

THE CODISCO READER

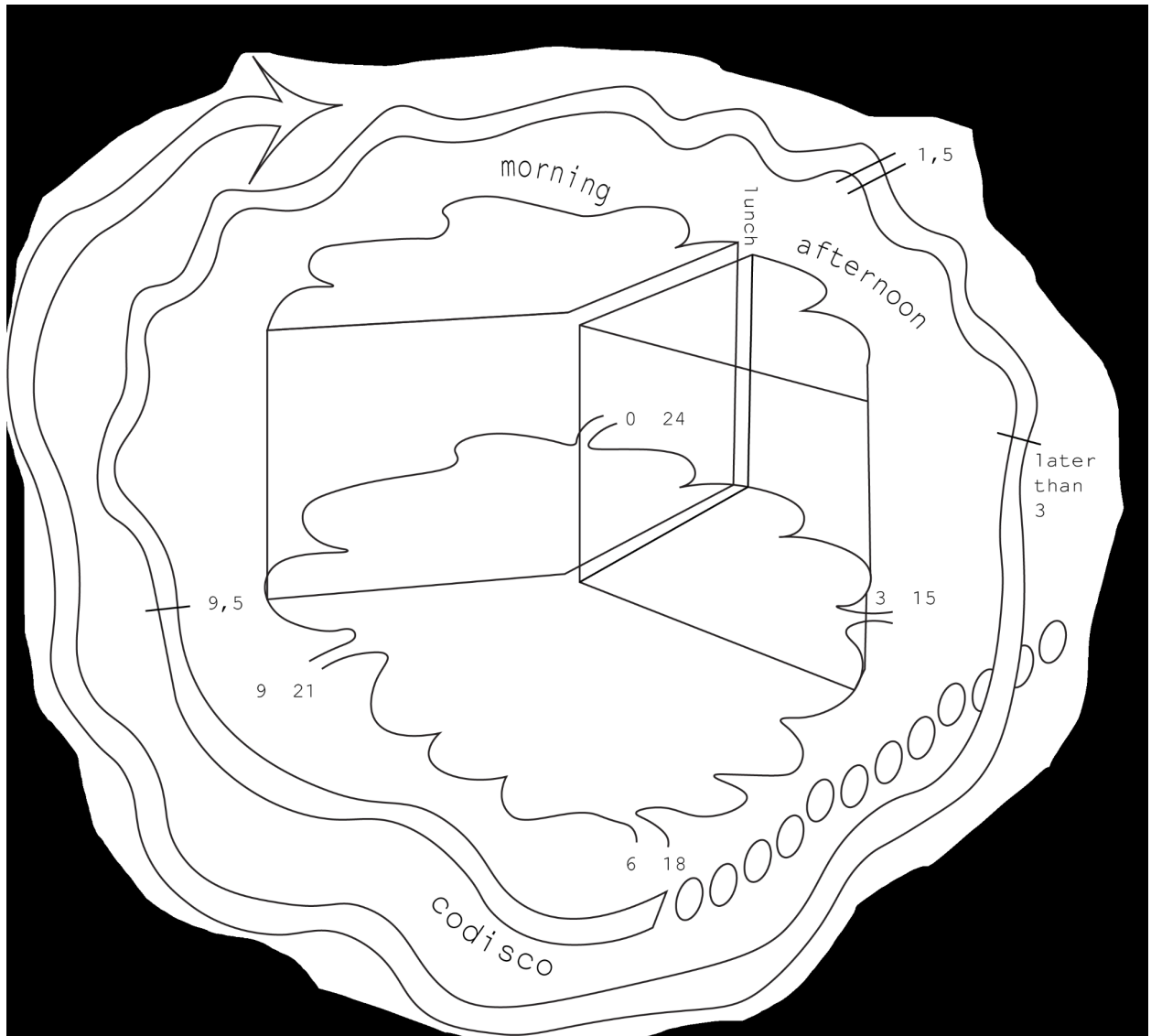


image: May Abnet

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DISCLAIMER

The story of Codisco runs over several years, is meandering, and involves a multitude of people, who would each tell Codisco's story differently. Anybody who engages with Codisco will inevitably contribute to her story and to re-telling her stories. With Codisco we support the practice of multi-storytelling - allowing a multitude of stories to co-exist - as opposed to imposing one narrative that everybody has to subscribe to. This reader is in itself the result of multiple voices that have contributed to the practice and the story of Codisco since 2017.

We hope that Codisco's story may grow with and through you, all the while taking care of some of the basic pedagogical intentions and principles that inform Codisco's practice.

HISTORIES AND HERSTORIES OF CODISCO

Codisco was initiated by [SPIN](#) following a series of group experiments on the theme of co-learning, as a part of the [SPIN OFF](#) series. SPIN is an independent support and research platform for artistic practice, currently carried by Hans Bryssinck, Kate McIntosh, Diederik Peeters, Laura Deschepper and Sarah Parolin. SPIN is a Brussels organisation, with collaborators also active in Rotterdam, Berlin and Mexico City.

The co-learn days : November 2017, November 2018, July 2019

In 2017 Hans Bryssinck & Kate McIntosh organised a weekend of self-education and knowledge exchange about different ways that groups collectively develop & sustain action-ideas. This first experience sparked SPIN's interest to further explore what collective learning could look like. In 2018 Hans Bryssinck invited Heike Langsdorf and Erika Sprey to co-organise a co-learning day around the question: how to develop better practices in taking decisions as a group? In 2019 the three of them organised another co-learning day, this time around the question: how to deal with real dilemma?

The co-learn research trajectory : 2019 - 2020

Within SPIN grew the desire to deepen these experiences with co-learning. SPIN decided to turn it into a longer research trajectory. For this trajectory several people belonging to different research groups were invited, all of them sharing an interest in experimenting with alternative ways to learn, to produce and to share knowledge. For an extensive list of who was involved see [credits](#).

To make this research economically viable, SPIN decided to look for funding. Because it concerned a transversal research that would be operating at the intersections of several fields, SPIN decided to look for funding outside the arts and wrote an application for Innoviris, a Brussels based fund

for social innovation. Hans Bryssinck, Anna Czapski and Laura Deschepper made good use of their time in the first months of the pandemic, to conceptualized and plan this larger research trajectory. They clarified their intentions in relation to learning and co-learning in particular, they explored their inspirations and some theoretical foundations, and imagined a meeting format for putting their ideas into practice.

In this phase they came up with the name Codisco; « co » evoking the idea of knowledge as a common, « disco » meaning « I am learning » in Latin and it's also a nod to joyful dancing as a part of popular culture. In other words: learning as a celebration of the commons.

Unfortunately Innoviris decided not to fund the research.

Codisco #1 #2 #3 : October, November, December 2020

There was no money, but it felt like they had been doing the groundwork (research, reading, reflecting, developing ideas), that was now ready to be activated and transformed into concrete realities. So in the fall of 2020 Anna, Hans and Laura organised 3 different co-learning days, that were now called Codisco days. #1 took place in radical_house, #2 and #3 took on a hybrid form: some people were at radical_house, while others took part online.

To facilitate these meetings, they decided to use Open Space Technology (OST). Typically, in an Open Space meeting, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. Thus, it helps to organise the available time and space in a structured yet extremely open way. It is based on set of principles and concrete tools: the marketplace, the breakout rooms, the reports, the news of the day.... For more information on OST see [documentation](#). The effect of OST is that it disrupts hierarchies and maximizes agency of the participants. However, because OST is very much designed to facilitate meetings where people predominantly interact verbally, the technology needed to be tweaked, in order to include the possibility of practicing together.

Each Codisco day, they started the day together by compiling responses to this central question: “What do you desire to learn and do together?” The different responses to this question determined the different sessions and the agenda of the day. Some folks proposed activities, others simply participated in the activities.

During these 3 Codisco days, Anna, Hans and Laura made sure that there were traces of all the different sessions. This had several reasons. OST puts emphasis on “reporting” as a way to circulate the material of breakout rooms (separate sessions) with the entire group. Next to that the pandemic forced us to deal with absence more often, so documenting/ tracing/ reporting was a way to keep people who had not been able to attend in the loop. And lastly, Hans had been studying and exploring narrative practices, a field of practice in which documentation is used to strengthen local knowledge, local narratives and to build connections between different communities and their respective narratives.

Throughout these 3 Codisco days, several people articulated it's strength and potential:

- that there is no hierarchy in knowledge
- that we are not just sharing knowledge or know-how, but that we are sharing the support for practicing freedom
- that every subject or practice that comes into the space is the right thing at that moment
- that OST allows what is important for one person to maybe also work for others
- that there is a common interest in doing and reflecting and in going back and forward

But if Codisco was to continue into the future, there were also aspects that needed extra attention:

- how to go beyond being a peer group and to engage with more and with different people?
- how to deal with the openness of the framework?
- how to invite, what to invite to, how to communicate, how to activate, how to host interest?

The invention of foster parents

By the end of 2020 Anna, Hans and Laura, who had been initiating and coordinating the research trajectory, needed to take a step back and invited other people from the research group to pick up the stick. At this stage the idea of foster parents was introduced. While Anna, Hans and Laura were considered the parents, new people could enter and become foster parents. This practice of foster parenting opened the possibility for foster parents to foster Codisco in yet unknown times and spaces.

Codisco #4 #5 #6 : April, June and July 2021

Within the context of the research project House of Practices, Heike Langsdorf, Alice Ciresola and Simone Basani were investing in maintenance as caretaking of already existing practices. They thought Codisco needed maintenance and thus offered to become the first foster parents. Heike and Simone had already taken part in previous Codisco days, but Alice was absolutely new to its structure and working. The parents had given them a first basic version of the Codisco Reader and they used that as a basis. The aim was to take Codisco further, by using and adapting the existing Codisco protocol/s, first for themselves and then possibly for other people.

The first step of the three foster-parents was to gently widen the list of contacts who would receive the invitation for the up-coming Codisco days, starting with adding people of their diverse circles of whom they could think of being interested, carefully estimating whether an invitation could actually be welcomed.

They also made some adjustments to the existing facilitation protocols, and the way Open Space Technology was applied. They understood that having a completely open structure with a blank agenda for the day might make people feel intimidated. For this reason, they gradually opened it up by involving people step by step in a process that was afterwards called 'light curation'.

At first, they contacted people who participated in the previous Codisco editions asking if and how they wanted to participate. The agenda (see a sample of an open agenda in [documentation](#)) started to be filled in. Secondly, they contacted and shared the partially filled in agenda with some other people close to them who would be happy to join by proposing an activity or joining one (by putting their names among the attendees). These people were chosen for their interest in collaborative practices and informal learning environments. They wanted people ready to “share” a practice or a formal/informal knowledge and not to “teach”. They looked for a variety of different people in order to make the “offer” and the “demand” of activities as diverse as possible. Eventually, they published the agenda on social media, for everyone to contribute.

A great emphasis, especially in the personalized and informal invitation email, was put on the fact that to ‘contribute’ to Codisco would not necessarily mean to propose something to share, but also to have an idea, a request for someone else to share something. The expression of a need, the need of getting to know/learn/be informed about something, was as valuable as the intention of sharing knowledge. This was a very decisive step to be taken in order to honor the aim of re-defining the paradigm “teacher/active/knowledge :: learner/passive/lack of knowledge”.

Another step was taken in the area of “documentation”. Since the invention of the foster parents, documentation and making sure there were traces, was also a way to build connections between parents and foster parents. By now, Codisco is being experienced by different people in different places, and thus the documentation becomes a way of tracing those developments, to give the possibility to reflect on those developments, and to share with potential future foster parents. Codisco #6 resulted in a beautiful audio and visual documentation. You can find the link in the [documentation](#).

AN ATTEMPT AT DESCRIBING CODISCO

Most of our approach to learning is marked by the educational system and the separations that come with it. So what kind of encounters and situations could we create in order to engage with learning while avoiding reproducing what we have known all too well within the conventional education system?

Codisco aims to be a pedagogical environment that is radically open. An environment where we try to undo the hierarchies between different types of knowledge, know-how and wisdom. Any kind of knowledge that a person wants to explore together with others is considered meaningful. Any subject that is brought into the space is considered the right subject for that moment and for those people. We aim at creating a space where there's no binary divide between learning and teaching, between the person who is supposedly learning and the person who is supposedly teaching. A space where everybody engages in processes of learning and teaching, often simultaneously. We don't regard anybody as an expert in something but we regard everybody to be experts in their own life. We share, we exchange, we experiment, we explore in an act of embodied learning. We learn through excitement,

because excitement means that you want to engage with it, that you want to live with it. We practice curiosity. We learn in order to practice freedom.

Codisco is not focused on a specific outcome but on the capacity to set a group in motion and in effervescence while allowing individuals the greatest freedom. So Codisco can also be looked at as an artistic and pedagogical research practice on the theme of reinventing and experimenting with learning in a collective way, to renew its understanding and practice inspired by decolonial, feminist and queer values.

In an attempt to clarify how we position Codisco in relation to generally accepted notions of schooling, teaching and learning, we made a list of intentions and principles. These can be used internally, or at your own will, can be communicated with participants or in your communication towards an audience.

Codisco: intentions and principles

We are more concerned with learning than with teaching. With the aim of disrupting the traditional hierarchies in which the teacher and the act of teaching has more weight, in Codisco we put emphasis on the aspect of learning. With Codisco we try to create an alternative learning environment where we learn together and from each other.

Everybody is a specialist in their own life. Even though you might not have received any formal training in anything, your singularity and life experience, what you have learned in order to get to where you are today, make you a specialist in your own life. You don't need to be a professional in order for your knowledge to be validated. You just need to recognise that what you already know has value, that you already possess skills that are not to be taken for granted.

Students, or people who are eager to learn, are fully accomplished autonomous beings. People know what they need and what is best for them. They don't need to be instructed or get knowledge transmitted, in order to lift the veil of their ignorance, to be illuminated or to fill what is lacking in them.

Any kind of knowledge is valid knowledge. Whether your knowledge is practical, theoretical, artistic, technical, artisanal, embodied, etc., it doesn't matter, it will be welcomed in the space and it will be cared for. The mere fact that you decide to share the knowledge that is precious and valuable to you, makes it valid and valuable for all. It will be received as a gift.

Only between everybody we know everything.¹ Knowledge and wisdom is achieved through collective effort. Anybody can contribute something. Everybody has something to contribute.

¹ We need other people, inseparably, to understand, to transform, to resist, to free ourselves. A Wixárika marakame (or shaman) summed up this principle by saying: "gathering the moments in one heart, one heart of all, will make us wise, a little bit more to face whatever comes. Only among all of us do we know everything. - El libro de los saberes, prologue

We reconnect knowledge, knowhow and wisdom to life, freeing knowledge from the confines of professional knowledge production and the circulation of knowledge as a commodity, while re-valorizing other spheres where knowledge cultivation is needed.

We aim at reconnecting the relation between the thinking mind, the feeling mind and the sensing mind. We feel-think, think-sense, etc...

Genuine curiosity and excitement are the best vehicle for learning. We try to make ourselves available for our own curiosity and that of others.

Codisco: the practice

Codisco is above all a practice, ongoing, open-ended, experimental, soft around the edges. Codisco is not a format, nor a solid block. What would happen when these practices are taken to different places, with different people? What would happen when Codisco is practiced in a village in France? What would happen when it is practiced in a mental health center in Anderlecht?

As a practice, Codisco is a lot about holding space, holding the space for others and for ourselves to be able to learn, in a way that honors the intentions and principles. A lot of things need to happen to be able to hold a space: to study to the context, to understand its challenges, limitations and opportunities, to understand what you can offer but also what your limits are, to clarify the conditions (in terms of time, space, money, people), to organise, to communicate, to organise some more, to be sensitive and receptive, to deal with obstacles, to listen, to prepare food, or at least some drinks, to relax, to celebrate, ...

In our past experiences of Codisco we relied on Open Space Technology (OSP) as a facilitation tool. More information about OSP in [documentation](#). We respected the basic principles of the tool, but adapted the tool to our specific conditions. Much of what Codisco is today comes from a combination of its principles and the way we facilitated it. Probably Codisco could be organised with different facilitation tools, but we haven't experimented with that so far.

Codisco: examples

Codisco #1 #2 #3 consisted of a compilation of responses to the central question: « what do you desire to learn and do together? » Everyone could respond to this question by proposing a session that automatically became part of the program of the day. These were some of the responses to the question:

- a DIY health practice
- a method for turning one's back on something or someone weighing on us
- hunting for empty buildings or how to spot potential squats in our neighbourhoods?
- a vocal warm-up
- a safe rave
- the basics of bokashi composting

- a lazy reading session
- online sound poetry in 18 different mother tongues
- the use of non-binary pronouns
- a score to talk about a place
- a sweatlodge

Codisco: the effects

We talked, we danced, we sang, we walked, we read, we wrote, we made a fire and ... we listened a lot. We did not barter skills to be more productive or to be better equipped in our professional environment. Instead, we made little pieces of a popular encyclopedia for our daily lives. We have really experienced the non-hierarchy of knowledge. We felt fluids and ideas flow through us in communicating vessels. We felt less anxious, we felt stronger and more confident and we were laughing more. We felt like we were moving and changing, we felt like we were training to become more free. As if at the beginning of new possible worlds... transforming this world by naming other worlds.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR NEW FOSTER PARENTS OF CODISCO

About the transition from parents and former foster parents to new foster parent

Because we consider Codisco a practice rather than a format, it seems important that a potential foster parent has already been familiarized with Codisco by attending or participating in a past Codisco activity. A transition should start with a conversation between some parents, foster parents and potential new foster parents. Some parents and former foster parents should accompany the new foster parents, basically by making themselves available for conversation whenever it is needed.

This Codisco reader has been put together to accompany the new foster parents. New foster parents are asked to update this reader with his- and her-stories, their descriptions, credits, and links to (online) documentation, and then to hand the updated version to one of the parents.

The parents are: Hans Bryssinck, Anna Czapski and Laura Deschepper

The foster parents are: Simone Basani, Alice Ciresola, Heike Langsdorf, xxx

About hosting

Be realistic about your own energies as hosts: a host should not be feeling trapped in mediating/hosting/organising the Codisco days. For this reason, it is important to plan a bit in advance who can be on the spot to take over.

Give responsibility due weight. Being a host doesn't mean "to serve" and constantly "be responsible" for the people joining Codisco. Once the principles and the instructions to join the practice are clear, people become responsible for how they decide to be with others.

As we want everyone to feel welcome and at ease to join in all moments, we advise having always someone busy with welcoming and providing people who enter the space/s of Codisco with basic information and instructions about how they can be together with the others.

On the other hand, as Codisco is meant to be a practice through which people mutually learn and empower each other, we believe it is important to communicate it as a practice that people are warmly invited to join from the beginning to the end. This is why it is important to have a collective starting and ending moment, to assess the practice.

Creating a comfortable environment: providing people with the possibility to rest (couches, fat boys, pillows, blankets, chairs). Depending on the season, warm and/or cold drink together with food (with vegan & gluten-free options). Possibility of warm spots (if winter) or shaded spots (if summer). We want people to stay and enjoy being together.

Creating an in-between space (in the case of radical_house a series of tables and parasols at the entrance of the house) helped people to transit from out-of-Codisco to inside-Codisco more gradually. This space was even more informal than the rest of other places, with people having the possibility to 'taste' the atmosphere before really deciding to join or taking the possibility to go away without feeling uncomfortable.

About how to approach the intentions, principles and facilitation

The intentions and principles should be taken into account when preparing and organising a Codisco activity. How the intentions and principles are translated into practice, what form they take, is up to the foster parents. The practice adapts to the conditions.

We have tried and tested Open Space Technology (OST) as a tool to facilitate Codisco activities. As mentioned in the his-her-stories, we had to make adaptations, hack the Technology to put it at the service of what we are trying to do with Codisco. Our experience up until now tells us that OST is good for leveling the room, making sure anybody can enter the room, make propositions and take responsibility for a session. When the central question (or main invitation) is clear, it enhances participation. Therefore we believe Open Space Technology is an adequate tool for enacting some of Codisco's main intentions and principles. Probably there are other facilitation tools that would also fit the purpose, but we never got to try out any other technique.

About the use of documentation as a way to connect across different Codisco activities

As mentioned in the his-her-stories, we started to put emphasis on documentation, not just for the sake of archiving, but most of all to make it possible to make connections between the different Codisco experiences. Therefore we also ask the foster parents to consider the question of documentation.

This is what Hans wrote about it in June 2020:

I would probably prepare a couple of questions and then find ways (moments or places) where I could ask those questions to some of the people. And I would document the answers.

Some of the questions that come to my mind:

- *Why is it important for you to be here?*
- *What are the words, phrases, images that you encountered today that moved you in one way or the other?*
- *How do those things relate to other experiences you had?*
- *If Codisco / The Radical House / the house in front could talk, what do you think they would say about what they witnessed here today?*
- *What do you take home with you, that wasn't there when you arrived here this morning?*
- *Does the experience of today invite you to do something else? What is it?*
- ...

All parents and foster parents would be happy and curious to see, read, listen to the documentation that you produce. S P I N can also archive the documentation on their dropbox, and the link can be added to the list of documentation in this reader.

About money

In the past, Codisco has both operated with and without money.

If you would manage to raise some money, you can take the following into account:

Having a budget at disposal, can raise several issues about who would manage the money and how. The foster parents of the editions at radical_house decided to cover the expenses for food and hygiene products (due to the Covid pandemic) and distribute the rest to the people who would propose an activity to create the structure of the day. This came with a couple of issues:

- This system reinforced a dynamic we actually wanted to disrupt (who proposes gets paid, who participate doesn't)
- By deciding on this system in advance, we happened to be paying people on a first come-first served basis, which created discriminations between the ones who proposed their activities first and those who arrived with a proposal later.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION

The communication of Codisco #1 #2 #3 was primarily meant for circulation within the research group. With Codisco #4 #5 #6 the communication was intended for people gravitating around radical_house and with an interest in collaborative projects. But on top of that the idea was to try to reach regular neighbors, not necessarily connected with contemporary art and unfamiliar with specialised vocabulary related to participatory practices. For this reason, Alice - who was also new to Codisco - decided to rephrase the main points of the first version of the Codisco reader, selecting what complete newcomers would need to understand about what kind of space Codisco is and what it invites to.

We believe that new Codisco foster parents will have to “play” with the communication of the project, choosing carefully who they want to address, how they adapt their vocabulary, in which language they communicate and which information and principles they decide to disclose. All the information that is given in this reader could potentially be used for communication purposes.

An example of what was used to communicate Codisco in April 2021

Codisco is a radically open, informal learning environment initiated by S P I N and currently organized by radical_house.

An online/offline format to meet each other for the first time (or not) where hierarchies between different technologies of knowledge, know-how, and expertise are broken.

At Codisco any kind of knowledge that you want to explore together with others is considered meaningful.

*From DIY health practices,
to hunting empty buildings,
from inclusive writing
to practical tips for writing a project or an application,*

Any subject that is brought into the space is considered the right subject at the right moment and place.

Codisco is a space, as its name suggests, where to co-learn, learn together, where any doubt is fruitful, any practice or experience can be an opportunity of knowledge, care, experimentation, empowerment, emancipation for yourself and the others who learn with you.

An example of a text used for a A3 poster disseminated in Gerموir neighborhood to promote Codisco in July 2021.

Is there something you would like to *learn from* others?

Is there something you would like to *give on to* others?

Join us for a day of informal and horizontal learning and knowledge sharing within the Gerموir community. Everyone is welcome, everyone can join on their own terms.

No teachers, nor students, just people being and learning together.

(Having an illustration was also helpful for attracting people.)

Informal communication

Please note that a great effort in exchanging informally (SMS, emails, chatting in other contexts) with people about Codisco had a due weight in the communication strategy. We discovered talking about it, about previous editions and bringing examples of how other people joined Codisco previously, made people comfortable with it.

Crediting

To honor the herstory and the multiple voices of CODISCO, we propose that the communication related to the next CODISCO episodes include the following formula:

Codisco was conceived by S P I N in 2020. It has also been taken care of by radical_hope_house (House of Practices), xxx (names of organizations which further take care of it). This edition of Codisco ...

CREDITS (in chronological order)

Co-learn days 2017 were organised by Hans Bryssinck and Kate McIntosh.

With the support of S P I N, Tropicana, Por Estos Dias (CO), Laagencia (CO), Macao (IT), Constant (BE)

Co-learn day 2018 was organised by Hans Bryssinck, Heike Langsdorf & Erika Sprey.

With the support of S P I N and radical_house.

Co-learn day 2019 was organised by Hans Bryssinck, Heike Langsdorf & Erika Sprey.

With the support of S P I N and radical_house.

The core research group of the co-learning trajectory 2019-2020 consisted of Hans Bryssinck, Anna Czapski & Laura Deschepper

The larger research group of the co-learning trajectory 2019-2020 consisted of:

Brussel Wild Life: Vincent Pierre Alexis Lebour

Club Travail : Mathilde Maillard

Futurologie of Cooperation: Anna Czapski, Diederik Peeters

Maarten De Vrieze

Notfoundon : Aay Liparoto

Open Source Publishing : Pierre Huyghebaert, Sarah Magnan

Post Collective : Elli Vassalou, Mirra Markhaëva, Marcus Berger

radical_house : Simone Basani, Alice Ciresola, Heike Langsdorf

S P I N : Hans Bryssinck, Laura Deschepper, Diederik Peeters

Codisco day #1 #2 #3 (2020) were organised by Hans Bryssinck, Anna Czapski & Laura Deschepper. With the support of S P I N and radical_house.

Codisco day #4 #5 (2020) were organised by Simone Basani, Alice Ciresola, Heike Langsdorf. With the support of radical_house.

Codisco #6 (2020) were organised by Simone Basani, Alice Ciresola, Heike Langsdorf.

It happened in the context of STAYCATION / Ixelles.

With the support of the Flemish Community (House of Practices), nadine vzw, S P I N and Elzenhof.

The organizations that made Codisco possible are S P I N and radical_house.

S P I N offered free labor, financial support for the co-learning days and the co-learning research trajectory, administrative support and communication.

radical_house offered a location, financial support, communication and documentation

People who collaborated on this reader up until now are: Simone Basani, Hans Bryssinck, Alice Ciresola, Anna Czapski, Laura Deschepper and Heike Langsdorf. The image on the title page is from May Abnet, who made a documentation of Codisco #6 (see below).

LINKS TO TOOLS AND DOCUMENTATION

★ [Colearn Days 2017](#)

★ [Colearn Day 2018](#)

★ [Colearn Day 2019](#)

★ The Co-learning research trajectory (2019-2020): [an insight](#)

- ★ [Codisco #1](#): all preparations, example of a market place, documentation of the sessions
- ★ [Codisco #2](#): the program of the day, documentation of the sessions
- ★ [Codisco #3](#): the program of the day, documentation of the sessions
- ★ Codisco #6: [invitation](#); [sonic documentation](#); [visual documentation](#)
- ★ Open Space Technology: [guidelines](#) & [article](#)
- ★ [Bibliography](#): a list with books, articles, links
- ★ Other tools: [a sample of an agenda /marketplace](#)