaboration typically limit involvement to co-creative practices in the early idea generation phase of the design process. In addition, they commonly allow community members to *propose* potential projects, rather than empowering them to initiate desired projects themselves.

Focus

Despite DSI platforms that prioritize one competency over others, no platform does it all. Specifically, there exists a gap where an open platform could support the end-to-end activities of many diverse initiatives all in a single place. Despite the complexity and challenges faced with platforms, I was inspired by the potential I saw in them to enhance DSI practice. Here is also where the audience of my design intervention shifted from designers to community members.

IDEATION

Informed by expert interviews and case analysis of current DSI platforms, I next explored ideal platform characteristics and potential project directions that might effectively address the challenges that were uncovered in the Research phase.

Desiderata: Ideal Platform Characteristics & Capabilities

Based on the challenges identified with DSI platforms, I conducted ideation activities to explore platform characteristics that might address the exposed challenges, and composed key questions for consideration in their design.

Accessible & Cost-Effective: How might we design a cost-effective platform for initiatives of all scales? Can design assist in reducing barriers into and within DSI practice and initiatives?

Modular & Scalable: How might modularity allow for nuanced levels of support from the platform? Could modularity help address the growing pains of scaling projects?

Open/Closed Variability: How might the ability to open or close collaboration or information-sharing efforts to others provide value (or not) to initiatives?

Connected Network: How might we connect initiatives to allow for increased cross-initiative knowledge sharing? What layers and levels of connection could be enhanced with a platform?

Archival: Is there value to archival functionality that enhances cross-initiative knowledge-sharing? How might different audiences benefit from an archive of DSI projects?

Brainstorm: Project Directions

Building off of the exploration of the areas of platform capabilities that interested me the most, listed above, I conducted a concepting activity to ideate and detail out project directions within the intersections of these spaces.

What resulted was a collection of 20 ideas, detailed with a name, one sentence summary, audience, pain points, and value. I noticed that many ideas fell into categories of similar themes, or had shared functionality of values — I grouped these ideas together to provide organization and to see where intersections were starting to arise.

The results of this activity led to 5 relevant thematic groups — collaborative platforms, methods to support practice, impact evaluation, supporting grassroots initiatives, and Value-Centered Design within DSI.

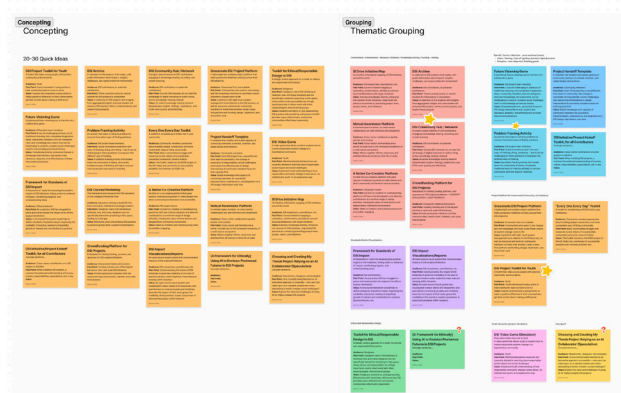


Figure 7: Ideation activity to explore potential project directions, grouped into thematic clusters.

PROJECT DIRECTION

In order to determine the optimal direction for the project, I created intersections between the most prevalent insights from Research and the results of the Ideation activities. These intersections led to an area of focus for the project, which informed the selection of key problems and opportunities, and the creation of a project vision statement.

Area of Focus

The Vision for Design for Social Innovation The aim of Design for Social Innovation as a practice is to make social innovations more probable, long-lasting, effective, and scalable. This goal resonated with me, and I found an interest in the idea of supporting DSI as a practice, rather than just the initiatives or projects themselves.

Networks & Ecosystems Manzini (2015) and Domanski & Kaletka (2018) call for a similar priority for DSI: the connection of people and projects, in distributed networks and ecosystems, respectively. Interconnecting small-scale, local projects with larger visions would enable valuable knowledge-sharing. Local manifestations of initiatives might inform the overarching initiative with their explorations into unique, tailored design interventions. Larger initiatives might provide local projects with strategies, guidance, and connections. Despite the clear value of these visions, such connective structures do not yet exist.

Ten Areas of Growth from SI Drive The article “Social Innovation — The Next and Last Decade” in the Atlas of Social Innovation (2018) identifies “Ten Possible Priorities for the Next Ten Years.” Amongst these are: tackle big challenges at the right level of granularity; connect into movements, activism and democracy; make the most of digital; broaden and deepen social innovation skills; and increase diversity of project contributors. The adoption of digital platforms addresses digital as a next frontier; increasing diversity, skill-building, granularity and activism address the importance of grassroots projects and deeper levels of community involvement.

Platforms and Communities Research highlighted this clear gap for support of small-scale and grassroots projects, and lack of deep involvement for community members. The accessibility of platforms has been well-researched, and presents a potential strategy for communities to initiate and contribute deeply to local projects for social change.

“By jointly weaving a large distributed system, they hint at a new concept of globalization — a distributed globalization where much of the decision making, know-how, and economic value remains in the hands, minds, and pockets of the local community...

...In this way, concrete local activities are connected to one another under a larger vision and common meaning.”

Ezio Manzini, 2013

Problems & Opportunities

Narrowing in on this area of focus aided in determining the project direction, beginning with the selection of three problems and their opportunities.

Barriers to Community Involvement and Initiation

Current platforms that support Design for Social Innovation have barriers to community initiation and involvement, despite the fact that community members hold a wealth of knowledge about their community's needs, challenges, culture, and more. Platforms that do enable "open" collaboration typically limit involvement to co-creative practices in the early idea generation phase of the design process. In addition, they commonly allow community members to propose potential projects, rather than empowering them to initiate desired projects themselves.

Opportunity exists to remove these barriers and empower community members to create the change they'd like to see in their community.

Lack of Knowledge-Sharing

DSI platforms and networks have an absence of connection between projects and within larger initiatives. The lack of knowledge-sharing is a missed opportunity, given that the potential value of distributed networks of local projects that are connected to larger initiatives was first posed by Ezio Manzini nearly 10 years ago, and has been echoed by researchers since.

Platforms are of greatest value as central hubs for an initiative's collaboration and knowledge-sharing. There is an opportunity to draw deeper connections between these projects, initiatives, and collaborators at the source, where efforts and insights are being made.

Minimal Support for Grassroots and Small-Scale Projects

Grassroots, or community-initiated, projects are often not supported with resources in the same way top-down, hybrid, or larger-scale initiatives are.

There is opportunity to reimagine peer-based, mutual support as a tool for communities to create the positive social change they envision. In this case, mutual support could come in the form of funding, but also for building a team, collaborating with stakeholders, idea generation and product/service testing, securing sponsorships and partnerships, and more.

How Might We...

These problems and opportunities culminated in an overarching vision statement for my project: How might we create a collaborative platform that inspires, supports, and connects projects of positive social change, while prioritizing community involvement?

CONCEPT

With a vision established, I began to define core principles and develop concepts for the design of the collaborative platform. Through diagrams, I explored the many relationships the platform would enable: between communities and projects, amongst individual actors and groups, and between stakeholders of projects and the platform. These explorations informed the creation of a visualization for connecting projects, people, and the platform, which in turn informed four core elements of functionality.

Design Principles

I started by identifying core design principles of an ideal platform for Design for Social Innovation. Each of these principles are in direct response to the problems identified through research, and their corresponding areas of opportunity.

Accessible: The platform, and all its resources, are accessible by projects/initiatives of all scales, and all people, regardless of role or level of expertise. Anyone can get inspired and get involved in projects that make a positive impact. The platform is built around the idea that everyone — from design practitioners with years of professional experience, to community members with tacit knowledge of a community's culture and needs — can contribute meaningfully.

Connected: Projects, people, teams, groups and communities are interconnected and share knowledge and resources across the platform. Connections are consistently visible and traceable throughout the experience. The platform draws relevant and insightful connections whenever possible, across silos of sectors, locations, times, and cultures. This design principle responds directly to research by Domanski & Kaletka regarding knowledge-sharing within social innovation ecosystems (2018, 2019).

Supportive: All actors on the platform share knowledge and resources through mutual, peer-based support. The platform's network derives growing value from peer-to-peer engagement and support.

Scalable: Despite its primary focus on accessibility to community members and the initiation/support of small-scale, local projects, the platform's functionality can, and aims to, extend to academia, existing DSI Labs, and design/research/strategy professionals, as well as to larger-scale efforts.

Functionality

From each of these explorations, I developed five key areas of functionality to focus on — the project database, the network of people created by the connected projects, Pledge and Request tools for mutual support, and a resource hub that collects methods and insights from across the database.

Project Database: Anyone can contribute existing projects to the platform or start a new one, building a collection of projects and a catalog of their characteristics that is publicly accessible.

Network: Each project is connected to its stakeholders and contributors, connecting individuals, teams, and communities to one another through their respective profiles.

Design Principle	Platform Functionality
Accessible	Open platform, project creation, process stages visible and open to public
Connected	Explore Projects interactive experience, tags, cross-references, network
Supportive	Platform resources, mutual support with Pledges & Requests
Scalable	Flexible profiles, Dashboard

Figure 8: Design principles and platform functionality that addresses each.

Profiles: Profiles can be created for people, groups and organizations, communities, initiatives, and themes. Because each of these types of actors are interconnected and characterized by other actors they are involved with, profiles create associations and cross-references across the platform.

Pledges & Requests: Pledges and Requests are tools to offer or request peer-based support for funding, mentorship, partnership, team recruitment, feedback, idea generation, and more.

Resources: A collection of informational resources including case studies, toolkits, articles, and methods used by projects within the platform’s project database.

Projects and Communities

Next, I explored how the platform might organize and create relationships between projects, and simultaneously aimed to classify projects by their initiative, theme, and community.

From research, I found that local projects are manifestations of a larger initiative, united by a common vision or goal. These local projects reflect a community’s unique approach to an initiative, based on the specific needs, challenges, and culture of that community.

For the purpose of further organizing the platform, I propose that these initiatives can be grouped into overarching themes, or impact areas, such as Education, Health & Social Care, and Environment & Energy. A community might have local projects spanning various initiatives that belong to larger themes. Simultaneously, an initiative and its larger theme might manifest in different communities as local projects with uniquely tailored design interventions.

A community might have other local projects that span diverse initiatives. In other words, an initiative can manifest in different communities as local projects with uniquely tailored design interventions.

On the platform, these characteristics will be used to organize projects in the database, from high-level Themes to discrete projects. Through profiles, projects will be associated with their overarching initiative and theme, as well as the community, populated with “inspired by real” projects.

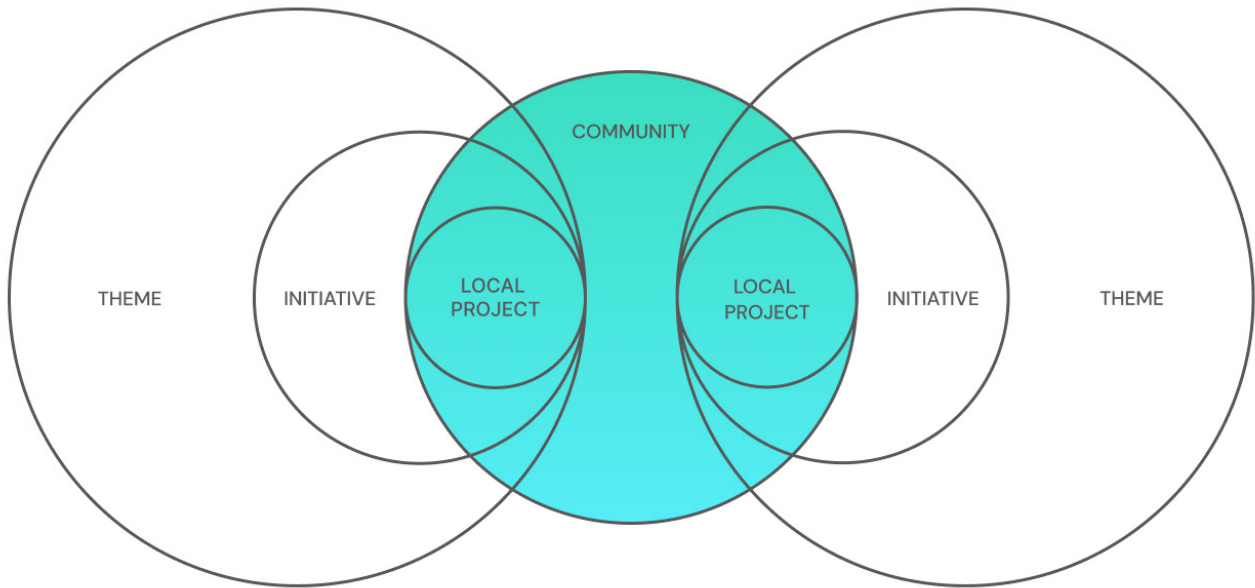


Figure 9: The relationships between local projects that occur in communities, and their overarching initiatives and themes.

Individual Actors and Groups

Next I began to think about the classification and organization of individuals and groups on the platform.

Individuals can be described as standalone contributors. They can have their own profiles, where they are associated with the project teams, groups or organizations, and communities they are a part of. Simultaneously, groups of people such as teams, organizations, or communities can also have profiles which are connected to the individuals and other groups they are a part of.

Stakeholders and the Platform

I also began to think about how a platform might connect the many stakeholders that are involved in DSI projects, in a way that allows them to support one another in shared efforts. Similar to how the platform connects projects and their larger initiatives and themes, the platform could also associate each project with its team, partners, sponsors, and the community it takes part in and with.

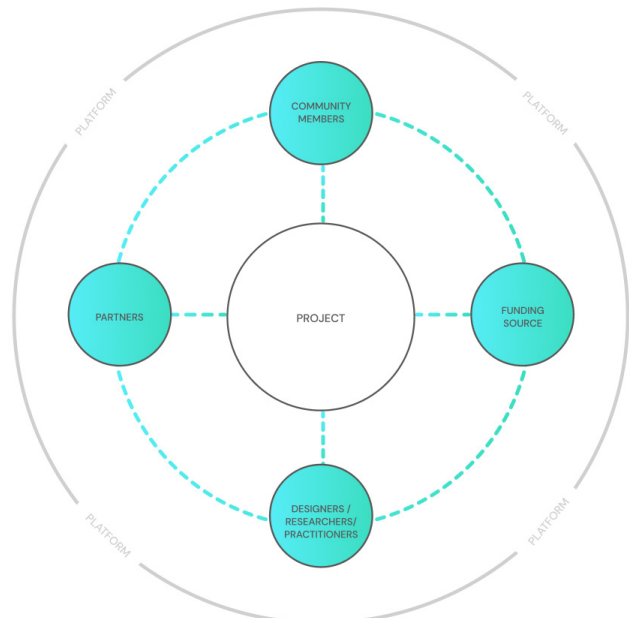


Figure 10: The platform supports stakeholders of a project with tools and functionality that allows them to engage in mutual support.

To do so, I first listed all of the roles that would engage with the platform — individual contributor, team, group or organization, and community. I created archetypes for each of these stakeholders to aid in understanding their unique motivations for using the platform, needs, etc. including community member, designer, student, researcher, government representative.

The platform provides tools and functionality so that stakeholders can engage in collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and mutual support. This support could take the form of secure funding, building a team, generating ideas, testing products/services, finding and securing partnerships and sponsorships, and more.

Connecting back to McIntyre & Srinivasan’s research regarding network effects and positive feedback loops, engagement on the platform contributes knowledge, insights, and connections back to the platform — developing even greater value for users (2017, 141).

The Weave

From these diagrammatic explorations of the relationships between projects and people, I created “the Weave” as a way to visualize *projects as intersections of initiatives and the communities*.

The horizontal bands characterize initiatives and their larger themes. Vertical bands characterize the communities projects take place in or with.

The Weave visualization concept aims to connect local projects of an initiative, with other local projects of the initiative, across the communities they are a part of. This reveals larger initiatives’ efforts across various communities’ local projects — how each community has approached the initiative in its own unique way, and where new local projects of an initiative might be launched. Knowledge- and resource-sharing could occur across one community to another, or even inspire local manifestations within communities where one does not yet exist. This could look like a eco-village project in Seattle learning about successful community feedback practices from the Portland project; or inspiring community



Figure 11: The Weave is a way to visualize projects as intersections of initiatives and the communities they take part in and with.

Initiatives
& Themes



Figure 12: Connecting local projects of an initiative with other local projects of the initiative, across the communities they are a part of.

members in Vancouver to launch a new eco-village project in their local community, with mentorship from existing villages.

Simultaneously, the Weave aims to connect all of a community's local projects from across initiatives. Knowledge- and resource sharing could occur within the community's members and groups, while providing a holistic understanding of their efforts. This could look like the local chapter of an advocacy group providing funding and sponsorship for Vancouver's new eco-village project to get off the ground, or creating a partnered event with Slow Food Seattle to host homegrown produce-sharing. In this way, communities can coordinate efforts across a portfolio of initiatives that they have active projects in, and see where potential new initiatives and projects might be launched to support their members.

Initiatives
& Themes



Figure 13: Connecting all of a community's local projects from across initiatives.

Classification

I drew from a variety of sources to name and classify Themes — SI Drive’s “Policy Areas” (Scoppetta, 2014), Holtgrewe & Millard’s “Policy Fields” (2018, 71) and Amatullo et. al’s “Primary Impact Categories” (2021, 29). I limited the list to 6 Themes, grouping intuitively similar impact areas where necessary, to simplify classification for users. As previously noted by Rabadijeva et. al (2018, 85), efforts to classify Initiatives have been slim. For the purpose of the project, I established and named 7-10 example Initiatives per Theme to show within the prototype.

Communities can be classified by location, group type, or identity characteristics.

For the purpose of the project, I established the naming and classification of characteristics needed to create a realistic prototype. However, further research should explore the validity of these proposed classifications and characterizations.

Design Direction

I decided that the best way to communicate my findings and proposals would be to create the conceptual design and prototype of a platform that featured these capabilities and interactions. I aimed to bring the design to a high-fidelity prototype to assist with the realism of the proposal, and the ability to imagine what a platform of this kind might actually work and look like.

The audience would primarily be for community members and changemakers focused on grassroots initiation of projects.

DESIGN & PROTOTYPE

Next, I began the Design phase, to bring these concepts to life in working designs and prototypes. The core parts of the platform created for the conceptual design are: Explore Projects, Project Profile, Pledge & Request, Create a Project, and Dashboard.

Information Architecture & Wireframes

To develop the platform’s information architecture, I created a hierarchical structure that would enable visitors to intuitively navigate the platform. I also began to draw connections across various spaces within the platform to explore interconnectivity through use of informational tags and metadata.

Based on the information architecture I created, I designed wireframes to begin exploring how the functionality and structure would correlate to layout within the platform. Overlaying the user flow helped to define what the experience of using the platform would be like. “Grey-box” wireframes sparked conversation about various experiential opportunities for the search and browse experience, as well as how the “woven” concept might be embedded into the UI as interaction with content.

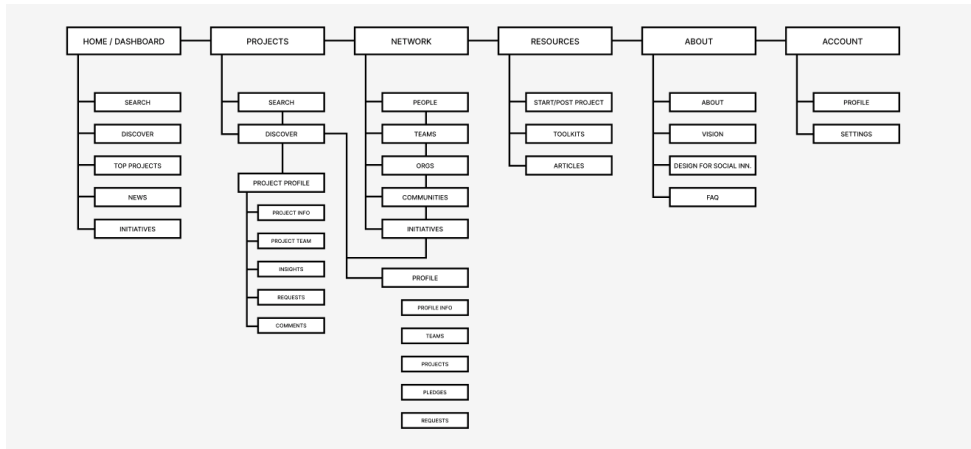


Figure 14: Information architecture diagrams assisted in determining structure for the platform.

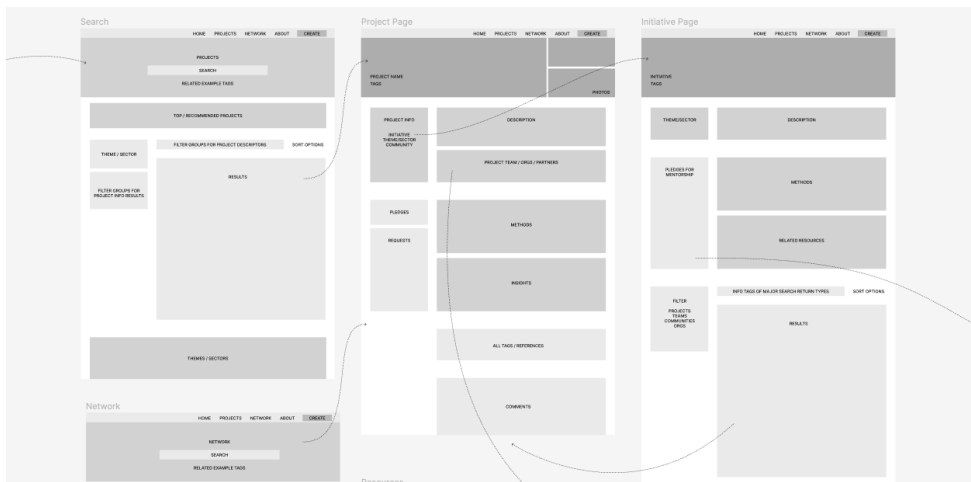


Figure 15: “Grey box” wireframes overlaid with a visitor’s journey helped define what the experience could be like.

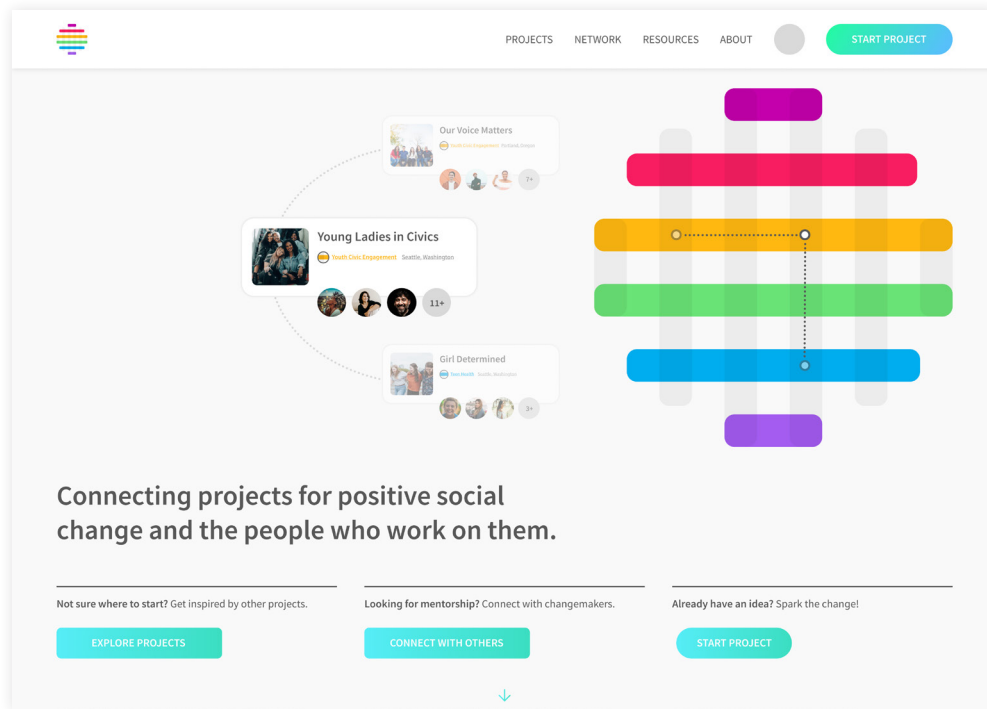


Figure 16: The Interlace home page, where users can choose to Explore Projects, Connect, or Start a Project.

The Platform: Interlace

Interlace is a platform that inspires, supports, and connects projects of positive social change, regardless of size and scale.

This digital platform is a space where creating positive social change is accessible to anyone, through mutual support, inspiration, and informational resources.

In the peer-built project database, users can get inspired by projects in other communities, learn about the specific methods the team used to initiate and facilitate the project, and explore insights. Each project lists all the stakeholders involved — including designers, researchers, sponsors, and partners — weaving a network of change-makers across projects who can request or pledge support.

The platform’s design centers around empowerment for grassroots projects and non-experts, helping community members create the positive change they’d like to see in their communities, while still extending functionality and support to larger-scale and organization-led initiatives.

Explore Projects

Explore Projects to browse Interlace’s database of projects, organized by Theme, Initiative, and the Community they take part in and with. Because Interlace’s primary audience is community members who may be learning about social innovation projects for the first time, the platform highlights an exploratory browsing experience rather than a directed search. This experience eliminates the need for previous knowledge of DSI terminology, approaches, and classifications, reducing barriers for users from non-academic and/or non-professional backgrounds or familiarity with DSI.

Users are provided multiple methods for narrowing their search: selecting characteristics from the Theme list and Community filters, interacting with the Weave to select Theme and world-

regional location, or searching and selecting characteristic tags. As users select characteristics, the intersections are mirrored within the Weave and the characteristics' tags appear in the Tags panel.

A project list below the Weave contains all projects with the selected theme, initiative, and community characteristics. Here, users can save interesting projects, or navigate to the project's profile.

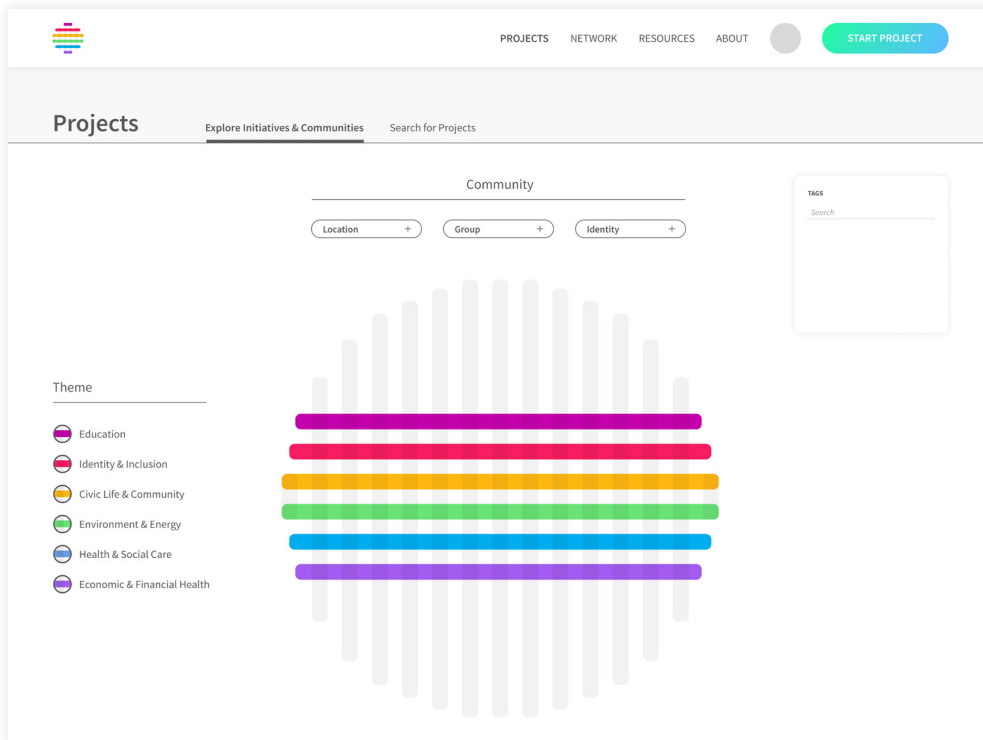


Figure 17: Begin exploring projects by selecting a Theme or Community attributes, or searching for specific tags.

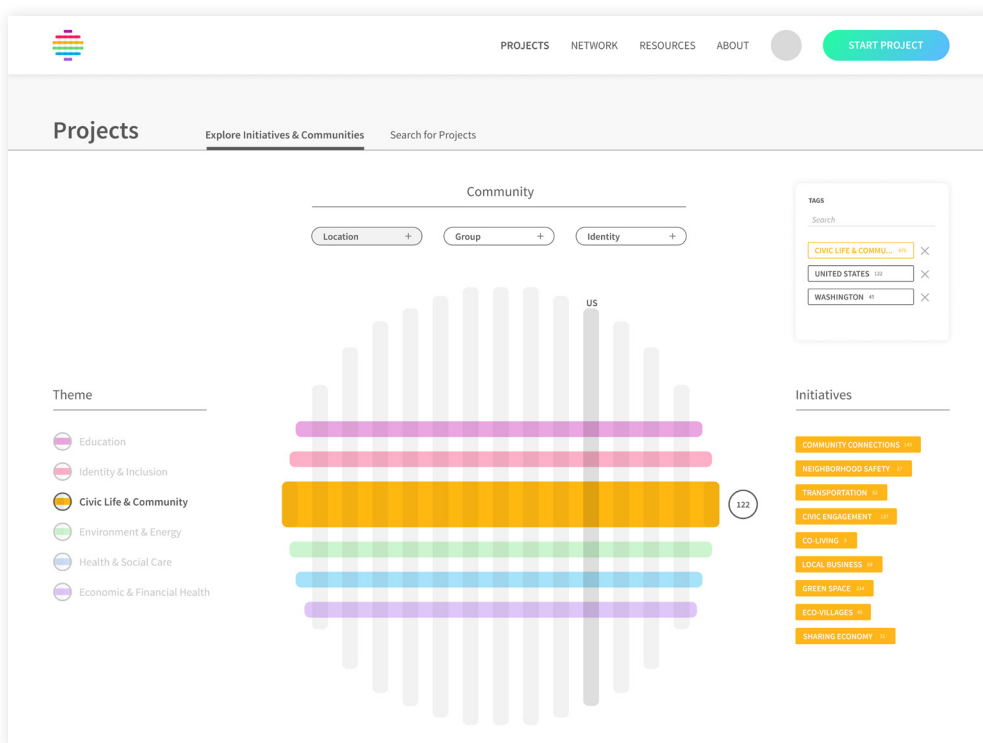


Figure 18: As users select characteristics, the intersections are mirrored within the Weave and the characteristics' tags appear in the Tags panel.

Visualizing the Weave and designing an exploratory experience in this way speaks to the design principles Accessible and Connected. Usually hidden behind financial barriers of paying for information in books, or educational barriers with information displayed in remote academic settings, DSI case study information on Interlace is public. The open nature of the information, as well as the intuitive experience to browse and search for projects within the Weave, lead to its accessibility to users of varied backgrounds, level of education, and technological literacy. The visible connectedness of projects to one another, as well as within and across initiatives, themes, and communities allows for insights and knowledge to be openly shared.

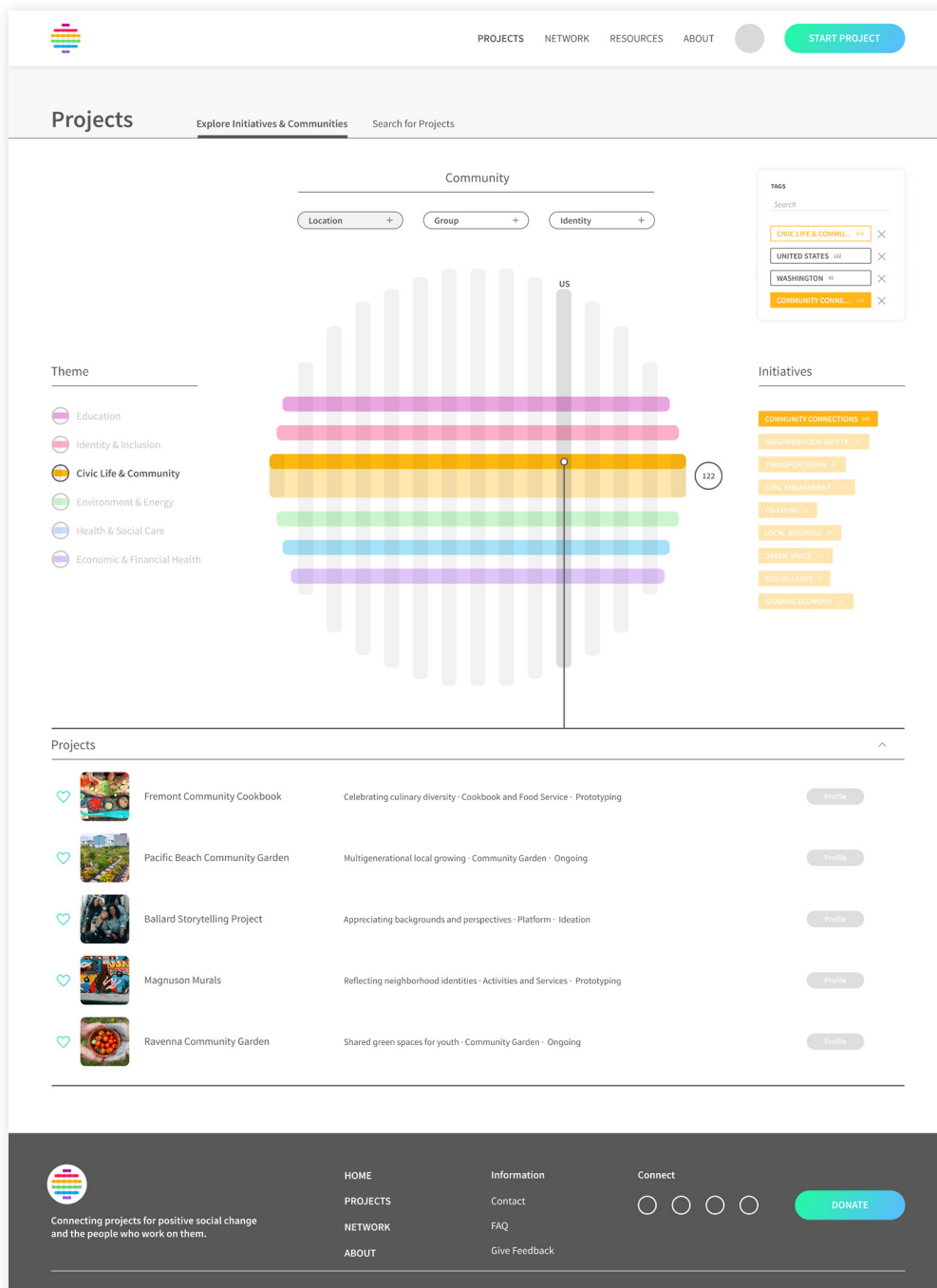


Figure 19: A project list below the Weave contains all projects with the selected Theme, Initiative, and Community characteristics.

Project Profile

A project's profile houses all of its key details including attributes, stakeholders and team, timeline, outcomes, methods, as well as Pledges & Requests. The page is organized so that project information is contained within the body of the page, while active Pledges & Requests — a profile's calls-to-action — are always visible in a static panel.

All underlined content or tags are links to cross-referenced content across the platform. Clear and prevalent cross-references speak to the Connected design principle, allowing users and the platform to draw deeper connections across discrete characteristics and variables.

Though I only created a project profile for the prototype, Interlace would also have profiles for people, groups and organizations, Communities, Initiatives, and Themes.

Project profiles are editable over time, so are able to scale in information, activities, and engagement as the project itself scales and progresses — an approach that reflects the Scalable design principle previously mentioned.

Pacific Beach Community Garden

Community Connections · Pacific Beach, Washington, United States

A community garden that connects multi-generational neighbors through the joys and lessons of local growing.

Theme Civic Life & Community	Community Pacific Beach Neighbors	Outcomes Community Garden Spatial Growing Classes Experiential Website Digital
Initiative Community Connections	Funding Grant Private Pledges	

RESEARCH / IDEATION DESIGN / PROTOTYPING IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION / ADAPTATION

Created June 2017 Ongoing

Team Members

- Sarah, Project Organizer
- Jackson, Community Liaison
- Rebecca, Government Liaison
- Rich, Designer

Pledge Your Support

- Funding Greenhouse [Pledge]
- Team Membership Designer [Pledge]
- Idea Generation New Services [Pledge]
- Community Feedback Prototype [Pledge]

Request Our Support

- Mentorship [Request]
- Services [Request]
- Partnership [Request]

Figure 20: Profiles enable engagement between actors on the platform.

Pledges & Requests

The profile also lists a project's Requests for support from other individuals, teams, projects, or groups. Below these are the team's Pledges for providing support to others. Pledge support for the project in a variety of ways, from funding and feedback, to joining the team as a contributing member.

Pledge and Request information is always visible in the panel card. Drop-downs allow users to learn more about what the details of each request are, as well as how many pledges have already been made, and how they have contributed to the project's overall goal.

To draw profile visitors' eye to requests, CTA buttons are highlighted in a bright teal gradient. This visual language is reversed for the profile's pledges.

Pledge and Request functionality speak directly to the design principle of Supportive. Throughout the platform, any user belonging to any team, group, or community can engage in mutual support with other actors. Exposing needs for support clearly and at a high level in the information hierarchy, reflects the importance of peer-based support on the platform, and allows for simple, intuitive functionality to aid in the case of complementary needs and ability to provide.

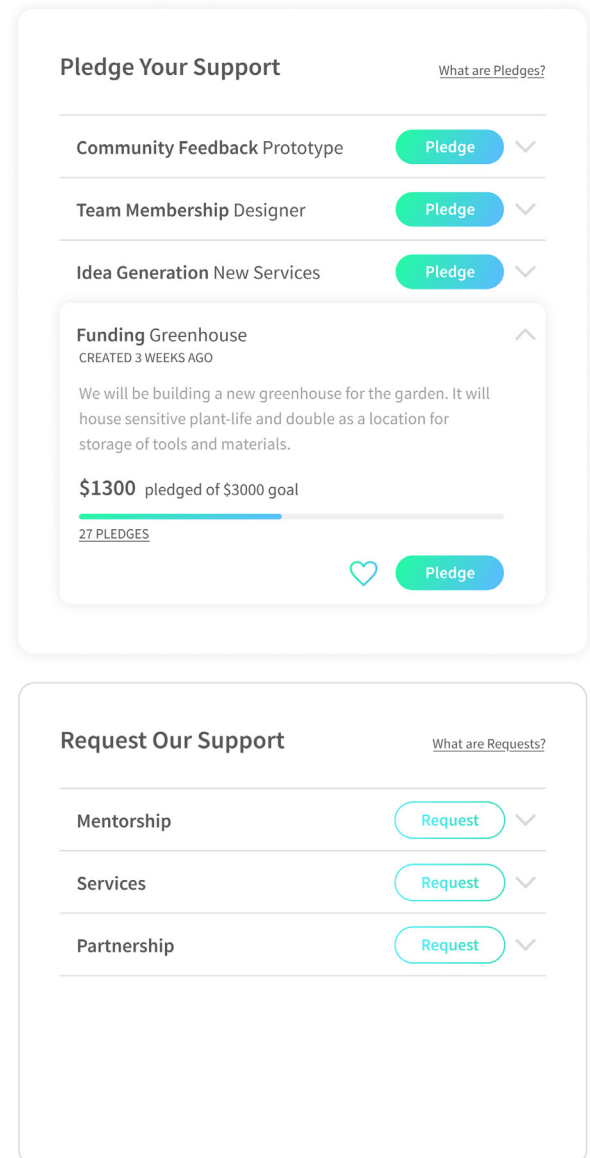


Figure 21: The static Pledge & Request panel, with the details of a project's Request expanded.

Creating a Project

Anyone on the platform can start a new project by walking through Interlace’s project launch process. The platform provides guidance for characterizing a project with key details such as Theme, Initiative, Community attributes, name, descriptors, and more. Review the project details before officially creating the new project’s profile and sharing its launch with relevant people and groups.

This was designed as an immersive walkthrough experience in order to have enough space and user attention to embed educational elements. For users who are not knowledgeable in DSI terminology or frameworks, the project launch process builds educational moments into the process.

The process of creating a project is outcome-centered rather than deliverable-centered, which is in line with the ethos of the typical Design for Social Innovation process. This value can be seen by the focus on characterizing a project by its goals and overarching vision for social change, through identification of Initiative and Theme, rather than urging users to commit to creating a specific type of intervention. Because project profiles are editable and scalable over time, as previously mentioned, any updates can be made later — keeping the focus at project launch on the vision and community needs.

a

What core **theme** is your project focused on?

- Education**
The **Education** theme encompasses initiatives and projects that improve educational environments, tools, resources, and structures for lifelong learning.
- Identity & Inclusion**
The **Identity & Inclusion** theme's primary goal is to foster respect, value, and inclusion despite differences by embracing diversity and promoting equity.
- Civic Life & Community**
The **Civic Life & Community** theme focuses on creating vibrant, inclusive, and resilient communities for residents to actively contribute and work together.
- Environment & Energy**
The focus of the **Environment & Energy** theme is on sustainable production-consumption systems and energy resources impact on the environment.
- Health & Social Care**
The **Health & Social Care** theme's initiatives and projects aim to improve health and care systems, access to services, and social care provisions.
- Economic & Financial Health**
The **Economic & Financial Health** theme encompasses initiatives and projects that improve economic conditions, opportunities, and stability.

← Back Next → QUESTIONS? SAVE & EXIT

b

Let's give your project a name and at least 3 key descriptors.

Simple Project Name

17/32

- Multi-generational Sustainability Youth Food Systems
- Social Care Social Isolation Aging Helping Hands
- Safety Communication Childcare Waste Management
- Learning Cooperative Vacancy Agriculture
- Volunteering Green Space Food Security Ecosystem

Don't see a descriptor that fits? Create one.

← Back Next → QUESTIONS? SAVE & EXIT

Figure 22a–b: Two selected screens from Interlace’s project launch experience.

Dashboard

The Dashboard helps users monitor activities and data across all of the teams, projects, communities, and initiatives they're involved in. As opposed to other spaces on the digital platform, the Dashboard is purposefully user-centered, spanning their activities, contributions, interests, and preferences.

The Dashboard's primary purposes is to display information and insights about project progress through metrics such as funding, team size, partnerships, and community engagement. It also keeps a log of Pledges and Requests, keeping mutual support top-of-mind and accessible in relation to project activity.

In the case of a recently created project, Interlace prompts users with helpful hints about how to begin securing funding, building a team and partnerships, and initiating community engagement activities to launch their project.

The Dashboard's functionality aims to support the Scalable design principle, in the way that it is able to measure a project's progress and deliver insights as it scales.

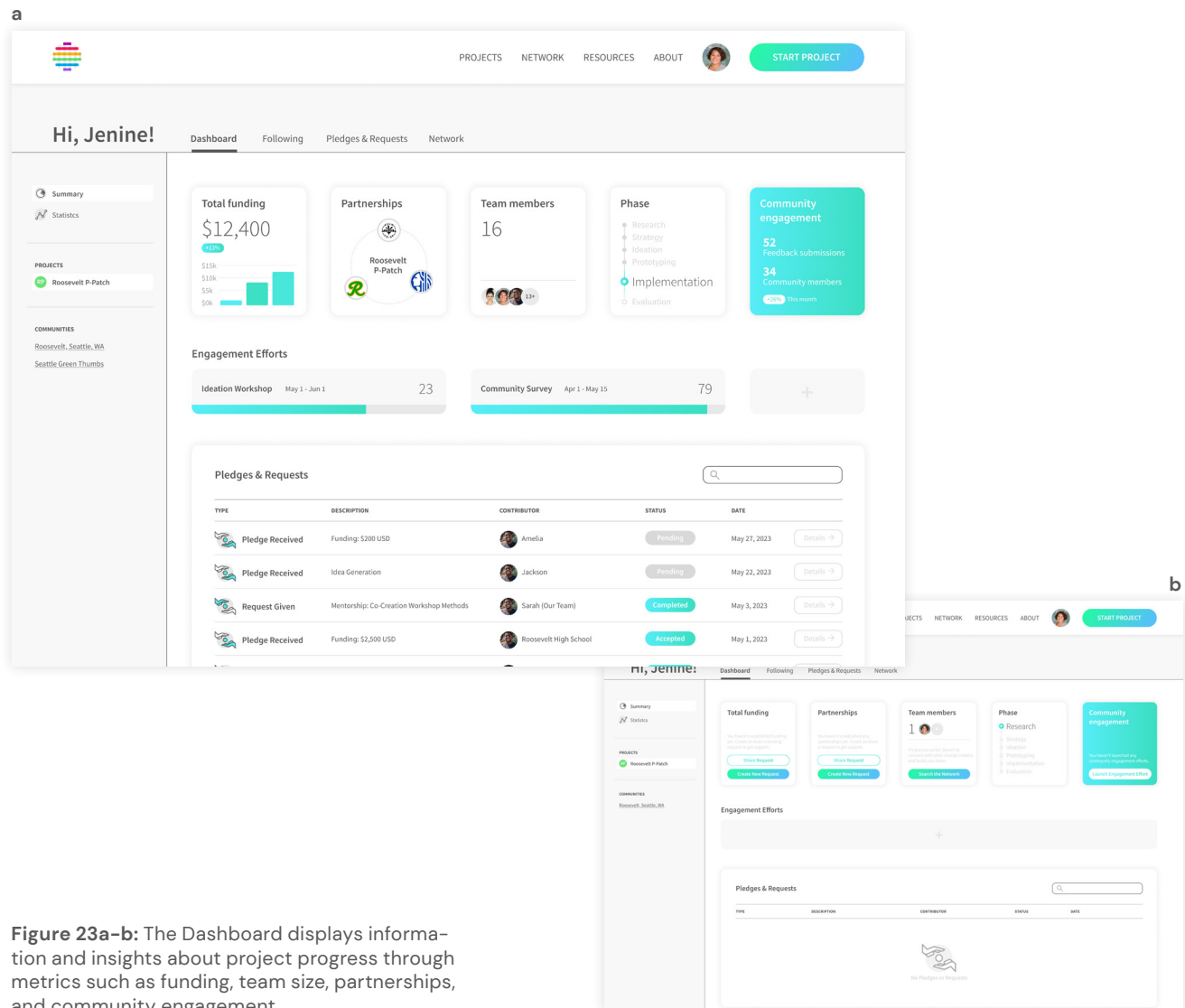


Figure 23a–b: The Dashboard displays information and insights about project progress through metrics such as funding, team size, partnerships, and community engagement.

DISCUSSION

The conceptual platform design successfully reimagines a social innovation platform as a community-driven space that supports knowledge-sharing through the connection of projects and initiatives across communities.

Unlike other social innovation platforms in the current landscape, Interlace allows anyone, but especially community members who have been historically barred from initiating projects, to launch their own social innovation efforts. Also unlike current social innovation platforms, Interlace embeds community members into a social innovation project as an equally-valuable contributor throughout the entire process, rather than a resource to be contracted when needed to inform expert practitioners.

The conceptual design also created a novel way to connect local projects across initiatives and communities, creating the structure for a knowledge-sharing network.

Project Challenges & Next Steps

Due to time constraints, I was able to bring some, but not all, concepts to the high-fidelity design and prototyping phase in order to communicate the conceptual design proposal. There are also a few challenges with the current state of the proposal. First, because the project scope did not include primary research with community member stakeholders, the design's functionality does not respond to specific, identified community challenges or barriers to engagement in DSI projects or platforms. Additionally, usability testing with community members could have been used to gauge the intuitiveness, legibility, or interactions of the platform. Finally, in regards to the peer-built project database, this proposal does not address "cold start" or adoption challenges commonly faced by platforms — most importantly because a large part of platforms' value is that they derive increasing value from increased adoption, engagement, and populated content.

To address these challenges, I plan to create a fully interactive prototype of the entire platform and test it with community members and DSI practitioners. Though the ultimate aim is for the platform's project database to be peer-built, I plan to populate it with existing DSI projects, both to root the working prototype in increased realism, and to aid in overcoming the "cold start" problem.

Finally, I am interested in developing the platform and making it available to the public at the purchased domain: interlaceproject.org.

Areas for Further Research

For the design and research community, there are many opportunities to continue to make progress in this space.

Classification of Projects, Initiatives, and Themes: This project scratched the surface of a complete taxonomy and classification for DSI projects and their overarching Initiatives and Themes. Further research must be conducted to determine the list of existing and potential Initiatives that might belong to each Theme, as well as an evidence-driven determination of the names of the Themes themselves.

Community attributes, including community types, groups, and identities could be defined more substantially to aid in their robust characterization and the resulting specificity of the platform's information.

Primary Research to Uncover Community Barriers: Though this project addresses community involvement and initiation of DSI projects in general, more in-depth research into specific barriers and pain points might highlight the need for additional or changed features of the platform. Testing the prototype of the platform with users could also highlight usability concerns, barriers to adoption, gaps in functionality, preferences, and other feedback.

Development of Resources for Capacity-Building: Interlace's conceptual design makes reference to a resource database, which collects the cross-referenced methods, insights, and resources from across the platform. Additional exploration into the contents and interactivity of such a database, as well as the design of new resources and collection of outside resources, would greatly improve the value of a DSI platform for community members.

Intersection with Agency-Outcome-Structure Model: Holtgrewe & Millard's Agency-Outcome-Structure model provides considerations for a "double pronged strategy in which bottom-up approaches simultaneously solve problems and develop agency... whilst top-down approaches create supportive" structures (2018, 70). The goal is to achieve a balance of involvement in structures of power and community agency, for optimal results in social innovation efforts. Further research into these considerations, as well as translation of these characteristics into the working design of a DSI platform, might yield improved outcomes with increased sensitivity to existing power dynamics.

Considerations of Levels of Impact: Researchers repeatedly note the differences in the level of impact of social innovations and DSI projects. Interlace currently does not distinguish projects and innovations of varying impact levels, however, this is an area of opportunity that has the potential to further classify and support projects with specific and varied needs. The questions of who and how projects are classified, the elements of progress and time, as well as resulting platform functionality, are all valuable points for further investigation.

Overlap with Project Management: Further research could help determine the value of a DSI platform that also encompasses project management capabilities. This thesis proposes a platform as a catalyst for making meaningful connections and engaging in mutual support activities, however there is opportunity for all of a project's collaboration activities, creations, tasks, project timelines, and more to be housed in a central, digital space. Specifically, research could investigate whether creating new functionality or enabling integration with existing project management software may be of comparative value, how such functionality might be integrated and impact the platform's use.

Reflection

Research in Design for Social Innovation (DSI) has been both challenging and rewarding. In countless ways, it has prompted me to take a critical look at what design is, the value and intention of its aims, the power it inherently holds, and as a result, what my place and responsibilities are as a person who conducts design professionally. Navigating this complex space with humility and awareness was, and continues to be, paramount. I'm happy that, through this project, I've learned how important it is to lean into the complexity with intention and openness.

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