

# Design for Civic Social Media

Principles and choices for designing, launching, and maintaining Civic Social Media

**MAY 2025**

**PUBLIC SPACES, PUBHUBS, CIVIC INTERACTION DESIGN RESEARCH GROUP**

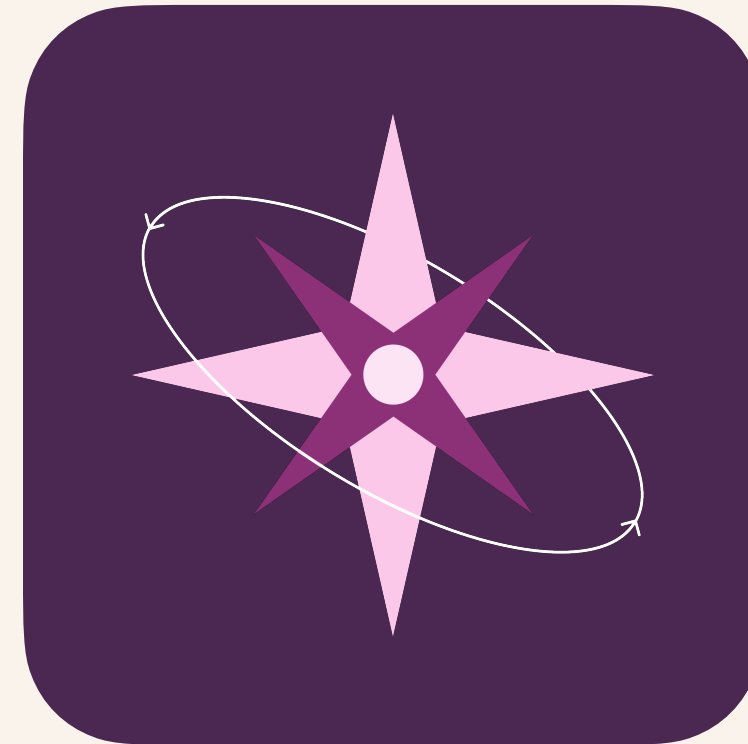
# Design principles



**COMMUNITY-  
CENTRED**



**SAFE AND TRUSTED**



**RESPONSIBLE**



**SOVEREIGN**



**DIVERSE  
ECOSYSTEM**

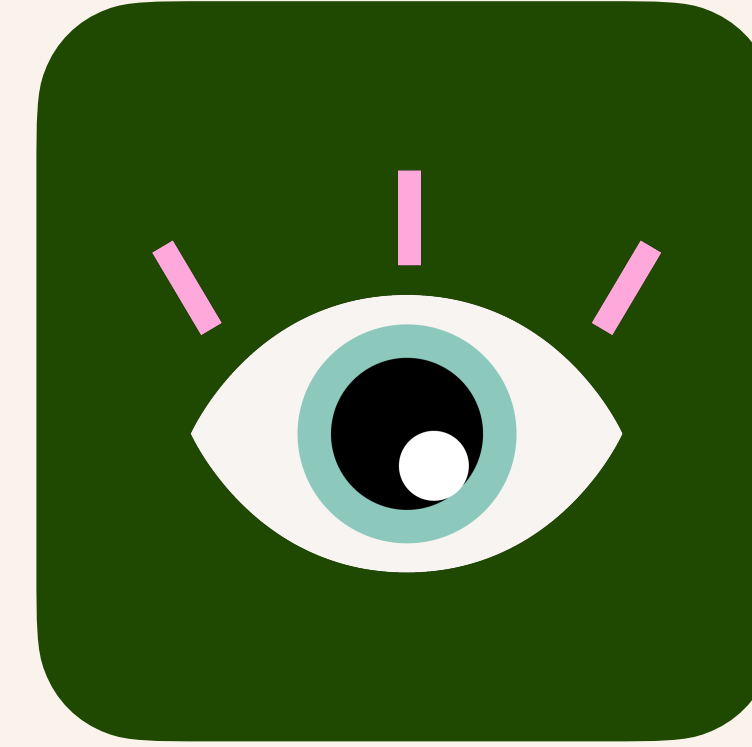
# Design dimensions



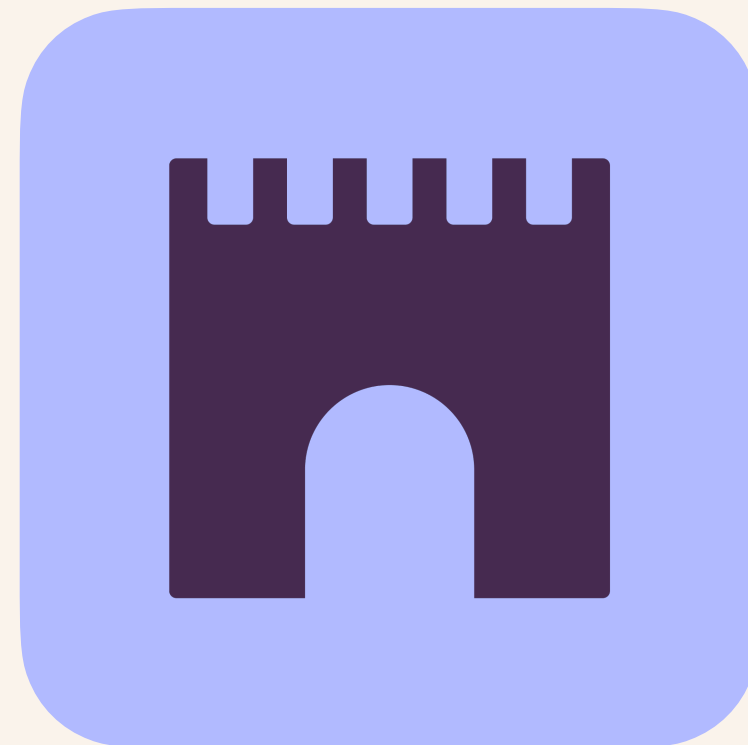
**GOVERNANCE**



**MODERATION AND  
CONTENT**



**VISIBILITY**



**AUTHENTICATION**



**PERSONALISATION**



**PHYSICAL AND  
DIGITAL BALANCE**

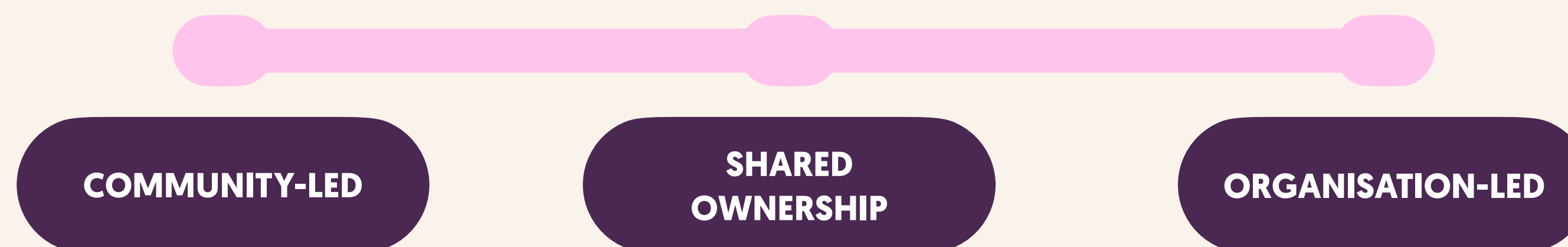


**CONNECTION**



## Governance

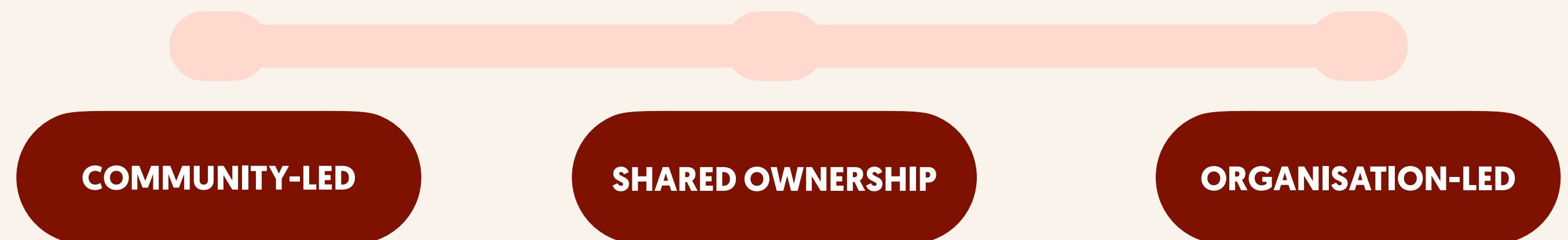
Who owns and manages the platform and its data, and who makes decisions about the future of the platform?





## Content and moderation

Who decides the community guidelines and what may or may not be shared?

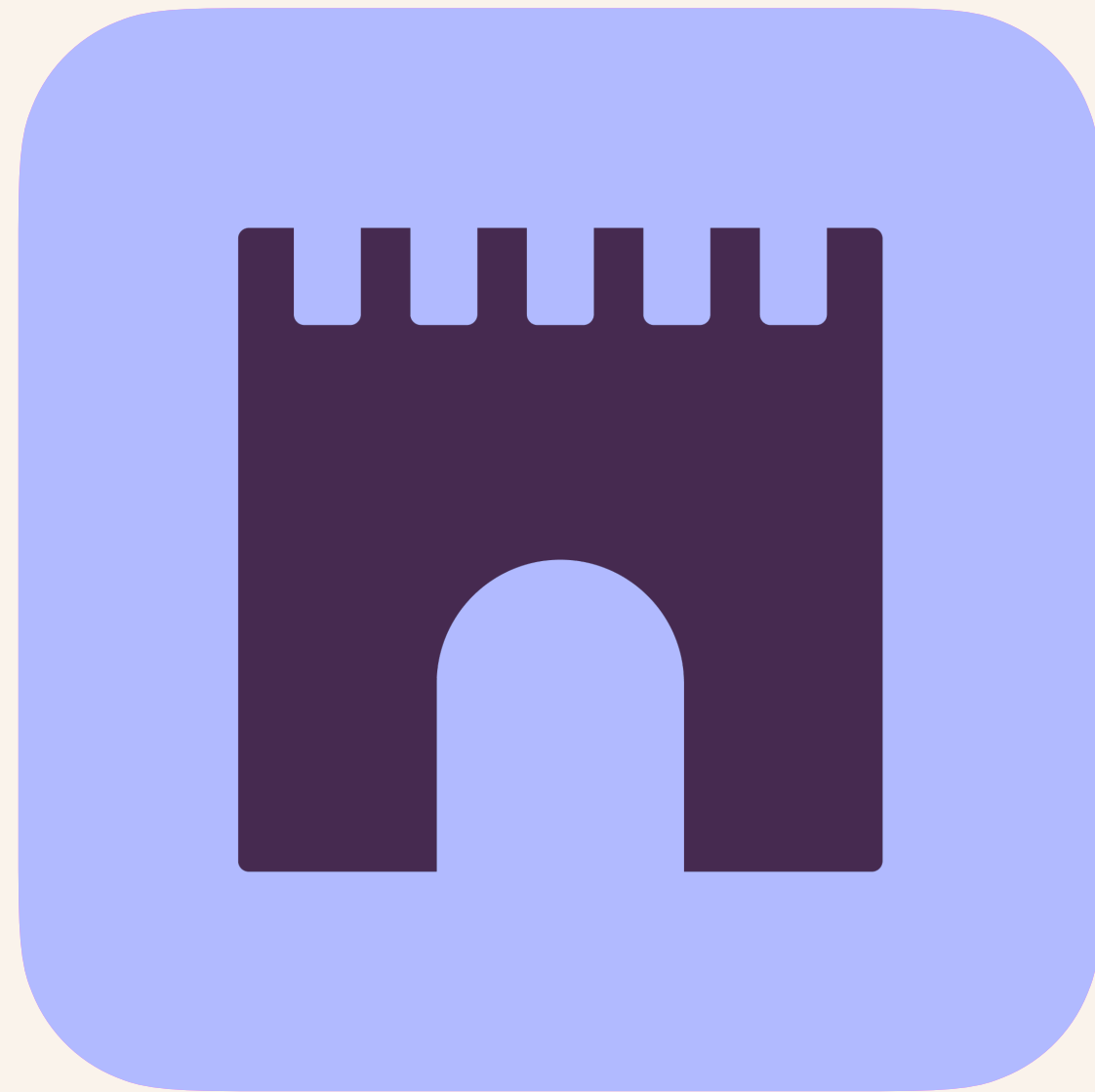




# Visibility

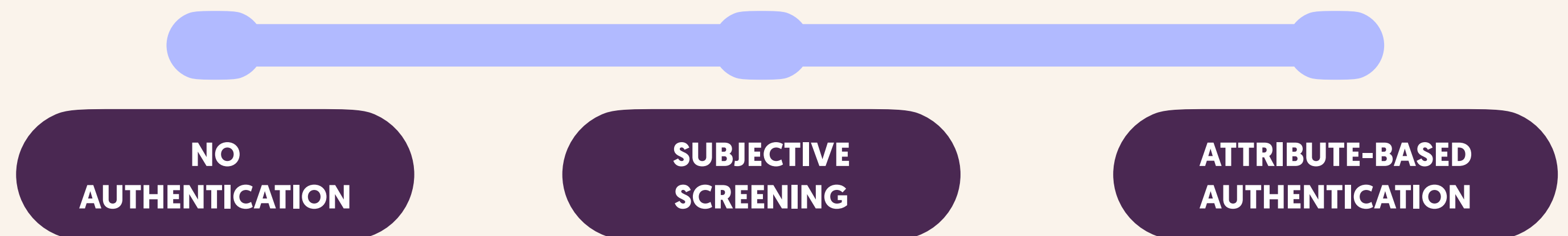
Is it important that conversations take place publicly, or that people can gather in confidence?





# Authentication

Are access requirements needed to ensure a safe environment? Or is a low-barrier to entry more important?





## Personalisation

Do members seek others who share their experiences, identity, or goals? Or are they open to diverse perspectives?

**DESIGN FOR  
CONVERGENCE**

**DESIGN FOR  
DIVERGENCE**





## Physical and digital balance

Is the digital platform the primary meeting place, or does the community gather physically as well?





## Connection

Do people come together to build lasting relationships, or are the connections more temporary and goal-oriented?



# Community archetypes



# Communities of care

*Communities of care* are support networks —groups of peers with shared struggles, ambitions or experiences—who come together to support one another, offer guidance, and exchange experiences.

## COMMUNITIES OF CARE

# What matters to communities?

We hope to find people who understand and support us

We're curious about others' experiences. We need a trusted space to share our stories

We prefer our community to be managed by someone who's part of it.

We want help finding the right community

We want control over our visibility

# What matters to organisations?

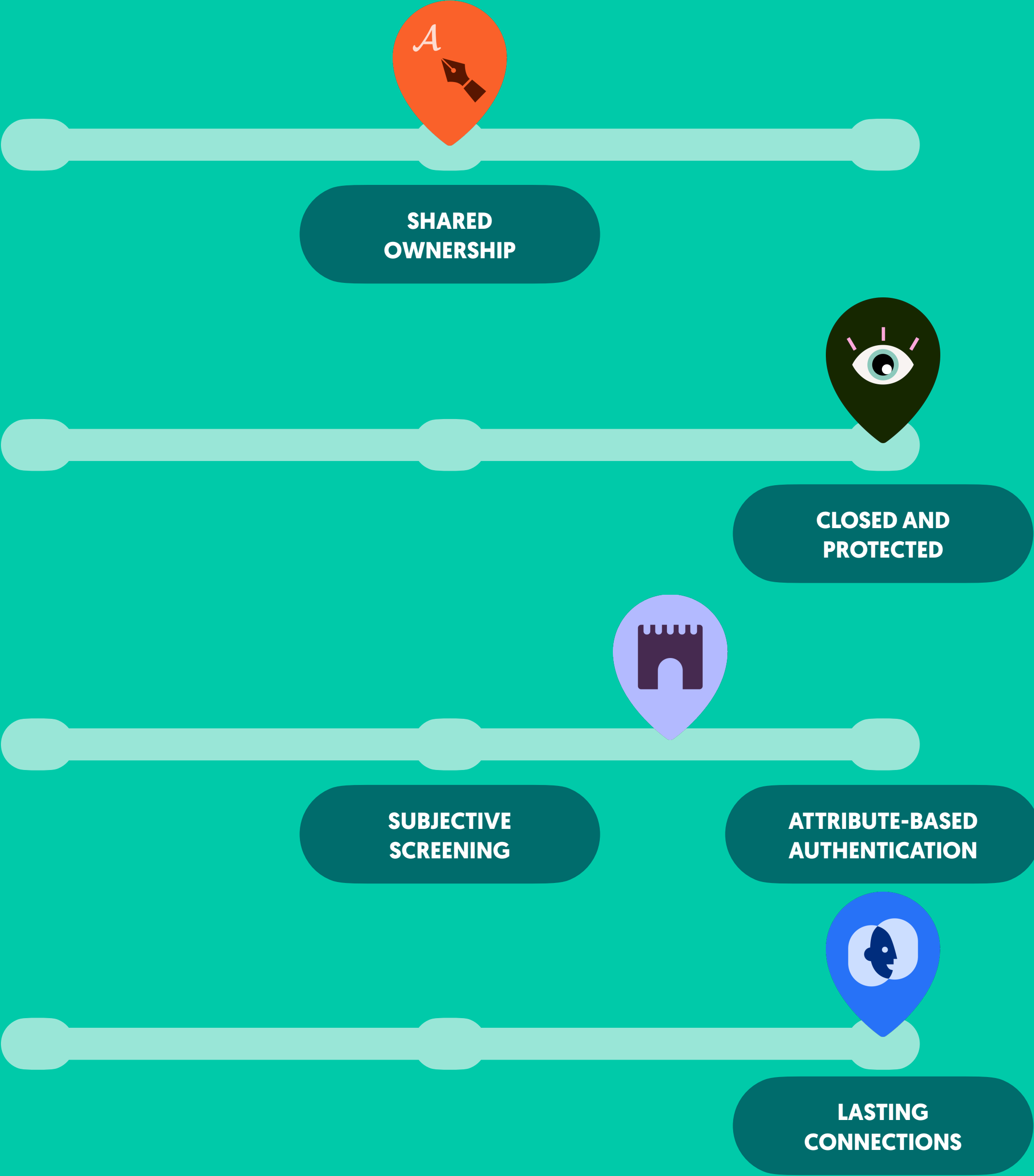
We want to take responsibility for community safety

We aim to strengthen the mental resilience of our communities

We want people to have tools to improve their well-being, with peer-to-peer contact as key

COMMUNITIES OF CARE

Designing for communities of care



# Communities of knowledge and culture

*Communities of knowledge and culture are people with shared interests who develop knowledge and insights together, and may collaboratively create or design things and share their creations.*



# What matters to communities?

We need a space around shared passions.

Some of us are very active—we want to share our knowledge. Some only want to participate casually.

We like starting and shaping our own groups.

We want a shared calendar for activities.

We want to share creations on our terms  
(copyright matters)

# What matters to organisations?

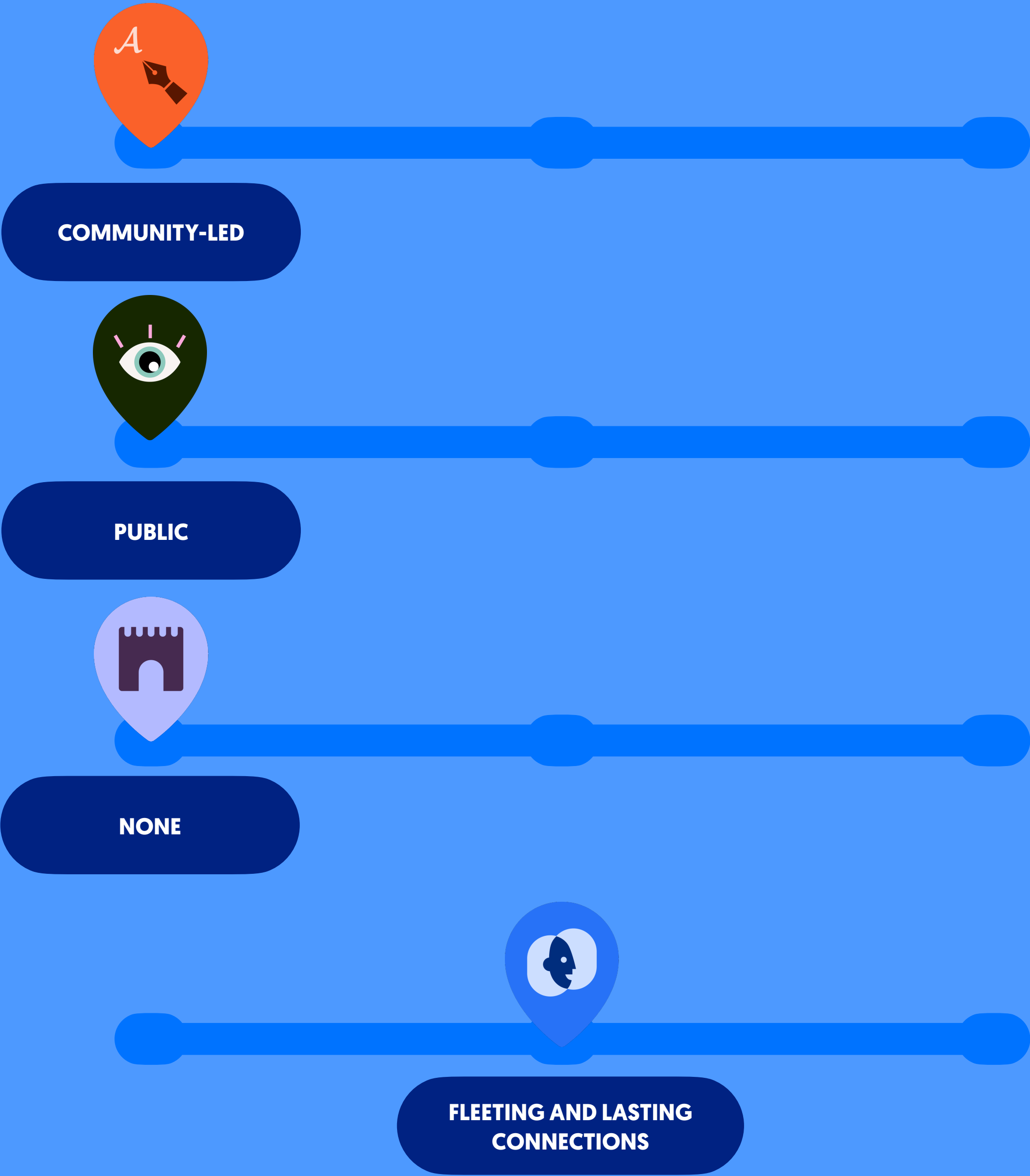
We want to support (amateur) creators and researchers.

We value connecting communities across sectors and regions.

We want knowledge to be publicly accessible.

COMMUNITIES OF CARE

Designing for  
communities of  
knowledge and  
culture



# Communities of intent

*Communities of intent* are groups of people actively working together to achieve a common goal, possibly through political advocacy or societal campaigns.

## COMMUNITIES OF INTENT

# What matters to communities?

We want tools for collaboration and communication

We want control over our digital environment—  
independent from institutions

We want to discuss sensitive topics without top-down  
surveillance

We want to grow our movement and attract members/  
partners.

We want to connect with people who share our  
purpose.

## COMMUNITIES OF INTENT

# What matters to organisations?

We want to support bottom-up initiatives (e.g., energy, food transition)

We want to enable active citizen participation

We want to strengthen social transitions in which citizen initiatives are essential, such as the energy transition or the food transition.

We represent a specific societal interest and aim to support and connect local organizations.

COMMUNITIES OF CARE

Designing for communities of intent



# Communities of place

*Communities of place* are people living together in a neighbourhood, city, or region who want to share practical tips and requests and stay informed about local developments.



## COMMUNITIES OF PLACE

# What matters to communities?

We want to know what's happening locally

Want to access a platform, without too many barriers to access.

We're often looking for things (e.g., a drill, babysitter, volunteers)

Sometimes we would like to offer things to our community.

We want to stay informed about and share local events

# What matters to organisations?

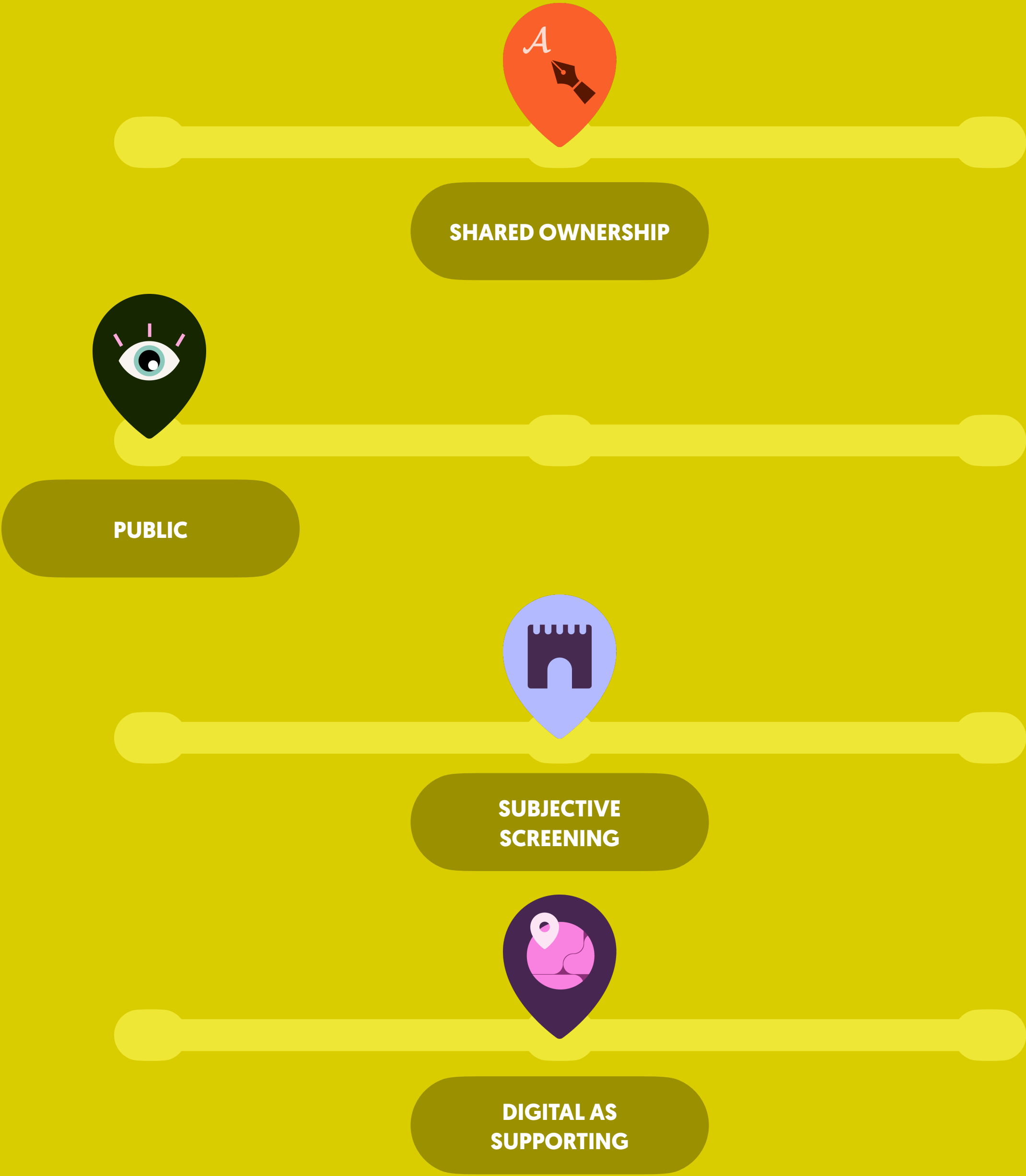
We believe in resilient communities that support one another

We want to promote sharing economies, such as shared mobility and local food production

We want to stimulate local entrepreneurship

COMMUNITIES OF PLACE

Designing for communities of place



# Communities of constituents

*Communities of constituents* are people who want to engage with official organisations and institutions such as the municipality or national government, or are invited to do so by these organisations.

## COMMUNITIES OF CONSTITUENTS

# What matters to communities?

We are often looking for answers to a specific request for help. We want reliable advice.

We are very diverse, so it is important that information is offered in different formats to ensure it is accessible to everyone.

We want a central hub for all info on a topic

We want to easily get in touch with an expert, professional, or contact person from an organisation.

We want to go through as few steps as possible to achieve our goal.

## COMMUNITIES OF CONSTITUENTS

# What matters to organisations?

We want to be a central hub. We want to be able to refer people to the right place.

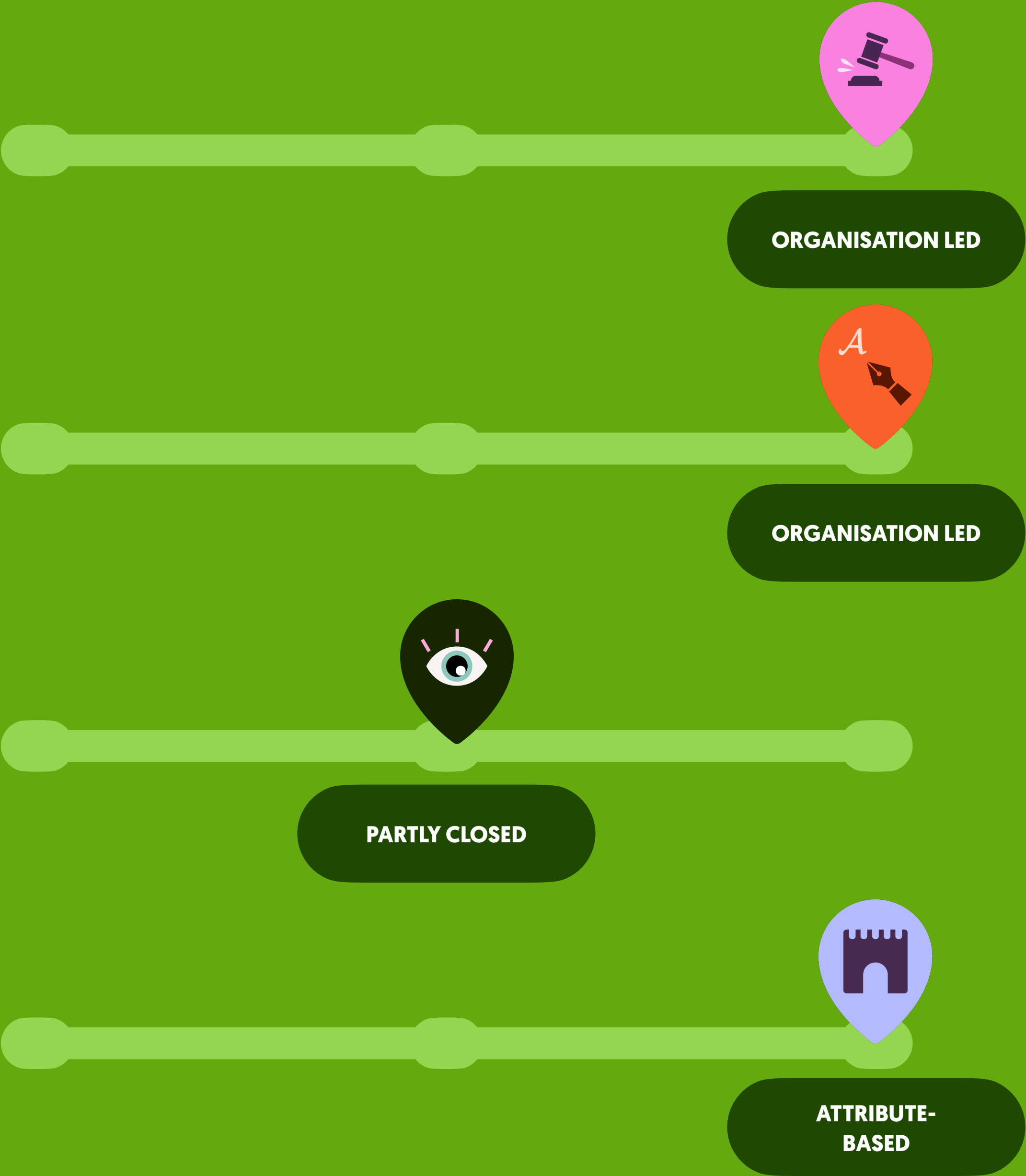
We want to be easily findable. We want to appear at the top of search results.

We want to provide reliable information and be able to organize information for better accessibility.

We want to engage in dialogue with our constituents. We want to involve communities in ongoing developments.

COMMUNITIES OF CONSTITUENTS

Designing for communities of constituents



# Communities of debate

*Communities of debate* are people who want to discuss diverse viewpoints on current issues and developments, through collective sensemaking and political debate.



## COMMUNITIES OF DEBATE

# What matters to communities?

We want a meeting place where we can come together around current issues that concern us.

We are curious about others and different perspectives.

We want an environment with clear norms of interaction and rules of conduct. We want to feel safe to express ourselves.

We want to gather in an environment where you can trust that others have good intentions and are also open to dialogue.

# What matters to organisations?

We want to bring certain topics to light and actively invite people to engage in conversation about them.

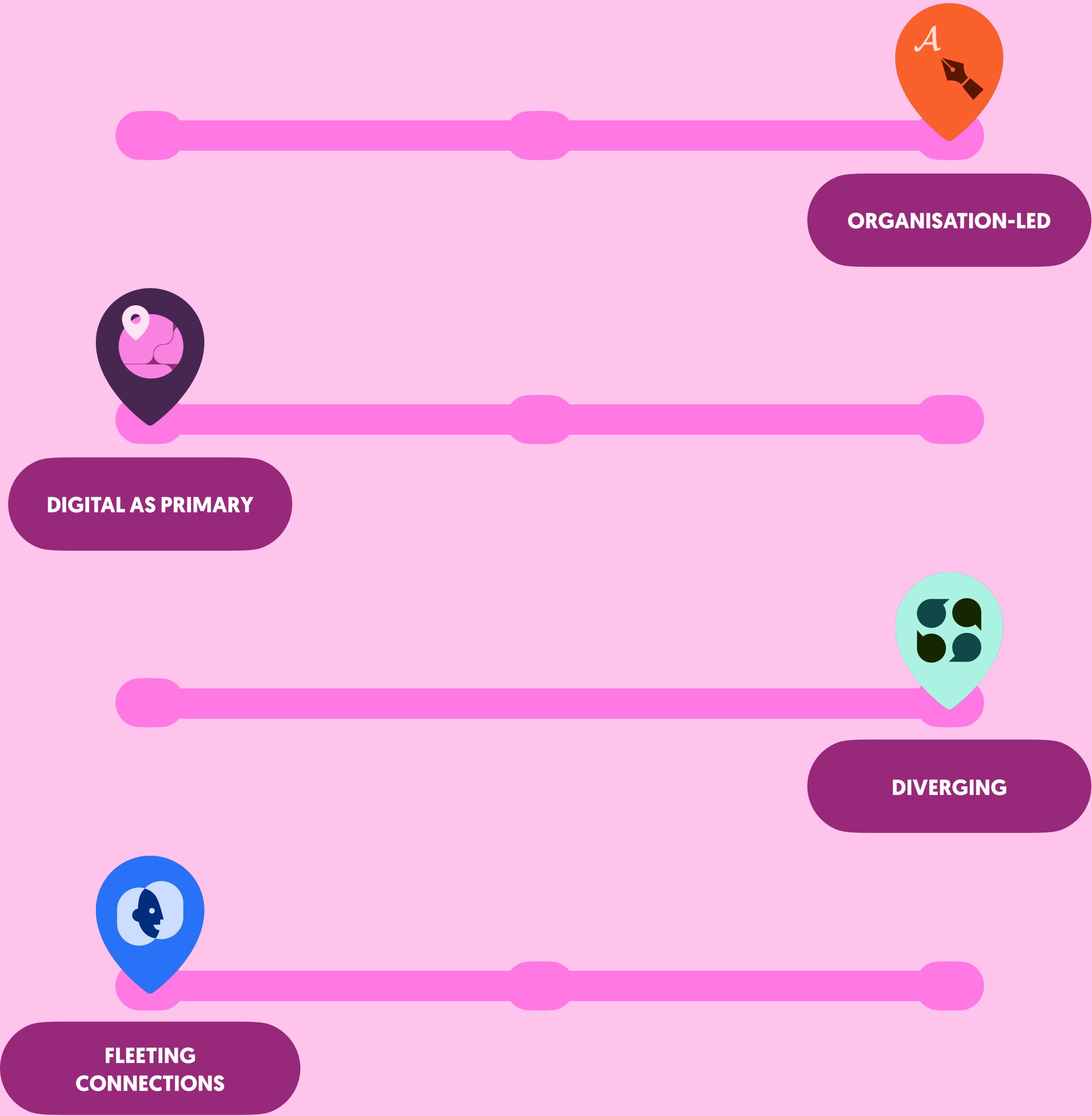
We want to counter polarisation in society by bringing different perspectives into contact with one another.

We want a vibrant democracy in which dialogue plays an important role.

We want to encourage participants to actively take part in the conversation.

COMMUNITIES OF DEBATE

Designing for communities of debate



# Communities of care

Sofia's story

*Now she longs for personal contact with someone in a similar situation, so they can seek guidance and support together.*

## INTERACTION 1

# A warm welcome

*During her search, Sofia finds a digital community where people share experiences about living with bipolar disorder. She's curious and decides to sign up — but she also finds it nerve-racking.*

## INTERACTION 2

# Pseudonym

*Sofia wants to share her experiences and connect with others, but in the beginning, she doesn't want to reveal everything about herself. So that she can be vulnerable without worrying that a family member or colleague might recognise her.*

## INTERACTION 3

# Friendship verification

*After being active in the community for a while, Sofia notices she craves more personal contact — ideally with someone in the same stage of life. She wonders how others her age deal with certain challenges.*

# Communities of knowledge and culture

Daan's story

*Daan immediately feels drawn to the group's passion and enthusiasm and decides to join.*



## INTERACTION 1

# Community collections

*Daan is just getting started with stargazing and sometimes feels a bit lost in the sea of information. He's looking for a handy way to expand his knowledge and find more direction in his journey.*

## INTERACTION 2

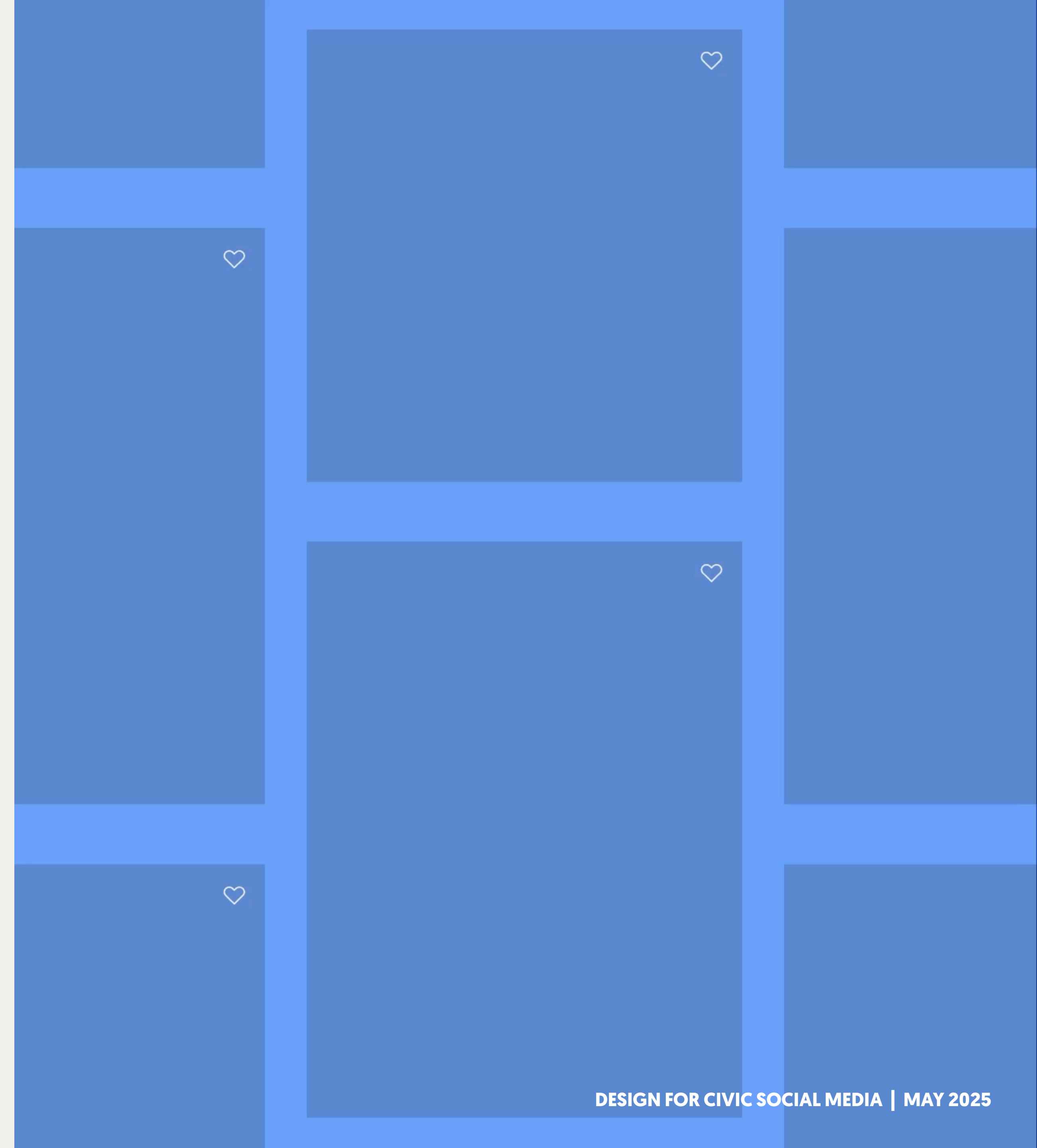
# Knowledge badges

*The community is open to people of all experience levels, and Daan quickly feels welcome — no matter how much he knows. As he improves his skills in stargazing, his knowledge level also evolves.*

### INTERACTION 3

## Showcase

*Daan enjoys discovering the stars and capturing his own photos of the night sky. While browsing the community gallery, he finds an image he finds especially beautiful and would love to print and frame for his home.*



# Communities of constituents

Ayaan's story

*While searching on Google, she comes across a platform set up by the municipality, specifically for residents looking to make their homes more sustainable.*

## INTERACTION 1

# A central place

*Ayaan has decided to dive deeper into her options for making her home greener, but sometimes feels overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information.*

## INTERACTION 2

# The collective counter

*Ayaan is looking for more specific information about solar panels and how best to begin the installation process.*

## INTERACTION 3

# Participation invite

*By now, Ayaan has been active on the platform for some time and is well on her way with her solar panel installation. She feels increasingly confident about the decisions she's making, but also realizes how much time and effort it took her to reach this point.*



## COLOFON & VERANTWOORDING

This publication is the result of a collaboration between the Civic Interaction Design Lectorate at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, PubHubs, Public Spaces, the City of Amsterdam and the Universities of Nijmegen and Utrecht on the development of a UX design and Use Cases for PubHubs. This research was made possible by a financial contribution from the SIDN Fund.

The insights in this publication emerged from desk research into recent developments in the field of social media and the broader design research trajectory of the AUAS into the User Experience and Use Cases for PubHubs. The needs of communities and organizations—clustered into six community archetypes—were mapped through generative research with users of such platforms and through workshops with public organisations from various societal domains, particularly in health care, media, libraries, and municipalities.

In addition, valuable insights were gained through practical research in support of UX design for PubHubs, and inspiration was drawn from several student projects from the Communication and Multimedia Design program, in which students worked on designs for PubHubs and other civic social media platforms.

One limitation of the research is that the different types of communities were not equally represented. For example, we obtained a more comprehensive understanding of the needs of communities of care compared to communities of debate, as we had many meaningful conversations with users and organizations around the theme of mental health.



## COLOFON & VERANTWOORDING

Organisations that contributed to the research include MIND, Ypsilon, Vereniging BovenJan, Kenniscloud, Bibliotheek Noord-Brabant, NTR Innovatie, Municipality of Amsterdam, Stadsdeel Osdorp and the Wildemanbuurt, Stichting The Beach, Bibliotheek Rivierenland, and Erfgoedcentrum Rozet Arnhem.

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[www.pubhubs.nl](http://www.pubhubs.nl)

[www.publicspaces.net](http://www.publicspaces.net)

[www.civicixd.com](http://www.civicixd.com)

<https://civicixdproject.com/civicsocialmedia/>

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