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**Creative Communities of St. Petersburg
and Berlin: The Effects of Spatial
Embeddedness**

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Introduction

This paper aims to trace the influence that the spatial embeddedness of urban creative communities exerts upon the communicative and creative processes within and outside these communities. This involves identifying the relations that emerge between the locations of creative communities in physical and social spaces of the city. Social space is understood here as a stable structure of social relations, symbolic systems and artifacts that comes into existence as a result of communication practices that are realized in the framework of certain spatial patterns (Duncan 1959) and places are correspondingly considered as both the contexts for, and the results of, complex relations between “actions, conceptions and physical attributes” (Canter 1997). In my analysis, I shall focus on the microscale of the spatiality of creative labor and communication by considering the role of shared working and exhibiting spaces used for generating and discussing artworks in creative communities. I shall proceed from the assumption that the material contexts in which the activities of creative communities are embedded and the communicative and creative processes that develop in these contexts are interconnected. When comparing three creative communities of Berlin and St. Petersburg, I shall analyze such traits of work and exhibition places that community members use as accessibility, polyfunctionality and openness to outsiders, and assess the spatial profits that shared communication arenas provide for the members.

Creativity and spatiality

Social practices are always spatially patterned and subject to the powerful influence of the spatial forms they are embedded in (Urry 1995). This is also true for creative activities, embedded in and organized around the material contexts that the artists live and work in. It has been shown that creative ideas and products tend to “emerge and develop in complex, dynamic interaction between the creator and his or her environments” (Meusburger 2009) including spatial settings. The awareness of this relation between space, place and creativity has recently given rise to the so-called “spatial turn” in creativity studies. It has been argued that this approach enables the consideration of situational and contextual determinants of creative labor and provides deeper understanding of the interactional dimensions of creativity (Ibid). Indeed, shared place can provide a stimulating environment for creative professionals if it attracts and retains talented and motivated people, and thus becomes a platform for interaction, debate and cooperation, a place where participants can gain support and encouragement (Griswold et al. 2013). Shared space can also stimulate mutual learning (Simonton 2000; Wenger 1998, 2001) and the generation and transmission of tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1958, 1967; O’Connor 2004). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that creative professionals are often characterized by a kind of environmental sensitivity (Carlozzi et al. 1995),

i.e. they are highly responsive to environmental stimuli, including those associated with the spaces they are living and working in; and the symbolic meanings, memories and narratives ascribed to them.

As Bourdieu argues, social space is not identical to physical space but it seeks to be implemented in it with the highest degree of precision possible (Bourdieu 1985). Relating to the art world, this means that artists, curators, gallery owners, collectors and connoisseurs should strive to secure for themselves certain communication platforms such as lofts, galleries, museums and studios. These platforms have not only physical borders, but also symbolic ones, because their accessibility depends on the volumes of economic, social and especially cultural capital that the actors possess. Co-presence of the representatives of the art world in specific physical spaces enhances their collective identification and creates the “club-effect” that allows them to exclude those who do not have the appropriate knowledge and tastes, and who do not follow the lifestyles expected of members.

Physical spaces where communication and working processes of artistic communities are embedded can also be considered as resources, access to which determines the opportunities and limits of the unfolding exchange and creative pursuit of the artists. To use Bourdieu’s term (2000), creative communities possess different volumes of spatial benefits, or localization benefits, that are provided through vicinity of deficient and/or desirable agents, goods and services or, on the contrary, the possibility/power of being able to distance oneself from undesirable people and things. With regard to creative communities, spatial benefits can embrace the localization of working or exhibiting platforms of the communities in the historical center of the city, their close proximity to other creative groups and spaces (studios, lofts, museums, galleries, etc.), convenient transport accessibility and situation within walking distance of areas where target audiences live, work or spend their leisure time. Another type of spatial benefit covers the possibilities of the creative communities to accumulate financial, informational and reputational resources around the working or expositional platforms that they share.

The effects of spatial localization show not only at the microlevel of small artistic communities bound to shared communication platforms that sometimes turn into their creative milieus (Heßler and Zimmermann 2008). Creative professionals generally tend to seek for attractive and comfortable lifestyles which often brings them to bigger cities with their heterogeneity, unpredictability and toleration towards cultural diversity and makes them likely to reside or work in enclaves (Florida 2002). As a result, such mesostructures as creative/cultural quarters emerge: those are territories of the spatial concentration of creative industries where the resources necessary for the generation, dissemination and consumption of creative products including artworks are drawn to and accumulated in (Pratt 2004; Mommaas 2004). Finally, at the macrolevel, cities winning in the worldwide competition for creative professionals reorient their economies towards cultural production, i.e. allocating resources to innovation incentives and projects which make them creative fields (Scott 1999), or

creative cities (Landry 2000).

But does not creative labor presuppose the diversity of inspirations, ideas, learning opportunities and social contacts, all of which demands high levels of mobility among artists and other creative professionals (Toernqvist 2004)? And does the spatial dimension of art change in late modernity, with this increasing mobility of artists and their publics and the boom of information technologies that allow artists to perform complicated operations in creation and dissemination of artworks without ever moving away from their PCs or to communicate with colleagues located in other parts of the world? Does the increasing individualization of creative labor, and the development of project-oriented networks engaging artists from different national and regional backgrounds, lead to the inflation of place in its traditional meaning and to the emergence of new de-territorialized spaces (Harvey 1985) of interaction and creativity? In other words, do space and place still matter for creative professionals and their groups?

In this paper, I attempt to tackle this question by analyzing the role of common spatial localization for the communication patterns and working processes of collectives of artists that fall under the category of creative communities. Creative communities are understood here as relatively open and expressive groupings bonding creative professionals to regularly make, promote and discuss artworks in the course of joint and/or related material- and context-driven creative practices. By looking at the empirical data, I shall try to establish whether the feature of spatial embeddedness is still relevant for such communities. I shall only focus on the microlevel of this spatial dimension (shared working and exhibiting spaces) deliberately overlooking the bigger scales of creative quarters and creative cities.

Research data

To discover how the spatial embeddedness of artistic communities shapes the creative work and communication patterns of community members, below I shall turn to the materials of the field research conducted in 2011-2012 in St. Petersburg and in 2013 in Berlin. This empirical study was devoted to art communities of two European “cultural capitals” working in the format of visual contemporary art, in the context of their interrelations with other representatives of the art world, broader publics and urban space. In accordance with the strategy of multiple case-studies [Yin 2009], four research cases were selected in Petersburg and two – in Berlin. Those were communities of different scale, structure, integration grounds, ideological orientation, professional background, forms of spatial embeddedness and artistic style. In the course of data collection, a wide range of field research techniques were applied such as in-depth interviews, participant observation and qualitative analysis of texts (Internet publications, forums and blogs connected with the creative work of our informants). To provide better comparability, in this paper I shall focus on three

out of the six communities investigated - the members of these communities jointly occupy working studios that are also sometimes used as exhibition platforms and – in one case – as domiciles for guest artists.

Nepokoryonnye 17, St. Petersburg

“Nepokoryonnye 17” (The Unsubdued 17) is a networked structure of nearly a dozen members with a stable core constituted by the founders and the old-timers of the studio and changeable periphery. It unites artists working in various genres and styles including easel painting and graphic arts, sculptural arts, video art, installations, and design. The community was established in 2007 by three graduates of Alexander von Stieglitz State Art and Industry Academy. Although the sudden availability of a spacious technical floor of an unused business center gave an impetus to the formation of the community, it was the comradeship of fellow students and countrymen that constituted the core of the association. Today young, but often already quite successful, artists from “Nepokoryonnye” are connected by pragmatic interests (e.g. the collective promotion of their creative products) and more infrequently – friendships. The community members demonstrate strong orientation towards symbolic success and professional recognition both in Saint Petersburg and beyond: in Moscow and internationally. Therefore, they are also highly aware of the unwritten institutional rules and expectations regulating interactions on these art markets.

The relevance of localization space for the community is reflected even in its name: “Nepokoryonnye” is named after the avenue where the artists work, but this name is also saturated with further connotations implying the noncommercial format of the community, pioneering experiments of its members in creative self-expression, and their break from professional traditions and conservative visual cannons.

The studio cannot boast a convenient location: it is situated a long way from traffic centers and the areas of creative spaces concentration – in a big business center in a peripheral district of St. Petersburg, in a monotonous industrial zone. Both the artists (who have to finish working early to get out of the remote area) and their publics complain of the inconvenient placement of the studio isolated from other creative spots. Because “Nepokoryonnye” are hardly involved in community-based art or public art projects, they do not interest the locals or the workers of nearby enterprises. Thus the artists rely on the enthusiasm of motivated and educated visitors from other city districts. Formerly, in the first years after “Nepokoryonnye” had been established, the lack of spatial benefits was partly compensated by the overall deficiency of creative spaces in St. Petersburg which made interested publics sacrifice their time and still come to “Nepokoryonnye” for exhibitions and art festivals. However, with the current rapid development of creative initiatives and spaces, “Nepokoryonnye” have been steadily losing their leading positions as the platform for the public presentation of art-objects.

Historically, “Nepokoryonnye” was intended to become a meeting point for creative youth – an incubator of young and promising artists that would provide them with productive, mutually enriching communication and the opportunities for public presentation and promotion of their artworks. Therefore gradual replacement of residents was declared the basic principle of the studio. But the field data shows that the actual composition of the community has been rather stable, with the leading actors, experienced and widely recognized artists, holding their ateliers for years. Having once served as a cradle for beginner artists, the studio now provides more common spatial benefits - the major of them being the possibility to spread the word about interesting projects, residencies and events in the art world within the community as well as to strike up useful acquaintances and attract the attention of qualified curators due to the spatial proximity of the group: *“If some person comes by – say, a prominent curator or gallery owner – it is very convenient for everybody that he would not drop in only at the atelier occupied by the artist he comes to visit, but he would rather call on all ateliers. And there are chances that he would note somebody else too”*¹.

Another spatial benefit for community members is the possibility to work on large-scale art objects that the spaciousness of the studio provides. This is what one of our interviewees, a sculptor who has recently left “Nepokoryonnye”, seems to especially miss about his membership: *“I had to bring part of my works back here because they simply do not fit anywhere. This piece of mine would not even go through the doorway. So I keep working on it here”*².

The “open studio Nepokoryonnye” (which is how the space is officially described by the members) can be divided into working and exhibition zones. The latter is only rarely used by community members to organize solo-exhibitions or joint projects; instead it is usually put at the disposal of outer actors such as beginner artists and photographers some of whom later come to constitute the periphery of the community’s communication network. Simultaneously, community members share the working space where their creative and everyday practices unfold; however, each artist occupies a separate room and independently designs this space - thus marking it as symbolically mastered and appropriated. Each of the rooms is locked, and although the curator and some older community members keep spare keys, artists still tend to perceive and describe their rooms as private rather than generally accessible. The artists jointly use only the reception room and the roof where parties sometimes take place.

¹ Artist, “Nepokoryonnye”, male, born 1981, one of the founders and informal leaders of the community.

² Artist and sculptor, male, born 1984, former member of “Nepokoryonnye”.



Fig. 1. “Nepokoryonnye”: one of the personal ateliers

“Nepokoryonnye” appreciate the possibility to get closeted from the distractions of the outside world in their rooms to concentrate on the creative process. They legitimize this choice of spatial organization by referring to the shared biographical experience of studying in the State Art and Industry Academy. For instance, one of the informal leaders of the community discontentedly recalls his forced proximity to fellow students in workflow which, as he believes, caused morbid competition and plagiarism: *“Well, we had a wild competition back then in Mukha³: you would take a canvas sized a meter by a meter and the next day some neighbor would make 1.2 meter by 1.2 meter. That’s because last time he had chosen 70 centimeters by 70 centimeters but later saw that you had a bigger canvas. And that’s a kind of wild fog where everybody seeks to excel and beat the others”⁴.*

Although the studios of “Nepokoryonnye” are used differently both as creative interaction platforms and spaces of informal friendly communication, negotiations with curators and gallery owners, and encounters with broader publics the functional zoning of the space can nevertheless be described as rather rigid and stable: working processes are necessarily accommodated in the artists’ rooms, whereas collective meetings of community members and reception of guests take place in the “front room”; parties are often organized on the roof and a special space on a lower floor is allotted for exhibitions.

³ Informal name of Saint Petersburg State Art and Industry Academy, previously known as Vera Mukhina Higher School of Art and Design.

⁴ Artist, “Nepokoryonnye”, male, born 1981, one of the founders and informal leaders of the community.



Fig. 2. “Nepokoryonnye”: front room

Being promoted as an open studio, in reality the space of “Nepokoryonnye” is not fully accessible for the outsiders: to enter the place outside working hours, the visitors have to arrange a meeting with the curator or one of the artists well in advance. Another entrance barrier is the reception desk of the business center where the studio is located. It is also worth mentioning that casual visitors are rarely accepted in “Nepokoryonnye” because, in order to find the studio “hidden” in an outlying industrial district of the city, one has to be well-informed and prepared.

Kukhnya, St. Petersburg

At the time of our research, the young art group “Kukhnya” (The Kitchen) united six participants connected by friendships and shared educational and sociocultural background. Community members basically create monumental paintings and installations; but some of them also go into graphic arts, sculpture, mosaics and collages. As a novice but rather ambitious group, “Kukhnya” demonstrates good awareness of the norms and values that constitute the institutional structures of contemporary art: the participants are actively involved in networking with other representatives of the art world, strategically choose legitimate exhibition platforms and actively work on their “image”.

The members of the community were recruited through informal networks with the active participation of the current community leader who originally planned to start a gallery rather than an artistic atelier: *“In the beginning I had a gallery here. The whole space (shows around) was a gallery space. But then I grew a bit tired of this story because I am more of an artist than an art dealer. And I made a studio here and I left an exhibition space there”*⁵. The selection was made based on acquaintanceship and friendships as

⁵ Artist, “Kukhnya”, male, born 1980, leader of the community.

well as communality of artistic tastes and readiness to work hard both individually and collectively. However, interestingly, the number of community members was determined predominantly by the capacity of the working space: *“We simply chose the zone and divided it into six mirror squares, or sectors. It was simply hard to squeeze in more people”*⁶.

The name “Kukhnya” symbolically connects the community with the notions of space and place – the space of informal communication of like-minded people, the place where arts are created (the association with the image of “Soul Kitchen” first used by American rock band “The Doors” is probably no mere chance too). Simultaneously, this name offers the audiences the prospects of peeping in on the know-how of creative labor and witnessing aspects of the creative process that usually seem to be enveloped in mystery and even sacred.

The artists from “Kukhnya” consider the location of their studio in the historical center of St. Petersburg in Belinskogo Street to be one of their major strategic advantages. Indeed, the studio can be reached easily from several museums, galleries exhibiting contemporary art, fashionable bookstores and debating clubs, arthouse cinemas, coworking spaces and other creative spaces that attract young educated people taking a great interest in everything new and experimental. Moreover, the house in Belinskogo Street where “Kukhnya” is situated also shelters a movie club showing basically classic and independent films, a drama group, a ballet school, a show room and several consumer spaces providing a wide range of socializing and entertainment offers. This turns the house into a place of attraction for broader publics who happen to wander from one establishment to another and simultaneously provides ample opportunities for the creative professionals to cooperate, initiate interdisciplinary projects, search for new forms of artistic expression. The founder of the studio clearly sees it as a meeting point for young artists, other creative professionals and connoisseurs, a discursive platform and a space of self-realization: *“Well, I am trying to fill this niche, provide what is lacking – a place for the artists and other creative thinkers to mess around. After all, there is usually a more pretentious atmosphere in a gallery which is a completely different story, but here young people can just come and drink something and do something else”*⁷.

Importantly, the spacious premises of the studio are clearly comprehended by the artists as a resource for less restrained and more far-reaching creative labor: *“This provided me with a working place, with a working space, a big space which is very important for an artist... Formerly, I worked in a small vault, in a tiny room. But when you work in a small place you have small works... So the scale matches the space... I have started drawing really big things here”*⁸. They also tend to strategically use other benefits that spatial proximity brings along such as the opportunity to secure and accumulate useful

⁶ Artist, Kitchen, male, born 1982.

⁷ Artist, “Kukhnya”, male, born 1980, leader of the community.

⁸ Artist, “Kukhnya”, male, born 1987.

information about the rules and traditions of the art world and to share promising contacts. Community members have introduced a rule regulating their interactions with curators and gallery owners: the resident who invites a prominent guest is obliged to demonstrate the works of other artists to the visitor and to introduce him/her to other community representatives present in the atelier. The communicative opportunities provided by this regulation are seen as one of the key advantages of collective work. Meanwhile, the violation of this rule arouses indignation among community members and runs into negative sanctions.

The space of the studio is divided into three functional segments: one of them is still used as a gallery where contemporary artists meet their publics; another area is the working space of the artists and finally the third one makes a storeroom. Thus, like “Nepokoryonnye”, the artists of “Kukhnya” have a shared working space available, but in this case it is a single room where working places are allocated just conventionally without any baffles or barriers between them. The only exception is the working place of one of the members who is attempting to gain independence and split from the community. Correspondingly, his workplace is symbolically and visually cut off out from the otherwise undivided working zone (wooden dais, loads of trunks and cases). Such symbolic barriers irritate the majority of community members who see them as a blatant violation of their communal norms: *“In principle it is a mere formality, but this is distressing for everyone. That is where a certain internal conflict originates from. It is not that the conflict is too heated but still there are some tensions because of that. It would seem a trifle, but the person attempts to localize”*⁹.



Fig. 3. Working area of “Kukhnya”

⁹ Artist, Kitchen, male, born 1980, leader of the community.

Generally, such spatial integrity of the community obviously increases the transparency of creative labor and promotes constant interaction of the artists about everyday issues and professional tasks. High intensity of emotionally demanding contacts and constant access to each other's artworks is sometimes fraught with potential conflicts - which makes community members compare their studio to a *communal apartment*. However, when successful, the regular encounters of the artists generate numerous practices of mutual commenting and exchanging useful hints as well as regular mutual assistance of the artists and even their bodily coordination. The openness and accessibility of the studio and the lack of communication barriers constitute a core value for the community members": *"We have a common space that we initially planned to divide by walls, to add some partitions. But then we decided we should not do that. And in my eyes, it was a sound decision. We have left it as open as possible"*¹⁰.

Interestingly, when reflecting about the effects of spatial proximity in collective creative labor, the artists from "Kukhnya" refer to shared memories about learning in the Art and Industry Academy exactly as their peers from "Nepokoryonnye" do. But in their case, the recollections are used to legitimize the good practices of the artists' co-presence in the studio in the course of creative activities: *"We have a huge experience of joint work gleaned in "Mukha". Why is that? Because we often shared studios back then where we worked together just like now. <...> That is how it used to be organized: you would come with a sketch, you would have a meeting with your teacher. And we would discuss all sketches among ourselves first and with the teacher afterwards. And very often this initial discussion turned out the most productive one. How do we therefore perform here? Of course nobody would impose themselves on the others. We try not to disturb each other. But if I have my doubts I shall certainly call the guys and say: "Look, give me a piece of advice". This does not necessarily mean that I shall follow. I shall rather consider one-two-three hints and weigh the pros and cons. But this is what I really appreciate in our situation"*¹¹.

The only space in "Kukhnya" that is possessed of functional distinctness is the gallery, which stands empty when no exhibitions are organized. On the contrary, in spite of the minimal art of material scenery, or probably thanks to it, the working zone of the studio can be easily transformed into a platform for informal communication and leisure whereas the storeroom is also widely used as a smoking-room and a meeting room.

¹⁰ Artist, Kitchen, male, born 1982.

¹¹ Artist, Kitchen, male, born 1980, leader of the community.



Fig. 4. The storeroom/smoking-room/meeting room of Kukhnya”

As to the openness of the space to the outsiders, “Kukhnya” is highly accessible for expected and casual visitors. The doors of the studio are rarely locked and any newcomer is allowed to enter, ask questions, see the residents’ artworks and take pictures. On days when there are exhibitions, the working space is separated from the display just symbolically – by black curtains, which are always opened so that the spectators can freely look into the working zone and watch the creative process.

KUNSTrePUBLIK, Berlin

“KUNSTrePUBLIK” (rePUBLIC of ARTS) is an art-group that unites five individual artists having a specific interest in urban space and doing site-specific community-based projects. It was established back in 2006 in Berlin to start a collective project “Skulpturenpark” (Sculpture Park) aimed at the creative reframing of a spot of wasteland in the very center of city, where the infamous Wall once stood. However, the community members also worked collectively outside the park – both as artists, curators and lecturers – creating installations, organizing performances and conducting workshops in Germany and abroad. After the territory of Skulpturenpark, which belonged to over 60 different private owners, was claimed by them to start mass construction, the group found itself disengaged and confused. Two community members are currently inactive, although they still keep in touch with the rest of the group and occasionally participate in joint artistic activities (or declare that they plan to do so). Meanwhile, three other members established the Center for Arts and Urbanistics (Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik, or ZKU for short) in one of the city districts, Berlin Moabit, in 2012. The ZKU is a venue for artistic residences that gives a home to German and foreign artists working in and with urban spaces. By getting to know each other and initiating joint projects, such artists constitute the periphery of the artistic network developing around

“KUNSTrePUBLIK”.

The name of the community represents it as a spatially embedded unity of artists prioritizing work with and responses from their publics. However, the group sometimes used to work under the name of “Skulpturenpark” which was even more spatially bonded. This fully reflected the complex changeable identity of the community: *“...what is interesting for me in this group is the way we **handled** our identity, and it has always been strategically. Yeah, so in the negotiations with the investors they never heard the name of Skulpturenpark whereas for the city, the Kunstwerk and Biennales in has always been the Skulpturenpark. For teaching, or during workshops abroad, we used the title of KUNSTrePUBLIK. So that was just an instrumental thing: how you would present yourself and present your project, what angle of the project you would present”¹².*

The origins of the community lie in the spatial proximity of the founding artists who rented neighboring studios and the closeness of those to the wasteland that was soon contemplated to become symbolically appropriated and reinterpreted by the artists, thus turning it into the shared working and exhibiting space of the community and simultaneously their major art object. However, the affinity between artists in their creative agendas and aspirations also made an important condition of community development: *“[The place] was so wild, surrounded by these innumerable buildings in the middle of downtown. I mean it was really wild. If you imagine such a spot of wasteland in the middle of some other big city, say, in the US – it is just impossible! So it was the beginning and we were all there and we set up a talk about it and pretty instantly all of our ideas were on the same page”¹³.*

Thus, unlike the creative communities of St. Petersburg, “KUNSTrePUBLIK” found its major spatial benefit in being part of the urban space to be creatively reconsidered and reshaped. Interestingly, the community never sought to be localized in one of the areas popular among fashionable artists and their target audiences. Instead of following their publics, “KUNSTrePUBLIK” would bring the publics to the once empty and tenantless land by organizing exhibitions on the spot and even moving part of Berlin Biennale to the Skulpturenpark. Perhaps one of the reasons for the artists not to strive for proximity with other creative groups and spaces was their awareness of the side-effects of spatially concentrated cultural production such as gentrification. Community members personally experienced the consequences of gentrification too: they had to move out of their studios and search for other accommodation options but soon faced the problems of drastic price increases again: *“...at Prenzlauer Berg, it’s really, really crazy how far this quarter has turned from once a really experimental area into a pretty expensive and more and more boring part of town. The speed of this development – that’s crazy! I think Berlin could do much better”¹⁴.*

¹² Artist, “KUNSTrePUBLIK”, male, born 1973.

¹³ Artist, “KUNSTrePUBLIK”, male, born 1973.

¹⁴ Artist, “KUNSTrePUBLIK”, male, born 1974, one of the co-founders of the ZKU.

It is not surprising that having benefited from spatial proximity in the early stages of community formation and development, the artists from “KUNSTrePUBLIK” counted on the effects of spatial embeddedness again when they established a new international artistic residency in Berlin Moabit in a roomy old storehouse. The ZKU is intended to contribute to the diverse art market of the city, promote experience and knowledge exchange and stimulate new individual and collective projects by bringing together creative professionals from around the globe. However, this recent initiative does not always work smoothly: many residents would complain about the insufficient intensity of communication within the ZKU – further complicated by the rotation of residents who would only come for several months and the lack of overlap in the guests’ periods of stay. The difference in the residents’ plans and ambitions, as well as their diverse cultural backgrounds and working habits, also creates an obstacle for the emergence of inclusive and insightful communication patterns in the Center.

Another spatial constraint is that the guest artists have to work in the rooms where they reside. The small size of the rooms and imperfect air ventilation system limits the artists’ possibilities of working with large-scale art objects and oils which reduces their creative activities to conceptual search, project planning, drawing sketches, computer design, etc.

The residency is divided into two major zones that are marked on ZKU premises plans as common space and studio apartments. In fact, there is also the third type of space constituted by the offices of ZKU employees. Common space is a roomy hall with a high ceiling that is used as an exhibition space and also accommodates various lectures and master classes. Below several semi-basement premises are located that are used as storerooms and utility rooms.

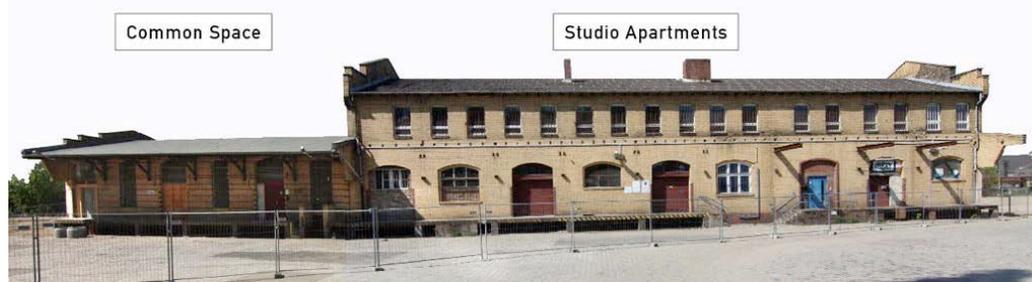


Fig. 5. ZKU building, photo from the Center’s website¹⁵

The ateliers of the residents are situated in the living quarters, which occupy parts of the ground floor and the first floor. These rooms are considered as private spaces of the artists: other residents are not allowed inside without explicit permission from the owners. However, some interviewees believe that such privacy of the ateliers significantly reduces the creative potential of artistic communication within the ZKU. To overcome this symbolic isolation, they

¹⁵ <http://www.zku-berlin.org/>

intentionally keep the doors of their rooms open – thus signaling their neighbors that they are currently open for intercourse.

In fact, the kitchen remains the only communal space of the residency where artists encounter and talk. As one of the founders of the ZKU emphasizes, “[t]here are all those short moments of relaxation when you eat and then you have a more relaxed talking than when you are in a business setting. So it gives a different attitude, nah?.. Say, there is a very good artist and you would like to professionally work with him but he makes noise in the morning and leaves rubbish in the kitchen, so you would probably say: “No, I don’t work with him!”. So it can be both sides. But maybe they get to know each other better when they share the space. In the ZKU, they share the kitchen, it’s not like a common sleeping dorm, but they have the common space when they **have** to meet if they are hungry. They don’t have the possibility to cook in their own rooms, well, maybe a little bit if they have some equipment but otherwise not. This was also a decision to create this kitchen as a social kind of space”.¹⁶



Fig. 6. Kitchen of the ZKU

Indeed, both the employees and the visiting artists describe the kitchen as the only generally accessible space of the ZKU, its symbolic center, the meeting place for current and former residents – the place where acquaintances are made and maintained and joint projects are generated. Regular common dinners, organized every Thursday and involving all artists and their friends, also take place in the kitchen.

The functional purposes of the majority of premises in the ZKU are rather stable; but the kitchen again makes an exception here. It is easily transformed into a kind of seminar room where artists present their former and future projects among themselves. This makes the discussions among the group less official and more intimate than in bigger events taking place in a special

¹⁶ Artist, “KUNSTrePUBLIK”, male, born 1972, one of the co-founders of the ZKU.

conference room located in the left part of the building. The transformative potential of the kitchen is increased through the usage of folding furniture that can be quickly removed when appropriate. Another exception is the manifold use of some housekeeping areas which often results from the residents' spatial tactics aimed at adapting the inconvenient old building – originally not designed for habitation (e.g. putting linen out to stair railings to dry).

Although officially described as an open center aimed at local communities and broader publics, the ZKU is not really accessible for outsiders. It is practically impossible to enter the building without earlier arrangement with the employees or residents, except on the days of exhibitions and other artistic events. However, even then the visitors can only see the common space whereas the studio apartments and offices remain closed for them. This pattern of spatial organization reflects the state of the Center's communication with the neighborhood which is currently almost nonexistent, despite the ambitions of the founders to grow in a community-based and participatory way.

Conclusions: spatial embeddedness as a factor of communication and creative labor patterns within the communities

Our empirical data clearly show that, even under the current conditions of ever globalizing world with its declared de-terrorization and inflation of place, spatial proximity of artists, their ability to be involved in face-to-face interactions about the art world and their artworks are subjectively highly appreciated by contemporary artists and their communities. The interviewees are emotionally attached to the working and exhibiting places they share, or used to share; they describe them with liking and nostalgia.

Moreover, shared spaces and places often make catalysts of creativity and premises of community identity-making. Symbolically appropriated homelike working places shared by community members provide favorable settings for creativity by allowing the artists to relax in habitual cozy locations and concentrate on more challenging issues of artistic pursuit. Importantly, they can also trigger the recollections of earlier productive communication between community members and thus encourage further communication of the artists concerning the creation and promotion of artworks and sometimes even lead to the development of new collective projects.

The creative communities under study enjoy the spatial benefits that their working and exhibiting spaces provide and are very reflexive about those spatial resources that are lacking. However, these benefits are sometimes understood differently in two cities: in Petersburg, location in the historical center and closeness to other creative spaces and place takes on crucial significance, whereas in the city of Berlin which is rapidly changing under the pressures of neoliberal economy, centrality turns into an unattainable luxury and the concentration of creative professionals is often seen by the artists as a

precursor to gentrification.

The spatial organization of studios and the content and shape of the communication and creative processes that unfold in these spatial settings are often mutually generating and co-evolving. For instance, in studios where ateliers are separated and privatized, e.g. in “Nepokoryonnye” and ZKU, communication about the creation and dissemination of artworks is less likely to emerge and joint projects are rarely developed. On the contrary, the general accessibility of working space shared by all community members (like in “Kukhnya”) stimulates face-to-face interaction of the artists, provides better opportunities for mutual learning and more effective transmission of dispositional tacit knowledge that can be acquired only through experience and imitation. This knowledge includes methods for preparing canvases and stretchers, usage of various brushes and palette knives, choice of palettes, arrangement of different objects in space, etc. Moreover, this accessibility sometimes leads to the drift of ideas and plots within the community, although this is not necessarily noticeable for the artists.

Polyfunctionality of spaces where creative communities are localized makes an important way of deriving maximal benefits from material settings but simultaneously it is a relevant marker of the communities’ flexibility and openness to change. Finally, the openness of the communities’ working and exhibition spaces to outsiders often mirrors the extent to which they are oriented towards communication with neighborhoods and other broad publics.

The stories of two Petersburg communities show that artists brought together by shared or related educational and sociocultural background and similar creative formats, genres, styles, political attitudes tend to create more stable common communication platforms. In both cases, founders of the studios invited other artists to join if the latter belonged to the same networks and therefore were very likely to find themselves “on the same page”. The logic of establishment of “KUNSTrePUBLIK” was inverse: here it was the spatial proximity of the artists that triggered the formation of the artistic collective. However, the generational and educational community of the artists, as well as their shared interests and preferences in the field of contemporary art, provided important favorable conditions for further development of “KUNSTrePUBLIK”. On the contrary, the ZKU, the major brainchild of “KUNSTrePUBLIK”, is currently failing to develop into an integrated expressive community of practice. The spatial proximity of artists is outbalanced here by such factors as cultural diversity of the members and their high level of rotation. This clearly shows that shared spatial localization makes an important but insufficient condition for community-making. It can only work if the artists are close socially, not just physically, i.e. if they share experiences, memories, cultural backgrounds, ambitions and tastes – it is only in this case that proximity of creative professionals gives rise to regular interaction and leads to the formation and reproduction of collective identity.

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