

(In)dependent student-led communities as spaces for undiscovered relation, collaboration and connection opportunities

by

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“Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass - build the resilience by building the relationships”

(brown, 2017, 42)

*A special thank you to my supervisors Thijs Witty and
Elizabeth Graham for helping me untangle this big
messy ball of thoughts & ideas*

*and a big warm hug to the awesome people of
Archipelago! So glad to have shared a wonderful year
of growing and learning together.*

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Introduction

Due to the nature of my practice-led project I am giving more attention to the preliminaries, hence the length of this opening section is 12 pages.

In my research I explore the potential of (in)dependent student groups that take root in institutional environments and their ability to facilitate new, unexplored interaction, learning, collaboration and relationship building opportunities. It also touches upon the process of community building, sustainability and management, as well as the influences posed by the inherent dependence on the institution's structure. As a fulcrum for the observations presented in the research I use my own experience of active participation within the student-led group Archipelago and my involvement in PZI as a student, as well as looking from a broader perspective of PZI being a part of a bigger institution - Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS) and what that entails. I also include voices from the interviews with each member of the Archipelago group and their perspectives. Besides this, I was also looking for an example of another student-led community to have a broader overview of how such groups function and what is their potential. I chose to include the Haven community alongside Archipelago. The Haven also functions within RUAS, but its focus is on bachelor students of Wdka. I deliberately chose to focus on these two specific communities as they both function under the roof of the same institution, yet have different approaches towards community work and dissimilar administrative/ financial relationship with the sponsor (RUAS). Thus most of the observations presented in this document are within the context of PZI, Wdka and RUAS environments.

Besides this I am curious to explore how student-led communities can become spaces for students to fulfil their desire to connect, belong and care for one another both in practical and nonmaterial ways. It is important to point out that my focus is not so much on student unions, that are known to have a more political standpoint and deal with protecting student rights and bettering of studying experience within the context of specific programmes. Even though I stand by the importance of these matters, I am more curious to explore communities that seek to create their own unique environments for connection and activities that encourage networking between students and relationship building outside the context of regular obligations as students. I expand more on these differences in the following chapters.

The main topic of my research revolves around community building, its management and sustainability. I am putting a significant focus in my research on communication and connection. I believe that having healthy, well managed ways of communicating and problem solving is the most crucial part of collective work. Besides this I look closer at what kind of impact a community can make for the learning process.

To give more context to my interest in this topic, I also briefly present my past experience with a student-led group Kurk Kurk, as it was the main reason for my willingness to begin this research. I also found it important to present Kurk Kurk's example in this work as an inspiration for possible future outcomes for student-led communities, namely the possibility of them becoming independent communities outside the institution's influence. I do acknowledge the shortcomings that influenced Kurk Kurk to the point of it eventually becoming dormant, but nevertheless pointing out the things that did work and allowed the group to be active for a while after being disconnected from the institution's support.

Having said all this, I do focus most attention on my experience and observations during the time of being involved in the Archipelago group, as it had the most influence in my expanded knowledge in community work. It was important for me to also include voices from other members of this community, hence I organised an interview with each member of the group. The initial motivation behind interviews with Archipelago members, was to figure out how each member sees their position/ role within the group, their goals/ ambitions and possible learning outcomes that emerged after continued involvement in the group activities. I was also interested to hear about their experiences as students in terms of connecting with their peers and people from other programmes within the PZI. Besides this I was curious to learn how each member experiences the inner ecology of the Archipelago community - group dynamics, structure, division of roles/ responsibilities, etc. After finalising the transcriptions, I came to realise that these interviews reveal a quite broad overlook not only of the community itself, but also of the motivating factors behind its existence. It also brings light to the complexities that arise due to commitments the community might have for the institution. I have included the full documentation of the interviews at the end of this document (below the appendix).

The interviews¹ with Archipelago members were conducted in a 3 months span, so there are slightly different perspectives being brought up by the interviewees as they become more involved in the group activities. Another aspect that gives a more broader outlook on the group are additional questions that were given to the members who were involved from the start of the group (co-founders). The names of the interviewees are kept anonymous for privacy reasons, which were discussed with each member beforehand. Additionally, any information that could give out a person's identity was omitted from the transcripts.

The backbone of my research are the collected transcripts from the interviews with Archipelago, Haven community members and my personal experience as an observer/participant. Additionally, I am looking into other practitioners and activists working in the field of art, education and community/ group work, who's practices are based on righteousness, care for others, listening, inclusivity and love; more specifically - Celine Condorelli, adrienne maree brown, bell hooks and others.

While analysing transcripts from the interviews, I drafted specific topics that were most prominent and presented them as different chapters in this document. In each chapter I aim to present my own observations about a given topic as an active participant of the group and a student of the PZI, as well as include voices of other members of the group and their perspectives.

¹ [Interviews with Archipelago members](#) are included at the end of this document.

Case studies

Archipelago community

Archipelago is a student-led community that functions within the framework of the PZI Institute and is sponsored by Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS). It is run by 6 students and 1 staff member. Some of the members were also the co-founders of the group, while others joined later. Archipelago formed as a response to the lack of connection between Piet Zwart Institute's (PZI) master programmes students. Therefore the group's public are the students of the PZI. 6 of the members from the group are also students of PZI master programmes. Such formation was done deliberately to have a better representation of each programme and its students. The group tries to balance its activities for the purpose of recruiting new students for the PZI, as well as to improve the inner ecology of the PZI, namely to improve the connection between students of the 6 master programmes.

Haven community

Haven is a student-led community that operates within the framework of Willem de Kooning Academy and is sponsored by Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS). It is run by 2 bachelor students of Wdka. Haven formed in 2021 as a response to the lack of connection between students. Haven's main objective was to create a physical space that would act as an informal environment for students to relax and recharge, host student-led events and connect with people from other departments.

Kurk Kurk community

Kurk Kurk is a student-led community that was formed by me and my peers at the time when I was a bachelor student at Vilnius Academy of Arts. The community started in 2014 and had 6 members. The main mission of Kurk Kurk was to present our knowledge and experience in graphic art to the people outside the institution. The community also acted as a space for students to interact and collaborate with each other. The activities of the Kurk Kurk community were funded by Vilnius Academy of Arts for the time that we were students. After graduation, we had to find ways to sustain the community in other means, mainly through hosting workshops in various events across Lithuania while receiving funding from private venues. The group became doormat around 2020.

Abbreviations

PZI - Piet Zwart Institute

Piet Zwart Institute (PZI) is part of the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA), which in turn is part of the multi-sectoral Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS). WdKA's Master's programmes are positioned within the PZI. The Piet Zwart Institute houses four full-time Master programmes - Interior Architecture: Research + Design (MIARD), Master of Arts in Fine Art and Design (MFA), Lens-Based Media (LB), Experimental Publishing (XPUB) and two part-time Master programmes - Education in Arts (MeiA) and Master Design.*

Wdka - Willem de Kooning Academy

Willem de Kooning Academy is an art school for bachelor's and master's degree courses in Media, Art, Design, Leisure and Education. It is situated in Rotterdam and is a part of the multi-sectoral Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences**

RUAS - Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences

Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences is an educational institution that offers various bachelor, master and associate degree study programmes. RUAS has 12 schools in different fields of education. Willem de Kooning Academy is one of those schools.***

* Information taken from <https://www.pzwart.nl/>

** Information taken from <https://www.wdka.nl/about>

*** Information taken from <https://www.rotterdamuas.com/about/>

Visualising concepts

The drawings presented in this research were inspired by a.m. brown's book "Emergent Strategy" in which she uses principles of biomimicry and permaculture² to explain and illustrate the concept of emergence.

Through her book she connects processes/ happenings in nature to human experiences - collectivity, connections, relationships, support, adaptation, transformation, etc. Such comparisons were helpful for me as a reader to better grasp the ideas presented in the book, thus I wanted to use a similar approach in my thesis.

I chose to use simplified linear illustrations as a way to summarise the concepts and give them more depth and character. These illustrations are also helpful to me as a researcher to put my thoughts in a different perspective, which in turn inspired me to discover new unforeseen angles for the arguments I present in my work.

Research timeline & positionality

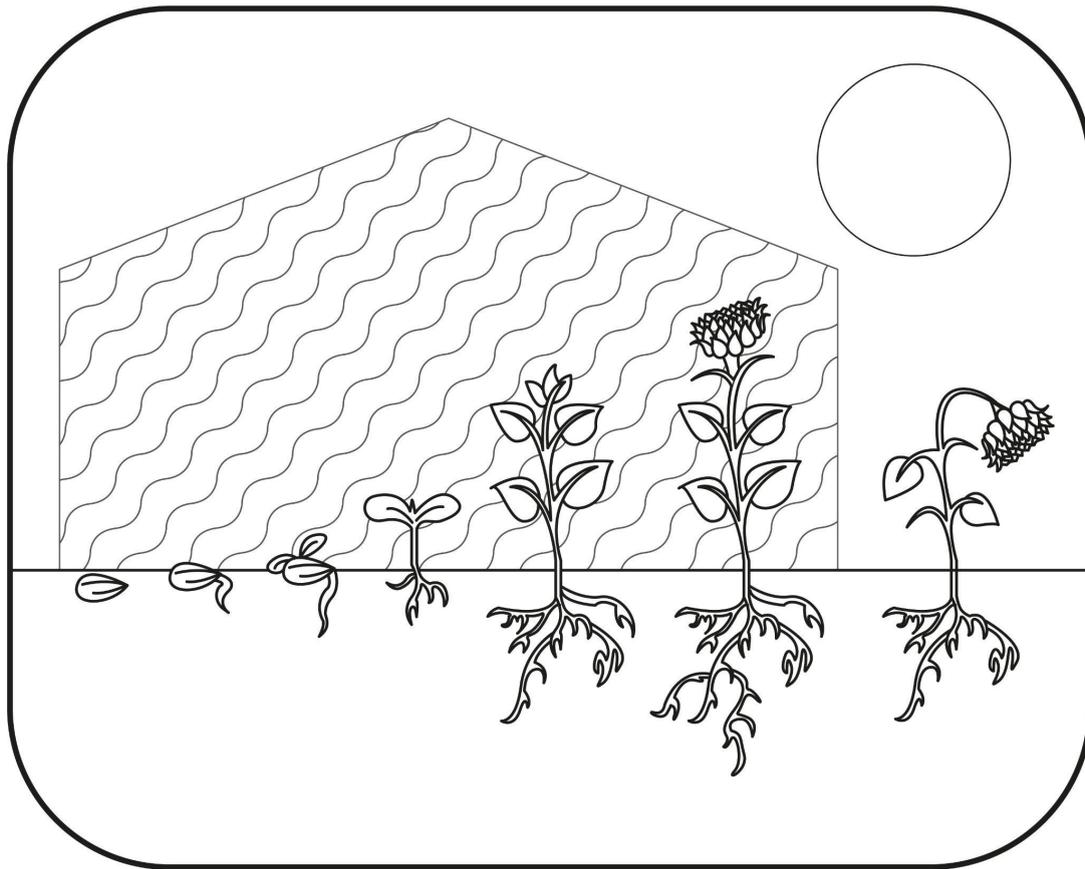
To give a broader context of my interest in student-led communities and how I arrived at my current position, I want to expand on the timeline of my research. Since the beginning, I wanted to analyse how student initiated communities could become an answer to student's struggle to successfully continue their professional paths after graduation. I was inspired by my previous experience in a student-led community Kurk Kurk which was formed in 2014 during my bachelor studies at Vilnius Academy of Arts. The community was initiated by me and several other students from my course as a space for us to collaborate in activities that are not connected to the school's programme and to exercise our knowledge in graphic art by organising workshops outside the institution for the bigger public.

² "Biomimetics or biomimicry is the imitation of the models, systems, and elements of nature for the purpose of solving complex human problems. Permaculture is a system of agricultural and social design principles centred around simulating or directly utilising the patterns and features observed in natural ecosystems." (brown 2017, 23)

I was concerned about the lack of representation for young artists and problems that they face after graduating from art academies, namely:

- Difficulty to sustain themselves solely from their artistic practices;
- Insufficient knowledge of self-marketing and establishing themselves in the art market;
- Fractured network with other creatives that was built during the study process;
- Lack of supportive groups/ communities that would guide young graduates in building their creative practices outside the institution.

These concerns surfaced from my own experience as an art student, as well as from conversations, shared struggles with my peers. I have tried to address these issues by carrying on with the Kurk Kurk community and trying to make it functional without having the support of the institution. For a few years, from 2017 till 2020, the community found a way to sustain itself by hosting workshops at various venues and events, however eventually it became dormant. Kurk Kurk was struggling to sustain itself due to the insufficient knowledge in community management, sustainability and group work facilitation. Hence, I thought that learning how to be a better facilitator/ leader would help me to have better chances in keeping the community afloat. My initial aim was to join an already functioning community and use it as a space for me to learn how to be a good leader within the group, understand better what this role implies and the ethics of leading the group.



Evolution of community growth supported by the institution versus outside of its support. Kurk Kurk example.
Illustrated by Urte Baranauskaitė

In 2021 I joined the Archipelago community and quickly became absorbed with the responsibilities and actions I had to take as an active member of the group. Through the process I became aware of how complicated it can be to start a community like this from scratch and how many layers go into that - securing the financing, dividing responsibilities, keeping up with the workload, managing group relations, constantly brainstorming for ways to make the most positive impact for the public and so on. These realisations influenced my research process and therefore my position as well. I realised it would be way more fruitful for me to further focus on carefully listening and observing the group's actions rather than creating situations in which I could exercise my role as a leader/ facilitator. Therefore my position has shifted to an active participant/ observer.

As an active participant I was really involved in the community's actions and strived to be a functional member of the group. Therefore by active I mean fully involved and dedicated to my actions within the group, my chosen/ designated role(s), going to meetings, helping with organisation of events, solving problems, etc. Since the main motivation of embarking on this research journey was to actually learn how communities function and develop stronger skills

that are needed to be a valuable member of the group, I knew that just observing was not going to cut it. I felt that I can get much more substance by involving myself fully in what was happening in Archipelago, as I believe the best way to learn something is by actively practising it. Furthermore, I was closely connected to the group's mission of creating new opportunities for students to connect and build relationships, so my involvement with Archipelago was based on genuine motivation.

I have introduced the observer role later on in the process - it developed slowly and organically as I gained the trust and built stronger bonds with the members. I started by collecting raw audio recordings of the collective meetings we had, but I was not analysing or going through them for a while - that came later.

Ethics

Being a researcher and using the Archipelago as a learning/ reflection space is complicated, because of the fragility of the group. For this reason I didn't feel comfortable to be too invasive as it could have provoked unnecessary tensions and disturb the natural flow of group formation. Hence, as said before I was focusing on being an active participant first and then also an observer and brought my focus on listening and observing what was happening within a group, what decisions we made and where it took us. I used my observations to inform further processes of the research. Also, I carry a responsibility for people's privacy considering the data I have collected as a researcher. Therefore I chose to keep the data from interviews and meetings with the members anonymous.

Resources

While doing the research, I was looking for other practitioners that share inspiring examples about community work, human relations, facilitation and care - that could expand my understanding about the topics I present in this document. Since I have more of a hands-on experience with community work, I wanted to look beyond my own knowledge and delve deeper to find support for the things that I have noticed, as well as seek new discoveries through other practitioners' work. While doing literature study I have found few exciting resources from different writers that had a big influence on the course of my study and shaped my writing and argumentation. Below I give a short overview of the authors (and their books) that had the biggest impact on my research trajectory:

adrienne maree brown

adrienne maree brown is an American writer and activist. I was drawn to adrienne's work, as she recognises the intricacy of human relationships and how small actions and interactions with others can have a big impact on a larger group/ community. She also brings attention to the inevitabilities of life, such as change and chaos, and how our ability to adapt and move through them tactfully influences the strength and durability of our relationships and quality of life. The two books “Emergent Strategy” and “Holding Change” had been greatly used resources throughout my research to further explain and ground my observations in community work.

Emergent Strategy

This book has given me a broader perspective on the observations I made during my time with Archipelago, as well as introduced me to new insights on community work that I haven't paid attention to prior. As adrienne stated “*relationships are everything*” (brown 2017, 28), I too came to realise that knowing how to navigate relationships with other members in the community makes all the difference. The book inspired me to recognise the complexity of human interactions and not be anxious about it, but rather become curious and open to understand and navigate occurring situations with care and compassion.

Holding Change

This book is a continuation of the themes presented in “Emergent Strategy”, but bringing more focus on mediation and facilitation. As I was struggling to fully comprehend what leadership and facilitation meant to me, the book helped me to understand that being a good facilitator requires deep engagement both with the cause and the people you work with. It's about listening, being aware of yourself (your strengths and limitations) and others and giving space to those around you so they can figure out their own process. It's about inviting, not imposing. Adrienne said that “*on this journey, teachers are everywhere, in our own thoughts and actions and in every interaction and mass action*” (brown, 2021, 9) and by reflecting on my research journey I do agree that by being open I have invited more opportunities to learn from the observations, material and people I came in contact with during my research - tutors, peers, Archipelago members, accounts from other practitioners and their work.

bell hooks

I was introduced to Gloria Jean Watkins' (known as bell hooks) work in the early stages of my research and I immediately felt a connection with her work and the way she talks about education, human relations and communities. I was inspired by her passion in teaching and education, her aspiration to look for ways to bring people closer together through understanding, compassion and commitment.

All About Love

Through my time working with Archipelago and Kurk Kurk, I have noticed what a big difference it makes when you build strong personal bonds with people which are based on trust and care. It creates an environment in which group members feel welcomed and needed, hence making the community stronger. The book "All About Love" has taught me that building trust and closeness with others requires active participation - love is not passive. As hooks said "*the word "love" is most often defined as a noun, yet <...> we would all love better if we used it as a verb*" (hooks, 2018, 4). The book offered me a new dimension to understanding love and seeing it beyond just a romantic connotation. Through it I realised that everything we do in life is either driven by love or lack of it. As described in the book, love is multidimensional - it is about "*care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect and knowledge*" (hooks, 2018, 94) and these principles can (and should) be applied in community work as well.

Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope

In my research I focus on communities that emerge in educational, institutional environments. Studying this book has given me more courage to present my honest observations about the school environment and how it affects student-led communities and their progression. I was inspired to not only notice the problems, but rather look for opportunities of how such coexistence can benefit the student and the whole schools' community at large - as hooks said "*when we only name the problem, when we state complaint without a constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope*" (hooks, 2003, 14). The book has also highlighted how the sense of belonging to a community in educational spaces benefits the wellbeing of the student, which I have experienced myself as a member of Archipelago. I expand more on this in the following chapters.

Celline Condorelli

Support Structures

The book discusses the concept of support and the complexities of it when applied in human interactions. Through the research process I have looked at the student-led communities as additional support systems for the students in providing them a space for expansive interactions that can only happen in a more informal setting. “Support structures” has been a great resource while I revisited and re-evaluated my experiences in community work. I came to understand that giving support can be complex - it is a back and forth process between the community and a student. It can take a while to determine what kind of support is needed and in what way, as the students might be figuring their needs as they go through the study process.

Other Resources

Toolkit for Cooperative, Collective, & Collaborative Cultural Work

The idea of the publication was initiated by the Press Press - “*an interdisciplinary publishing initiative that aims to shift and deepen the understanding of voices, identities, and narratives that have been suppressed or misrepresented by the mainstream*” (Press Press, n.d.). In 2019 the group gathered “*cultural organisers, artists, musicians, and community-oriented practitioners*” (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 4) for a two day workshop, where everyone involved shared their experiences in collective work and community building. The discussions have therefore inspired this publication, which is aimed to help individuals and organisations in the cultural/ educational sector who deal with collective work and are in need of guidance.

I have found compelling information in this publication, which has highlighted some of the challenges I have faced as an active participant of a community and offered viable solutions/ suggestions. It was a great resource for me to compare my own observations and thoughts about collective work to those of other practitioners working in similar sectors. As mentioned in the publication - “*collective work is messy*” (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 7), which I found to be the case in every community I was involved in. I learned, however, that by having open discussions with the members, naming the problems concretely and looking for solutions in a joint effort can increase the potential of the group’s longevity and ability to do well.

Chapter 1

In the first chapter I aim to present possible conditions that call for student-led communities to emerge. In this case I am mostly using Archipelago's example, as I have been closely involved with this group since its early beginnings and have observed and experienced the challenges that arose as we tried to build up this community. I focus my attention on describing the specific conditions of how Archipelago became urgent for the student body of the PZI as well as provide a better overview of the community's composition and position within the institution. Besides this I present the most influential activities by Archipelago and Haven, that made the most influence on student collaboration and relationship building. Throughout the chapter, I include voices from the members of Archipelago to give a more nuanced view of the group.

Key influences for the emergence of student-led communities

In recent years implemented restrictions due to the global pandemic had also largely affected educational environments. As the teaching/ learning process moved online, opportunities for in-person interactions, collaborations and connections have diminished. Students were finding it hard to connect not only with people from different departments, but also with their own coursemates. Having spoken with my coursemates and other master students, I came to realise that these feelings of disconnect were shared amongst almost everyone in the school. Most students felt like they were missing out on an all-encompassing learning experience. That includes live interactions with other peers, tutors, participation in workshops, events, informal connections that happen in-between classes, get-togethers etc.

“It was also during covid that all of us international students, who are not from here or don't live here, were not allowed to come here on campus. <...> I can't speak for the rest, but I know the consensus was that we didn't know how to connect to people here. I didn't have classes on campus, I didn't have tours of the buildings, I didn't know that we were all under one umbrella and had all these different programmes and how to get in touch with anyone if you wanted to collaborate.”

- student of the PZI, member & co-founder of Archipelago

Students had to find their own ways to connect with one another, as there was no community established prior that would provide such opportunities. This especially applied to those who wanted to form connections with people outside their immediate circle (coursemates) and reach people from other programmes within the institute. Speaking with students and recalling my own experience it appeared that reaching those other circles of people was not an easy task. Since PZI was not necessarily putting emphasis on encouraging interactions between different programmes, it was difficult to navigate such an environment and understand the extent of possibilities for broader connections.

“It happened outside of the school’s influence that I’ve gotten to know somebody from other programmes. Before Archipelago there was not really any connection with students from other programmes.”

- student of the PZI, member of Archipelago

“We generated a small community within my own department, because we could only go there and see each other every day, whereas outside everything was closed. But we never went outside the studio to other departments, studios. Just maybe one time we had a class, where students from other departments presented their work, but it was more related to academic work and not on the personal level to get to know each other, that did not happen ever before.”

- student of the PZI, member & co-founder of Archipelago

“There was no connection. Nothing. Some of us are part time students, so we’re here once every two weeks. Once in the evening, once during the day. There’s not really any overlap with other departments put forward to us. So the only kind of connection that I started making was when the restrictions of Covid were over and we were allowed to go to the Stations. That was the first time that I connected with some of the other students and realised that there were other people in this building.”

- student of the PZI, member & co-founder of Archipelago

In early 2021, reacting to the situation, a couple of students from the PZI, together with the guidance of the PZI's employee, formed a community and decided to look for ways how to rewire lost connections between master students and discover new ones. At the beginning stages this crystallised in having dedicated by-weekly newsletters for the students. Since the group was established in the time of COVID restrictions, it was quite challenging to find other forms of interacting that weren't online. One of the co-founders recalls that besides the lack of connection between the departments, a space where students could form relations and help each other was also missing:

“...when we created Archipelago, me and other members brainstormed and realised that the 'space for care' was missing. <...> Students did not relate to different masters. There were a lot of discussions, conversations about multidisciplinary, collaborative work, so many things that relate to different students getting together in pursuit of a project or shared intention. We saw that it wasn't happening in PZI, even though the discussion and the conversation was there in theory, however in practice it wasn't.”

- student of the PZI, member & co-founder of Archipelago

Since the founders and members of the group were mostly students themselves, they were closely connected to the problems that they felt had to be addressed and had ideas on how to approach them. As creators of the *Toolkit*³ said *“In the wake of the pandemic, we are reminded that at the heart of our work lies the understanding that wellbeing, integrity, equity, and care is our collective responsibility”* (*Toolkit*, n.d.). Speaking from my own perspective as a student of PZI, 2020 was a difficult year to begin my studies as a foreigner in a new country. Since the beginning I was craving to form connections with my peers and other students within the school. A year later, when I joined Archipelago and we hosted our first public event for students, I realised what a big difference it makes to have a collective moment with all of the students at the beginning of the school year. Me and other Archipelago members understood that we have an important mission on our hands and it is our responsibility to create collective moments for the students, so that they can have a better experience unlike we did when we started studying at PZI. I believe that this shared experience of isolation during the

³ I am referring to the publication “Toolkit for Cooperative, Collective, & Collaborative Cultural Work” described in the resource list in the introductory chapter of this research.

pandemic brought Archipelago members closer to each other and made us appreciate our collective effort and time spent together.

Looking over the transcripts I noticed that some urgency was repeatedly mentioned across the interviews with the members: a need to connect and collaborate with students from different departments, to have an independent community led and organised by students, representation of students' work, and having a channel to communicate relevant information. Some of the members also mentioned a possibility for the group to take on some of the activism roles that are more typical to student unions. However, from my perspective that would have been a vulnerable path to take, as the group itself was still in the process of building itself up and trying to establish its presence firmly within the PZI. Adding to this, there were tensions present between the members of the group and by what means it was funded by the institution. For this reason I don't think it would have been wise, or welcomed by the school for members to take upon activism positions. I expand more on this community-institution relationship in [Chapter 4](#).

To introduce change into an institutional system that already has its pre-defined/ established practices of operating is challenging and requires a lot of patience and diligence. To describe student-led communities I use a term (in)dependent, as such groups have to navigate between the inherent reliance to the school's funding (and therefore adhere to some of the conditions that come with that) and the need to represent and care for students in a most inclusive and caring way (that may not necessarily be profitable for the institution). To manoeuvre between these two polarities can be strenuous. As one of the Archipelago members shared: *"we see problems within our Institution and how hierarchy creates problems. But then how do we counteract that in a group that wants to be horizontal and still be successful and productive?"*

While being a member of the Archipelago, I was also observing how the activities, relationships and discussions within the group were shaping the overall dynamic of the community. I was motivated to understand what were the proper ways to run a community and maintain close connections within the members, as well as how a student-led community could improve artists and young professionals' experience in and outside the institution.

Despite this, I believe that such communities should exist and become a common practice amongst all academic institutions alike. Having been a part of the Archipelago group for a

year, I have witnessed the positive change in the overall atmosphere within the PZI. Through the organised activities and initiatives, students became more familiarised with one another and that is felt in the daily encounters inside the institution as well as outside of it. Just a simple fact of recognising faces of people from different departments already creates a more familiarised, pleasant environment that encourages further interactions and increases a sense of belonging. This in turn can lead to more profound, intimate connections and create space for supporting one another. As described in “Support Structures” by C. Condorelli *“Support’s first operational feature is its proximity. No support can take place outside a close encounter, getting entangled in a situation and becoming implicated in it. <...> This unarticulated moment is one of an intimate, un-named knowledge; someone is listening, someone hears something”* (Condorelli, 2009, 15).

The concept of support became even more relevant in the time of Covid. First hand experience of being a foreign student in a new, unknown environment has really shown me how important it is to have people who can relate to you and vice versa, also to feel like you belong to a group, a community, a structure. For me that was being a student of the PZI - this label gave me some sense of security and belonging, as I could relate to the people who were also a part of the institution or other students in general. Besides this, I could rely on the institution for at least some type of support - having a workspace for studying, seeking help for practical questions concerning my study process, having space to meet up with my fellow coursemates and organise activities together. However, lockdown has exposed the need for a more encompassing support system that goes beyond regular practicalities of being a student.

“I was feeling disconnected from the school that I became a part of. <...> I came from a different country and I was all of a sudden in a lockdown where I was sitting at home doing online classes in a tiny little apartment in the city that I didn't know, with students and lecturers that I've never met in real life. I just really wanted, for my own sanity, to connect with the place that I'm studying at a bit more. Maybe there would be an opportunity for me to actually come to campus and work a little bit, network, meet new people, see what life is really like here.”

- student of the PZI, member & co-founder of Archipelago

This urgency has called the attention of the PZI students who decided to form the Archipelago community in hopes to better accommodate students in their need to connect and form relationships and create a stronger support system. In the early stages of the group, members were mainly reaching out to students via newsletters, but that quickly proved to be insufficient to build a strong network between students. Reacting to this, members have decided to expand the group and invite more students to join. As there previously were only 3 students and one staff member of the PZI involved in Archipelago, it was not enough to represent the whole student body of the PZI. Hence, four more students from each department of the PZI joined Archipelago, thus now having a member from every masters programme available in the school. As the group expanded, more initiatives were put forward by the members. Most notable and impactful ones were Intro Week events for the new students of the PZI and the by-monthly newspaper “The Piet”. These initiatives and the group environment itself had had a big impact on the overall ecosystem of the institution and the way students relate to each other. Over time Archipelago became a recognised community within the institute and one that actualized the space for care, networking and relationship building.

“Archipelago started a space that didn't exist. The fact that it does exist already makes it possible for people to interact. There is a place for people to go to, if they want. It was not the case before. The only place that existed was the hall, where the printer and the coffee machine was. Now there is this space, there's representation of each department through this group. There is a connection. This is just the beginning. The foundation is still being built. It's important to say that, because it's not fully formed yet. It's something in the process of. This allows more transformation. It allows for something to be different. It's important to keep going. I think that this space has potential, which wasn't there before. There's more openness, more possibilities, more interaction.”

- student of the PZI, member & co-founder of Archipelago

Since it's only been a year of this group being active, there are still a lot of improvements to be made, however Archipelago community existence has opened up new opportunities for students that weren't available before. The open concept of the group allows all of the PZI students to be actively involved in the Archipelago activities and propose new initiatives.

Spaces for connection & collaboration

One of the key goals for student-led communities is to create a solid, functional space(s) that can facilitate connection between students. Such space acts as a core driving force for the community to exist and continue its work, as it has a concrete set out purpose. In my research I look into examples from the two student-led communities - Archipelago and Haven. Both of them found different approaches to such spaces and how to make best use out of them to fulfil the community's mission. Besides focusing on the needs of students, such spaces also establish a clear purpose for the community within the institution and help to have a more firm position regarding the imposed objectives by the school that do not correspond to that purpose.

Archipelago's initiative "The Piet"⁴

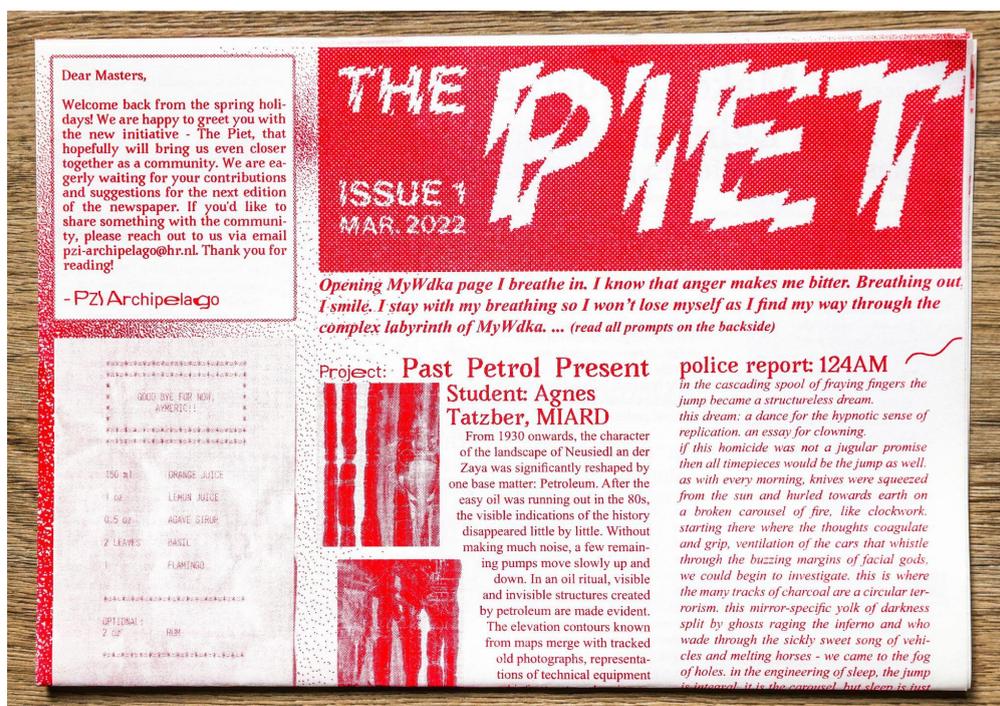
Over time, as the group got bigger and more members joined, there was capacity to take on more activities. The one shared desire amongst all of the people involved in Archipelago was to find ways to facilitate interactions between students and make those connections grow. After several discussions the group came up with an idea to start a school newspaper in which all of the master students would be represented. We called this newspaper The Piet. The first edition of The Piet was issued in spring of 2021 and it welcomed students to participate, send their submissions and suggestions for how this newly created space should look like.



The welcoming word by Archipelago to PZI students on the first issue of The Piet

⁴ You can view all editions of The Piet online: [The Piet documentation](#)

The first edition featured some of the excerpts from students' researches, poetry, images, illustrations and other creative work, as well as fun additions such as word puzzles, memes, diy tasks produced by students. For the first edition, members of Archipelago had to reach out to the students in person and ask for their submissions, but for later editions students became keen to participate and sent their contributions themselves. The newspaper is designed by few of the members of the Archipelago community, while others help to collect contributions.



The first issue of The Piet, 2022

As Archipelago has several activities that are happening simultaneously, the group had to divide into smaller teams for specific initiatives. For the first few issues I was involved in the making process myself together with two other members. The design process was quite fluid and organic, each month we would set up a date to work on the collected material and designate specific tasks amongst each other. We decided that the best way to design the newspaper is to work together in person, rather than doing it remotely. This way the creative process was more enjoyable and productive as we could discuss changes in real time and would come up with spontaneous ideas together.

The release of the first issue attracted a lot of attention from students and personnel of the PZI, hence helping to spread the word about the Archipelago community. This also made it easier to design the following issues, as students were more keen to send in material and contribute with different ideas. With every issue, the newspaper grew in volume as well as in the variety of presented topics and material. The newspaper has adapted to students' needs and became a

place for people to share their work, ask for help with projects, post advertisements for workshops/ events, share valuable tips to help foreign students, and most importantly - a place to speak openly without censorship.

The newspaper is also the first big project by Archipelago that is completely disconnected from the institution's wishes. Archipelago sometimes has to contribute to other activities that fulfil the recruitment role, such as Open Day events. The school is expecting Archipelago members to represent the PZI to the interested people and introduce them to the available programmes within the school. Several people within Archipelago have expressed their wish to have a space that is not managed or overlooked by the school and to give opportunity for other students to express themselves and interact with others freely. That is why The Piet was such an important project for Archipelago and the students of the PZI. As one of the editors of the newspaper, I could observe how with each edition students were sending in more and more submissions, opening up their voice and speaking about things that matter to them. Every month that we issued the newspaper we received positive feedback and increased willingness from students to contribute. I have prepared a link to an archive of all the editions of the newspaper which you can find in the appendix.

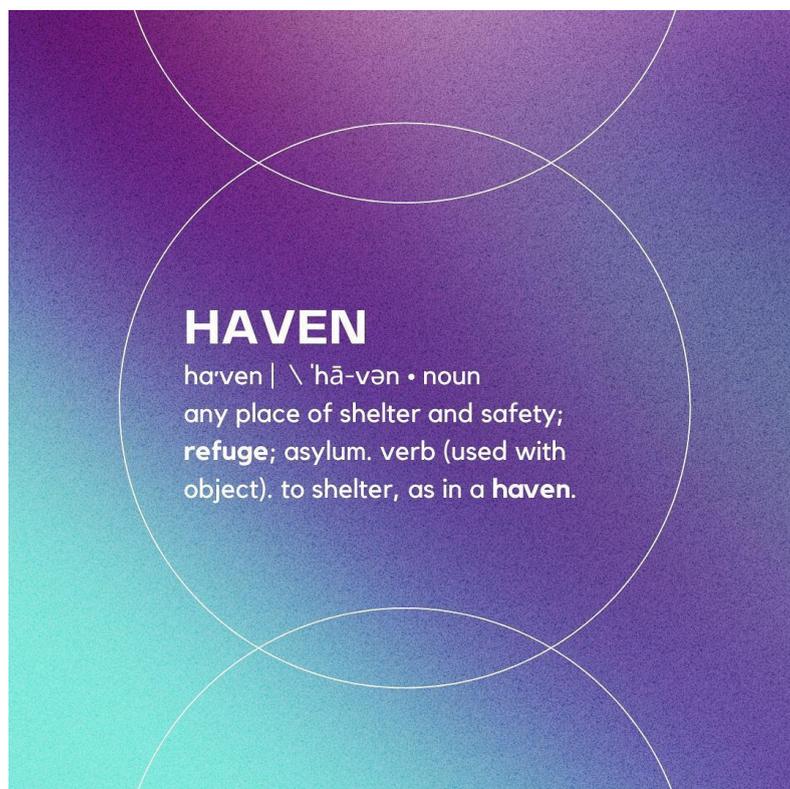


The first four editions of The Piet, 2022

Haven's safe space for students

“With the Haven, we want to focus on creating a safe space in our room in WH.2.151. We create weekly gatherings focused on wellness, togetherness and community. We want to perpetuate sharing resources such as knowledge, skills, time, food, spaces, energy and so on. Our intention is to have a collaborative network. We want to support students in starting their own initiatives within the academy.”

Excerpt from Haven's instagram channel



Haven's instagram post, 2022

Haven community focuses on student-led initiatives that take place in its “headquarters” (room WH.2.151 at Wdka) or other places at school. The co-founders of the group are the support system for the bachelor students - they provide the guidance and tools for the events/initiatives. Haven also acts as a social platform (through their instagram channel), where students can share their invitations to specific workshops/ activities, public messages. When I spoke with one of the co-founders Emily, she explained that their main focus is to provide students with a space where they can come and relax from the stressfulness of school and

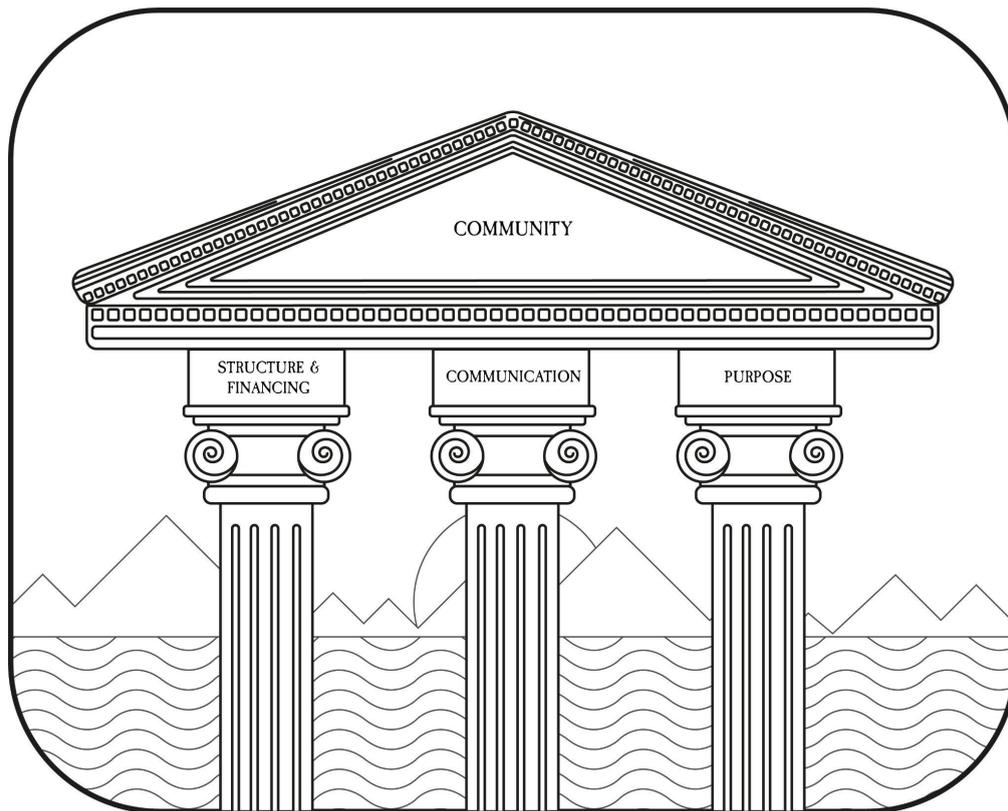
interact with others in a home-like environment. To achieve this, Haven uses part of the funds to furnish the community room with homey furniture and decorate it with artworks. Emily shared that because of strict school regulations sometimes it is complicated to realise some of the ideas for the room and can take a lot of time.

Haven community is not managed by the school, which gives them more freedom and flexibility in organising events and initiatives. This also allows them to take on a more active role in promoting social and political causes, as well as providing a platform for students to express their views and ideas. Emily, one of the co-founders, emphasised the importance of providing students with a space where they can freely express themselves and be heard. She also mentioned that the community room is not only a place to relax and socialise, but also a place where students can come together to discuss and take action on important issues. Overall, Haven serves as an important outlet for students to have their voices heard and make a positive impact in their community.

Chapter 2

What holds the community?

In this chapter I want to expand on the topic of community building, management and sustainability further and section it into different categories. I bring my focus onto what ‘holds up’, sustains a community. I examine three factors that I think have the most impact for the strength and sustainability of the community - *Structure & Finance, Communication and Purpose*. I have drafted these factors as a ‘*three pillar hypothesis*’ that I further investigate in this chapter. To give substance to my observations, I lean on to the work of other practitioners and creatives who have extensive experience in community building, group management, leadership/ facilitation and communication. I have found valuable insights in the work of adrienne maree brown and in publications by other cultural organisers and artists that have helped me to draft the proposed hypothesis and put in place concrete ‘points of attention’ that I believe should be considered in order to have a well functioning community space. Undoubtedly, as the research is built around my involvement with the Archipelago, I base most of my findings/ proposals from the learned experiences gained as an active participant.

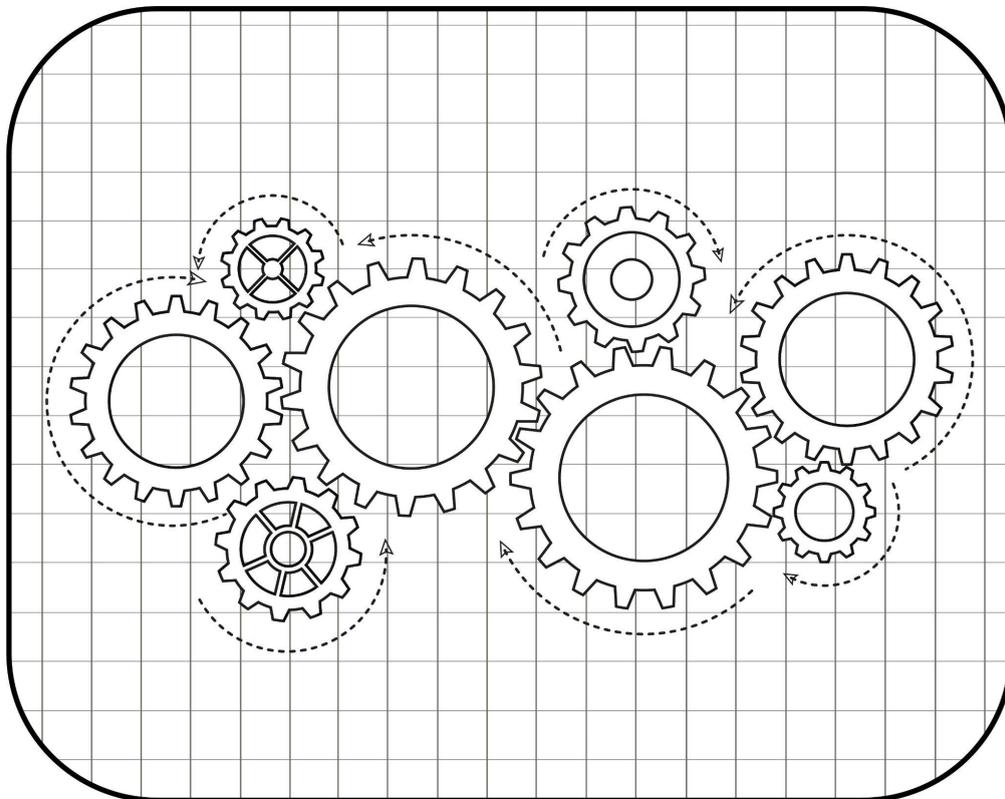


Three pillars that hold up a community
Illustrated by Urte Baranauskaitė

With this chapter I aim to be more specific and present acquired knowledge about community building. My aim was to construct this chapter as a guideline, a reflection of what I believe are the most important things that keep communities alive and well-running. This chapter came together from hundreds of notes collected from the margins of my notebook(s), the observations and experiences with Archipelago and insights from other practitioners. I, and other readers who find this valuable, can always come back to this information and do a check-in with the members of the community, to see what can be improved, what needs attention. This chapter, as well as the whole thesis, came together from an inner desire to understand what I can do better as a community member/ builder.

I argue that each of the described 'pillars' must be built and maintained simultaneously. In order for the community to stand firmly, it is important to once in a while go through the checkpoints and together with other members examine whether each of the 'columns' are standing firmly, or whether any corrections are needed. It is also wise to every now and then perform a check-in with yourself and ask: "*why am I involved in this work? What is important to me? How do I want to contribute? Are my needs/ expectations as a community member being met?*". The community is a cluster of unique individuals working together - like gears that spin

together to make the machine go and if one of the gears stops spinning, the machine starts failing. Hence, it is important to keep accountability both in your own motivation/ well-being as that of the collective.



Illustrated by Urte Baranauskaite

I was recently listening to *The Rich Roll Podcast*⁵ on YouTube and in one particular episode Rich was having a conversation with a monk and a spiritual guru Radhanath Swami about how unity is strength. During the talk, Radhanath expressed that people come together when there's a need - to support each other. He made a beautiful analogy to the Redwood forest in California, where trees have an immaculate root system, which expands so far that it connects all the trees within the forest into one strong system and when the storm hits, the trees never fail to stand. As Rich concluded - "**collective thrives only in embracing interdependence**"⁶ I too believe that any community that involves people should acknowledge this principle of interconnectedness. In my experience with Archipelago and other groups, this proved to be true, as to make things happen in a collective, I needed to act from a team player mindset. Every member mattered as much as I did, everyone had their own strengths, capabilities and challenges. With Archipelago members, in times that we strived to work closely together, help

⁵ Rich Roll is a content creator, public speaker and an athlete who posts weekly episodes of his podcast online, where he has in depth conversations with "the brightest and most forward thinking, paradigm busting minds in health, fitness, nutrition, art, entertainment, entrepreneurship & spirituality" (Rich Roll Enterprises LLC, 2022).

⁶ Link: <https://youtu.be/PEmaWdfUUuk?t=903> ; time stamp - 15:03.

each other, be present for one another we have strengthened our interdependence. With that the trust grew and so did the will to act and make change. I see such interdependence as a binding material that keeps the foundation strong enough for the community to be built, for the ‘pillars’ to stand in place.

Structure & finance

Structure

Working as a team requires structure. Student-led communities are usually composed of people from different experiences, backgrounds, values and ambitions. Hence, having a clear definition of how the group work is structured, in terms of way of working, sharing responsibilities, accountability, etc. is an unskippable step. One of the more challenging aspects is defining the roles within the group. Especially if those joining the community do not know each other from before or do not have a clear idea of what they would like to be doing. As me and several other members were from different departments and joined Archipelago later down the line, most of us were not familiar to one another prior, nor did we have pre-assigned roles. That in turn made us somewhat ‘disadvantaged’, as we had to go through a transitional period of getting to know the group’s environment and how things were managed. In contrast, the other members (who were also the co-founders) were already working with Archipelago for an extended period of time and had been undertaking specific roles. Hence, at least in the beginning of my membership, it felt that the hierarchy was already pre-established. Even though we were encouraged to put forward what specific roles we would like to take and make our proposals, it was not so easy at first.

Reading through the *Toolkit*⁷ I have found this situation described as *embodied hierarchies*. These types of hierarchies “*can be understood as forms of entitlement that are either unconsciously or consciously internalised by group members*” (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 14). As described further, they can be based on various socioeconomic factors “*such as class, race, gender, sexual orientation*” (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 14) and I would also add that they can depend on age, level of professional experience, possession of the ‘insider’s knowledge’ (having good connections with the institution’s personnel or students, knowing the ‘ins and outs’ of the school), etc. Looking back, I believe that co-founders, who were already with the group for a longer time, have developed a certain level of involvement/ attachment to it and

⁷ “*Toolkit for Cooperative, Collective, & Collaborative Cultural Work*”, published by Press Press and Institute for Expanded Research, 2020.

naturally gravitated towards desired roles, whether it was explicitly decided or came up organically. As time went on, Archipelago found ways how to negotiate to have more *explicit hierarchies*⁸, yet some of the roles that were taken when the group was first established had remained unchanged. Therefore the community was left balancing between the two hierarchies for a while.

“Well, the group dynamics... I see them changing. There were already some members from before, those who started the group and there were other people who joined the group later. And first I noticed that the dynamic was the old group versus the new people. And I really felt a bit of distance in between those two. But I feel now that this distance is getting smaller. So the group dynamics are changing, but there’s still sometimes a bit of tension. We try to figure out ‘who does what?’ and we also have to get to know each other, because we all didn’t know each other that well before. <...> it takes time to understand each other.”

student of the PZI, member of Archipelago

It is difficult to unambiguously state that one way of hierarchy/ role distribution is better than the other. I would say that what matters most is the collectively agreed way of working that fits the group. The key here is to make decisions as a team, whether it’s to work horizontally or to have a predefined steady leader/ facilitator and roles for each member. It is also good to acknowledge the possible limitations of the group in terms of making firm structural decisions from the get go, as some members of the community may have less experience in group work and might need more time to figure out what would work best for them and for the whole collective. Despite this, such decisions have to be made at some point, as just relying on organic developments of group work can create an unwanted imbalance in the hierarchy.

Despite the initial challenges of role distribution, Archipelago has made efforts to have a structured way of working: established time for meetings, distribution of responsibilities and keeping accountability through check-ins. Having an agreed weekly schedule has helped the group to keep more accountability and deliver tasks in a timely manner, as well as track the progress of the whole collective and overlook the possible improvements for the future. However, since the group did not take the time to construct a clear guideline/ ‘toolkit’ that

⁸ As described in the Toolkit “explicit hierarchies are ones that we may acknowledge or agree to, such as allowing certain group members to take on certain tasks on behalf of the group” (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 14)

would specifically describe the structure and ethics of collective work, it would sometimes create minor misunderstandings. Especially with the role distributions, as mentioned before. Having had the conversations with the members, few of them expressed the perceived inflexibility of the collective to shift between the roles, not making them more fluid. Some members who chose to fulfil a specific role at the start, have felt that the collective was not open enough for them to take upon a completely different role later on. As a member myself, I wouldn't agree that that was necessarily true - I believe that because we didn't have enough dedicated meetings to lay down specifically what is the group's structure and how much freedom of change there is, some of the members were left confused and uncertain about their ability to suggest structural changes.

To sum up, I believe that acknowledging the importance of having a clear way of working is crucial for the community's stability. Hence, it should be in the interest of the whole collective to dedicate enough time to draft and negotiate a structure that works with all of the members. Returning back to the Toolkit example, it is a good idea for each member to take time and figure out what role would bring the most satisfaction and motivation and then bring the suggestions to a meeting. It is also important to realise that some roles might not be as joyous, but someone still has to take up on them. Hence the collective should spend time and have an open discussion around questions regarding role distribution, similar to ones suggested in the Toolkit: *"Where is there opportunity for joy and growth in the different aspects of the work for group members? Why do certain group members fill certain roles and are those the roles they want to be playing? What strategies can the group use to accommodate the diverse needs, expectations, and goals of different group members?"* (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 19).

Building the community - questions for the group meeting.

Setting up the structure:

- *What are the most important structure aspects for our group?*
- *Do we want to work horizontally? If so, what does that mean for us?*
- *Who gets to define the roles/ hierarchies - individual members or the collective? How much freedom do we set to switch between the roles?*
- *How often should we set up the collective meetings?*
- *Shall we set up a minimum hourly involvement for each member per day/week/month?*
- *How do we keep accountability for our shared and individual responsibilities?*

Finance

The other important aspect of group work are the financial agreements with the individual members and the institution. Since setting up a community requires a lot of time, effort and funds, the financial reimbursement options need to be discussed. Depending on the structure and the purpose of the group, financial reimbursements can differ. From my experience with student-led communities, such agreements require ongoing effort to be established, especially if the community is being built from scratch and/ or there were no similar initiatives in the institution prior. Since the institution is usually the main (or only) sponsor of a student-led community, certain compromises could be necessary. Both the students and the institution are exposed to possible risks. From students' perspective it is risky to collaborate with unfamiliar people, set up a feasible work plan and follow it through, responsibly designate roles, manage the inner communication and resolve conflicts ethically. As from the institution's side the risks might be about trusting the students to follow the set up agreement, school's protocols, publicity policies and such. I discuss more about the problematics and possibilities of a student-institution relationship in [Chapter 4](#).

One of the elements of the finances that should be considered first is the financial support for the community's physical space, events, workshops, collaborations and other initiatives that require specific expenses to be made. These can range from buying/ renting tools necessary for the workshops, purchasing decorations and equipment for the events, reimbursements for collaborative projects with people outside the student-led community, etc. More often than not, the institution offers limited funds for a specified period of time or per project. Hence, the students have to figure out a budget plan that would cover all the proposed activities within the community. Depending on the number of activities and the scale of them, the available funds may not always be enough. Thus, students might have to improvise.

The first big event organised by Archipelago was Intro Week 2021. The event itself lasted for a week and its aim was to help newly recruited students to get to know each other and the environment of the school, its possibilities, as well as the Rotterdam area and main cultural establishments. The community was given limited funds to organise this event, so we had to make some organisational cuts and adaptations. Since it was the first time organising an event of such scale, we weren't exactly sure how big the budget should be. The second aspect was that Archipelago was newly established and had not yet built a strong presence and

recognition within the institution. After the event we decided to produce a Report Document⁹ in which we reflected on the event, the impact it has made, as well as thoroughly explained what Archipelago is all about. The purpose of this document was to build a strong case for the Archipelago and demonstrate its positive influence for the students and the whole inner ecology of the PZI. This document was then presented to the administrative staff and the tutors of the school and that in turn helped the community to get more funding opportunities in the future. This specific example is one of the possible ways to secure a bigger influx of funds for the community. It is essential to take into account that at the beginning a student-led community might not receive a desired amount of money from the institution for the activities, as it has to first acquire trust from the institution by showcasing tangible results.

The second aspect of consideration are the individual financial agreements between the members and the school. From what I gathered so far, there could be different types of them - paid volunteer work, fixed-term contracts with the school, distribution of acquired funds as reimbursements for worked hours, etc. It is important to be transparent with the community members about the financial situation and what are the capabilities of compensation for each member's contribution. The imbalance of financial agreements can potentially cause tensions or affect the motivation and performance of the members.

Archipelago offered paid positions for its members to compensate for their efforts. These paid positions were provided by the institution. Having said that, there were different types of agreements with each member, which created an unbalanced environment. Most of the co-founders of Archipelago were provided with contracts that had fixed hours, whereas members who joined later could only be reimbursed as paid volunteers without having any type of contract. Even though the hourly pay was the same for everyone, members with contracts had the opportunity to contribute more paid hours than those who worked on a volunteer basis. A similar issue is described in the *Toolkit*: “*when someone else does much more of the labour, it may bring up feelings of inferiority or inadequacy by some group members who have less capacity to be involved*” (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 17). The main issue with this kind of arrangement was the inflexibility to choose how much you want to contribute, as members working under volunteer basis had to always keep track of the amount of hours they worked and not go over the limit. Since all of the members were equally capable of contributing to

⁹ [Report Document](#) was written by Urte Barauskaite and Diogo Rinaldi. Please find the link to the whole file in the [appendix](#).

Archipelago's growth in terms of their available skill sets and knowledge, the reasons for such imbalance were not fair.

Building the community - questions for the group meeting.

Structuring finances:

- *How do we negotiate a favourable influx of funds from the institution?*
- *Who should be responsible for setting up a budget plan for our projects?*
- *How do we divide the available funds across all the planned activities?*
- *What kind of individual financial agreements do we want to have with the school? (volunteer based, fixed-term contracts, etc...)*
- *What is a fair hourly/ monthly pay for each member of our community?*

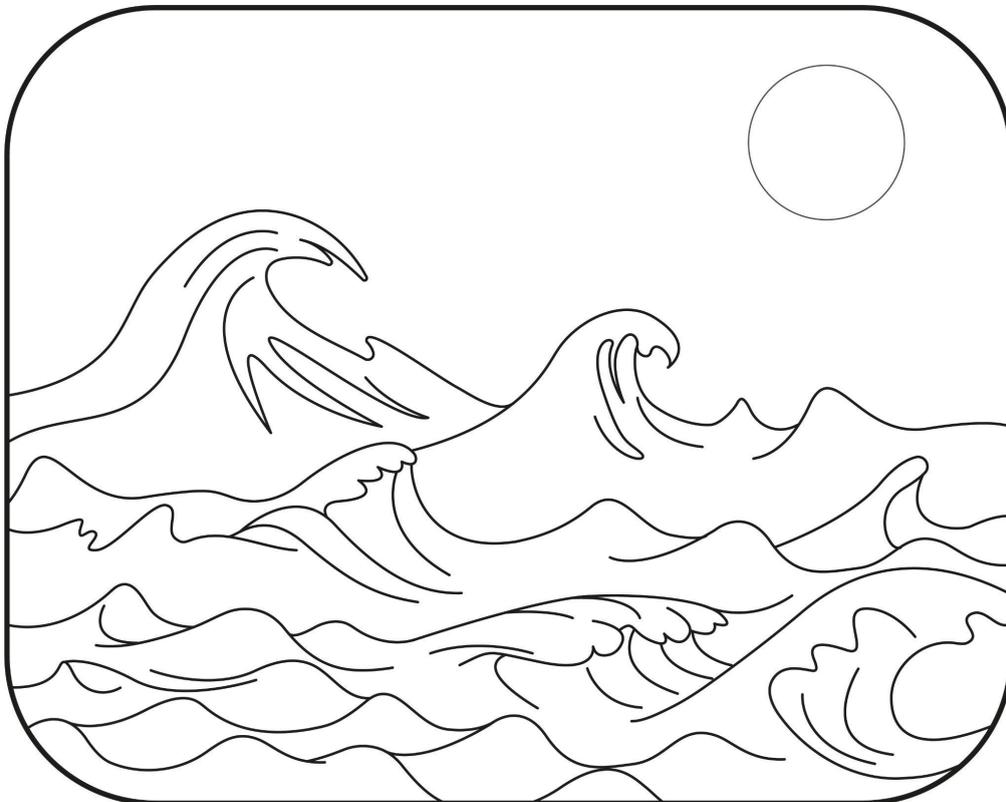
Communication

As mentioned before in the structure section, in order to have a good working environment there should be clear agreements of group work. Yet most of all, I believe that healthy communication and a sense of unity should be the basis of any collective work. As a. m. brown said *“meaningful collaboration both relies on and deepens relationships—the stronger the bond between the people or groups in collaboration, the more possibility you can hold”* (brown, 2017, 159). When comparing Archipelago and Haven communities this becomes especially noticeable. As I mentioned, the Archipelago group is mostly composed of people that haven't known each other previously. Oppositely, the Haven group is managed by two bachelor students who were already good friends before the community's establishment. As I spoke with Emily, who is one of the founders of Haven, she expressed that she has a very relaxed and well balanced relation with the other co-founder Carlota. Since they knew each other already for a while and were aware of each other's strengths and vulnerabilities, it made their collaboration more smooth and grounded. When asked to describe the dynamic of their duo, Emily shared this:

“It works quite well, because we are both relaxed people, yet we both want to get stuff done. Carlota is definitely way better than me at organising, she's so on it. She knows how to do everything so well. I think I've been learning from her and recently it has clicked for me. I can give all these ideas, but then I find it hard to make it concrete. It has been really good to work with her. If she is struggling, she can ask me for help. We are friends anyways. We are also great 'business' partners.

When we have a meeting, we don't even go into it as friends, it's kind of funny. We don't talk about anything to do with us during the whole meeting, just about work."

Looking at Archipelago, besides it being composed of people who were not familiar to each other before, it is also a way bigger group assembled of six students, plus the staff member of the school. All of these variables add up and it becomes a bigger task to mediate a group of this size and ensure that everyone is heard and has their needs accommodated. Hence for such a group, having clear boundaries when it comes to communication is key. As Brown says *"this includes how often you communicate, what is ok to talk about, who it's ok to talk to about the process, and permission to express feelings"* (Brown, 2017, 137).



*"Together we must move like waves. <...> The waves are not the same over and over - each one is unique and responsive. The goal is not to repeat each other's motion, but to respond in whatever way feels right in your body. <...> We must notice what it takes to respond well. How it feels to be in a body, in a whole - separate, aligned, cohesive. **Critically connected.**" (Brown, 2017, 16)*
Illustrated by Urte Baranauskaitė

Adding to this, as noted in the Toolkit, it is not really possible to tell what issues or misunderstandings might arise, especially when working with new people. So it is good to acknowledge that the boundaries will most likely be set and re-adjusted as the community grows and learns from the incurred challenges. The authors of the Toolkit offer several techniques that might help to communicate better through differences. The first one is to

actively listen and acknowledge ideas of others, without outrightly dismissing them. Everyone has their own opinion and is entitled to it, however each member deserves respect and space to express themselves. The second one is to pay attention to what language is being used, to *“think about how you are being present in the group”* (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 29). Thinking about the meetings we had with Archipelago members, we did have to go through a phase of finding the right voice for our group. Since all of us came from quite different cultures and have distinct understandings around communication, it was not always clear whether someone is irritated or just have a direct way of expressing themselves; or perhaps someone being quiet not because they do not have anything to say, but rather because they are waiting for the right moment to speak. As time progressed and we got to know each other better, we learned about these nuances. Such learning happens over time.

The other technique described that I found useful is about withholding careless reactions when conflict arises. It can be easy to follow with a charged emotional response, but depending on the situation it might not be the best option. Hence, by stepping back you can ask yourself *“why is this making me so upset? Do I need more clarification about the situation? What could be the implications of my hasty reaction to this matter? Do I have the capacity to solve this conflict myself or do I need others to get involved?”*. I remember one particular instance where stepping back was needed. As Archipelago chose to undertake the task of producing visuals for the Graduation Show of PZI, we as a group had to present our ideas to the staff and the students of the institute. That already was a stressful undertaking, as we were trying to make something that would be welcomed by the whole PZI community. During the presentation, one of the attendees made a careless, inappropriate comment about the specific detail of the presented designs. That detail was made by one of the Archipelago members and such comment made them quite upset and unmotivated to continue with the work. Looking back, that particular comment was completely unnecessary and did not add any value to the discussion. Had that person composed themselves and given an actual constructive suggestion on how to improve the design, the situation would have been avoided. This occurrence has taught me how important it is to think carefully before hastily reacting and to *“reflect on your own role and responsibility in the group”* (Zhang & Kirkman, 2020, 30).

There are other valuable communications techniques described in the Toolkit (pages 29 & 30) that I won't list out in this section, but I will say that the main take-away for me was to make sure to treat everyone in the group as an equal - with respect and dignity. It is also about

learning to work together with all of our differences, being kind and patient, making sure to “*move at the speed of trust*” (Brown, 2017, 42). A. m. brown suggests that our existence is shaped by the interactions and contributions we have with and around people. I do believe that connections are an integral part of life, through relationships and friendships we learn about the world and ourselves, we find our unique position in it. Hence it should be in our best interest to approach people and situations with openness and respect, to communicate authentically while being aware of our biases.

“Are you actively practising generosity and vulnerability in order to make the connections between you and others clear, open, available, durable?”

(Brown, 2017, 91)

Building the community - questions for the group meeting.

Communication guidelines:

- *What does healthy communication mean for us?*
- *How can we create a space where everyone feels comfortable to express themselves openly?*
- *How do we build trust amongst each other?*
- *How can we practise active, non judgmental listening?*
- *How do we resolve conflict? Do we need a mediator?*

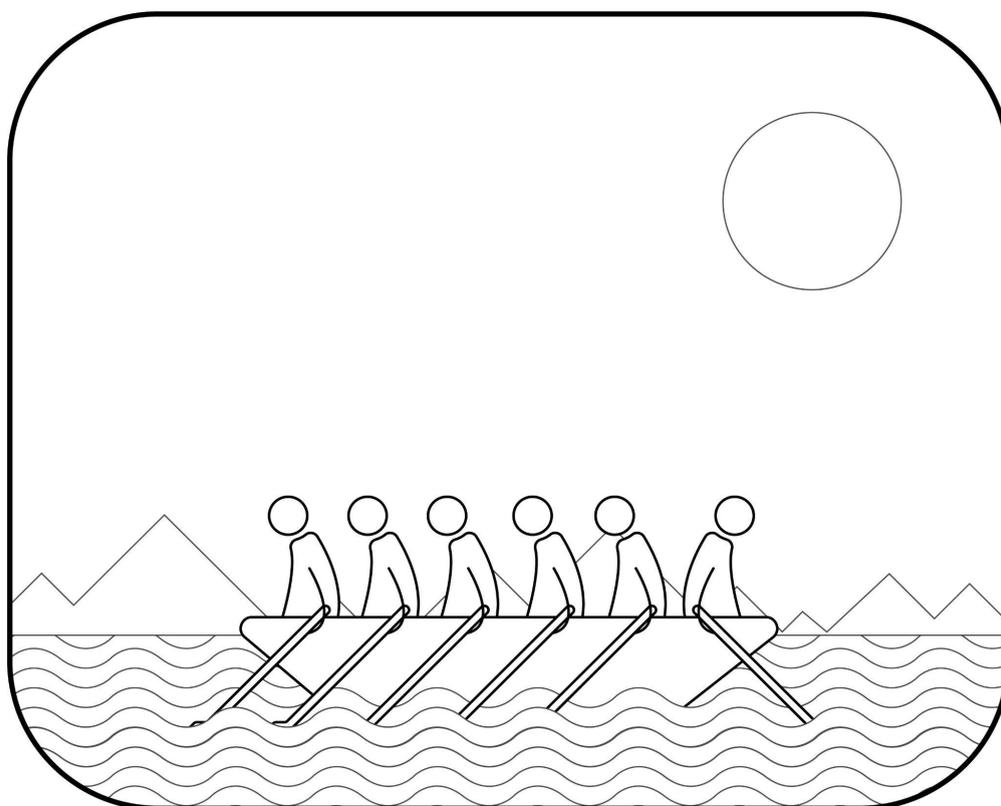
Purpose

Through my experience in student-led communities, I have learned how important it is to have a clear mission, values and ethics of working. I think it is important to know what the primary goal of the community is and where it wants to go. Having strong values is what keeps the community capable of withstanding and adapting to change. In her book “*Emergent Strategy*” a. m. brown calls this intentional adaptation. As she says “*change is definitely going to happen, no matter what we plan or expect or hope for or set in place. We will adapt to that change, or we will become irrelevant*” (brown 2017, 70). If members commit to the community’s purpose and take informed actions supported by the established values, the community has a better chance to carry itself through the changes and grow in the process.

“The clearer you are as a group about where you’re going, the more you can relax into collaborative innovation around how to get there.”

(brown 2017, 70)

The value of having a clear structure became evident in my experience working with the Archipelago group. When I first joined, it was discussed amongst the members that the group's main purpose should be to serve the students of the PZI and focus on creating new pathways of connection between the departments that weren't there before. However, looking back at how this community started, it was initially composed of few people hired by the school for the purpose of recruiting new students. Only later the group started to slowly shift from that initial responsibility of recruiting students for the PZI towards becoming a community that is actually helping students who were already enrolled in the institution. I joined the group half a year later after its establishment, but the group was still not fully detached from the recruitment obligations and that has influenced Archipelago's actions in the following school year. The most noteworthy example of this was Archipelago taking on the responsibility to develop an identity strategy and visuals for the Graduation Show 2022 of the PZI. The idea was brought to one of the Archipelago meetings and after discussion with the members the decision was made to take upon the project.



“If the vision is only clear to one person, that person ends up trying to drive everyone towards their vision, or at minimum control how everyone gets to the vision.” (brown 2017, 70)

Illustrated by Urte Baranauskaite

Looking back, there were split opinions about doing this, as we already had several initiatives in the process of development and those were directly corresponding to the desired mission of connecting students. From my perspective, the Graduation Show project was more valuable for the school itself, as it aimed to reach the audience outside the institution that would be interested in PZI activities and programmes. Sure, it was great to have a unified visual identity that represented all of the programmes, but overall this project took away a lot of Archipelago members' time and energy that would have been otherwise distributed to other activities that were focusing on strengthening connections between students.

Despite the struggles, this experience has taught us an critical lesson of how important it is to decide firmly on what is the purpose of the community and stick to it wholeheartedly. It has also shown that communicating with each other and making informed decisions together as a group takes time and practice.

“How we live and grow and stay purposeful in the face of constant change actually does determine both the quality of our lives, and the impact that we can have when we move into action together”

(brown 2017, 69)

In the case of community work, I see purpose as a two-fold aspect: personal purpose and collective purpose. Personal purpose relates to each individual's sense of value as a community member. More specifically, what purpose does each member's contribution bring? I think it is important that each individual in the group feels that whatever they bring to the table in terms of their skills, adds value to the collective work as well as creates valuable impact for the public. This helps members to feel motivated, because they feel needed. As I made interviews with the Archipelago's members and observed the regular meetings, I noticed that each member wanted to contribute to the group's work with what they knew best, be it artistic skills, problem solving skills, management skills, etc. To add to this, each member's contribution should be properly accredited, when the work is being published. The other aspect is the collective purpose. I believe that the group collectively needs to feel that what they are doing brings value to the public that they are trying to reach. If there is a positive response from the public, it also helps to bind the collective as they see that their work is purposeful.

Building the community - questions for the group meeting.

Defining purpose:

- *What is the mission of our group?*
- *What kind of work/ actions are most purposeful to us?*
- *How do we make the most positive impact?*

Chapter 3

Educational aspect

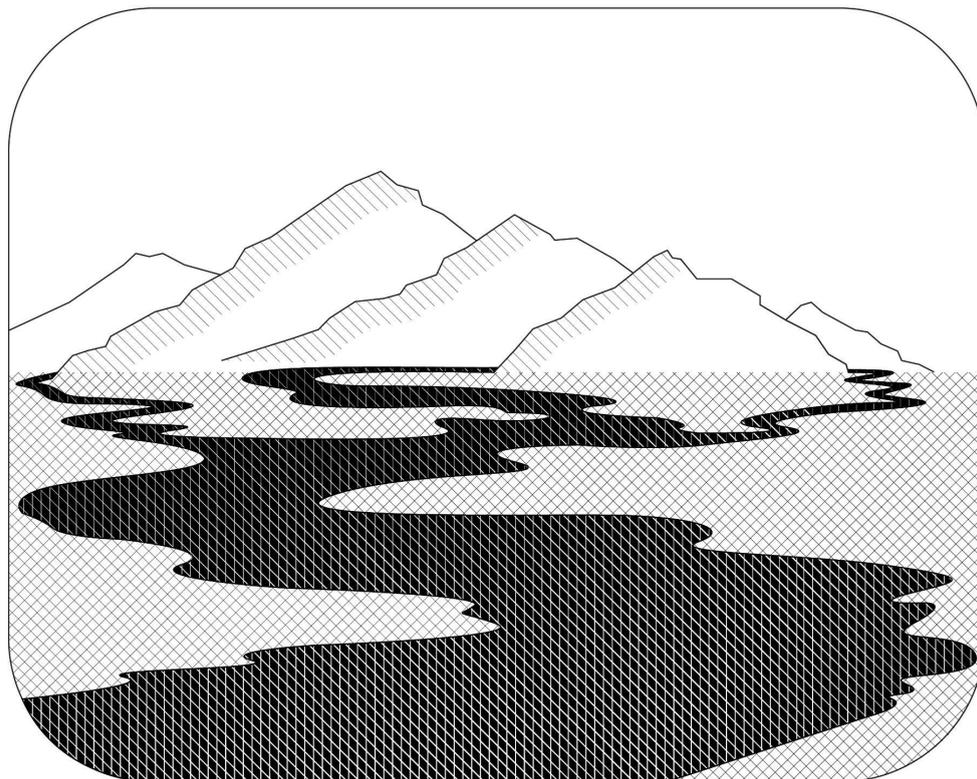
My motivation to be involved in Arcipelago arrived from my interest to learn about functionality and sustainability of the community for artists and young professionals. Some of the topics I was studying throughout my research process were:

- Navigating relationships between community members
- Taking care, supporting each other and cultivating space for care
- Negotiating and finding consensus as a group
- Encouraging active participation and proactiveness among group members
- Structure of power and its effect, distribution of roles
- Horizontality as a method of managing group work
- Collective and individual responsibilities, accountability
- Community as support structure for students, artists and young professionals

I believe that by studying these topics I have a better chance of successfully working with community building in the future. Archipelago is a space where I was able to openly connect with all of the members, take initiative and bring up discussion points, suggest activities or be a part of initiatives proposed by other group members. Through active participation and observation I began to collect some answers to the questions and topics that I bring up in this research.

What is being learned?

Besides my personal objectives, I was also curious to find out what kind of learning happened in the inner parameters of the community as well as how Archipelago actions affected the public that it reached. To understand and expand on the educational side of this community I have prepared a [Report Document](#)¹⁰ with Diogo Rinaldi in which we explained the origins of the community and its aims, as well as given an overview of the most notable activities done by the group and the impact that it made among students. It revealed the urgency and relevance of the group's work. I also see this document as a part of my research process as it expands on the impact such communities have for students and their overall learning experience. Besides this, the interviews with Archipelago members were helpful in expanding what goes on inside the group, its dynamic and structure and how each individual experiences the group's ecology. I was also observing what kind of learning happened during one on one interactions, brief chit chats, catching ups and what was being learned collectively in group meetings as well as collective activities. To make note of these happenings I collected notes as well as recorded each collective meeting that we had as a group. I divide learning aspects into three parts: learning by doing, managing group work and space for care.



Three springs flowing from the mountains represent the three learning aspects - learning by doing, managing group work & space for care. These springs join into a wide river that encompasses all of these learning aspects together.

Illustrated by Urte Barauskaite

¹⁰ [Report Document](#) was written by Urte Barauskaite and Diogo Rinaldi. Please find the link to the whole file in the [appendix](#).

Learning by doing

The Archipelago community formed through a process of negotiation, collective decision making, and learning from mistakes. The members were exploring their own capabilities and resources with which they could contribute to the growth of Archipelago. As was stated, this initiative is run mostly by students and everyone has their own goals, ambitions and reasons for being a part of it. Each member of the group comes from a different department of the institute, bringing diverse sets of skills and ideas to the group. Members recall that one of the more important learning moments happens during the verbal exchange of ideas and working on projects together as a collective. The group is unique in a sense that everyone has contrasting preferences in ways of working, creating and thinking. Each member has their own particular professional interests be it film, photography, illustration, design, web & IT, education, creative writing, managing, community work, etc. Besides this everyone comes from diverse cultures (Netherlands, UK, Lithuania, South Africa, Brazil, Italy) and belong to a wider age group (from early 20s to late 30s). Such differences create some challenges when trying to co-manage group activities and flow of work, but more than that it cultivates an environment where constant learning happens. As bell hooks said *“there is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community”* (hooks, 2018, 129). Hooks argues that in order to have strong, meaningful, loving relationships and address the deep-seated injustice in our society we have to follow the ethics of love.

“Without an ethic of love shaping the direction of our political vision and our radical aspirations, we are often seduced, in one way or the other, into continued allegiance to systems of domination-imperialism, sexism, racism, classism.”

(hooks, 2006, 243)

I believe that committing to act within a community that is diverse (in class, sex, gender) opens up the possibility to dive deeper into personal biases and have real, open, sometimes uncomfortable conversations with people that might have completely different viewpoints and life experiences. As hooks says, we are often mostly concerned about our own well being and the injustice that directly affects and limits us, at the same time ignoring or even supporting other forms of domination. Throughout my active involvement in Archipelago I have also confronted some of my limited understanding about certain societal issues, that for

other members was a reality. That was an uncomfortable, yet eye opening experience, that made me aware of my own privileges as a white, heterosexual European woman. It is not so easy to sit still in the discomfort and analyse the root cause of it, but it is necessary. As I became more curious about the experiences of other members, I was able to broaden my own views and understand better how to listen and respect others. I believe that learning how to be compassionate and accepting of others continues throughout our whole lives and I am eager to continue on the path of embracing the love ethics.

“Embracing a love ethic means that we utilise all the dimensions of love - ‘care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge’ - in our everyday lives”

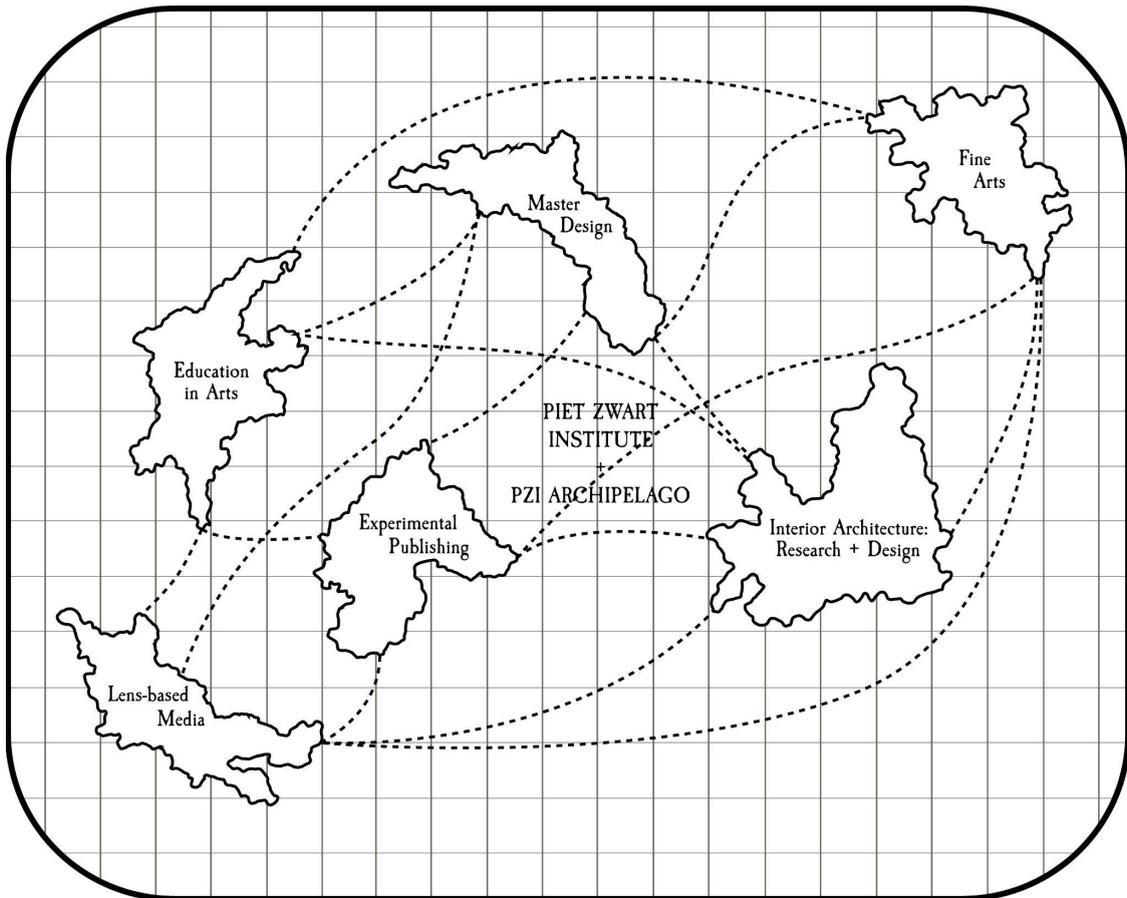
(Hooks, 2018, 94)

Working collectively to create something meaningful requires one to look outwards, start noticing and getting to know other participants, and approach situations with attention and care. There is always someone with a completely different outlook than yours and it helps to look at a problem from a new perspective and notice the unforeseen angles.

“I learned how to collaborate with a group that has so much variety in it. Different backgrounds, different skills, different cultures even. I learned how to mediate in this. It’s not about imposing your own view. It’s about listening and making the best out of a lot of different points of views.”

student of the PZI, member of Archipelago

Coming together and adopting a multidisciplinary approach can lead to more innovative solutions. This is important not only for the Archipelago, but also for the whole community of Piet Zwart Institute. As described in the Report Document, interactions between departments can create more opportunities for networking, relationship building, collaborating, and strengthening the community as a whole. Therefore, one of the biggest motivations of Archipelago is to build a strong community that would close off existing gaps in communication and set a strong foundation for future generations of students to enrich their learning experience beyond classroom walls.



The influence of Archipelago within the Piet Zwart Institute.

New connections are forming.

Illustrated by Urte Baranauskaitė

Managing group work

Being in a constant process of evolving evokes learning. Working together means negotiating, establishing boundaries, getting to know the dynamics of the group and finding your place in it. As a member of Archipelago I noticed that certain topics can have unexpected effects on individual members and the group itself. It can be difficult to know your place and space given to act when you join a group that already has members with pre-existing roles. Those roles might not be officially set, but they are felt regardless.

In Archipelago's case the time to resolve discrepancies is during by-weekly meetups with the members. At the moment when new members joined, it was stated that everyone can put forward talking points to be discussed during the meetings. However, speaking from the

experience, the time given for the meetings was not enough to really delve deeper into topics regarding the group dynamics or the well being of the members. Most of the time in the meetings is dedicated to brainstorming ideas for new projects, improving existing ones or dealing with other technical or bureaucratic matters.

Space for care

The other issue is that it is hard to know what level of support or care is needed, especially when you deal with a group that has a lot of diversity. As Jan Verwoert in his essay about care said *“how do you know what kind of care or support (. . .) is needed when you offer it? The act of making such an offer of care and support would only be appropriate and justified if the needs of the other could be truthfully determined. What if that, fundamentally, was a problem?”*¹¹ (Condorelli, 2009, 165). What could be the best possible ways to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable enough to truly express what they feel and need? If some people involved in the group are more reserved and perhaps choose to take a step back and observe before reacting, it can create this unbalance where some members seem more active than others. That could also be the case of someone feeling unaccommodated and needing to adapt to unspoken expectations of how their participation should look like. Having said this I do agree with Verwoert's thoughts that *“the demand to determine the need of the other deeply relates to the question of competence. The risk to fail the other in the moment when seeking to determine their need is incredibly high. (. . .) The chances are, that while you try to care for people who don't know what they want, they will blame you for doing the wrong thing”* (Condorelli, 2009, 170).

In Archipelago's case the group started on quite an ambiguous base. The co-founders had an idea to connect with the students, to create a community, yet they did not have a specifically tailored plan on how it would work out. When I did the interviews, every member had a slightly different idea on what the group was about. Even though everyone agreed that the main cause was to somehow bring students closer to each other, each had their own understanding about it. The staff member of the PZI, who was by most members considered as a mediator/ leading figure of the group had also put forward their wish of not wanting to impose specific roles or ways of acting. The open call that was sent out in search for new

¹¹ Jan Verwoert “Personal Support: How to Care?”, Celine Condorelli “Support Structures”, pg. 165

members, had also displayed some sort of ambiguity: *“We are looking for team players who can be responsible and reckless at the same time. Who are able to seek, receive and use feedback; who can define and develop working methods. We want a community that can challenge and confront, hack the system, be assertive and able to operate independently”*¹². Hence, the members who have joined after the open call had a vague understanding on what exactly they would be doing in the group - that became clearer organically as members became more familiar with each other and the environment of Archipelago. In the interview, when asked about whether there were specific expectations when joining the group, one member shared this:

“I really didn't know what this was. It was kind of strange and confusing. I thought ‘ok, what is this mysterious organisation? What are they gonna do?’ and it was quite vague from the description, but then it seemed exciting and I felt like I could fit in and do some great work and address some stuff that was bothering me. But I didn't really know what this was, so I did not have any expectations.”

- student of the PZI, member of Archipelago

Now, looking at the situation from a distance, I understand better why the act of supporting each other is not always so straightforward. As Verwoert said it is complicated to care for someone who does not exactly know what they want or how to ask for it. This can be observed in the early stages of Archipelago's development, as most members who joined the group had indeed stated that they do not have specific expectations or desires for joining the community. They were mostly driven by curiosity and only later became more aware of how they wanted to position themselves in the group. I believe that there is nothing wrong with letting things become clearer over time, yet in that case it should be accepted that the path to knowing how to deal with one another might be a bumpy one.

Through the course of my research I have often come across the idea of *“safe space”*, but as I became more involved with Archipelago, I realised that this concept poses some issues. For me, *safe space* indicates something that requires a great deal of effort to maintain, specific type of knowledge and strict set of rules that must be followed. As I researched the work of

¹² Excerpt from an open call sent out by the co-founders of Archipelago to the students of PZI in a newsletter. You can view the full invitation in the [Report Document](#) (see [appendix](#)).

other practitioners, I came across the concept of “*brave space*”. This idea was proposed by a. m. brown in her book “Holding change”¹³. Brown explains that a space should be constructed in a way that encourages people to be aware of their own needs and limitations, allows participants to be authentically themselves and only give to others to the extent of personal capacity to do so. Similarly to brown, I see *safe spaces* as being limiting and imposing, as it seems that everyone would have to follow a specific set of strict rules of how to relate to one another, rather than being vulnerable and critically honest. The *brave space*, or ‘*space for care*’ as suggested by one of the Archipelago members, is more attainable and puts less pressure on the members and the mediator. It also requires each person’s active involvement in discussions and efforts to maintain a good collaborative environment.

In the end it should be kept in mind that no perfection can be reached and someone at some point might feel disappointed and unheard simply because they weren’t sure what they wanted at the moment or didn’t feel confident enough to express themselves. The important key here is continued effort to allow space for concerns to be put forward when they arise, even if they take a while to be processed. Adding to this, as brown said, each person is responsible in recognising their needs first. To get the support that you need, you have to be brave and ask for it.

Chapter 4

Navigating the collaboration between student-led initiatives and educational institutions

In this chapter I would like to explore the possible frameworks for the relationship between a student-led community and the institution, as well as the possible outcomes/ opportunities that can arise from such collaboration. From my experience with student-led communities, I have witnessed how specific agreements/ set conditions with the school can shape the community and influence its impact. I would like to argue that setting clear objectives for the community and being direct about them to the contact person(s) of the institution can eventually make or break the community. Both the students and the institution have their own

¹³ Chapter “*An Invitation to Brave Space*”, page 80

views on how the school should function and accommodate students in their educational journey and realities of student life. I believe that giving space for students to innovate and collaborate with one another in their own preferred ways can reveal a more intricate picture about what students actually need in order to have an all-encompassing learning experience. This in turn can help the institution to make more well informed decisions and changes that correspond to the actual needs of the students.

Student-led community can be an additional space that does not necessarily intervene with the existing agenda and system of the school. It can act as an addition, an ‘after classes’ or a ‘between classes’ activity. It is a collective effort from students to put something together that serves the needs that otherwise stay unmet. As Emily (the co-founder of Haven) said *“we are the students who are in the school. The teachers are teachers. There is a separation in that. I think it’s nice if there’s something that is run just by students, because you as a student are in the same process as everyone else. You as a student can understand better what other students want, because you can also base it on what you want”*.¹⁴

It is important to acknowledge the obvious tensions that can arise between student-school collaboration. As mentioned previously, both parties have their own ideas on what should be happening in the school and how everything is supposed to be managed. As most student communities strive to act and make decisions as independently as possible, an open dialogue with the institution is necessary. From personal experience, not all ideas that arise in the community meetings can be implemented. Especially those that have a political, activism outline or directly challenges the institutional system. Most of the time proposals for events or other activities have to be presented to the school and not all of them get a ‘green light’. As the school not only cares about the students’ well being, but also about its own image - there will be a need to reach a compromise depending on the content of proposed events. The extent of such dialogue also depends on the chosen collaboration method, that I describe in the following paragraphs. As I compare Haven, Archipelago and Kurk Kurk groups, there is an obvious difference on how much freedom of act each community has. Despite this, all of the mentioned communities at some point have to discuss/ report on what is going on within the community and what content is being put out to the public. The other important factor is the level of trust between the community and the school - that takes time. When setting up a community from scratch, it is always a good idea to start small, organise activities that are

¹⁴ Excerpt from the interview with a co-founder of Haven and student of Wdka Emily. Link:

[Interview with Haven co-founder](#)

'lightweight' in their content and see how other students and the school react, ask for feedback and try to improve. Community building is a lengthy process that requires a lot of patience, determination and consistent work. Yet as the community grows and earns the respect of other students and the institution, it also gains more strength and power in how it can act within the school.

I would like to propose three possible scenarios for a student-led community to function within the institution, based on my participation and observations gathered during the process of this research. I am aware that there could be more possible ways of partnering with the institution, but for the purposes of my research and its situatedness I want to base my findings through real personal experiences I had with mentioned communities. I have drafted these scenarios depending on the level of involvement from the school or its personnel in the organisation of activities within a student-led community:

- **Un-guided partnership** (Haven example) - a partnership that allows students to have full control of their collaborative actions with little to no involvement from the school. The school provides the necessary tools/ financial contributions requested by the students, but does not guide them in their community building process.
- **Semi-guided partnership** (Kurk Kurk example) - a partnership that allows students to have most of the control of their collaborative actions with some involvement from the school. The school provides the necessary tools/ financial contributions requested by the students and might give guidance to the students in their community building process as well as have specific requests/ obligations to be fulfilled by the involved students.
- **Guided partnership** (Archipelago example) - a partnership that is based on the collaborative action between the school (or its personnel) and the students. The school, or its appointed staff member(s) is closely involved in the community's development, guiding students through the community building process and overlooking/ managing the resources/ financial contributions that are needed for the specified projects. The community might also have specific requests/ obligations appointed by the school to be fulfilled by the involved students.

During my involvement in said communities, I came to realise that the condition of acting under the institution's roof is not merely an obstacle - it can be an opportunity for a mutually beneficial companionship. Reading through the mission/ values statements of institutions mentioned in this research, I can see that the focus is on the students and the effort to make their time in school worthwhile and beneficial for their future. Hence, these institutions work on developing different specialised educational programmes, improvement of tools and facilities, scholarship opportunities, assembling professional staff and tutors all to ensure that students can get the most out of their studies and excel in their professional careers. Wdka mission statement reads *“it is our mission to help our students become the creating pioneers the economy is looking for, and to prepare them for their international professional careers”*¹⁵ and PZI states that their programmes are aimed to *“educate professionals who have a critically reflective, innovative, questioning and imaginative approach to their work”*¹⁶. I believe that many other educational institutions share similar goals that emphasise the professional growth of the students. I do agree that this is an important aspect for enrolled students, however, in the pursuit of academic achievements, the need for connection, relatability, mutual exchanges and collaborations can oftentimes be overlooked.

That is where student-led communities can step in and fill in the missing gap. Afterall, being a student is not just about excelling academically, but also about experiencing a new phase of life, finding new friends, building a network, having a close personal support system; a space to express oneself without specific obligations or limitations. Emily, the co-founder of Haven, made a remark: *“I found it strange coming to school here [at Wdka] and there were no clubs, events, nothing. It was really bizarre. I think it’s weird that university doesn’t provide that kind of space.”* These feelings have been also shared among me and my peers at PZI as well. When I conducted interviews with the Archipelago members (who are also students of PZI), most of them shared the same feelings of lack of opportunities to connect with others. When asked what was the experience in terms of connecting with other students before Archipelago was established, one of the members shared this:

“I mean there wasn't really any. We knew twenty-something people within our building <...>. I'm not sure if I have met anyone in another department properly. I might have emailed someone or bumped into

¹⁵ <https://www.wdka.nl/about>

¹⁶ <https://www.pzward.nl/>

someone, but that's pretty much the extent of it. Because there was nothing happening, there was no connection.”

student of the PZI, member & co-founder of Archipelago

After conducting the interviews I realised that there definitely was a missed opportunity to provide students with a space where they can interact and build extensive relationships freely. The very fact that communities such as Archipelago and Haven emerged shows a demand from students that was not previously accommodated by the school. It is not to say that the institution was unaware of these needs, but perhaps more so that the students themselves, in some aspects, know better on how they want to come together in clusters and organise themselves in certain activities.

I believe that student-led communities are playgrounds in which students can exercise their theoretical and practical knowledge in fun, inspiring ways without being confined by school's norms. It is also a space where students can gain and employ skills that are so necessary for life after university: self-organisation, resourcefulness, relation building, leadership, communication, empathy, patience. Continuing on a 'playground' concept, I would like to draw an analogy between student-led communities and the junk playground also known as adventure playground¹⁷. Such playgrounds were constructed as an opposition to conventional playgrounds which tend to be more constricted and often follow a safety protocol decided by the government. Adventure playgrounds allowed children to experience play without restriction, to exercise their free will to construct their own objects, rules and boundaries without having them imposed by anyone else.

"An adventure playground has no readymade play equipment and no predetermined agenda for what should take place in it. Children introduce content and meaning to the playground through their own action."

(Kozlovsky, 2008, 2)

¹⁷ "The concept of a "junk playground" was first proposed by Carl Theodor Sorensen (1936) a Danish landscape architect. <...> Sorensen's junk playgrounds were to make play and playgrounds the imagination of the child - not the imagination of the architect or builder. Children themselves, with assistance from play leaders, later called playworkers in the UK, would create playgrounds for themselves and choose their own play objects and forms of play" (Frost, 2012)

These playgrounds also had an appointed leader who guided children in their play, explaining them how to use the tools safely and cooperate with other playmates as *“this type of playground required professional guidance, since children had to be taught how to play and become autonomous and free”* (Kozlovsky, 2008, 3). Similarly, I believe that such a relationship can work between the institution and the students, who start building their communities. The school can be a leading/ facilitating figure that helps students by providing necessary tools, space, equipment, financing, while giving guidance about how to cooperate with others and maintain a functional community. However, just as a playground leader, the school should not restrict students’ autonomous action and should leave space for them to organise activities as they please. This is also a way to build a trusting relationship between the parties that can grow into a lasting partnership. In his book¹⁸ about the possibilities and the potential of adventure playgrounds Paul Hogan said that *“for a playground to succeed, its ultimate users must be its builders. This does not mean only that the adults of a community must build and be responsible for that community’s playground; it also means that the children must be involved.”* (Hogan, 1974, 16). Likewise, as the ultimate public of a student-led community are the students themselves, they should be the ones taking the most responsibility for building it. I also believe that the students should be able to choose what is the best partnership model with the institution, as it is their “playground”.

Coming back to the described partnership models, I would like to expand on how they work and differ from one another. Haven community has a more relaxed relation with the school (un-guided partnership), where the co-founders are solely responsible for what goes on in the community, what direction, mission it takes upon. There is no predetermined agenda from the school, so the students can act as they wish. This allows a lot of space for experimentation, which also shows through the activities that are being organised. Since the school is not involved directly in the activities of Haven, the community has way more freedom to also host events that have more of an activism mission (that could otherwise be deemed risky/inappropriate by the institution). One of the examples is a solidarity event organised by Haven and other student-led activism group SPIN¹⁹ to *“stand with student resistance in Iran,*

¹⁸ Hogan, P. (1974). *Playgrounds for Free: The Utilization of Used and Surplus Materials in Playground Construction*. MIT Press.

¹⁹ *“SPIN is a student-organised collective based in Rotterdam <...>. SPIN believes in the importance of acknowledging that ecological degradation is inherently connected to the issues of colonialism, class, the feminist struggle and other global inequalities”* (SPIN, n.d.)

*Rotterdam, and everywhere*²⁰ about the current protests²¹ against Iran's government for the death of Mahsa Amini in relation to the oppression of women rights and the brutality of the Iranian authorities on the protesters. Such events are organised by student initiative and the school is usually not involved in its planning. I believe such partnership also enables students to feel more empowered in their beliefs and values, to be more daring. However, one drawback of such cooperation is that the lack of leadership/ guidance from the school can sometimes become troublesome for the community members, especially when they are dealing with unforeseen organisational challenges. The school's communication personnel usually have years of experience in event planning, team work, crisis management, etc. and could be helpful in advising students. When asked about the school's involvement in Haven's activities Emily shared that *"We just want to be able to check in with someone more frequently, have someone who is a bit more involved, more interested in how it's going. The person we're dealing with is really nice and she cares, but she's also really busy with everything else, so she doesn't have much time to sit with us, have a cup of tea and talk about how things are going"*. Despite this, looking at the overall picture, I believe that such cooperation model works well for Haven, as it has a secure physical community space at the school and the ultimate mission for the group is to provide students with an open, non-restrictive space, where students can feel free to express themselves how they want.

In contrast, looking at Archipelago and Kurk Kurk examples, activism becomes more challenging as the school has a closer involvement with the communities' development. As said previously, I would describe Archipelago relation with the institution as a guided one. Besides providing financial support, the appointed person from the school also overlooks the activities that happen within Archipelago and sometimes requests specific events to be organised by the involved members. Hence arranging initiatives that have a political message is not as smooth as in Haven's example. One of the instances of such friction happening was when I suggested to make a social media post about the ongoing war²² in Ukraine and that we as a group are standing in solidarity with Ukrainian people. The suggestion was met with hesitation from the group members and later on we decided to just make a post about the donation collection points (for the Ukrainian people) in the Rotterdam area. There were other

²⁰ Excerpt from the invitation poster on Haven's instagram page. Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/ClyGehAo1ZA/>

²¹ *"Students were the trigger and sustaining force behind protests that erupted on September 16. During the first two months, young Iranians demonstrated against the government at some 143 universities in all 31 provinces, which led to government crackdowns and hundreds of deaths."* (Bradbury & Nada, 2022)

²² *"On 24th February 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukraine and launched an unprovoked and illegal war <...>. In a country of 44 million people, more than 7 million people have been forced to move to another country and another 8 million people have been internally displaced."* (Shevlin et al., 2022, 105)

instances of Archipelago group members suggesting to take action on matters that have a political underline, but that didn't go much further. As for students rights, Archipelago members had several meetings about certain problems that are affecting some of the Master students relating to student-teacher communication, but addressing them properly proved to be challenging. Few members had a separate meeting with a school's student counsellor, but Archipelago as a group didn't go much further to become vocal and address discussed issues openly with the whole administration of the PZI. Besides such limitations, having a guided partnership has helped the Archipelago group immensely. I believe because the group members are master students who all have different schedules and are from different programmes brings more challenges in group management. Therefore, having a leading figure with pre-existing teamwork knowledge and direct contacts to the school's administration proved to be the 'glue' that kept the community stronger and more organised. This sort of arrangement works for Archipelago as its mission is to open more possibilities for the connection between the students from all different departments and that requires a closer collaboration with the institution as well.

As for the Kurk Kurk community, the relation with the institution was semi-guided, as the members had freedom to organise the activities as they please, yet sometimes were requested to do specific workshops that were meant to promote the school's educational programme. These workshops were still in line with the community's values, therefore such partnership worked out reasonably well for both parties. As the Kurk Kurk was acting not only inside, but also outside the institution, it needed more financial support than the previously described communities. Kurk Kurk didn't have direct supervision from an appointed person from the school, but would sometimes receive practical guidance from the school's administration in regards to organising certain events. However, when it came to the inner organisation, role distribution, meeting arrangement and other management matters within the community, Kurk Kurk would sometimes struggle. As all of the members were full-time bachelor students with no previous experience in community building, it was challenging to keep the group's work consistent and stable. From my experience as a former member of Kurk Kurk, me and other students came together firstly to have a more playful space to exercise our creativity and experience what it's like to also receive some financial gains from it. Initially, we did not have an incentive to become a student body that aims to connect with other students within the school or offer a social, free-speech/ free-act space like Archipelago and Haven. Similar goals came to Kurk Kurk only later when the group tried to continue its activities after all of its members had graduated (I talk more about such transition in the following chapter). As the

community was mostly focused on organising workshops, the provided guidance and partnership with the school was sufficient for the time being.

The proposed partnership models in this chapter are just a few possibilities that I have drawn from my observations and experiences and I do acknowledge that there could be many more. My motivation was to present several concrete examples for the reader, so that he/ she can get an idea of potential options between student - school collaboration. In the end I do not believe that one collaboration scenario is better than the other. Every one of them has its pros and cons. It is up to the students to decide which one of those align best with their community's vision and values and would yield the most benefits. It is also a school's decision of how much it would like to be involved in students' activities and to what extent. The fact is that a student-led community has an inherited condition of being under the school's roof, hence there should be an open dialogue between both parties to see what would work best for the student body at large. In most cases, the students who create such communities seek the betterment of student life experience. Thus, I believe that the institution should be motivated to provide the necessary support. In addition, institutions can better understand what the students need when there is a solid student body in place, rather than collecting separate inputs from teachers, staff or individual students. Student-led communities can become a research ground for the institution and inform about the substantial changes that need to be implemented to improve the current environment of the school and also attract more new students.

Closing

Why belong to a community?

Personal learned experiences

Looking back at my involvement with Archipelago and other student-led communities I've been a part of, I realised how rewarding such involvement can be. Even though working together poses many challenges and requires patience and dedicated energy, ultimately it was a wonderful exercise for me both as a professional and a human to learn how to relate to people, ask for help, be more brave to try new things and share ideas, support others and feel

supported in the actions we take, as well as experience how joined effort can transform ideas on paper into real life action. As many other artists I have developed specific ways of working as an individual and going into group work was not always intuitive. Coming from an art school background where individuality and personal efforts are praised and encouraged, it is not so easy to find your way in collective environments or ask for help/ contribution from other creatives. Yet, as a. m. brown said *“I’m learning that interdependence is not about equality of offers in real time”* (brown, 2017, 95), I too hold a belief that interdependence is a strength and a thing to strive for. I see more value in reaching out to others, being vulnerable and honest than trying to do everything by myself or thinking that I would be a burden to someone. Through collaborative work and contributing to collective initiatives I found myself becoming more enriched with invaluable knowledge that I wouldn’t otherwise be exposed to had I chosen to work on my own.

“I love knowing how incredible it feels to have a need met, to be loved and cared for, and also know how incredible it feels to meet an authentic need. It’s data, all this learning. Tender data.”

(brown 2017, 96)

Adding to this, I believe that involving yourself in community work is a great way to rethink some of the accepted capitalistic society norms, especially those that praise individualistic growth with the focus on material gains and professional undertakings for the price of our own well being. bell hooks speaks about this in her book *“All about love”*, where she exposes how the lack of education about love and how to love properly pushes us further away from real connections and makes us fearful, anxious. As she said *“left alone in the “me” culture, we consume and consume with no thought of others“* (hooks 2018, 105). Community work has taught me to be more brave and speak about my needs as well as be open to hearing others’ needs. It taught me to see the ‘bigger picture’, to care about what makes the community grow and flourish, who we are as a collective, where we’re going and in what ways we are acting. It is a work of balance - noticing and caring for yourself, the other and the collective at large.

Artists for artists

Since the first moment of embarking on this research journey I was driven by a dream of being a part of an expansive network of creative minds - individuals who possess strong ideals, values and a shared vision. I believe that artists should be in close proximity to one

another, form an intricate web of connections that extends far and beyond. The creative process oftentimes can be isolating, but having the ability to turn to other artists for support through sharing resources, collaborating on projects, or simply having a conversation over a cup of coffee can make a significant difference.

I believe that relationships formed during the educational and collaborative process in school can continue after graduation and take on different forms. There are great examples of such occurrences, when graduates form co-ops to share studio space, equipment and other resources. Others decide to collaborate on specific projects or exhibitions or continue to grow the communities they have built in schools. While not all connections are meant to continue, and some people want to move on and seek other opportunities, the experiences I had with mentioned communities gave me a deeper understanding of how valuable staying close to your peers is. The art world can be complex and unfamiliar to new graduates, but staying connected with others can help to navigate these new waters and find one's place in it.

I hope that this research inspires other students and educational institutions to encourage collaborations and look for ways to make them sustainable and long lasting. I am convinced that meaningful change for artists can only be achieved by fostering close relationships with other creatives and taking informed actions collectively.

Continuing the journey: exploring collaborative opportunities

As I look back at my very first encounter with the community building process with Kurk Kurk and the experiences I had in those years, I am glad that I decided to seek new knowledge and understanding in collaborative work by setting out on this research journey. Back then I already saw the potential of Kurk Kurk becoming an independently functioning community that embodies multitude of capabilities within itself: a space for building long lasting connections between artists; a place to freely express oneself, collaborate and benefit from creative undertakings; a '*brave space*'²³ to explore the individual and collective capabilities for

²³ 'Brave space' is a concept used by a. m. brown as a contrary to 'safe space' concept. Brown argues that in order to confront the oppression in the society, we first have to confront it in ourselves and in the communities that we are involved in. Brave space encourages one to be vulnerable, more in tune with personal needs and limitations, to practise healing together with others.

meaningful changes, to be there for one another while confronting limited beliefs and going through the healing process. Even though the independent chapter of Kurk Kurk's evolution was short lived, it offered a brief glimpse of the immense possibilities such a community could potentially offer once acting outside the institution. For a brief time after Kurk Kurk members graduated and the community became independent from school, we managed to organise multiple educational workshops around the country, reaching broad audiences and making tangible impact with our actions. However, what stopped us from progressing was our lack of experience in structuring the collective work, communicating and having a clearly defined long term purpose, as well not having a well-defined strategy of supporting the community without the institution's help. I was not aware of these things back then, yet through this research I now understand what we needed to work on.

My membership at Archipelago offered an exceptional possibility to relive the process of community building and this time approach it with more intention, focused attention and deliberation. I am grateful for being a part of the Archipelago community, where I learned about the importance of human connections, collaborative work, healthy communication and care. I was excited to be in a space where I had the freedom to experiment with different approaches to my research, to find which one worked best. I learned that my chosen method of active involvement and observation was the most appropriate and in turn resulted in productive learning outcomes. I believe that because I chose to be an active member of Archipelago and not just observe it from afar, it allowed me to personally experience some of the concepts I encountered in the writings of a.m. brown, bell books and other practitioners. This in turn laid a solid groundwork for collaborations I plan to have in the near future. I am happy to have been a part of Archipelago's shaping and growth and excited to see that it is continuing to change and evolve with each year. I wish for it to gain even more agency within the institution and make more substantial changes. Hopefully this research will inspire the whole community of PZI and other institutions alike to collaborate more closely with students and support communities like Archipelago in expanding their positive influence within the school.

The main focus of this research was on student-led communities, yet as mentioned before, I believe that initiatives started in schools don't have to end with graduation - they can transform into other forms. The extension of this research would be experimenting with these different forms and seeing which would work best in my pursuit to collaborate and build

communities with and for artists. As Archipelago's main mission is to be there for the students of PZI and it does not have plans to expand outside the school parameters, I plan to revisit the idea of Kurk Kurk and see if this time I can approach it from a new perspective. As of now Kurk Kurk functions as an online platform²⁴ where I invite artists to share their creative experiences, however I would like to experiment with other formats that would bring back the more tangible feel of a community. After my experience with Archipelago I feel more prepared to dive back into this work and commit to fundamental shifts.

I see this research as a toolbox that contains in itself effective, tested tools to assist in troubleshooting certain situations that might occur during the community building and maintaining process. I can always come back to this document and reflect on the things I have experienced and check if what I am doing today is the right approach to the situation, or whether it is possible to act differently. This research is just the beginning of my overarching goal to collaborate with artists. I am looking forward to being involved in creating space(s) for mutual connection, sharing opportunities and tools, and building lasting professional and personal relationships.

**If you found this research useful and want to connect with me or have ideas for possible collaborations, please reach out to me via info@kurkkurk.lt*

²⁴ <https://kurkkurk.lt/en/>

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Appendix

- Report Document. Written by Urte Baranauskaite and Diogo Rinaldi. Link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uoGJ9BulHiZqRgB6EJkSfNA8-080iAfc6jNyVuVL_D0/edit?usp=sharing
- Interviews with Archipelago members. Interviewed and transcribed by Urte Baranauskaite. You can view the full documentation on the following page of this thesis ([Interviews with Archipelago members](#)).
- Interview with Emily, the co-founder and member of Haven community. Interviewed and transcribed by Urte Baranauskaite. Link: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XNjDGKUNNggmGtLZomkdRRNonip7hCj02TYRo8AHqt4/edit?usp=sharing>
- Archive of “The Piet” newspaper: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LZ4iVWh2SDfiy1AQZQDBB-5pXk2Wyg0N?usp=share_link

Word count: 19504

Interviews with Archipelago members

Note:

- *Acronyms used:*
 - *PZI - Piet Zwart Institute*
 - *Wdka - Willem de Kooning Academy*
 - *MEiA - Master Education in Arts*
 - *MFA - Master Fine Arts*
 - *XPUB - Experimental Publishing*
- *This symbol (...) marks the pauses that the interviewee makes.*
- *Anything written in square brackets like these [] are the comments, corrections made by the interviewer.*
- *Some information that could indicate the identity of the interviewee has been removed or altered.*

Interview nr.1 with a member of Archipelago

Interviewed by Urte Barauskaite, recorded in December, 2021.

1. Why did you decide to join Archipelago?

When I read that they search for people, I really wanted to join because in the first year [of studying] I didn't really meet any other people from other masters. Only a few from [my course] and that was it. There was so much more going on and I really didn't know what was happening. I think when you're studying, especially in art schools, it's good not to stay in your own bubble of your own class, because there are so many people walking around, who have ideas and sometimes it's best to work together with people from different [professional] fields. It's good to work with people from different disciplines, from other fields and the school didn't provide a way to meet students from these different studies. Then I thought 'oh, it's really good that Archipelago tries to do this so

that different studies meet each other'. So I really like to be part of this, because I always like to organise things and find ways to let people meet.

2. What were your main aims and goals when first joining this community? Did you have any specific aims?

No, not really specific. (...) Not really. Well, the goal was to create something where people could meet, but the methods of doing this were not specific, because the open call to join the Archipelago was not really specific on what you were going to do exactly. So I didn't have any expectations when [joining this community].

3. What was your experience connecting with students from other departments before Archipelago?

Well, not that much. Well I only knew some students [from another course], but that was because there was one person from [my course] having a relationship with somebody from [that other course]. So it was because of this. It was not because of some school conditions. It happened outside of the school's [influence] that I've gotten to know somebody from [the other programme]. Before Archipelago there was not really any connection [with students from other programmes].

4. What do you think has been the main impact of this group thus far?

(...) I think the main impact was maybe the introduction week. I think it had the biggest effect. And for the newsletters I don't know. Maybe they could also be the main impact, but (...) I don't read any emails, I don't have access to the email of Archipelago, so I don't know what kind of response we get. We do know that a lot of people read the newsletters. They click on the [newsletters], but I don't know what people do with this information.

But can you expand more about what kind of impact you see from your perspective that this group has made so far?

Well, I heard a lot of positive feedback about the introduction week and (...) personally, when I have a meeting with Archipelago and I'm already early at school, my classmates ask me 'oh, why were you so early' and I say 'ah, I had a meeting' and then they are like 'oh, with Archipelago!'. So people know it exists. So that is maybe already an impact that people know that it's there [the Archipelago community]. We didn't really have the chance after the introduction week, or we didn't take any chance to really set something up, because of the corona measurements. So it's a bit hard to really know what kind of impact we had actually.

5. How would you describe the group dynamic so far?

Well, the group dynamics... I see them changing a bit. Of course, because there were already members from before, who started the group. And then there were some other people who [joined] the group later. And first I noticed that the dynamic was a bit like the old group and then the new people. And I really felt a bit of distance in between those two. But I feel now that this distance is getting smaller. So the group dynamics are changing and I feel that at the moment the group dynamics is (...) there's sometimes a bit of tension which is alright. We try to figure out 'who does what?' and we also have to get to know each other a bit, because we all didn't know each other that well before. I don't know, maybe some of us knew each other before. I don't know how you could describe the group dynamics, but it was a bit (...) It [takes time] to understand each other.

6. How do you personally experience the group's structure?

Well, (...) because I thought that Archipelago was only [run by] students, for me personally in the beginning it was a bit [unexpected] that the [PZI's employee] was also a part of this, because they are more from the schools side of course, or like totally from the schools side. Which is also good, because then you know what you can do and how the school operates. We got assigned to these [tasks] from school, because we were hired more as recruiters. That was not really clear in the beginning. [In the group] everybody was like 'ok, what is your role?'. For me it was also a bit... I didn't know exactly what was expected from me inside the group and what I could do, what were the possibilities.

Because every meeting went very quick and we should decide in the meetings, but sometimes it was more talking and not deciding. At first I had to hold back a bit, because I could not make decisions on my own, I felt like. First we have to know what your role is, what you can do and then you know more if you can decide on things too.

7. You said before that you didn't have specific aims, but perhaps there were some expectations when you joined Archipelago?

Yes, a little bit. Well because in the [open call] it was stated [that they are looking for] some people with organisation skills and with a design background. They mentioned a lot of different backgrounds you could have to join Archipelago. I was expecting that we would do a lot of different things, because, [they wanted] people [who could] organise things, or do something with design, write things, or... There were some more things I forgot now. I did expect that we would do various activities. So those were my expectations - that we would do different things, but I didn't know what kind of things.

8. Have your expectations changed since?

A little bit. Depends on the time that we meet, because there were some months that we only focused on the open day and now we are going to focus on the next open day too. And I think recruiting new students for the Piet Zwart Institute was not my expectation when joining Archipelago, but this is a part of it. And I also understand it too, it's a part of why there is money available for something like this [community]. So I also feel like 'ok then, we should do this'. But also, the nice thing about this recruitment thing is that you get to know more about the different study programmes. And you understand [better] what to organise for the study programmes if you know more about [each of them]. So in that way it is good, but this recruitment thing I think, in my opinion, we put more time on it then on other things. So sometimes that feels a bit... Yeah, I didn't expect this. It's not necessarily bad, but I didn't expect this.

9. How would you describe the practice of horizontality in Archipelago so far?

Well, I experience it quite horizontally. I feel like everybody can say something and everybody will be listened to. (...) We have to work with the structure of the school, or how the school works. So, in a way that's not really horizontal, because the school still makes a lot of decisions in the things [that we do]. So in that way it is not horizontal at all. But within the group (...) with all the people of Archipelago including the [PZI's employee], I [experience it as] a horizontal structure.

Are there additional ways of organising that you see in the group? We talked about horizontality, perhaps you see other ways that would work differently?

Well, it's a bit difficult, because... I don't know... No. I think it's a bit difficult, because sometimes you want to have more autonomy, make more decisions in certain subjects, but then still we all have to agree on it. We are quite a big group, so we already noticed that sometimes it's a bit difficult to meet up and make decisions. So sometimes you could say 'okay, let's make more decisions', but not necessarily everyone will always be in the meeting. Or you could do more autonomous things. [This is] sometimes being said, that 'hey, you can do things' or 'just do it', but then sometimes I also feel like 'okay, but you still have to keep everyone in the loop'. And this process takes time. (...) It's a bit difficult to say. It's a bit time consuming to always meet with everybody or find the time, because sometimes we spend more time deciding when the meeting [is going to take place] then on the meeting itself. But this is also a part of keeping it horizontal - to keep everyone involved. And if you won't do this then it can happen that either one of us maybe does something that was not agreed upon with the school, or people would feel left out, or maybe certain people would decide most of the things but, for example, if one person from one specific study [programme] cannot be at the time of the meeting then [the whole of the study programmes] are not involved in decision making. So it's difficult. I don't know...

10. What have been important learning-moments for you by being an active member?

Well, it's really interesting to see the structure of the school, how the Institute works. I find this interesting. One learning moment for me was that there was never really this 'thing' that really connects all of the studies of the Piet Zwart Institute. For me, it was really interesting to know that this wasn't done before. And you can do something like this, you can work with the school to start [a community] like this and have new ideas. So that's really interesting. The institute is quite big, but you can still work with [it]. That's something I learned.

11. Are there things you feel could already be improved?

I don't know. Of course there's always something, but (...)

Maybe you see something that really sticks out and you feel like it could be improved? For example in communication, safe-space, ability to connect, give feedback...?

Do you mean within our group?

Yes, within the dynamics of the group. Do you feel something could already be improved?

[long pause] Well, sometimes I have a personal opinion on things, how something could be improved, but I don't know if that works for the group. I think personally, sometimes it can help to maybe not stick to this special design of the newsletter. And it's okay if sometimes it's different. Although I also understand that for some people... And I agree it looks nice, but some [people in the] group really want to stick to the things that they did. Sometimes I feel that things can be improved if you don't stick to them, but focus more on the (...) People [would] have more autonomy in the group, if you wouldn't have to stick to a certain grid. But I don't think that everybody agrees on this, so then it wouldn't be an improvement if we do this, for some people. I'm not sure if that's a good answer.

12. Are there new goals for your continued participation, now that you have been an active member?

The newspaper. We need to make something in print. And not only digital works. My goal is to work on the newspaper and make something that people would really read or look forward to. Something a bit more artistic in a way. That's something I look forward to. (...) I really like the newsletter a lot, but I think something like a newspaper could be more like a document for people to maybe send in more stuff. And that people from all the studies could feel part of it in a different way than a newsletter. That could be really nice and it's something I really look forward to - a sort of a product that everybody can be a part of, that is more physical.

Thank you for your time.

Interview nr.2 with a member/co-founder of Archipelago

Interviewed by Urte Baranauskaite, recorded in December, 2021.

1. As one of the founding members of the community, what was your input/role at the beginning stages?

So, the interesting part of this group was that we didn't know from the beginning what the work itself was going to be. So it was just me, two other members and an [employee of the PZI], but they were more on a horizontal level with us. The one thing we knew was that we wanted to build a community among the masters, because it was completely lacking. But we didn't know from the beginning which roles we were going to have. So what happened was that we started brainstorming about what could be needed, what we wanted to contribute with. And the roles that I took, I basically made them because of my own interest, so my own skills and what I could bring with that. Because I was already developing my visual skills and graphics, storytelling through images, I just took that and added my contribution [through] it. So with the things I already knew or was learning to do. I have decided my own role, which was kind of special, because it was also my first work that I had in my whole life and I could decide my role.

2. How did you experience the process of starting a community?

As I said, it was really special. I felt really free in taking decisions and also heard, because we were all, as I said, horizontal. There was not one person that brought their own ideas and went over each other, we all would listen with respect. It was also interesting to learn this process as well - to listen to each other. One thing that I learned, from one of the members, was that these things take time. So it's not that, you know, you make a decision and then put it on a group of people and that's what's going to happen. It's more a process where you try, you fail and you learn from it. That's one thing that was interesting to understand.

Were there any challenges that you've experienced?

It's still a challenge, because it's... It did start with an aim, but didn't start with a structure, I have to say. It's not like 'we're going to do this and this', it's a continuous challenge to understand what inputs we can do and not knowing the effect - time passes and then we get feedback from the masters [students] and then we know. It's always a challenge.

3. What was the process of making decisions at the beginning stages of the community?

The process, how we did it - we sat together once a week for more or less one hour and we would brainstorm. By being master [students] ourselves was really helpful, because we were basically the organisation, but as well the 'end client', it's not the right word, but you know we were also the case study itself. So we could talk. That's why we also chose one [student] from each master [programme] to have a more holistic view of all of the courses. So each of us could talk about our own experiences, which were different, different perceptions. So basically, we were brainstorming trying to figure out the problems, what was lacking in the current situation. Then we came up with... the first thing we did was a means of communication - this was a base for us to create a medium

to communicate to all the masters - it was a newsletter. Then many other initiatives. But we would always start from what's missing and what we can do to fill this gap.

4. Why did you decide to join Archipelago?

So, as I said, it was not a thing that someone made a call and said 'join the Archipelago', because it was not yet the Archipelago. In the beginning it was just a call for recruitment staff for the university, but then the [PZI's employee] had this project in mind and they made this opportunity for it to become the Archipelago, which is still recruitment, but it's something more. To be honest, I didn't know what the outcome was going to be, because it was not clear how we were going to build a community or something like that.

So you didn't have any aims or goals when you started the community or did you?

The only aim that I had was that I wanted to highlight master students' works. We wanted to differentiate masters from the bachelors. Because they were basically non-existent, also on the communication level. So the very first aim was to make master [students] works be known to the outside world also. That was my [goal]. Maybe for other members the goal was to already build some sort of internal community, but I don't know.

5. What was your experience connecting with students from other departments before Archipelago?

Before the group, I think it was non-existent at all, because [the Archipelago community] came with covid, so the school was pretty much empty. We generated a small community in my own department, because we could only go there and we met each other every day, whereas outside everything was closed. But we never went outside the studio to other departments, studios. Just maybe one time we had a class, where students from other departments presented their work, but it was more related to academic work and not on the personal level to get to know each other, that did not happen ever before.

6. What was the motivation behind the open-call for new members for the group?

I thought if we had to build a community among masters, I didn't believe in one or two or three people [involved] in a process of [making] decisions to a whole group of 150 people when we don't even know their dynamics. So really my aim was to at least have one representative from each master [programme] that could tell the stories of what's happening, because they are so fragmented and that's the main problem that we had. That's why the Archipelago is structured as different Islands, but they are not at the same sea, because we are different. There's space in between us, that is a tricky environment to engage with. As I said, my aim was to have at least one representative from each island, [to know] what's missing, or what their colleagues are like, what are their needs, what are their objectives, what they want as a community in their master [programme], what they would like to have. That was one [motivation]. Another important thing, for me personally, was to have more different skills in the group. Someone else, for example, photography is a key as a way of engaging. It's a really powerful medium. For example, with one member we thought, in the future we would like to have a website or some sort of platform to interact [with students], which we did a bit with the call for the open space. These kinds of methods. So yeah, these two - to have more representatives, but also more skills to build on the work that we had already made [prior].

7. What do you think has been the main impact of this group thus far?

I think the newsletter was a very well-thought project, because it's still on-going and it still works. People are reading it and it works as a channel for communication. The big issue was that we didn't even have a platform to communicate. For example, the opening hours for the studios, which is already something that's a necessity. So that was, I think, a really nice project that had an impact, that made people feel like 'okay, there's a newsletter just for me as a master. I'm receiving this information that is dedicated to me'. Also the part where we exhibit students works - that I think also [adds up]. We are going to make more [exposure] in the future, but I think it's a great [starting] point. Then, for sure the Intro Week as well. As someone who didn't have that during Covid, I feel like [it's great] if you're already coming into something where you know that there's something

other than the school, a specific community that is there for you. As I said before, it's a process. Even though we don't have direct results, I think continuing the [work] will for sure [produce] something. Of course, from my personal point of view, I think structuring visuals for this [is important], like images - they create meaning. So if you see Archipelago having a certain style, certain ideology I think it creates a kind of a reality, in part. It's something that needs to be developed for sure.

8. How would you describe the group dynamic at the beginning stages, before new members joined the community?

For sure it was in a way more easy, from my point of view, because it's different when it's three, four [people] then when it's seven. Of course in the expansion you also expand the roles and expand the work, so it's not as easy to coordinate that. In a meeting of only one hour it's more chaotic than before to really grasp everything and have an overall picture on everything that's going on. But it's not necessarily good or bad. As it gets more complex in any association, I think, it gets more difficult to manage.

9. How do you experience the group's structure?

I feel that at the moment we're almost starting to engage with a proper structure. I see it as liquid, which I don't necessarily think is bad. I like when it's more floating around decisions and roles. But I experience it as something positive, because you're independent with your own choices and you can bring your own interests in the work that is being made. I talk from my point of view, I do visuals so I can kind of engage with that on a free level. I think also another member, who makes their interests as a part of this. So I like this liquid structure, where we are free and independent. I mean, of course, we ask for feedback and we relate to each other. I think it's nice, it's a different way of approaching a really big project.

10. Did you have expectations when you joined Archipelago?

Sure, I think this is going to be just a really really really start. I said my aim was mainly to bring relevance to masters students' work. And then of course, building a community

it's somehow related. But I think this is really really the first step of something that is going to become, in future years, as an organisation that goes parallel with the academic and school related stuff. It's a support community that brings added values to personal level experiences and things like that. The aim is literally reaching the proper group of students who are supporting the community and bringing events - cultural and also informal. We will leave this group after we graduate, but other people are going to replace us. We are already making an open area [for students], but I'm sure in the future we're going to have our own room to make decisions. I feel like this is just a 'born baby' and then it's going to grow and grow.

11. Have your expectations changed over time?

For sure they changed, because the [group] itself grew. So starting from three and going to seven. Something that is growing makes you think that it can be something more than what you've expected before. Something that is evolving and more ideas, more people, more connections. So for sure they changed in a way that they became more than what I expected.

12. How would you describe the practice of horizontality in Archipelago so far?

One person started [the group] and they are formally an [employee of the PZI], but the horizontality is there. It's independent. What you bring to the group, of course we define tasks for ourselves and in the group, but you're independent of what work you bring. There's horizontal feedback and everyone is heard I think. I mean, from my perspective I feel heard. And also in a way there's trust, like 'let's not bring down or judge'. It's always something that's up for discussion if we are not agreeing, but without censoring something. If you are at a meeting and you bring something it's not like it gets 'cancelled'. It's always horizontal in a way that there isn't someone that can decide from above 'oh, this is good, this is bad. This is going to happen and this will not'. It's always a process where 'okay, let's do this, let's try. I trust your work' and then we can all decide together how to move forward.

13. Are there additional ways of organising the group that you see?

Well, I think it's going quite well, there could be other ways. I think the way where everyone has their own projects and we build on them through feedback is going well. To define the roles, I think that's something that every person has to do for themselves. If I say 'okay you're good at this, you're going to do this', I think it's something that has to come from a person. So I will not say that I would want to impose a structure that's different from the 'natural' one. Because what's beautiful is that it's kind of natural. It's not like you're in the university and you're given an assessment to follow. It comes from you and it's accepted how it is. It's nice like that, I think.

So are you content with how it's organised at the moment?

Yes.

14. What have been important learning moments for you by being an active member?

I learned how to collaborate with a group that has so much variety in it. Different backgrounds, different skills, different cultures even. For sure I learned how to mediate in this. It's not about imposing your own view. It's about listening and making the best out of a lot of different points of views. As I said before, mainly the fact that this kind of project relates more to community building, it would be a wrong idea that this one project will lead you to this. Maybe you start from something that you think will bring this, but then it brings something else. Even better or worse. And it's always through time that you can understand that. It's like a continued research.

15. Are there things you feel could already be improved in the group?

I think now that it's becoming more complex, I think we need more than one hour per week to discuss among each other. Because we always work independently on a task, it could be interesting to use certain... Because we depend on a contract or whatever, it's also not about that, but we basically have 8 hours per week. And if we really implement that, then it's basically a full day and then we could stay together physically and work on

things. Being physical and in the same place, I think, that would for sure [affect] the performance. It's already good, but we are all scattered around and we meet only for one hour. So imagine if there would be a space, a place to be and to engage with people, like talk to them and work on things together.

16. Are there new goals for your continued participation, now that you have been an active member for a while?

I was thinking about this. Because for now my role is to create visuals through storytelling, to engage with all of this. I think I can go a step further and literally think about... not a communication strategy, don't get me wrong, but like literally make something - a small project out of this. I'm still thinking. Now I'm designing visuals according to certain events that are happening. So it's almost like a backdrop tool to a concept. I think what I can do more is to build a small project about this. It can be...(...) We're going to have a newspaper, it can be something parallel, something digital, a platform, literally something active to work with it. That can be one. But I don't have an idea yet, I haven't talked about it yet. But there can be something more to add. When we came up with our small project (...) Because being seven, potentially a lot of things can happen if every member builds a small activity to engage with. Then potentially, a lot of things can be happening together, which is nice.

So are you interested in a more of a managing role in the future?

I would be interested if that's something that we would decide all together. For me it's always important that I don't impose on something. So that it's so natural it's already beautiful. If there's a communal idea 'okay, now we need someone to manage all of these small projects. Who wants to do this?'. You know, if I tell about a project and everyone agrees, for sure I would be interested in doing that.

Thank you for your time.

Interview nr.3 with a member/co-founder of Archipelago

Interviewed by Urte Baranauskaite, recorded in March, 2022.

1. As one of the founding members of the community, what was your input/role at the beginning stages?

Right at the start it was very much about us brainstorming (there were three of us). Brainstorming about the kind of issues that we've seen - one of the biggest issues that we saw was that everything was so disconnected. It was also during covid that all of us international students, who are not from here or don't live here, were not allowed to come here on campus. Because we were new students, apart from one person who was in the 2nd year, and I can't speak for the rest, but I know the consensus was that we didn't know how to connect to people here. I didn't have classes on campus, I didn't have tours of the buildings, I didn't know that we were all under one umbrella and had all these different programmes and how to get in touch with anyone if you wanted to collaborate. That was a big thing for me, because I come from community driven spaces. In the beginning we brainstormed about what was necessary, how we could be a 'catalyst for change'. It was so far back, I can't remember all the specifics...

Do you remember if you came forward with specific roles that you wanted to take upon?

Well, we kind of ran with the idea that one person will do the design, I'll do the copywriting and keeping things together and the other will be strategizing stuff. We would all work within that strategy space about how we could get [the information] out to the rest of the community. When it was time to recruit new members, I was in charge of getting that process rolling and writing all the stuff to be sent out, checking the emails constantly, being on top of dates and what is happening in our group and what needs to be done in the next steps.

2. How did you experience the process of starting a community such as this?

What do you mean?

For example challenges - did you feel that there were some easier moments, some frictions in the process of actually starting something like this?

I think it was really inspiring, because we really each gave our own inputs and that is why we started - to connect with people and learn from one another as well. It was really comforting to know that there were people who had the same issues, same like minded outlook on why we want to create this group. We each knew how to take the steps, how to communicate with one another, to get the job done. Obviously we had a really good facilitator (employee of the PZI) who has been very supportive and kept us on track. The more challenging thing was to get other people involved in what we were trying to do. Even though we knew there were people who felt the same way, it was hard to get people [involved]. Because everything is institutionally so disconnected. So how do we as a student group all of a sudden connect everyone and get them to want to be involved in the things we wanted to do? That's why at first we really started with establishing what we were about, this is what we stand for, this is the kind of language we are going to use, this is the kind of visual language we will use. Then we took it further to bring more people in so that we could start doing events. Then how do we get more people involved in terms of participating in our events. That's the more challenging thing - how do we reach out and get people to participate in what we are trying to do.

3. How would you describe the process of making decisions at the beginning stages of the community when you had less people?

Well, the decisions would be put on the table similarly to how we do it now, but with the smaller group the discussions don't go all over the place. Because we had very specific goals that we needed to achieve and very specific deliverables that we created - we really knew where we were going towards. It was easy then to bring it to the table, discuss, come up with a new [proposal], or give feedback to one another and make changes

accordingly. That process would always be a very collaborative, safe-space to talk about "this works for us, this doesn't work for us, maybe we should do this, etc". Then we would go from there.

4. You mentioned a bit about why you decided to be a part of this group, but maybe you can expand more on that?

Like I said, I was feeling disconnected from the school that I became a part of. I reached out because I saw that the [school] had a job opportunity for the similar thing that we're doing now [with Archipelago], but for bachelors. I didn't know it was for bachelors, applied for it and then they were like "so many master students have applied". So there obviously was a disconnect and there had to be a community for the master programs as well. You know, I came from a different country and I was all of a sudden in a lockdown where I was sitting at home doing online classes in a tiny little apartment in the city that I didn't know, with students and lecturers that I've never met in real life. I just really wanted, for my own sanity, to connect with the place that I'm studying at a bit more. Maybe there would be an opportunity for me to actually come to campus and work a little bit, network, meet new people, see what life is really like here.

Did you have other personal aims, besides wanting to connect? Did these aims change afterwards, when you joined the community?

I see a lot of connection between what we initially started with [my research] - collaboration, connection, making possibilities for people to work with each other in between master programmes and connect with people of diverse backgrounds. But it's gotten to a point where you don't want to put that into this space of Archipelago, because it adds to the business and the stress of the members already. Which is also a connecting factor - we all understand that each of us have pressure and we try to work around that. But in some ways, because of this disconnect in communication between the different masters and dates and all of that, I think it's also a really disbarred kind of schedule that we're trying to work with. It's not possible to put an umbrella and say that we're all under it. It's not impossible, but it's going to take a long time and there are deeper rooted

issues that need to be taken on as a student group and that's not something we can do. Yet.

5. What was your experience connecting with students from other departments before this group came along?

There was no connection. Nothing. Also, [some of us] are part time students, so we're here once every two weeks. Once in the evening, once during the day. There's not really any overlap with other departments put forward to us. So no. The only kind of connection that I started making was when [the restrictions] were over and we were allowed to go to the Stations. That was the first time that I connected with some of the other students and realised - there were other people in this building.

6. What was the motivation behind the open call for the members to join Archipelago?

The messaging was about connecting. The idea behind the Archipelago is that it's a bunch of islands that are separate, but they are a part of one unit. To create that unit is to connect different students. I personally know how important it is to have different perspectives and diversity within who you're studying with, people that you collaborate with. There are strengths and weaknesses between skills and ideas that you might not get from just being by yourself or just talking to someone who's doing the same master programme as you. I really wanted to create a space where, let's say, someone from MIARD can connect with someone from Master Design and maybe that really helps for the research to go forward. Also for people who are disconnected, feeling a little bit homesick - there's a space for you to meet with other people. You don't have to talk about school or anything, but just to know that there's a support base in a community for you to be a part of.

7. How would you describe the impact that this community had so far?

I think it's been great. Lately we haven't really been doing a lot of things with participants. Traction has picked up, people started noticing us and we were asked to do a lot of things and we're concentrating on doing them. So we're not actually in the "nitty gritty" connecting students right now that much. We have the newspaper, which is great, but I really enjoy when we do events like the Intro Week, something like that. The feedback we've got from the Intro Week was incredible, there's still groups ongoing where people are connecting and creating really good friendships from just being introduced to one another in a more social setting around the idea of school and not around your research or what you're supposed to be doing at school. It's just here we are, here is everyone who'll study with you - meet. You know, people have created really good relationships from that [event]. It's all positive. I mean it's not negative that we're getting noticed, but I think because we were so new and we were still kind of figuring everything out, it's getting a bit lost in translation exactly what it is that we are doing. Obviously there are things that we really want to accomplish and then it's becoming chaotic, because other people are giving input. But that's also part of this, that we want other peoples' input, but we don't yet really have a structure to [distinguish between] what is noise and what is necessary. [pause] But overall, I think it's a good response - people know who we are, they want to join the workshops that we present, they want to be involved with us continuously. I think that people see that there is a benefit of [working together].

8. So you think that the 'ice' has broken a little bit in terms of connectivity between students from different departments?

I think that there's connectivity between people who want to connect. I don't think that there's yet connectivity between the departments. I think, unfortunately, in a way that needs to come from course directors. You know, I can't say "let's collaborate with Lens Based ", because they have different curriculum, different schedules, different everything. For example in my old school we used to have group projects, we also had multimedia illustration, photography, videography, graphic design - all these different departments. Once a year there would be an inter-programme group project and there

would be people from every single programme on one project. Outcomes were absolutely fantastic. That would only happen if it's supported by course directors.

So you think there should be more collaborations between course directors and different programmes, because Archipelago is not necessarily capable of providing the opportunities?

Definitely. Because the Archipelago is not institutional. We are a student-led group, community. We can't change what is done at school. We can only facilitate other opportunities to counteract what we see as problematic.

9. How would you describe the group dynamics at the beginning stages, before new members joined the Archipelago?

It was very much about exploring. Exploring what we could do, what it is that we want to do, what we stand for, how we put ourselves forward. We were all very give and take. It was very collaborative. I think we had more defined roles then currently, because there were specific things that needed to be done and specified people who would do those things. It was great. It still is. It's just a little bit more chaotic at the moment.

10. Can you elaborate more on how you see group dynamics now that new members have joined the group?

I think with more members joining it's almost as if the roles got a little bit lost in translation. We started getting new things to create, to do and you want to make sure everybody is part of that process of conceptualising without really saying "you're the leader, you do this, you do that". But then things get a little bit confusing actually, because somebody needs to take the lead. I mean we keep hearing "take a lead on something, take a lead on something", but I think people are a little bit shy to put themselves into a leadership position within a community that is supposed to be about collaborating in a community on an equal level.

11. How would you describe the practice of horizontality in a group?

I think we're trying our best to create that kind of environment. There are issues that come up with volunteer based versus contract based, which again is beyond our control. The issue is that, how we work here is based on being under these specific contracts, right? I think that inherently creates a little bit of discrepancy or the feeling of inequality. I think because of the not defined roles it makes it hard to just do things. I don't know, it's just really hard to just keep everything at a specific level. You have to have somebody taking a lead and I think maybe that's going to be coming in the future, where we say "cool, this is project A, we need someone who's gonna lead this project, we need someone who's gonna design this project, someone who's gonna write this project" or whatever the roles might be. And then that's it. Then everyone else can't really chip in and have a negative opinion about not being a part of it or being part of it, because it was defined from the start. Then you can run parallel projects like that. But right now it's all over the place and where can you help out, who can do this, and etc.

12. How do you experience the groups' structure besides the roles?

I think it's going to be an ongoing process. It's a sensitive thing, because we see problems within our Institution and how hierarchy and things like that create problems. But then how do we counteract that in a group that wants to be horizontal and still be successful and productive?

13. Did you have expectations when you first joined the group? Have they changed over time now that you've been an active member?

Practically, I thought I would be doing a lot more design and things like that, because that is where I am strong. And I am starting to feel less confident in my design, because I keep not doing design stuff here, you know? I know I'm a strong writer and a strong project manager, organiser. I can keep track of things, dates and people. That is kind of where my role has now fallen, which doesn't bother me, but I wish there was a little bit more diversity within that space. I wish I could take on one of the design roles at some point. The fact that I am the one who's keeping track of all the notes and all the meetings and things like that, it's kind of hard to jump out of that role and say "I'm gonna do the

design for this project". If no one else is going to take on the role of doing the meetings and keeping track of the dates and things like that. So, yeah, I think my expectations were that we were going to be doing a whole bunch of different things, but then it goes back to the fact that we don't have defined roles and we should have defined roles. There are unspoken roles that are now created and I don't feel comfortable stepping out of my role without knowing that someone else is going to take it over.

So do you think there should be a designated meeting to define these roles?

Perhaps, but then we've spoken about it and then people would be like "but you can just jump in on a project" and then I'm like "that's not how it works". Like I can't just jump in on a project, you know? I want to be a part of it from thought to execution. Often what happens is that I'll just get an email saying "please can you write content for this, it needs to go out tomorrow". Fine, I can do it, it's my role, I do write, but then I want to not just be told to write this. Let's come up with what needs to be written together.

14. Do you see any other ways of organising the group work in this group?

I wonder if when you do recruitment and you put what roles are needed instead of just saying "who wants to connect?", what if we say "we need a graphic designer. We need an illustrator. We need someone who does layout" - defining a bit more the kinds of roles that we have so that people can apply for specific roles, instead of just applying because they want to be a part of the community. Inherently, they do apply because they want to be a part of the community, right? But then you applied for this community, but you've come in and stepped into "Z". So if anybody has questions about "Z" they get appointed towards you. If anything within the realm of "Z" needs to be done, you will take the lead on that.

15. Could you expand on what were important learning moments for you personally by being an active member of this group?

I've always thought I was someone who worked well with people, but I had to learn to have quite a lot of patience. I think that has to do with the fact that we're a massively culturally diverse group. We are all from all over the world and that's fantastic. But

sometimes I don't really understand what's being said, or I don't understand the humour, or something like that. Sometimes some things go over my head and I feel if I ask for clarification, sometimes it's like "come on". But it might just be me overthinking things. Sometimes I just feel a little bit like I'm from a different island.

Also that there are a lot of rules that go into being part of something that wants to make change. Even if you think there aren't. There are rules that we need to follow and that I didn't expect. We're here to be a force for change, but there are rules that we still need to follow.

It's about giving space for other peoples' ideas and then also knowing that you should be given space. I think all of us sometimes struggle with that a little bit, because we have strong minds and we follow through with what we wanna do, but there needs to be space for other people to be part of that also. And not only this community, but outside our group as well. Because we are sensitive human beings. We are all human beings with emotions and sensitive to outside perspectives and issues and we need to be aware of that and one another.

16. Do you think that something could already be improved in the group?

[long pause] I don't know... I think it comes with the fact that we are a community group, but I think sometimes people are nonchalant about meeting times and things like that and that really bothers me. I'm always early, because we are all busy and we need to respect each others' time. I think that, with certain members, it's going to sound so bad, but with certain members it's just like this is like a little extra thing they're doing. I feel that this kind of mindset is not productive to what we're trying to do. It goes against being sensitive towards other people. So I think if this is a job that we're doing, regardless if you're contract or volunteer based, this is the job that we're doing and that needs to be treated properly and with respect. Sometimes I just feel like that's not [the case]. Other changes... [long pause] You see it's hard, because what are we, right? We're

creating something new. It's like it's in the cocoon that's becoming a butterfly right now and deciding which butterfly it will be.

What about communication, safe-space, ability to connect and give feedback.

Does anything else from this resonate with you?

Communication maybe, but I think that goes into the cultural thing. Because I think sometimes someone communicates with me and I'm like "why are you being so harsh with me" and then it's like "oh, cos that person is from a different country and it's just how they speak". [I'm from a culture] where we are very empathetic and like "is everyone doing ok?". Maybe I should just be more "balls to the wall" sometimes. Communication can always be better. Always.

17. Do you have new goals for your continued participation now that you've been an active member for a while?

That's something that in the last few weeks has been coming up in my mind, that I'm the one who's going to be continuing in this group. So I've been there from the start and I'm going to be the one left over when all of the others will graduate. It's just continuing with what I'm doing currently and that's making sure that schedules are run properly and keeping track of everything. It stresses me out when everybody wants to do everything in one space. In my mind, surely if you want to do this, we need to first connect with the people and then do it in a proper way, but then someone is like "just jump in". That freaks me out. I just don't see a point in jumping into something if we have to jump into it again later and fix it. For example, with an open space, first let me connect with the guys who take care of this floor, so that we don't go buy a couch and then we bring it here and they would be like "no, sorry". But "just jump into it"... So, I think for me it's really about making sure that going forward there's processes in place of how we handle situations when it comes to course directors, FIT, or people within the school that we need to talk to. Project management, you know.

Thank you for your time.

Interview nr.4 with a member of Archipelago

Interviewed by Urte Baranauskaite, recorded in March, 2022.

1. Why did you decide to join Archipelago?

Because I wanted some things within the school to change and I felt like I cannot do it by myself. So it felt like a good opportunity to join and try to address those things. I also wanted to be more involved with the organisational part of what's going on in the school.

2. What was your experience connecting with students from other departments before Archipelago?

[long pause] I mean I kind of knew people from other departments. Obviously I know people in this organisation (Archipelago) quite well. Working here kind of gives you a door to meeting other people. But I guess most of my interactions with people from other departments come from other social circumstances, not necessarily with the Archipelago.

So before Archipelago you were connecting with students from other departments? Did Archipelago's presence change something?

I mean the extent to which I was connecting with people changed, but it's not like before that nothing existed. I still met people, but now I have a chance to meet more people.

3. What do you think was the main impact of this group so far?

On me or generally?

Generally.

I think all of our activities, everything we planned to do has had an impact, because I feel like everyone has been craving for and been eager for an organisation like this. Be it a student union or recruiting/student union group like we are or just something like that. I think everyone is eager to seek stuff coming from us, but also to let us help the institution. I think everything we do has an impact, be it social, organisational, or just

the fact we send this newsletter, or be it information. I think it has a multilateral impact on things, obviously of different levels and degrees. It's covering a lot of the gaps within the Piet Zwart Institute.

4. How would you describe the groups' dynamics so far?

I think it's really funny. I think it's just a really fun, friendly dynamic. Obviously, sometimes things can get off track, someone takes too much charge and some people are silent. Sometimes someone has too many responsibilities and some people don't have any, some people take things too personally. But I think this is pretty normal in a group like this. Especially when you have a lot of things to do and not enough time. But I think the group dynamic is pretty fun. I think we managed to merge this work environment with just being a group of people who get together and sometimes have breakfast and organise events and stuff like that.

5. How do you experience the group's structure?

I feel there's a bit of hierarchy. I think we still rely a lot on the [employee of the PZI] and their approval and in that sense I feel there's a strong structure, based on the pyramid structure. Sometimes I feel like the people who have been there from the beginning, stand higher somehow than people who joined later. But I guess this is just a group dynamic thing and it might be temporary. I don't know. Usually these things are sorted out just by working with these people and by interacting. I think sometimes you can sense that there's a structure when you're reminded that "oh, I have ten years of..." or whatever. But otherwise I think it's quite uniform and it has a fluent way of functioning within that structure.

So are you happy with it?

Yeah, I'm happy. Obviously there are things that sometimes can be annoying, or you just internally roll your eyes about things, but then you get over it and just get the work done. You get towards the thing that you want to achieve as a group and everyone does the work they have to do and just get over themselves.

6. What were your expectations when you joined Archipelago? Anything specific?

No, I did not really know what to expect. I really didn't know what this was. It was kind of strange and confusing. I thought 'ok, what is this mysterious organisation? What are they gonna do?' and it was quite vague from the description, but then it seemed exciting and I felt like I could fit in and do some great work and address some stuff that was bothering me. But I did not really know what this was, so I did not have any expectations.

7. So now that you've been an active member for a while, do you have expectations now, did your perception about the group changed?

I mean I would like it to be in a certain way, but I don't have those expectations, because at this point they're unrealistic. So, no, I still don't have expectations. I just participate in whatever is happening and if it's possible to do other things, I'll do them.

8. How would you describe the practice of horizontality within the group?

I think it's very horizontal. Probably more horizontal than other stuff going on in the school.

9. Would you see other additional ways of organising the group?

Well, that's just my personal opinion and my personal view, but it's impossible because the [employee of the PZI] says that we're not going to be here next year, but I think it would be cool if we could get more hours and do more stuff. Not to transform to a student union, but to do some student union stuff. Be a bit more proactive with some issues within the school. But on the other hand, I am also very aware of the fact that it's a lot to ask and there's a lot going on and it's just my projection on the group and that's not necessarily something that has to come to fruition.

10. What have been important learning moments for you personally by being an active member of this group?

I don't know if there are important learning moments.

Any realisations?

Yeah, my biggest realisation is that this place is more fucked than I initially thought [referring to the Institute itself]. By getting insights from other people and when I'm talking to other people, doing the things that we are doing - you see the fact that there are more structural problems than you think there are.

You're talking about the school?

Yeah, about the school. The institution.

And in terms of working in this group with other members?

I mean every time we do something when we have something, you learn something. But there's nothing that I can be like 'I discovered the meaning of life' or nothing else that I can pin down. It's more small things that you find out as you're doing something. But I don't have an 'epic' thing to say.

11. What are the things that you feel could already be improved in the group?

Communication. Working hours. I think we should be given more attention, but that's not internal, that's more external... Yeah, that's all.

12. Do you have any goals for your continued participation now that you've been an active member for a while?

I don't have any goals. I just want us to do good work. Just try to leave something after we finish our degrees. I feel like the goal is more like a collective goal rather than an individual goal, because I don't see myself... Like I'm a part of a group and I work for the group and with the group and I don't project my individual desire or goals onto that. If I have goals I'll do them outside. I'd rather work as a team and think about the common needs and what everyone wants to do rather than place my own desires first.

Thank you for your time.

Interview nr.5 with a member/co-founder of Archipelago

Interviewed by Urte Barauskaite, recorded in January, 2022.

1. As one of the founding members of the community - what was your input/role in the beginning stages?

We got together, me and a few other people. Initially the group intended to be responsible for recruiting new students. That's something that the Piet Zwart Institute needed. Once we got together it was still during COVID, that's important to mention. COVID showed a lot of needs, a lot of situations that we needed to address. The year before this [group started] I have worked with one of the counsellors of Wdka in a project that looked into why a lot of students had issues, be it emotional or academical. They were not connecting to the counsellors, they did not know all the things that the schools offered. So me and other master students looked into how the wdka website was perceived, how easy it was to find information. We realised that there were a lot of things that were available, however it was not easy to know [how to access them]. Students did not know that the school provides a lot of things. That already showed that there was a lot that needed to be addressed in the school. The year after when we created the Archipelago group, me and other members brainstormed and realised that the 'space for care' was missing. There were a lot of holes in communication, perception and identity of PZI. The Institute is not really easily understood, perceived. You know when you talk about the Piet Zwart Institute in The Netherlands, people don't know that it is in Rotterdam and it is for Master students of Wdka. We already understood that there was a lot of disconnection within the PZI. Students did not relate to different masters. There were a lot of discussions, conversations about multidisciplinary, collaborative work, so many things that relate to different students getting together in pursuit of a project or shared intention. We saw that it wasn't happening in PZI, even though the discussion and the

conversation was there in theory, however in practice it wasn't. There was a little bit of a budget from school, so we figured we could do something about it. So we started putting together a group that was trying to listen to the needs of students first and foremost. That was our initial intention. We also wanted to create a communal space, to try and bring people together. Not only through virtual space, but also a physical one where students could interact. Physicality was also a big issue in PZI. I heard that it has been a big issue in the past as well. There was no shared space for master students. Especially for part time masters, like master education in arts as well as master design. They do not have a specific studio space. They don't have their own location where you could always find students. So we figured that we could do something about it. We knew it's going to take time. We figured that introduction week was a beautiful moment to [ignite these changes]. Introduction week is a great moment when students get together. I was the only one who participated in the Introduction Week that happened before COVID, so I knew there were bike tours. They were really interesting, that's how I got to know other students. That was the only way I got to know other students from other masters. So I knew how powerful it was. I also had an experience of participating in an Introduction Week in another school and I know how powerful it was in creating this shared space. So we figured we could try to create something for the Introduction Week that wouldn't be too costly, because there was already a budget for the bike tours. But we could do something more, it was just a matter of aligning a time and a moment among the departments. I think we were extremely successful with that.

I had some experience in alternative and social projects, getting people from different backgrounds together and trying to create something - a shared desire. I was the one who developed the overall plan for this to happen. I put together a scheme, a rough plan, to be able to accomplish what we wanted to do.

2. How did you experience the process of starting this community?

It was super nice. I felt extremely welcomed. I was welcomed by kind, receptive, open people. I think we shared the desire and the eagerness to do something like that. I think

that the base structure was there, even though we did not have a budget, but we did have energy and desire to do something. That was already the main drive to be able to construct something new. I think that we took the Introduction Week seriously enough, we understood that it could be a moment in which we could show the community and what we intended to do, the potential. I think we were very successful on that,

3. What was the process of making decisions at the beginning stages of the community?

We were having weekly meetings and we were brainstorming a lot. A lot. We were putting ideas, shared work online on the MIRO platform. We were very open. The roles naturally progressed to someone being responsible for graphic design, the aesthetics of what we were doing. Another person was responsible for copyright, the content. I was responsible for organising the overall idea, doing research on it. We also had a person who acted as mediator (the employee of the PZI) between our group and the institution.

4. What were your main aims and goals when you started this community?

It was designed to use the analogy, the narrative of the name of the group. So we called ourselves The Archipelago, because in our conversations we saw that each master department was an island and they were disconnected from other islands. So we felt like we were a bunch of islands, but we didn't communicate. So we felt like there was a big ocean among us, but we were not crossing this ocean as often. We were not creating in-between structures that could facilitate conversation between departments. I think that our goal was to create this 'in-betweenness' - space for care, where people can feel comfortable and safe to be able to interact. I think we were potentializing interactions. We wanted to potentialize the creation of such space. We knew for sure that there was a desire among students for this space to be there. We knew through conversations with our friends and people we knew and through the poster in which we invited people to interact with us. We asked them to tell us their desires and thoughts. We knew that there was energy for something like that to be built, constructed - this in-between space. We knew that students wanted to interact, they wanted to engage with each other, but there

was nothing like that. I think that our main goal and desire was to build that and let it grow organically.

5. What is your personal motivation to be a part of this group?

My personal motivation was, to be very honest with you, one was money. It was a paid position and it was during the pandemic. The other was, when I see a need and I see a potential, I try to put energy in starting something to happen. I feel that I developed techniques and ways to kick-start things. To use a poetic narrative - if I see a piece of land and see there's a potential for something to grow there, I will take care of it and I will sow, I will do it. I'm really good at starting things, but I'm terrible at maintaining them. I think that's what my energy is about - to start things. I see something that can grow and I can use my energy towards it. I feel relevant, I feel happy about it.

6. What was your experience in terms of connecting with students before Archipelago?

2019 was the last Introduction Week before covid and it had a bike tour. Through this bike tour I got to know a few students from other departments. I had a chance to meet them on by-weekly basis, whenever I was in the building, because the master education in arts is part time. It only happens every other week on Fridays and Saturdays. This kind of pushed a group aside from the daily activities from the building, because other students tend to be there from Monday through Friday. So students from Meia rarely see other students because of that. So I didn't have a lot of interaction with them, because of this. However I did visit the building more often, because I really liked the workshops. I enjoy working with my hands, so I was playing a lot with ceramics, printing, all that. I saw a lot of students there. But I didn't interact much. I didn't participate in projects of other departments, but I wanted to. If there were projects or ideas or situations that invited me to participate, then I would. Then COVID hit by February 2020 and everything went online. The interactions became even harder to happen.

7. What was the main impact of the Archipelago so far?

Archipelago started a space that didn't exist. The fact that it does exist already makes it possible for people to interact. There is a place for people to go to, if they want. It was not the case before. The only place that existed was the hall, where the printer and the coffee machine was. Now there is this space, there's representation of each department through this group. There is a connection. This is just the beginning. The foundation is still being built. It's important to say that, because it's not fully formed yet. It's something in the process of. This allows more transformation. It allows for something to be different. It's important to keep going. I think that this space has potential, which wasn't there before. There's more openness, more possibilities, more interaction. There's even a messaging group among all 6 departments that wasn't there before. So there's a lot more stuff that's going on, which wasn't there when I started.

8. What was the motivation behind the open call for new members to join the group?

As far as I remember the [employee of the PZI] said that there would be a budget to hire more people. Then we figured that it would be extremely important to have one student from each department. There were two reasons for that. One was that, I think there's a need for students to be the ambassadors - they function as the ambassadors of their own department. At that point it was also discussed that they could also work as possible recruiters. They would have not only the function of participating in this community, the Archipelago, but also function as communicators or recruiters for potential students. The second was, that if we are building a community for all the six distinguished islands, it was extremely important to have one member of each island to participate in this community. It functions as a structured way of representation. So the person that participates in the Archipelago communicates to their own department what's going on, but also that people from each department feel represented, by having someone from their department in the group to communicate their needs. It's important to embrace all the different needs from each department.

9. How would you describe the group dynamic at the beginning stages, before new members joined the group?

Do you want me to be polite, do you want me to be extremely honest?

Be honest.

Okay. Let's see then. I think that [pause]. I think that we wanted to be horizontal, but there were very distinct power dynamics. One, there was a distinction of [employee of the PZI] being our mediator. Even though we wanted to be horizontal, there was a very clear position in that sense. There was also a position that the [employee of the PZI] had chosen a specific person to participate in the group and the [employee of the PZI] knew this person's work, they knew each other beforehand. But the [employee of the PZI] did not know me or the other member that joined at the start, or what we did. So, I knew that the [employee of the PZI] invited or gave the responsibility to this person to take care of the graphic design part. Also the other member was the only one that had English as their mother language, so immediately they took upon or were given a task of being the copywriter. Me having the experience of working with organising, coordinating, I was invited to take up this role. So we didn't have a space or time for these roles to sort of define organically. I don't see it as a failure, but I see this as, especially on the graphic design part, there wasn't so much space for me and the other members to play with. I think we both had experience in graphic design and we could have had more fun with that, but we didn't. We didn't have that space. I think that still exists. There isn't that much horizontality on that. I think it's something that needs to be worked on, because I think the plurality of the aesthetic is also important. But it's not there yet.

10. How would you describe the group dynamic after new members joined the community? How did it shift?

I only participated briefly, only in the very beginning, I met everybody. I wanted to be part but I didn't have responsibility, I didn't have anything to lose being in the process, because I wasn't there anymore. I could say anything I wanted but at the same time I didn't feel like I had something to lose. I didn't know what kind of weight my voice had, so I wasn't

that comfortable as well, because I was coming from being someone who was one of the initiators and at the same time I advocate horizontality. So I wanted more that others would participate and to give them a voice. So it's a bit awkward for me also because I knew I was going to leave so I didn't know what to build, you know. I feel like it's really hard, it takes a lot of time. Not hard, but it takes time to build something horizontally. Things develop organically and I don't think that the group fully embraces that, because there was also an expectation of delivering something. By delivering some things meaning that some things needed to be done and responsibilities were not necessarily assigned, but there was space for people to step up and take the responsibilities. So I feel that this space of taking responsibility instead of actually delivering comes with discomfort sometimes. Some people were expected to do something but they didn't. Some people took responsibilities but didn't deliver. I also think the [employee of the PZI] didn't know how to react to that. But all of these things are extremely important and they are necessary to happen. I don't know how it is right now, but I feel that the members are mature enough that they understood how to position themselves within the group. I'm not following the group so closely anymore, given my situation. So I don't know the stage that it is in. There was a strange feeling to me that sometimes I felt that... because it's a paid position, so there's also some responsibilities you know. There's a strange situation in which we are to be a group that works independently of the institution, but we are also paid from the institution, so we also have responsibilities over the institution and the payment that is received. I feel that sometimes people were taking this group more as a fun thing, rather than taking responsibility over some things. These are just my comments, because it's also important to understand the evolution of it. It's also very plausible, because what we are doing is very fun and necessary and the fun needs to be there. It shouldn't be something that's strict and boring, quite the opposite. It is something that's extremely complex. but it's important to be talked about.

11. How would you describe the practice of horizontality with the group? Do you want to add something?

I think talking. Voicing. It's very important. And being honest and transparent about everyone's expectations and desires. Also the thing about horizontality is that it's about self responsibility. If you say you're going to do something, you have to deliver. if you don't deliver you cause a very uncomfortable situation, because then you start losing trust and trust is something that needs to be cultivated. You need horizontality. Trust is something that is extremely needed in horizontality. Otherwise it doesn't exist.

Do you think the concept of horizontality works in this group?

I don't know. I cannot make a judgement on that because I don't know how it is right now. I know that horizontality is not something that you achieve, it's something you maintain. So it's a different idea. Horizontality is something you have to constantly work on for it to function in a healthy way. Hierarchy is something you identify and that's it, right? And then you have very defined responsibilities and consequences. Horizontality is something that needs to be constantly maintained and worked on for it to properly function. It's very organic. For me it is right, a very important exercise for everyone to do, because you learn a lot - not only about yourself but from others as well.

12. How did you experience the group's structure?

I feel that we could have had a better definition. I think that the [employee of the PZI] could have defined it better. I think they felt responsible for the group, but they also stepped back and let the group define it. I think that this created a space of uncertainty. It was hard for everyone to position themselves.

13. What were your expectations, goals when you joined in building the group?

I am very utopic sometimes. I'm quite rebellious, let's say. I tend to be an outcast all the time. So for me in this group, I saw it in the beginning as an embryo of a student union. A group of master students, extremely smart people that could create a student body that could have a political voice. So that we would sit down at the table with the heads of all the departments and we eventually would have a voice to be in the position of defining a structure and defining budget. I do believe it is necessary for every institution to have a

space to be criticised. I believe that a student body like that should be maintained and cultivated. The students are always at the bottom. They are the ones that everything works towards. I think that their voice should have a bigger weight on everything in the institution.

So do you feel that your expectations have changed over time?

They were not my expectations, they were my dreams or desires. I didn't expect it to be there so fast. I knew I wasn't gonna get there. It was what I wished for. It is slowly evolving. I don't know if it's going towards [becoming a student union]. I was reading our group chat and I saw someone bringing up an online conversation about student bodies, so I am really excited about it. I don't know what happened there, but I felt very excited that there was an online conversation. I think this is really cool.

14. Would you see other ways of organising the group?

I think that the group could give more space for experimentation. What do I mean by that? For example, the group could be open to rearrange itself every semester. "Let's define how we're going to work for the next semester - okay, I will take this role. Okay I will take that role. Okay, let's define the hierarchy for this next semester". Then work with the created set of rules and see how it goes. You know what I mean? Or you rotate responsibilities. I think there could be more experimentation in that sense.

15. What have been important learning moments for you by being an active member of this group?

[long pause] learning moments... I mean I learned a lot of small little things, how people work. I love watching and seeing how people work. I think it's something very beautiful.

Do you feel like you realised something or concluded something that you already knew?

I think for me it was more learning about how the institution works, how PZI works, how it's related to Wdka. I got to learn that some departments do not speak to each other at all, which is very very weird. They would just do whatever they think is best, there's no integration. For me it's super awkward. It's super awkward that they do not speak to

each other for introduction week. It's super awkward that it's not integrated into the introduction of Wdka. It's super awkward how the Wdka relate to PZI to something kind of 'out there', not really a part of. But it is. I learned that there's desire to do something different and there's potential and there is space for that. I understand that in the institution there's a lot of possibilities for things to be done, you just need to go and talk to the right person or have a specific idea, project in mind. I learned that sometimes it's just better to do and to provoke a reaction within the institution. I reinforced the understanding that physical space is extremely necessary, more than ever.

In terms of working together in the Archipelago community, the inner space?

What did I learn about it?

Yes.

I think what I mentioned - I learned little things, about horizontality and how things need to work. So horizontality is a constant learning curve. For example, this experiment of having a horizontal situation in which somebody has a hierarchy, how then this person needs to interact with the rest of the group. There needs to be very defined ways of relating. You have to set the boundaries very straight, very defined. Because if you leave space not discussed, you leave a lot of uncertainty. then people tend to safeguard themselves instead of trying something on top of that.

16. Do you think it's possible to maintain the practice of horizontality when there are differences in positions?

I think it is possible. I'd like to think that also, because I was in such a position in another group. I was a mentor, but also a participant at the same time. However it was important to me to always keep maintaining a safe space, a space where students could talk to me about whatever they want. I don't know if that space is being taken care of in the Archipelago group. I feel that the [employee of the PZI] might expect things from students that are not vocalised. I think that everybody understands the situation in a different way. So horizontality, communication is very very important. I think that perhaps having a moment where everybody understands that it's a moment where we're

gonna talk and vent everything that we want and it's gonna stay here, it's just for us to say everything that's not going well or whatever and we're not going to have problems with it. It is important to cultivate this space, where you can say clearly and without a problem what you think is not working well. I don't necessarily think it is there yet with this group.

17. Do you feel something could already be improved in this group?

Communication. I feel that students do not express everything that they want, they do not express disagreement. Being free to disagree is extremely important. I feel that disagreeing is not necessarily something positive, but it is important to exist. It is important to disagree and to be comfortable in creating arguments in a respectful way. I don't think it's there.

Thank you for your time.

Interview nr.6 with a member of Archipelago

Interviewed by Urte Baranauskaite, recorded in January, 2022.

1. Why did you decide to join Archipelago?

To put it simply, in my first year [of studies] there was so much going on with COVID that we were having a really hard time knowing what was what, who was where, we couldn't meet people. We didn't really know where we were situated as students within a department, within a school, within the university. Everything just felt really abstract. We knew this kind of world existed, peripheral to us of the rest of the Piet Zwart, but no one really knew any of the other people. I just thought it was important to start making those connections a little bit more and try to reintegrate MFA in particular with everything else, so that there's more collaboration that could potentially happen between people. Also, just from a social perspective, are people meeting other creative people and creative peers that were around them that weren't a million miles away, both literally physically and metaphorically in terms of what people were doing. There is so much overlap

between the [departments] that it makes sense to have those connections there that weren't really existing.

2. Did you have specific aims or goals when you first joined?

No, not particularly. It was just like let's see what we can do to create more of a bond between the MFA people and the other departments. And of course just within the other departments. I thought, oh, you know, that might be through sort of social activities, it might be through trying to organise inter-departmental collaborations from the university's perspective, rather than just student-led things. But I think from sort of a student-led perspective was where I was coming from. But without anything really specific in mind. I was thinking it's going to be a group of people, I didn't know how many, I didn't know who, from where. It was just relying on let's see what kind of group feel is.

3. What was your experience in terms of connecting with other students before this group?

I mean there wasn't really any. We knew twenty-something people within our building and obviously 13 or so new students that would come in in september. I'm not sure I have met anyone in another department properly. You know I think I maybe would email someone or bumped into someone, but that's pretty much the extent of it. Because there was nothing happening, there was no connection. Unless you were doing something in the workshops and someone was like 'oh, I'm also from Piet Zwart'. But that was so rare, because there were so many undergrad wdk students taking up space that you know, these kinds of things didn't really happen organically. Especially with the MFA being in a different building. You know I think that plays a part in it. For other Piet Zwart programmes it's different, because people are sharing a floor and sharing spaces. But ours is a distant little island.

4. What do you think has been the main impact of this group so far?

I think the Introduction Week went really well. That was really well organised as a way to get people to start making those connections that I was talking about wanting to make in the beginning. I think that was really important to let people know that other people

were there to organise things and put them into an environment where they can sit and chat with each other, get to know each other. Then people can decide for themselves 'hey, I want to talk to this person' or 'hey, maybe I should connect with someone from this department, because I'm really interested in this'. I think that did start to happen and then we had the whatsapp groups and telegram groups popped up and I think that's been positive. Since then it's been hard, you know. COVID regulations changed and we weren't really able to organise the kinds of activities, gatherings and events that I thought was going to be purposeful with what we were doing. I know there's been a lot of talk about the common area in Wijnhaven, but obviously for the MFA and for me this is kind of an abstract concept that we don't have much input on, because people don't use that space. Hopefully things change in the next few months, we can get back to kind of where we were before and maybe organise some things. I think maybe, this newspaper thing, if this comes off can be interesting. It's hard to put a pin on what the impact has been beyond the Intro Week.

5. How would you describe the group dynamics so far?

It's positive. It's friendly, but focused. People know what they are doing. People are concise with their ideas most of the time. People have different opinions on things as we've seen from meetings. But it's always resolved in a kind of 'ok, well let's just try doing something' kind of way. It was hard to do anything productive in the environment that we are in. I think that proactivity or a desire to be proactive has been positive about the meetings we've had.

Structure is maybe a difficult term. There's not much structure. It's fairly loose, but I think that's a good thing. If it became hierarchical then it would be problematic. There are people who are in the group longer from last year, they set it up. Obviously, they knew a bit more from the outset how things were working logistically. But I think everyone kind of got their own voice and opinion and it's all being heard on a level. One of the members might be at a slightly different position within the group and might say - yeah we can't really do that. But then students would say - maybe we should try this instead, as something that wouldn't be thought over from someone in that position. I

think we're all second year students and I think that having first years involved from the get go would be interesting, because those people are on the ground with new experience and not relying on a former one. Last year was complicated and weird and difficult because of COVID, but new students are experiencing their first year differently and the people who came in the following September will experience things differently again. That could be interesting in terms of structure. But I think it should remain non-hierarchical.

6. What were your expectations when you first joined the group?

I think as I said before, I was just expecting that we would be able to get people connected on a social level first and then hopefully more toward the working level where there could be some kind of collaboration between individuals and/ or departments. I think that started to happen a little bit and people are speaking with other departments, doing things in other departments and other people. But it's taunted by the position we've been put in. You know, socio-politically. That's regardless of what we're doing or first years doing. It's just, you know - the world.

7. Have your expectations changed since then until now?

Yes, because I can't expect that we're doing social things now. Even when we were organising movie night back in November-December, I was like maybe it's not the best time to be doing this right now. It's something I would love to have done at that point. So I'm not expecting at this immediate moment that we're going to do anything like that. The focus has changed a bit towards things like a newspaper, towards things like the common space that can be more long term planning then immediate short term thing.

8. How would you describe the practice of horizontality within the group so far?

I think it has been mostly good so far. Some people's voices are a bit louder than others, but I think it works as it is, just because we recognise the position that each other is in. You know, we are all peers on a level. It works like that.

9. Do you see any additional ways of organising the group?

I think within the group it's working as I would expect it to be. I'm not in a mind to change that drastically. I think there's always room for change in sort of managing these kinds of groups. So from the inside position it works, but thinking externally how we could work more in tandem or in conversation with those in the position to act on what we suggest. So, bringing this report to the dean for example and having those conversations with the people outside so that decisions that we make can be validated or at least seen.

10. What have been important learning moments for you by being an active member?

I think there are people doing things in a way that I wouldn't be used to. I worked in management before I moved here for two and a half years, sort of gallery management and working with the arts and the artists, with people who work in a very particular way. Now working with people who are interior architects, designers, people working through education, people like our manager who work as a staff in a school doing administrative work. It's been good for me to process things through those different kinds of perspectives and ways of working, ways of thinking through connecting students. Because I'm used to the fine arts school environment. I don't have a design school or education practice type of way of thinking. For example you and another member think very differently about how these things operate and what you want to do with it then someone like me or another member of the group.

11. Do you feel that there are things that could be improved in the group?

I think it could be a little bit more focused sometimes. It feels like we have a conversation three times before we kind of get to it. I think people are doing a lot of things and again that's partially to do with the outside world situation, where it's really hard to focus. I'm doing a thesis. I think other people are doing the same, plus trying to manage my studio practice, plus trying to manage my work, plus trying to manage doing this and organising other people and organising with other people. So really trying to nail down that focus a little bit more and really action things a little bit quicker would be better. But I also recognise these problems with doing things slightly being pushed into it too quickly

without much planning. So, making sure things are focused, but also that everyone knows what's happening, what's going on, what needs to be done.

12. Do you have goals for your participation in this group now that some time has passed?

I was in this from the beginning to organise events that would call people together. That's kind of impossible to do right now. I think maybe in a few weeks, a few months time we can start to think through this again and especially as we start to get towards the Graduation Show. Thinking how these things could parallel each other a little bit potentially and what can be done from the above to connect, join the dots a little bit, even if it's just socially. Like, drawing other Piet Zwart students to the MFA show, drawing them to the XPUB events. I think things like that would be good. But I think it starts on a social level from the beginning with things like intro week when people start to get to know each other on the ground level, before you try and force some kind of working relationship that doesn't necessarily work, just because someone says it might. So I would still like to organise more social bonds between things and I think the communal space can start that. It would be that collective point that people can come to. From an MFA perspective it's a bit like, people aren't going to go there because we have that space within our own building. We also have a garden in Karel Doormanhof which is kind of a collective point as well, without people having necessarily to go into the building. SO when the weather gets better, you can invite people to come and have lunch, come and do some kind of event. There's people willing to do things like that, that could be really progressive.

Thank you for your time.