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**BUILDING IDENTITY BY
CO-BUILDING SPACES.**
**A CHAPTER IN THE
STORY OF MELUSI 3**

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abstract

This report compiles materials from a student project in an informal settlement in Pretoria, South Africa, focusing on how bottom-up and participatory design, coupled with qualitative data collection, can foster community-building architectural processes.

The research employed various methods to gather contextual information, community aspirations, and stakeholder insights, simultaneously establishing relationships for future interventions. The process involved understanding the context, collecting data through workshops, interviews, and observations, reflecting needs back to stakeholders, and co-designing solutions. The journey was documented for potential future interventions and reference.

Collaboration with local stakeholders led to on-site interventions utilizing community skills and resources whilst promoting sustainable bottom-up solutions. The hypothesis suggests that engaging with the community and stakeholders to understand, map, and address needs can facilitate effective, intentional interventions and encourage future community-led initiatives.

acknowledgement

Many have been involved and made great differences in this project. We would like to extend a thank you to our teachers, examiners, community workers and tutors who involved themselves in this project, as well as organizations who donated materials to our cause.

We would like to extend a *special* thank you to the team behind the development of MYDO and the MYDO Melusi 3 Branch. Hlakudi, founder of MYDO and key stakeholder in making our work possible, and Lerato, Mpho and Nkhsana who were our main connections through this process and are doing amazing work for their community.

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MYDO volunteers
Community of Melusi

Donations & resources

African Scrap Recyclers
Archneer
JulieBean Coffee
Mahem Raceway
Simply Gates
1322 Backpackers Hostel team

course context

Reality Studio at Chalmers University of Technology is an educational platform designed for joint knowledge creation and collaboration. The initiative started in 2005 and has since continued to evolve, addressing various urban and regional development challenges. A notable aspect is its focus on real-world applications, emphasizing innovative planning and design strategies adapted to local contexts, aiming to improve the quality of everyday life. Additionally, collaboration with local communities and organizations, acting as a platform for enhancing partnerships across national borders.



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1.1 introduction to project

aim

The project aim is to explore the role of identity for an individual and a community, in relation to skills, self-image and dreams. To investigate how a specific place can be developed to reflect the needs and identity of the community. To co-design with empathy, care, curiosity and deliberation.

Meanwhile, involving and empowering the community and its residents in the design of both process and interventions. To establish mutually beneficial relationships, yielding tangible, positive outcomes in the short and long term. Ideally, to spark future interventions initiated and run by the community.

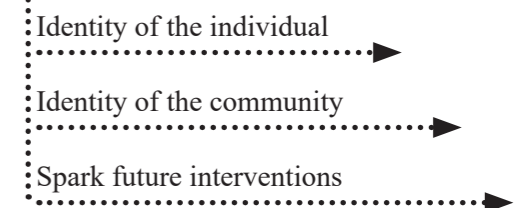
introduction to project

In getting to know Melusi we found a network of people who had begun mobilizing the community in transforming visions to action. They had recently started a new branch of the local youth development organization, MYDO, and showcased strong visions and engagement. We were inspired and saw potential for finding a way to act as a small extra push on this wheel that was already spinning.

A central theme of identity soon emerged. Both from the previous findings of University of Pretoria students, that indicate a need to strengthen positive self image, especially among youth, but also from seeing the new MYDO site as a place still in its most formative stage. We realized that we would be working with identity on multiple levels, that of: the individual, the new MYDO location, and the community.

Understanding community and participatory design as key concepts in the development of informal settlements, it was natural for us to work alongside the community in every aspect possible. The hypothesis was that working with existing stakeholders and community can assist in construction of community and identity and result in qualitative interventions.

Our general approach was to make every step meaningful, and therefore had two processes ongoing in parallel. One leading up to the small interventions that we were doing on site, and one addressing more long-term aims of the collaboration.



1.2 designing a process

guiding questions

How can we design an inclusive participatory process where we design as little as possible of the end result ourselves?

How can a design process play a role in strengthening the identity of a community and its residents?

How do we ensure that interventions have a long-term positive impact?

Informing aims of project approach **1.**

Informing aims of project outcomes **2.**

guiding questions

long-term perspective

Every step of the process builds up to the future initiatives, projection of community

future initiatives by community

specific aims

- Collecting specific information
- Strengthening self- and community identity
- Building relationships and community engagement

core values

- care
- curiosity
- deliberation
- empathy



key concept: identity

Identity is the collected perceptions of an individual within a certain context, constructed throughout life. It is personal, but often constructed through socialization and viewed in relation to different groups that the individual is part of. (Coenraad et al, 2019).

UN Sustainable Development Goals

4 QUALITY EDUCATION *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

Goal 4 is addressed through the engagement with an organization that acts as an educational support system for school children and youth. Specifically, target 4.A by contributing to the development of their new educational facilities.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.*

Goal 11 is addressed through the engagement with an organization that works to provide safe spaces and platforms for inclusive interaction and development. Specifically, target 11.3 by engaging the community in creating sustainable change.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.*

Goal 17 is addressed through the collaboration across national, cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Specifically, target 17.16 by establishing relationships built on shared visions, values and exchange of knowledge between multiple stakeholders.

UN Convention for the Rights of the Child

12 *Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.*

Article 12 is addressed by aiming to highlight the voices of children as co-designers of a space that is important to them.

29 *Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full.*

Article 29 is addressed by working with an organization that supports children and youth in developing different skills and interests, as well as building self-esteem and identity.

31 *Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.*

Article 31 is addressed by exploring how such activities can be facilitated within the context of the organization.

2.1 methodology



participatory design

Participatory design is a design strategy in which people directly affected by an intervention play an active role in different parts of the design process (Harrington et al, 2019). It is a response to the traditional top-down approaches that lack end user representation, and aims to democratize design and promote social justice (Coenraad et al, 2019). As decisions are self-owned, it is more likely to be sustained beyond the interventions (Daniel, 2013).



human-centered design

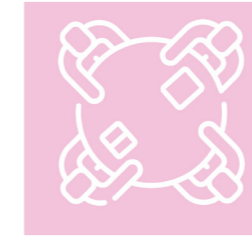
Human-centered design is a problem-solving approach that places people's lives and desires at the core, and can be applied to a variety of design challenges. It is based on the belief that learning directly from the people you are designing for helps arriving at solutions that are desirable, technically feasible and financially viable (IDEO, 2015).



small change

Small change is an approach that gives precedence to small-scale, incremental change over large-scale projects, suggesting that the trickle-up effect produces the biggest changes (Spatial Agency, n.d.). It is also described as "acting in order to induce others to act" and "cultivating an environment for change from within" (Hamdi, 2004).

2.2 methods



workshops

A design workshop is a creative gathering of participants, in which particular tools, materials and goals are used to generate ideas (Harrington et al, 2019). Generative techniques, such as workshops, guide participants to reveal deeper levels of needs and help designers gain a better understanding of their experiences (Visser et al, 2005).



observations

Observation is a research method originating from fields of ethnography and anthropology. It aims to understand people's needs and preferences in a certain situation or context, focusing on what is happening and how people behave, as inspiration for developing design solutions (Wikberg Nilsson et al, 2015).



interviews

Interviews is a research method in which a selection of people are asked questions. A semi-structured interview is an informal conversation based on a predefined set of questions that are adapted as required (ASF, 2012). A group interview can be useful to quickly learn about a community, whereas individual interviews offer more depth to the understanding (IDEO, 2015).

2.3 context introduction



Pretoria

Pretoria serves as the administrative capital of South Africa and is located in Gauteng Province (South African Government, n.d.). The city is also home to key government buildings and educational institutions like the University of Pretoria.

informal settlements

Informal settlements are residential areas characterized by three main criteria: (1) no security of tenure, (2) lack formal basic services, and (3) non-compliance with current planning and building regulations (UN-Habitat, 2015). Approximately, close to a quarter of the world population live in informal settlements. These settlements have a dual nature from a human rights perspective, representing both a systematic violation in terms of poverty and deprivation, but also a form of grass-roots practice of people claiming their space in the cities (United Nations, 2018).

Informal settlements in South Africa have a lack of formal housing and inadequate access to basic services, posing significant challenges to residents' lives. For instance, many residents rely on communal standpipes for water, often inconveniently located with long queues and insufficient water supply. Women and children typically bear the burden of water collection, exposing them to health and safety risks. Electricity access is also limited, with many households resorting to unsafe connections. Due to historical and socio-economic factors, including apartheid-era policies, poverty, and unemployment, these settlements have grown, despite policies aimed at upgrading them (SERI, 2018).

South Africa

South Africa, located at the southern tip of the African continent, is renowned for its diverse culture, rich history, and stunning landscapes (South African Government, n.d.). However, South Africa faces many challenges such as high unemployment, inequality, and crime rates (The World Bank, n.d.).

The population is a melting pot of ethnicities, cultures, and languages (South African Government, n.d.) and has a complex history with colonialism and segregation. Apartheid, a system of segregation, formally ended in 1994 with the election of Nelson Mandela as president, marking the beginning of a new democratic era (South African History Online, n.d.). Following this election, there has been efforts to establish a participatory democracy with support in constitutional and legislative frameworks. However, information about government decision-making and opportunities for public participation is relatively inaccessible, especially to marginalized groups such as women and refugee communities (Hicks, 2010).



Map of Melusi

Melusi

Melusi is an informal settlement in Pretoria West. It emerged from the people migrating from rural to urban areas, in pursuit of employment and improved living conditions. Hence, the demographic composition is diverse (Hugo & Sonnendecker, 2023). Melusi is informally split into three main areas: Melusi 1, 2 and 3.

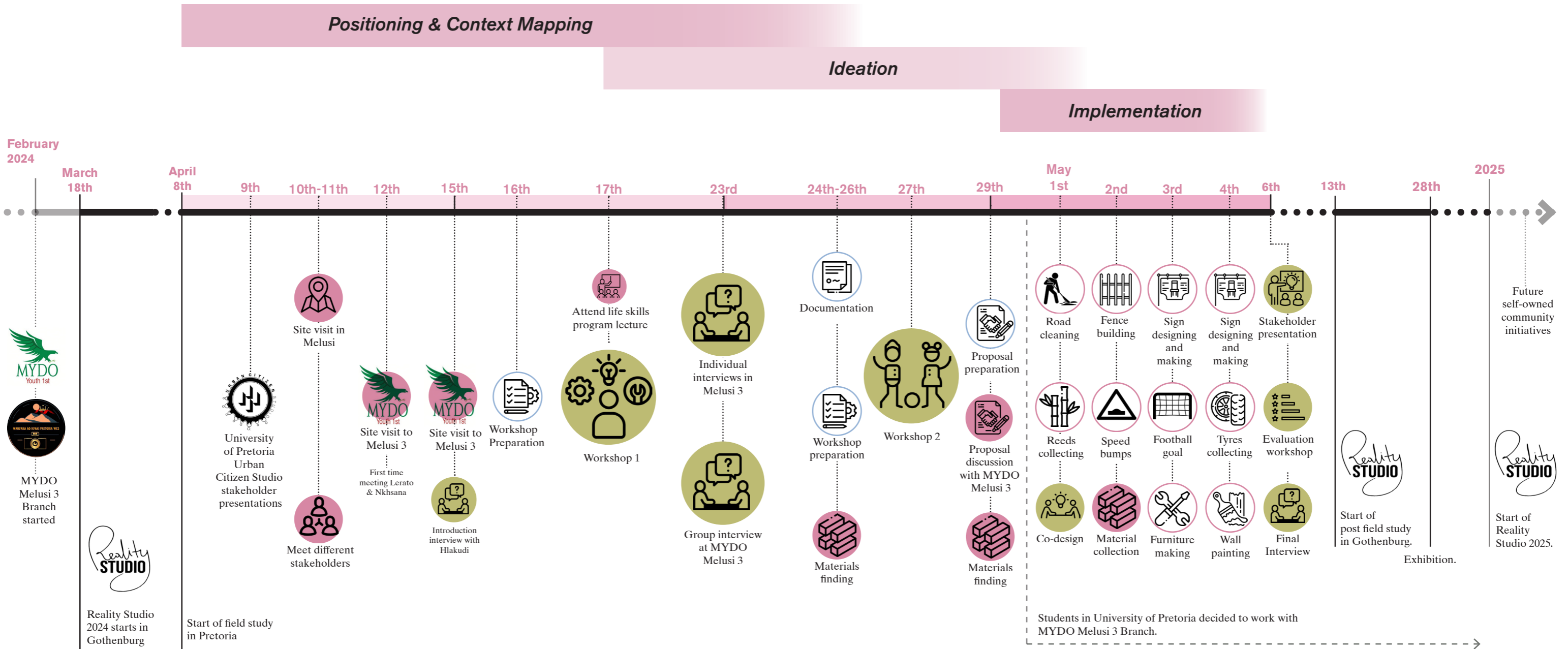
Melusi has since its establishment in 2008 witnessed substantial expansion and population growth (Hugo & Sonnendecker, 2023). This has created numerous challenges, including inadequate access to clean water and electricity, and issues related to overcrowding (Patrick et al., 2023). In response, both governmental and non-governmental organizations have been involved in initiatives aimed at addressing the immediate needs of the community while fostering long-term development and resilience (Meyer, n.d). For example, MYDO, Melusi Youth Development Organization, is an important actor.



Melusi 3

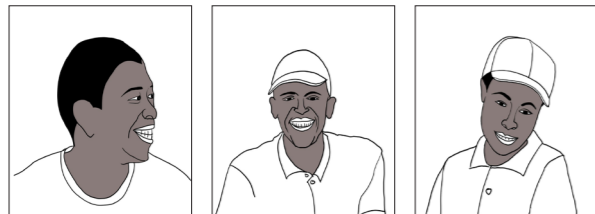
Melusi 3, situated on the western side of Melusi, is the largest and most populated section, but lacks both legal electricity and water supply, forcing residents to rely on dangerous illegal or unreliable connections.

2.4 project overview



2.5 stakeholder introduction

MYDO Melusi 3 branch managers



Lerato, Nkhsana and Mpho are volunteers of MYDO Melusi 3, main responsible for maintaining and developing it, and key stakeholders in this project. Lerato and Nkhsana also operate a news company called WANPW Breaking News, addressing different matters in the community. They started the new MYDO branch in Melusi 3 after seeing the success of MYDO.

MYDO Melusi 3 branch volunteers



Local volunteers take care of the kids at MYDO Melusi 3, especially helping them with homework after school. Most don't have formal jobs for now and work at MYDO without salary.

MYDO founder



Hlakudi is the founder of MYDO. Currently, he is in the process of expanding MYDO's services to Melusi 3 together with Lerato and Nkhsana.

Youth



Most came to Melusi to seek jobs in closeby industries and companies. Ages 18-35 can participate in the MYDO Life Skills Program.

MYDO volunteers



The volunteers are mainly from Melusi, primarily working at the first MYDO, but increasingly involved in MYDO Melusi 3.

Community Hub

Initiative aimed at improving the well-being of the community through a variety of health and social services.

Melusi 3 children



The MYDO Melusi 3 branch provides homework assistance and feeding to children up to 10 years old. There are around 25 children ranging from 4 - 14 years old currently enrolled.

Community workers



Ally and Daniel assisted us Reality Studio students in Melusi, and have connections to both MYDO and University of Pretoria.

Melusi 1 & 2 residents



Reality Studio
Reality Studio students

University of Pretoria
Architecture students involved in Urban Citizen Studio, also working with Melusi.



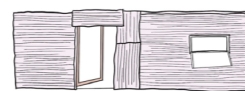
Simply Gates



Mahem Raceway



Africa Scrap Recyclers



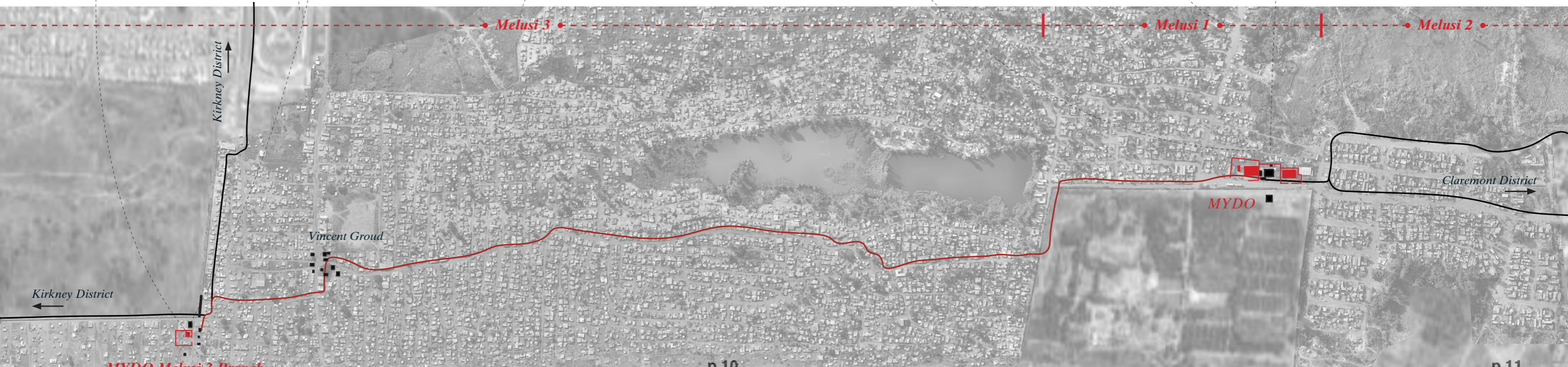
Nearby neighborhood



Melusi 3 residents



People residing in Melusi 3, including many families but few elderly residents. Most of them have heard of MYDO, but only a few have participated in their programs.



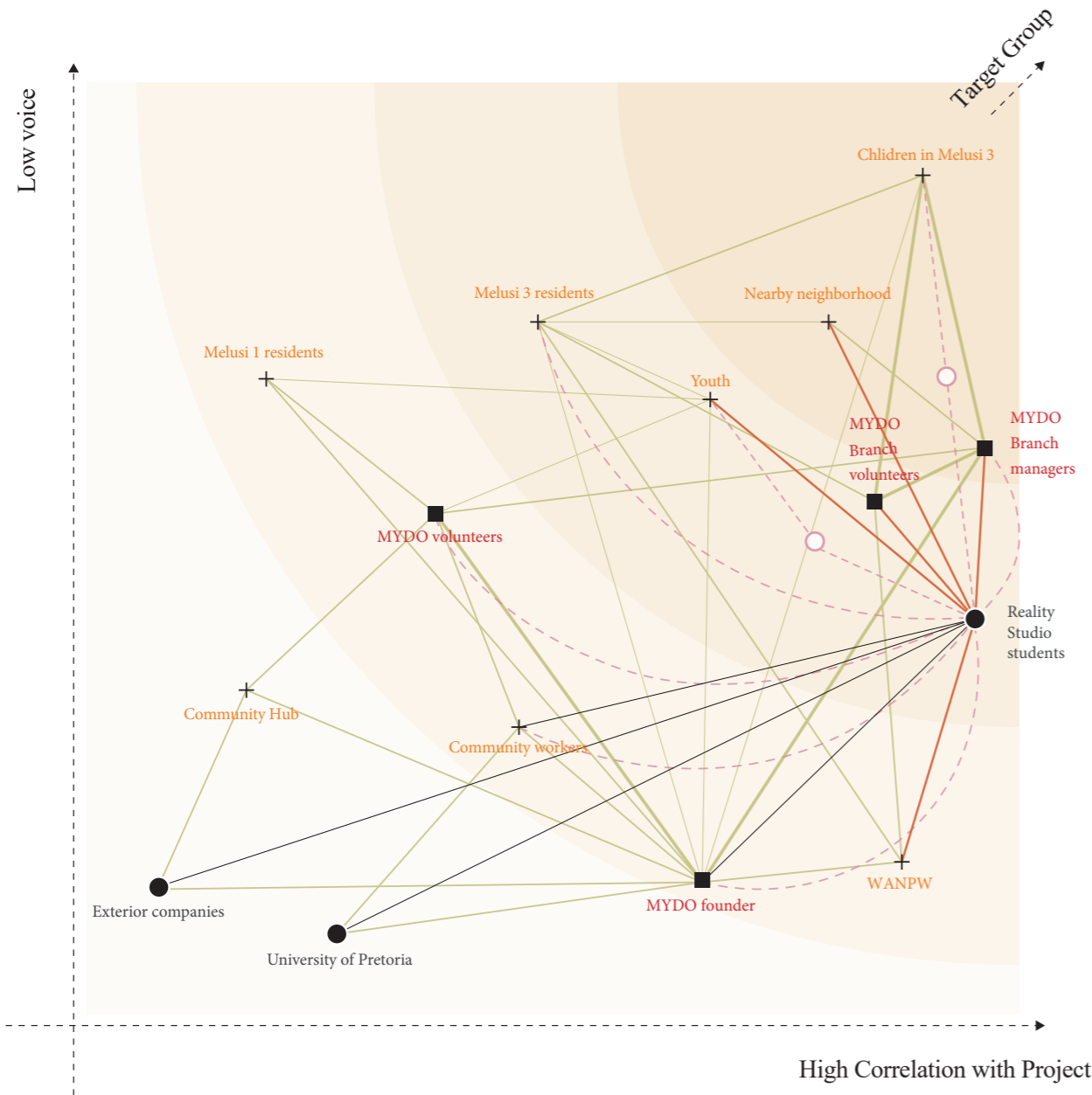
MYDO Melusi 3 Branch

2.6 stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder maps are a tool for visualizing the identified key actors in a project context and what their relationships are (Hanington & Martin, 2012). The horizontal axis of the chart below represents the degree to which stakeholders are connected to the project, and the vertical axis represents the relative strength of the

stakeholders' voice in the context. Both are based on subjective measures.

A diagonal axis emerged and shows the target groups of the project: children as a vulnerable group, being a main focus of the project.



Stakeholder Groups

- Outside Melusi
- + From Melusi Community
- From Melusi and MYDO

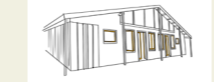
Relationship Building

- Co-work and Co-design
- - - Interview
- Workshop
- Meeting

Strength of Relationship

- High
- Middle
- Low

3.1 introduction interview



Office in MYDO

45 min

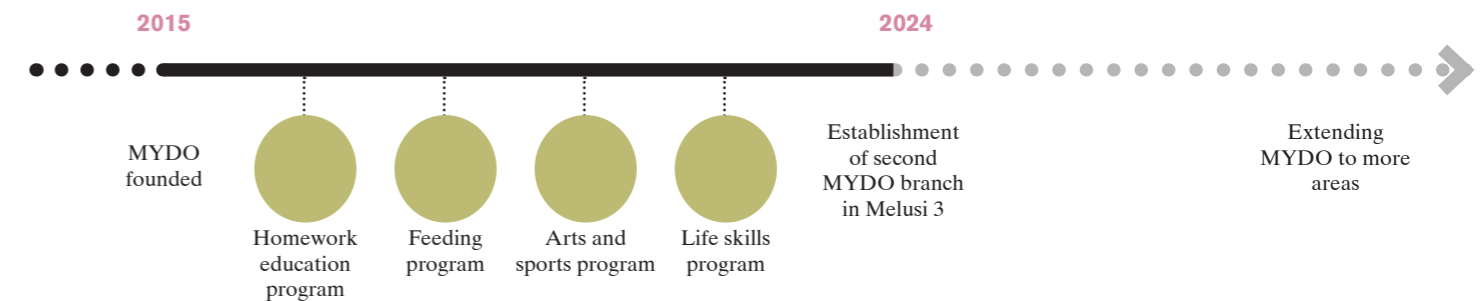
Early in the process, we met with Hlakudi, the founder of MYDO, over an unstructured interview. The meeting was not recorded, but notes were taken during the conversation. The questions took inspiration from the narrative interview approach (Kartch, 2018).

aims

- 🔍 Gaining a basic understanding of the community and its needs, focusing on MYDO, historically and currently
- 👤 Supporting a strengthened sense of self- and community identity
- 🗣️ Building engagement and relationships with people in the community for later co-design work

key insights

"the story of MYDO"



🔍 In February 2024, the second MYDO branch was opened to extend the services to children and youth living on the other side of the settlement.

How does the second MYDO need to be different from the first?

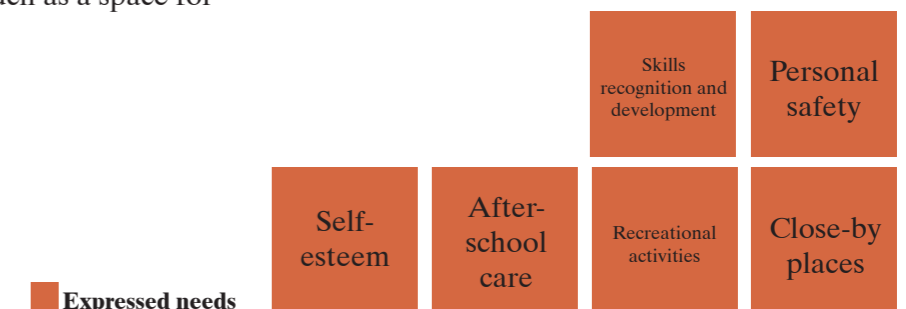
MYDO came out of a bottom-up approach, as a response to the lack of services catering the needs of children in Melusi. As more needs were identified, programs were added.

Even if the homework support is a foundational part of the services, MYDO aims to offer more than just another formal study setting, such as a space for recreation and safety.

👤 There is a strong dedication in the community to better the situation for children. This helped the organisation grow, even if they operated on limited resources.

🗣️ The session helped us understand our position and the terms and expectations of our project.

What impact can we make within the limited scope of Reality Studio?



3.2 guided walks and context immersion

We mostly started our field days at the original MYDO and walked to the other side of the settlement. As a result, we continuously mapped the surroundings in more or less structured ways. In the first weeks, we were guided by our community workers, but later felt comfortable going on our own.

Spending more time in the neighbourhood allowed for taking in more impressions of the place and the children's perspective. For example, how the time and day of the week changes the atmosphere. Many opportunities for talking to community members appeared spontaneously, leading to insightful conversations and observations.

aims

- 🔍 Gaining a first-hand, basic understanding of the community in terms of physical space and lives of its residents
- 🗣️ Building engagement and relationships with people in the community for later co-design work.

How do we ensure that the integrity of people in the settlement is respected?

key insights



Children have to walk long distances within the settlement. There is no school in Melusi, so children leave the settlement early in the morning by bus. The bus stop is at a place called Spincity, just outside Melusi 3. Their route there follows a wall that marks the boundary of the settlement.



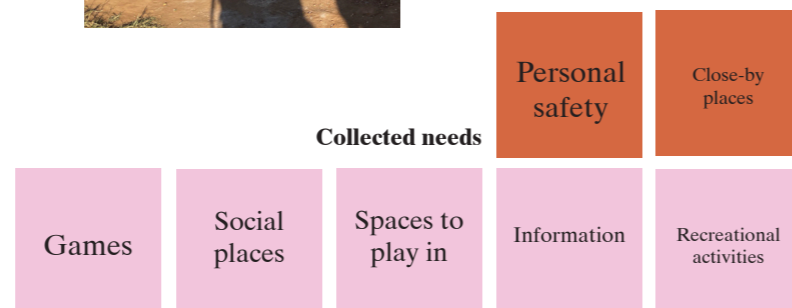
A key observation was a craftsman working with reeds, a local plant. This led us to explore its availability and how it can be used. Overall, mapping different available materials and skills of the community.



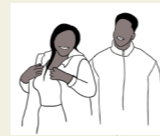
Walking through the settlement in times when children were not busy with school helped identify more activities that they enjoy. We observed a great creativity in how different available materials can become toys or sports equipment.



We got an overview of the main points of interest in Melusi. For example, a square called Vincent's Place where lots of people pass by.



3.3 workshop 1: what are my skills?



14 youths, ages 18-35



Inside MYDO Melusi 3

2 hours

Coloured pens, papers and camera.

The Life Skills program was launched at MYDO Melusi 3 in the early phases of our project. This served as an opportunity to organize a workshop with a group of youths that were already in the process of identifying their skills and developing themselves.

Participants worked first individually on listing their skills. The main tasks were adapted from a drawing workshop (ASF, 2012), and revolved around using their skills together to transform a plot of land as they wished. In these tasks, they worked first in pairs and then in groups of two pairs. Our community worker was very eager to help with taking photos.

aims

- 🔍 Mapping skills among youths and investigate how these relate to their aspirations for themselves and their community
- 🗣️ Supporting recognition of skills and visions to strengthen the sense of self and community identity
- 🗣️ Building engagement and relationships with people in the community for later co-design work

challenges

- 🗣️ Working in the larger groups, some participants took a leading role and others were less active. The task and materials did not accommodate team work as expected.
- 🗣️ Note-taking in a sensitive manner was difficult. We wanted to be active and engaged, but unfortunately this made us miss out on documenting valuable information that was not part of the generated workshop material.

What can we learn for organizing collaborative work?

How do we simplify while obtaining the desired complexity?

- 🔍 Wording of questions may have influenced participants to be very concrete in their drawings. We also realized that it would have been good to include more time for discussion, to help in interpreting the drawings.

key insights

- 🔍 A wide variety of skills, ranging from recreational and practical skills to interpersonal skills. (see Appendix)
- 🗣️ People were engaged in the workshop and showed a willingness to develop themselves and their community.

Can these skills be used in realizing the interventions?

- 🗣️ The connection to the Life Skills program content was clearer than anticipated, and created a progression through the workshop.



Can we expect similar engagement in a co-design activity?

3.4 context interviews

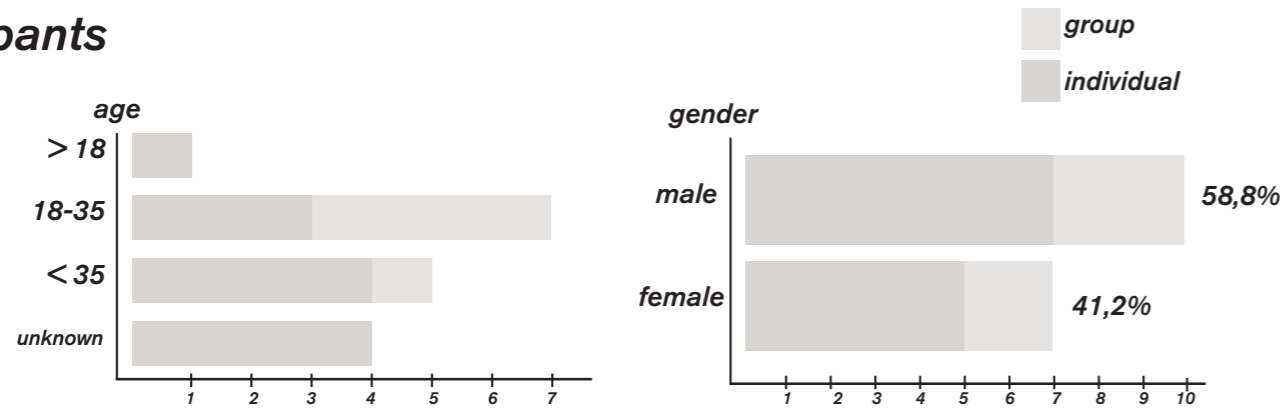
To gather qualitative information, we conducted in-context, in-depth interviews; both a group interview and individual interviews, based on a semi-structured format (ASF, 2012). We made an interview guide with questions (see Appendix), of which some were prioritized to easily adjust the extent of the interview.

We were inspired by the narrative approach when formulating the questions, as it is suggested that individuals can create a sense of belonging and identity through narrating their own experiences (Kartch, 2018).

aims

- Understanding the needs, visions and desires of MYDO Melusi 3, as well as the identity of the Melusi community, such as its values, physical spaces and characteristics.
- Supporting a strengthened sense of self- and community identity
- Building engagement and relationships with people in the community for later co-design work

participants



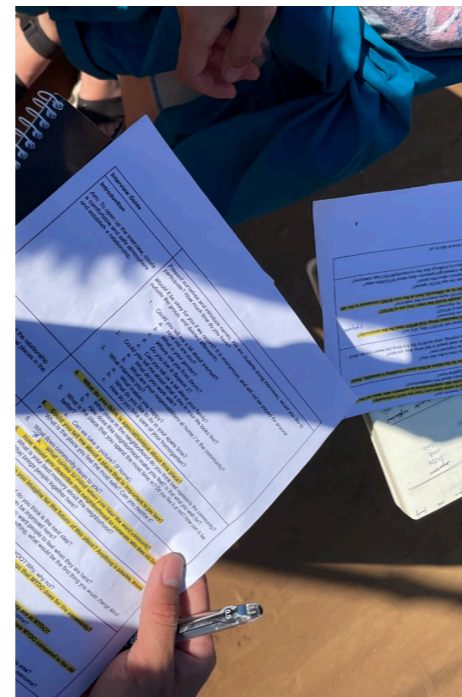
individual interviews

- 12 residents of Melusi
- Different locations in Melusi 3
- 5-20 min each
- Interview guide, phone for recording

We realized that we could not plan who we would meet in field, but were open to include anyone in Melusi willing to participate.

challenges

- As we had no established relationship with most participants, it was no surprise that people were hesitant to being recorded. Instead, we took brief notes and later summarized from memory.
- Some participants found the narrative approach confusing. The open-ended questions yielded a lot of interesting information, but not all directly related to our project. It was a challenge to balance staying focused and letting the participant direct the conversation.



key insights

Expressed needs
Latent needs

<p><i>"I want an open space to gather together"</i></p>	Information	Social spaces	<p>The original MYDO is considered important because it helps with accessing information and getting into contact with people. It is considered accessible as it is free and does not ask too many questions.</p>
<p><i>"The gate is always open and free to everyone"</i></p>	Information	Places to recognize	<p>Most people know of MYDO, but find that information is lacking. It is not widely known that the new MYDO branch has opened and what services they offer.</p>
<p><i>"People must feel home, yeah, this is home for them"</i></p>	Sense of belonging	Welcoming places	<p>Many have come as immigrants looking for job opportunities. Therefore, having little sense of connection to the neighborhood.</p>
<p><i>"This is not some place where people want to live here, just like they come here because they have no place"</i></p>	Sense of belonging	Sense of permanence	<p>There is a lack of basic amenities such as electricity and water, as well as a threat of forced locations, and people have little trust in government interventions. People want the new MYDO to have a permanent structure.</p>
<p><i>"Kids are looking for at least something that is bigger, and that is able to do other things that you are looking for in the form of sports"</i></p>	Spaces to play in	Safe spaces	<p>Children are exhausted after school, and MYDO keeps them studying longer. There are no designated safe spaces around Melusi where children can play, so they play in the streets. The new MYDO is considered too small, but there are few other open spaces that are safe to occupy.</p>
<p><i>"Kids need to play, they need sports and playground"</i></p>	Close-by places	Personal safety	<p>The area is perceived as unsafe, especially for children. Many concerns relate to the long distances within the settlement. People appreciate what the original MYDO offers for caring for the children.</p>
<p><i>"Parents they register so that they [children] can be in safe hands"</i></p>	Skills recognition and development	After-school care	<p>The area is perceived as unsafe, especially for children. Many concerns relate to the long distances within the settlement. People appreciate what the original MYDO offers for caring for the children.</p>
<p><i>"MYDO should be a place to learn lots of experiences while looking for a job"</i></p>	Interests	Recreational activities	<p>Unemployment is widespread and there are many negative distractions. People are interested in using their time for different activities and learning skills.</p>

group interview



5 MYDO volunteers



Inside MYDO Melusi 3

45 min

Interview guide, phone for recording

We had planned to conduct individual interviews with the MYDO volunteers, but adapted to their suggestion for a group interview, using the same interview guide (see Appendix). After the formal interview, showing us around to elaborate on thoughts, leading to identification of expressed and latent needs.

challenges

? Distributing the word equally between the participants was challenging. Some people were more talkative and confident, and we did not want be too directing of the discussion.

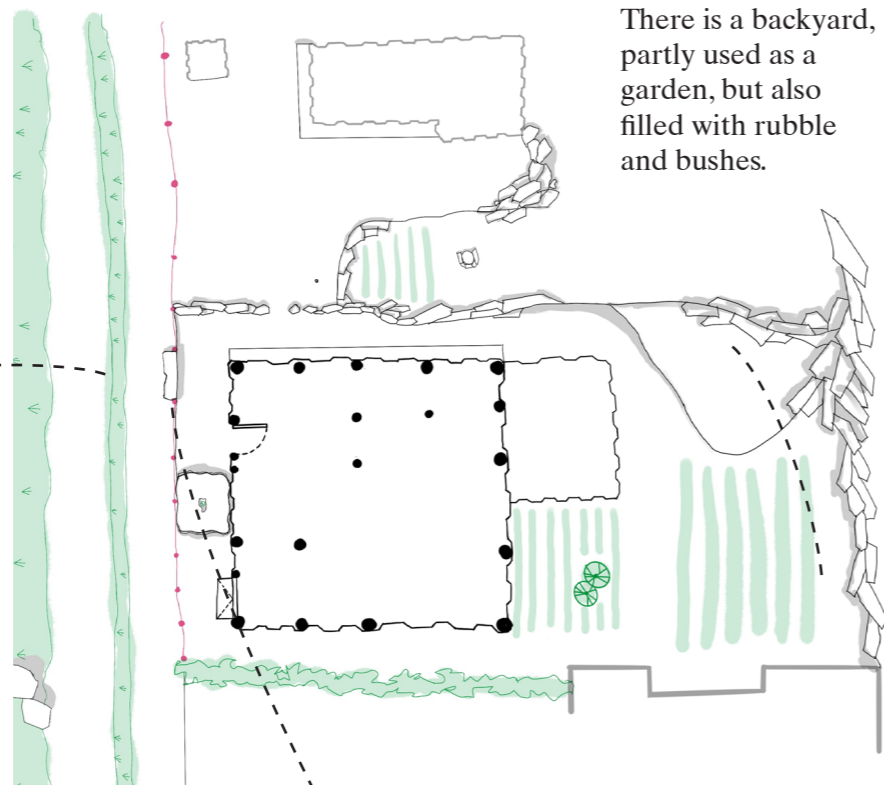
key insights

The area and the new MYDO branch go by many different names. No signs identify what the structure is or what they offer, neither at the site or in the area.

Who should be responsible for the process of naming the new branch?

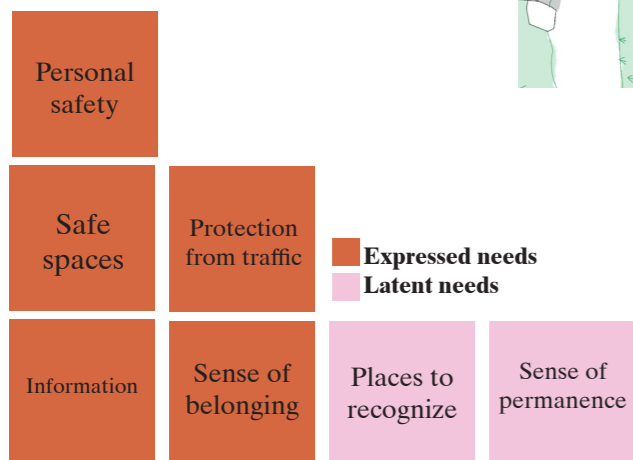
There is plenty of space outside the fence, but it is not formally claimed. The road has some traffic, seen as a safety risk for children playing.

Can we just claim the space outside the fence, or do we need permission?



There is a backyard, partly used as a garden, but also filled with rubble and bushes.

The fence opening is not in front of the entrance, making it less approachable and the flow less smooth. There is also a dangerous rock at the fence opening that people sometimes fall over.



"We want people to access information"

Information

Social spaces

They want the new MYDO to operate as a hub for social interaction, information exchange and community development.

"I just want to see this place operating as big a place thing for the people"

Welcoming places

Places to recognize

It is necessary to make MYDO's presence and services more evident and attractive for people passing by.

"Someone by seeing the colour they can realize that this place is something"

Interests

Recreational activities

MYDO should be a place where children can choose to do different kinds of recreational activities, including games, dance and music.

"A place where they can learn more and have more fun than in school"

Spaces to grow and learn in

Spaces to play in

The space is considered too small, especially considering that they want to help more children in the future. Also, the structure is not rainproof.

"Kids need to play, they need sports and playground"

"I don't want to move this MYDO [...] we need to expand here"

Close-by places

After-school care

The other MYDO is too far from Melusi 3 and it is not safe for the children to walk.

"I think it will be better because here is safer than to be lonely"

"We are trained to help them become a better person of tomorrow"

Skills recognition and development

Self-esteem

Apart from feeding and tutoring, they also value encouraging children to develop skills and follow their dreams, and keep them safe until parents come home from work.



3.5 workshop 2: my dreams & interests



23 children, mixed gender

age	%
4-7	21,7
8-11	43,5
12-14	34,8



Inside MYDO Melusi 3

2 hours

Coloured pens, papers and camera

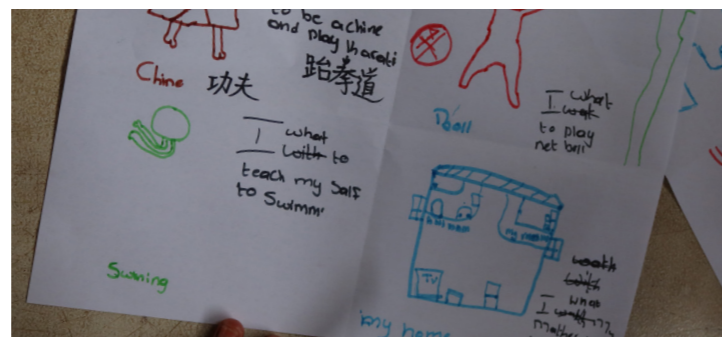
During weekdays, childrens are busy between coming home from school and finishing their homework, leaving little time to participate in a workshop. To avoid disrupting the services of MYDO, we organized a session on the weekend, fully dedicated to the project.

How do we avoid disrupting more than we help?

aims

- Understanding how the space is currently being used and mapping the needs and interests of children and volunteers using it
- Supporting recognition of dreams and interests to strengthen a sense of self and community identity
- Building engagement and relationships with people in the community for later co-design work

The main tasks were outlined according to a drawing workshop (ASF, 2012), asking the children to draw their dreams and favorite things to do, further exploring the identified needs for play and recreation.



challenges

What role can we expect the children to play in the co-design process?

It was hard to know beforehand what to expect from the group in terms of knowledge, skill and social interaction. This made it challenging to formulate tasks, but we prepared a flexible structure. Children took longer than expected to draw and there were some unexpected distractions. To give them time to elaborate on their drawings, we removed one task.

How can we avoid being "lazy" designers?

It was also difficult to design questions to understand the needs and dreams of the physical space, but not rely on the participants' drawings too literally.

Language barriers were evident when asking questions, but volunteers helped out with translation. Children were a bit shy to present to everyone, so we asked questions one-to-one. It was challenging to take notes while establishing a trusting relationship.



key insights

How can MYDO facilitate these activities?

The group was very mixed in terms of age and language skills, but the task engaged all participants. The diversity is important to take into consideration in our interventions.

We realized that games could be an important bearer of personal and collective identity (Burnett, 2006) as well as develop different skills.

Children are interested in a range of activities (see Appendix), with sports such as soccer being most popular. There were also games of strategy, imagination and group interaction.

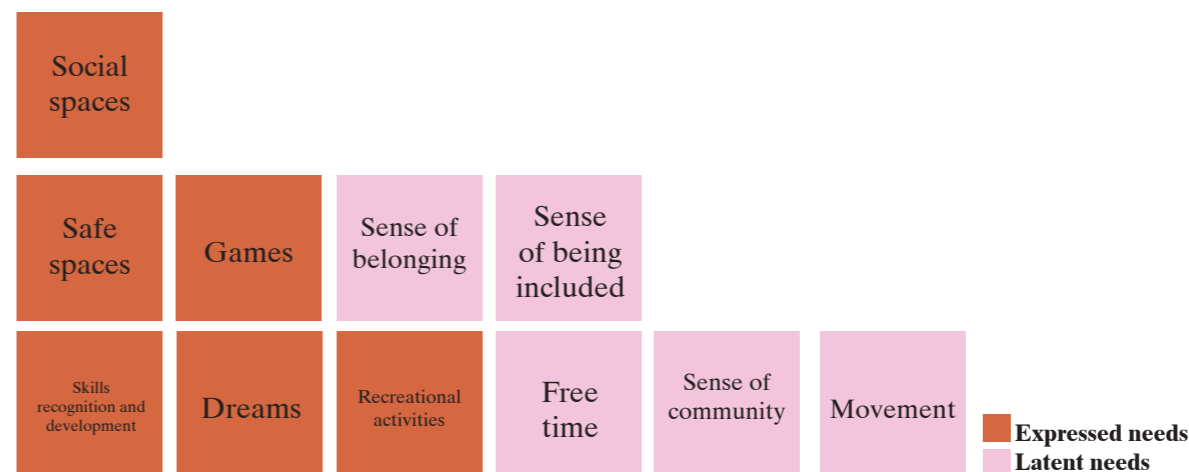
Children are driven by a strong will to help other people and to give back to the community, as seen by their dreams of future professions.

Can we transform the road outside MYDO to a play space?

We were also spontaneously shown a few more games outside, helping us understand how they currently use the space. We observed that traffic poses a risk when playing outside.

How can MYDO facilitate these dreams?

Playing together helped getting to know each other, build trust and overcome communication barriers.



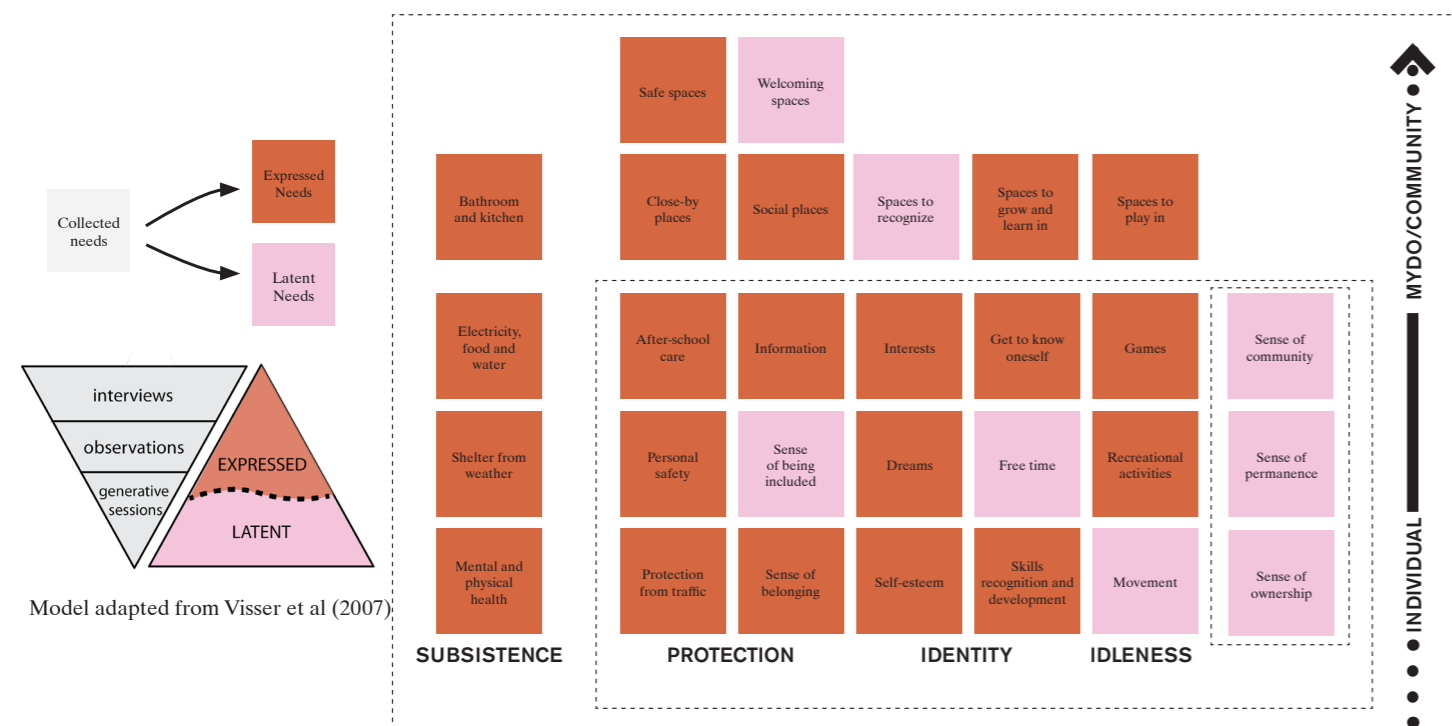
data collection & interpretation

3.6 summary of collected data

analysis

The data gathering yielded lots of information, analysed through Affinity mapping (Krause & Pernice, 2024). Needs can be broadly categorized according to their explicitness (Visser et al, 2007), and in our analysis we have simplified needs as being either expressed or latent, although in some cases the distinction is not definite.

Below is a summary of the most important needs. The sorting was loosely based on Max-Neef's (2008) Fundamental Human Needs Framework. Identity emerged as a central theme, relating closely to needs of protection and idleness. Needs of subsistence also came up, but were considered out of the scope of this project.



key insights

- IDENTITY** There is a need to strengthen the self-esteem and identity of children and youth, as well as to create a sense of belonging.
- RECOGNIZABILITY** The building is not recognizable as MYDO and does not yet have a clear identity of its own.
- INFORMATION** Information about MYDO services is lacking and they want to increase outreach.
- RECREATION**
- SAFETY** There are no designated safe spaces for children to play in Melusi 3 and in general there are many different kinds of safety concerns.
- PERMANENCE** Permanence is lacking, in both a tangible and intangible sense, and related to different kinds of needs.



community project days

4.1 community project days



Replacing the old fence with a new



Clearing space on the road



Collecting tyres from Mahem Raceway.



Mounting the new signs.



Building a speedbump to slow down traffic.



Painting the signs.



From the left, Guiling, Mpho, Nkhsana, Karolina, Tove, Lerato, Xifeng



Construction of new gate and fence.

community project days

4.2 approach and process

The community project days were our approach to engaging the community in implementing change through small interventions. We derived a set of intervention proposals from our analysis, addressing

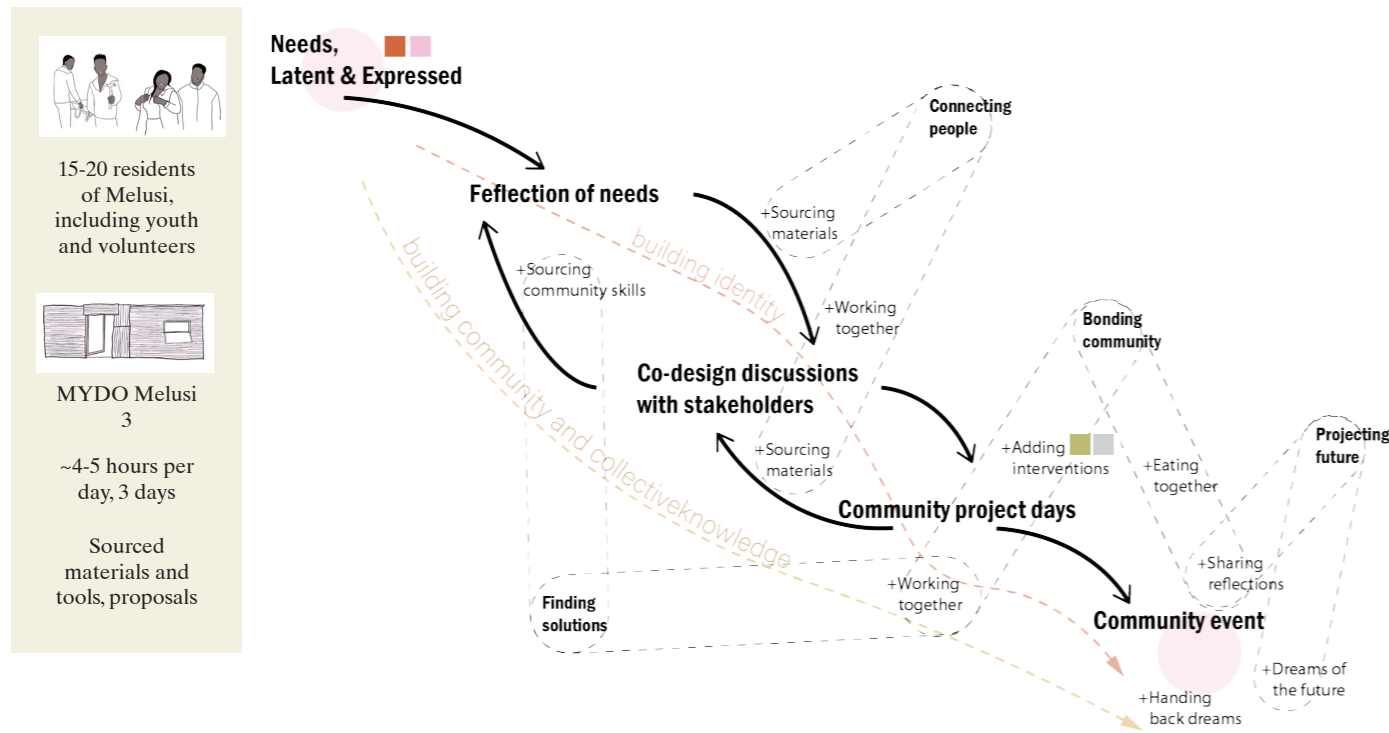
collected latent and expressed needs. These were sketched out loosely (see Appendix) and used in discussion with stakeholders, then realized together with the community over a few days of co-designing.

aims

- Collaboratively identify, design and build solutions with the community
- Supporting a strengthened sense of self- and community identity, and highlighting skills and creativity of participants
- Building engagement among people in the community for further dreaming and co-design work

needs addressed

Skills recognition and development	Dreams	Sense of community
Self-esteem	Sense of belonging	Sense of being included



key insights

Working with the community required a non-linear approach, bouncing between ideas, reflection of solutions on different levels of abstraction. Co-designing prompted additional adaptations and intervention suggestions. These are categorized as:

challenges

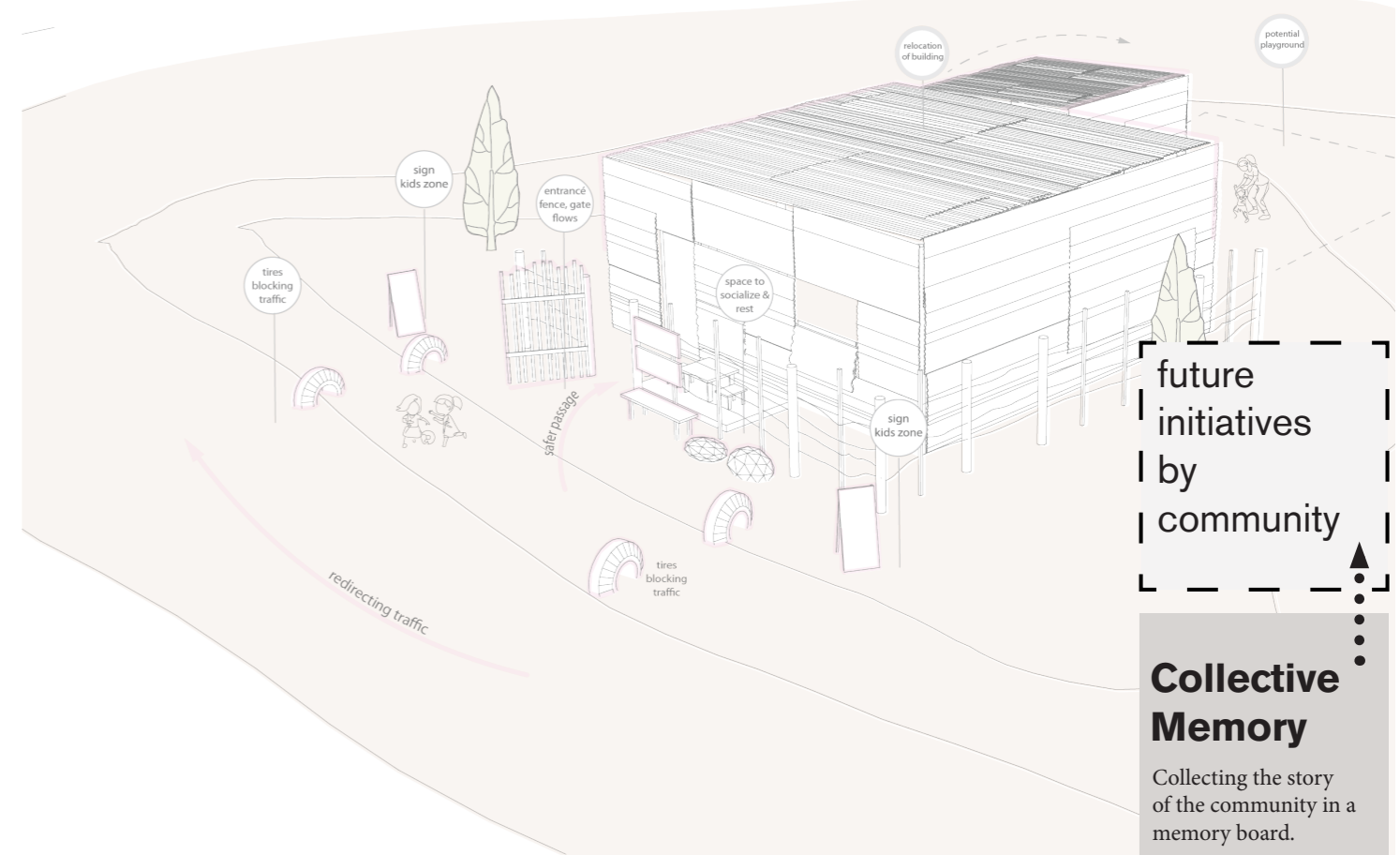
The lack of adequate materials and tools required a collaborative effort to solve. This prompted creativity, but limited the ability to implement interventions. It helped identify needs of new stakeholders for both design and implementation, resulting in more people being introduced into the process.

While the community days engaged many people, few women participated, which limited their representation in the co-design process.

- Co-design found**, through co-design by the community and implemented by the community during community project days.
- Future interventions**, found by the community, planned to be implemented in the future

community project days

4.3 interventions



- expressed
- latent
- co-design found
- future interventions

Name of MYDO 2 Key stakeholders named the new branch of MYDO in Melusi.	Fence & Entrance Efficient flows and safe passage, as well as increased officialness.	New Playground Changing yard to allow safe play for kids.
Zone for Children Increasing awareness of children in area and slowing down traffic	Road Blockage Claiming road space to create designated space for kids to play	Play Recreation Facilitating activities for children and adults.
Visual Recognition Making the MYDO and WANPW identity visible.	Places to sit Building sitting places for socializing, avoiding the sun and resting.	Speed Bumps Slow down traffic to increase safety.
		Information Board Sharing services & events of community
		Relocation of Building Increasing safe play space.

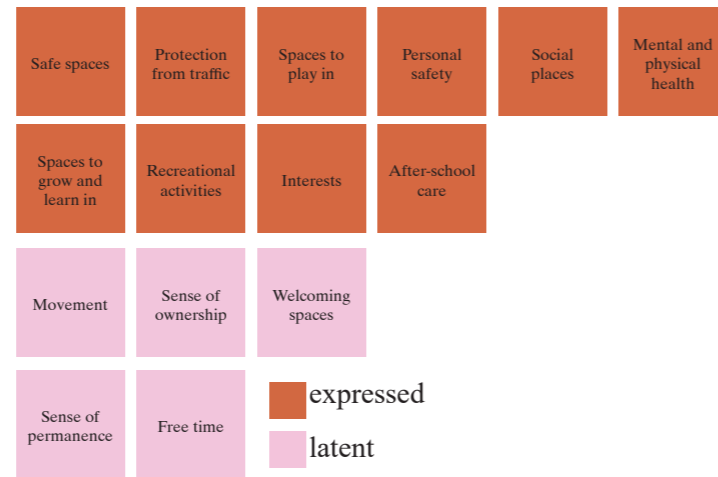
community project days

Zone for Children

Increasing awareness of children in area and slowing down traffic

Colourfully painted signs made of re-purposed metal shelves, standing by means of a folding reeds construction.

needs addressed



claiming space

To increase the sense of ownership of the space, it was key that construction techniques and design (including wording of signs) came from skills and ideas in the community.

Road Blockage

Claiming road space to create designated space for kids to play

Partial blockage of the road outside MYDO using dug down car tyres, an idea from the community.

Speed Bumps

Slow down traffic to increase safety.

Stacked rubber strips connected by nails and wire, a solution found by a community member, placed at either end of the space.



Relocation of Building

Increasing safe play space.

future interventions

The community suggested to relocate the current building a couple meters back on the plot to create space that is completely car free, as a more long-term solution to the need of safety.

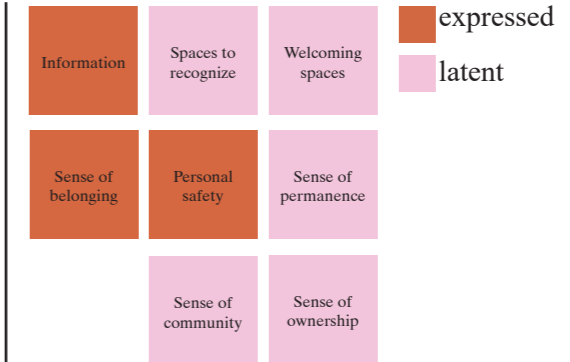
community project days

Visual Recognition

Making the MYDO and WANPW identity visible.

Overarching for most of the interventions, but is most concrete in signs with logos and colours of painted items. Also, a sign on the nearby wall.

needs addressed



Fence & Entrance

Efficient flows and safe passage, as well as increased officialness.

Community initiated and built using reeds and re-used poles from old fence. Gate was moved to straight in front of the entrance, avoiding dangerous obstacles.

Name of MYDO 2

Key stakeholders named the new branch of MYDO in Melusi.

The official new name MYDO Melusi 3 Branch was chosen by MYDO leaders, and used in signs and communication.

identity by naming

Finding a name for new MYDO was crucial to progress in the interventions and identity-building. Place names relate cultural groups to geographical spaces, with important functions for constructing identity and emotional ties to places (Jordan, 2012), as well as a feeling of belonging (Helleland, 2009).



Information Board

Sharing services & events of community

Collective Memory

Collecting the story of the community in a memory board.

future interventions

Learning from the co-design, the team behind MYDO Melusi 3 Branch decided to on their own design and build similar signs with leftover materials, to provide information about their events and services. Additionally, a memory board, as a space to collect the progression of the branch development, including pictures we printed for the stakeholder presentation..

Places to sit



Seating made from large rocks from clearing the road, as well as wood and re-purposed fence pieces, painted to show belonging to MYDO.

Play Recreation



A table doubling as gameboard, made from re-purposed painted wood. A football goal made from reeds and wire.

needs addressed

Spaces to recognize	Welcoming spaces	Social places	
Sense of community	Spaces to play in	Recreational activities	
Sense of being included	Spaces to grow and learn in	Interests	After-school care

expressed
latent

facilitating recreation

Different places to sit were built and painted together. In the process, ideas for also facilitating different kinds of activities emerged, based on available materials.



future interventions

The community had many ideas to further develop these interventions, including building a proper playground behind the building and making the frontyard safer.

New Playground

Changing yard to allow safe play for kids.

4.4 reflections from stakeholders

At the end of our field study, we invited different stakeholders to a presentation. This was also an opportunity to collect reflections about the project in a workshop, interview and conversation. It also acted as a first handover of the project.



aims

- Understanding how different stakeholders have experienced the process and its outcomes
- Supporting recognition of dreams and interests to strengthen a sense of self and community identity
- Building engagement and relationships with people in the community for later co-design work.

evaluation workshop

We ended the session with a workshop in which participants anonymously answered questions (see Appendix) about their experience on post-its to put on the walls.

20 people, mixed stakeholder groups



Inside MYDO Melusi 3

1 hour

Coloured pens, question papers, post-its

key insights

- People are feeling happy and inspired by our work. The interventions are perceived as positive, especially the upgraded fence and signs, having improved recognizability and appearance.
- There are some ideas about future interventions, particularly exploring how more childrens' games can be facilitated.

"This project brought change into the community & our organization"

"We will achieve great things"

"The project is nothing but a blessing"

"The place can be identified better now"



challenges

- The event was marketed as open for anyone to attend, from Melusi residents to external companies. It was challenging to formulate questions that fit everyone, regardless of their role in the process. The event took place during working hours, meaning many of the people involved in the co-design could not attend to give their feedback. However, their experiences were partly documented during the community project days (see Appendix).

Getting responses to the "negative" questions was difficult. It was hard to tell if they are genuine or if people felt hesitant to voice their criticism.

concluding interview



2 MYDO Melusi 3 managers



Inside MYDO Melusi 3

20 min

Interview guide, phone for audio recording

Additionally, a semi-structured group interview (see Appendix), with the managers of MYDO Melusi 3, gathered their concluding remarks on our work together.

key insights

? We were happy to hear that they were satisfied with our co-design approach and its outcomes.

🗨️ Their plans and visions for the future of MYDO Melusi 3 have transformed with the ideas and methods of our project.

challenges

? We had more established relationships with the participants, but still only got positive comments. A takeaway is that question wording can be finetuned to help participants formulate criticism.

Short-term

Long-term

? Tangible interventions

🗨️ Participatory design

🗨️ Community engagement

🗨️ Recognizing skills and strengthening identity

Recognizability and safety are seen as positively improved after the project.

They felt like we had fully understood each other and that their opinions had been heard.

Their impression was that we had created engagement and inclusion across different groups in the community.

They described that the project helped recognizing their skills, leading to insights about what they are capable of.

“We are happy about everything that you implemented”

“I loved how we worked together, it was not an individual thing, we managed to do everything together”

“You even include the local or the community in order to have a perfect product at the end”

“We were able to do many things that even us in this office we never thought we could do”

“When someone is out there, by the corner, they are able to see that ‘wow’ MYDO is here or Breaking News is here”

“It was all our plans, our opinions”

“You put everyone in this project. It was not a one man show”

“It really revived my skills”

“I think the kids will be much safer, because the signs are there and then they play outside we don’t have to be worried”

“You always included us in the process”

Were there voices that we missed or disregarded?

“It was not about you, it was more of ‘what you think guys you can do,’”

How do we ensure that this is not a “false” sense of safety?

“You guys didn’t just plan it on your own, you were able to give us that space to say ‘what do you think’”

How do we evaluate the child perspective?

How do we hand over in the a way that “keeps the wheel spinning”?

Was this true for everyone involved, or just the people we worked most closely with?

5.1 handover and follow-up reflections

handover

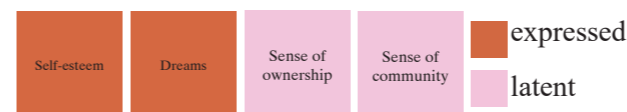
On stakeholder presentation

Dreams Collection
Showcase the children’s dreams and strengthen identity

Letter to MYDO
Marking the end of our chapter in their story

Giving back the drawings from the workshop with the children, for MYDO to use as desired.

A letter addressing our time together (see Appendix), framing our work as part of their continuing story.



After end of field study

Project Report
Presenting our findings and analysis in full.

Contacts
Sharing contact information for future collaborations

This report, as an overview of the entire project, to MYDO stakeholders and University of Pretoria students.

Mediating contact between MYDO and stakeholders outside Melusi, that could benefit each other.

follow-up reflections

A few weeks after returning to Sweden, we reached out to the MYDO Melusi 3 managers to follow up on the interventions. The response consisted of photos, videos and voice recordings.

“know that you have changed the kids’ life in our community”

“We are happy with you work, there is nothing much we can complain or add”

“the children are also happy with the initiative”

key insights

? In terms of our interventions, the play space is actively being used by the kids. The only issue has been a chair needing to be fixed.

🗨️ They are still expressing that they are happy about our work, and no further complaints have come up since we left.



Sketch based on photo from Lerato, showing current use of the space

5.2 future areas to focus on

continuation of our project

We have identified some opportunities for extending our project. These could be part of future projects of Reality Studio or Urban Citizen Studio at University of Pretoria.



As pointed out by the community, there the play space can be further developed. This includes clearing out the back- and frontyard, adding things to play with and exploring how different recreational activities can be facilitated.



Currently, volunteers move chairs from inside to sit along one of the walls in the shade. Introducing more permanent seating outdoors and adding more shading could be a possible area to elaborate on.

identified areas of possible intervention

We identified many areas that were out of the project scope to address. These relate to important needs of the community and could have a substantial impact.



Garden. The volunteers imagine that the backyard garden can be developed to provide vegetables for their feeding program and for selling. Many residents are interested in gardening, making it a possible recreational and skills-developing activity.



Water. Currently, there is no bathroom on site, but they use the facilities on the neighbouring lot. Additionally, they rely on that tap water for washing hands and dishes, as well as for watering the garden and cleaning.



Kitchen. The feeding program at MYDO Melusi 3 currently relies on deliveries from the original MYDO. They would like to build a kitchen and storage for groceries on site. It might be necessary to also address waste management.



Rainproofing. When it rains, they have to close down operations. Future projects could look into waterproofing the structure and softening noise from rain.

5.3 project reflections

limitations and critique

The course context of Reality Studio poses some limitations on the project, including available funding and time. Moreover, we have identified some shortcomings of our methods and outcomes, in relation to the addressed SDGs.



In our workshops and interviews the gender distribution has been close to equal. However, in the community project days, female participation was very low. Hence, co-design and decision-making was not as inclusive and participatory as intended, given that a group with limited voice was not rightfully represented. Literature suggests to investigate what might restrict participation to accommodate a gender-balanced representation (Daniel, 2013).

How can future projects better capture the voice of women and children?



The course itself acts as a platform for enhancing partnerships across national borders, playing a part in addressing this goal. A big part of our project work has been building relationships with stakeholders and mobilizing knowledge, resources and skills for self-owned community development.

However, in terms of financial resources, professional expertise and governmental involvement, partnerships have been limited.



We only interacted directly with the children once, meaning that their participation was limited. They were informed about the project and its goals, but had little influence over the project as they were not consulted for the intervention proposals or included in decision-making. Additional workshops with the children, as well as more knowledge about leading children groups, would have been necessary to better address this goal.



Our interventions have made an impact to increase childrens' opportunities to play and relax as part of their daily lives. It supports extending the MYDO programs aimed at developing personality, talents and abilities through different activities.



This goal is addressed as our interventions have mainly revolved around improving the safety of an educational facility. However, a concern is how we ensure that the interventions in fact create a safe environment. Frugal construction methods and material sourcing means that the results may not live up to the safety standards that we would use for play spaces in formal settings.

5.4 project reflections

challenges and questions

The process has been frustrating every step of the way. We imagine it stems from being afraid of making mistakes in the unfamiliar context with consequences for real lives. In many situations, we have also been challenged to trust the open process and take small steps without assuming too much about the end result. We have struggled with wanting to define an overarching project structure, but the nature of the project limiting us to only knowing the general direction and having to be flexible to adapt along the way. Frustration apart, it has been equally rewarding at every breakthrough, to see the pieces falling into place.

Part of this was also accepting that we couldn't control the outcomes. Rather, taking a step back and focusing on designing a process that represents our values and facilitates the visions of the community, without doing much designing ourselves. It has been challenging to navigate what role we can claim in the co-design process and to resist making detailed plans, as in our usual workflow. However, we soon realized that mobilizing skills and creativity in other people is rewarding in itself.

The context of academic and community collaboration, as well as identity characteristics such as skin color, gender and social position, has underlying power dimensions (Muhammad et al, 2014). We had to be aware of how our privileged position impacts our interactions. For example, to question whether yes-saying comes from asymmetrical power dynamics, or if our process and ideas are actually perceived as positive. MYDO being an organization that operates with very limited resources, we have feared that they feel obligated to accept and appreciate all our proposals, and not dare offer genuine criticism.

Another question raised during the process was whether our work has a positive impact, or if our presence in field has disrupted more than it has helped. The community has offered us much in terms of time and dedication, and we received much appreciation for our collective achievements. However, we can't help but wonder whether the yearly entry-and-exit of students is a burden for the community.

key takeaways

Keeping an open, uncertain process can yield rewarding results, but unless we dare to act before knowing the outcome nothing gets done in such a process.

Accepting to have to let go of much of our usual role as architects or designers, but there are other roles in design work.

Reflecting on and being aware of how our position and privilege may impact power dynamics and collaboration is important.

Remembering that we play a very small part in the big picture, but do what we can to make every step of the process meaningful and consider the long-term impact.

5.5 conclusion

Conclusively, approaching the project without a rigid plan and relying on frameworks of human-centered participatory design, and guiding keywords was successful in achieving our aims. Identifying key objectives, such as strengthening identity and community, in both short and long-term perspectives was crucial for designing workshops and data collection methods aligned with our values.

Working step-by-step allowed us to build relationships of mutual trust and respect with the community. Also, ensuring that the project's progression was guided by the community's needs, desires and resources, rather than strict deadlines from our side.

This project has sparked change—hopefully for the community, but certainly for us as emerging professionals, shaping our approach to design and community engagement. In handing over this report, we hope to inspire future interactions and contributions from Reality Studio students and others. *We extend our thanks to those continuing this process, particularly:*

- The University of Pretoria students, being a part of the next steps of the story;
- Future Reality Studio students, who may find inspiration or insights in this report;
- The community of Melusi 3 and MYDO, who continuously dream of a better future;
- Readers of this report, inspired to embrace care in their efforts.

Thank you for your time and care!

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Architecture, MPARC

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Images

Images and illustrations are taken or made by the project team, unless otherwise stated.

SGD and CRC icons:

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Interview Guide: Context interviews

Interview Guide	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Aim: To open up the interview, create a comfortable and safe atmosphere and establish a relationship.</p>	<p>Present ourselves and introduce names. We are students doing interviews, would you like to participate? How much time do you have?</p> <p>Would it be okay for you if we record? It is anonymous, and will not be played for anyone outside the group, and deleted afterwards.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Could you tell me a bit about yourself? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How old are you? What is your gender? Where are you from (born)? Do you live in Boyson 2? Can you tell us a bit about your family? Could you tell me about what a day in your life looks like? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What do you work with? What are your responsibilities at home / in the community? What interests you? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What makes you happy? What do you like to do in your spare time? How do you take care of your home/garden?
<p>Places</p> <p>Aim: To understand the relationship people have to physical places in the neighborhood</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. What do you think is special/unique about this place? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What place in the neighborhood do you think best represents the community? How does this neighborhood make you feel? Is that what you wish for? What is the place that you spend the most time in? Do you like it or not? How can it be better? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Can we take a picture? (if home) 6. Could you tell me about a place that is important to you here? What is the place you feel the most safe? Can you describe it?
<p>Community</p> <p>Aim: To map the view on community and understand the its identity and values</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What does community mean to you? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What comes to mind when you hear the word community? 9. How would you describe this neighborhood to someone who does not live here? What is your best memory about this neighborhood? What brings people together here?
<p>Dreams</p> <p>Aim: To map the issues currently faced at MYDO and visions of the future</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. What do you imagine for the future of this place? Anything is possible, dream big! <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think is the next step? What can be improved here? How do you want people to feel when they are here? If you could change anything, what would be the first thing you would change about MYDO/this area?
<p>MYDO</p> <p>Aim: To understand the identity of MYDO</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have you been involved with MYDO? Why, why not? 15. What are the most important things that MYDO does for the community? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What can be improved? What works well here at MYDO? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What can be improved? 17. How do you wish people would feel when they are at MYDO? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How can MYDO make everyone feel welcome? 18. What would you like to do differently here at the new MYDO compared to the old MYDO? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What makes the new MYDO special? What is your best memory about this place? Could you tell me an interesting/impressive story about MYDO/this area? Could you tell me about a challenge that the community/MYDO has overcome?
<p>Ending</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Any final thoughts? <p>Thank you for taking the time to talk to us!</p>

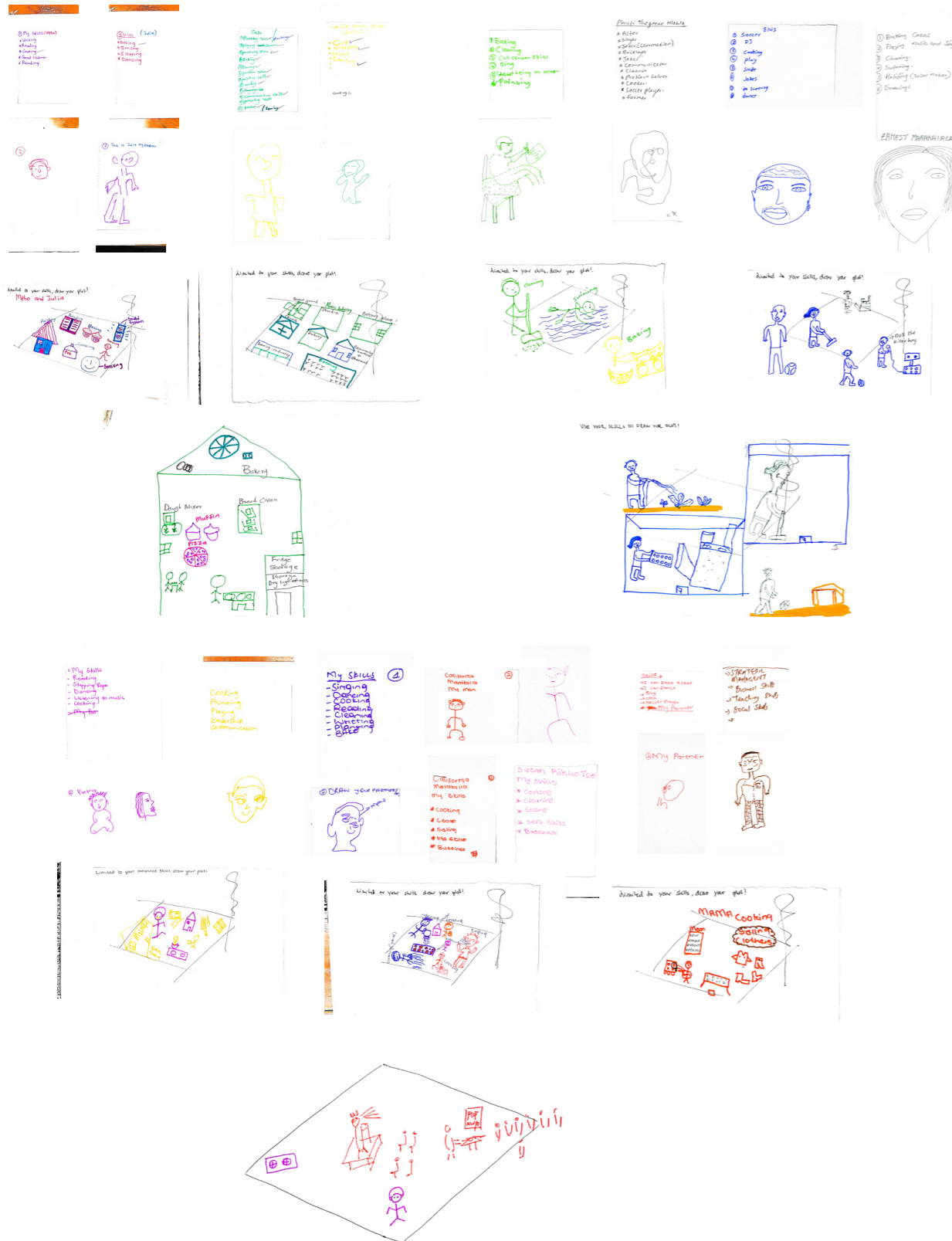
Design proposals



Workshop 1: Instructions and drawings

Instructions on board:

1. Write down your skills! (Examples: drawing, singing, talking, making jokes)
2. Draw your partner without looking and without lifting the pen from the paper!
3. Use your combined skills and draw something which you would want to do on this piece of land! Example: a festival, a building, an event, a maze, a fireplace.
4. Now combine your group with the next, and add a material: you can use bricks, water, sand or wood. Combine your land of skills with materials!



Workshop 2: Instructions and drawings

1. Dreams: Draw 4 things you want to do, one thing in each box. What would you like to learn? / What would you like to be better at? / What do you want to do/work with when you grow up? / What house/world do you want to live in? / What does your life look like?
2. Games identification: Draw four games you like to play. It can be what games you play with your friends or something you do for fun. You can discuss with others. Where do you usually play this? / Who do you play with? / How do you play it? / What things do you like to play with?
3. Mark your favorite activity/game.
4. Sharing: Does anyone want to tell us about their favorite game?



Community Project Days Poster and Data Collection



COMMUNITY PROJECT DAYS
Join us in developing MYDO!

Together with MYDO, students from Chalmers University in Sweden are doing a project and welcoming everyone in the community to help out with designing and building the new MYDO branch!

Everyone is welcome, no matter your skills, age and interests.
We will be happy to see you there!

When: May 1-3, 09:00-13:00
Where: MYDO Melusi 3 Branch

How old are you? Mark with a dot in the box!

10 years or younger	11 - 20 years
21-35 years	35 years or older

How did you hear about the event today? Mark with a dot in the box!

Facebook / Social media	Information board / Poster
Friends	Other

Community Project Event Poster



COMMUNITY PROJECT EVENT
Join us in celebrating **MYDO** and your community!

Together with MYDO and the Malusi community, students from Chalmers University in Sweden have been working on developing MYDO.
We would like to share all the progress we have made together over the last few weeks and we will be happy to see you there!

When: May 6th, 12:30 - 14:00
Where: MYDO Malusi 3 Branch

Handover: Letter and printed pictures

Hello,

We would like to extend a big thank you to the team behind MYDO Melusi 3 Branch. We are grateful for all your support and dedication, without which none of this would have been possible.

These weeks have given us more than we could ever have imagined. Everyday has brought us so much inspiration and motivation to better the world around us and care for the people in our communities, just as you have shown us.

We are sad to leave, but will keep this time close to heart for a long time. We wish you all the best with all your future dreams and visions for yourselves, MYDO and the community of Melusi. On that note, we would like to hand back all the admirable dreams of the children of MYDO, and hope for all of them to come true.

Take care and keep up the amazing work,

Chalmers team

