Our FEELedwork Strategy: Mobilizing Knowledge for and with Community

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1. Introduction

The FEELed Lab is an interdisciplinary collaborative environmental humanities field lab of the University of British Columbia, Okanagan (UBCO), led by Astrida Neimanis and located on unceded Syilx territory, in Kelowna, BC. Their activities support curiosity, inquiry and action for living well with human and non-human beings in the Okanagan watershed and beyond. The work of the FEELed Lab is grounded in hydrofeminist principles that insist on the messy and necessary amplification of feminist, queer, crip, anticolonial, and antiracist perspectives to address the tangled challenges of social and environmental crisis (www.thefeeledlab.ca).

A guiding principle of the FEELed Lab is **"we do what we can with what we have"** (Astrida Neimanis, personal communication, Jan. 17th, 2025), positing the crucial importance of time constraints, energy fluctuations, and the necessity of sustainable, non-extractive research practices. Rather than treating knowledge as a static output, the FEELed Lab embraces iterative, flexible, and responsive forms of knowledge mobilization. Therefore, this knowledge mobilization strategy was designed to be practical, adaptable, and low-maintenance, ensuring that participation remains meaningful without becoming overly burdensome. The lab's approach heavily stresses engagement that accommodates different capacities, allowing for continuity even when contributors need to step back.

Goal

Currently (in Feb 2025), the FEELed lab uses a combination of their website, newsletter (the FEELed Guide) and Instagram for knowledge mobilization (KMb). For the FEELed Lab, community building is both knowledge mobilization and the research process itself. Therefore, ways of connecting with the FEELed Lab audience and community are crucial to the FEELed Lab's work. However, Instagram is no longer a viable platform for the lab due to a number of ethical concerns. Firstly, Meta, Instagram's parent company, has recently ended their third-party fact checking programme (see e.g. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly74mpy8klo). This exacerbated existing concerns over supporting billionaire-owned platforms whose algorithms have, among other issues, been shown to censor women and vulnerable users (Are, 2020). Secondly, like many other platforms Instagram is designed to support or enable social media addiction mediated through fear of missing out (Sultan, 2023) and have been shown to impact body esteem and perfectionism among users (Simon et al., 2022). Therefore, the goal of this project is to reform the FEELed Lab's knowledge mobilization strategy to sustain and potentially grow the community without using Instagram. The proposed KMb strategy aims to make the work of the FEELed lab accessible to different audiences without flattening the specificity of what the lab does.

2. Knowledge Mobilization Theory & Pathway

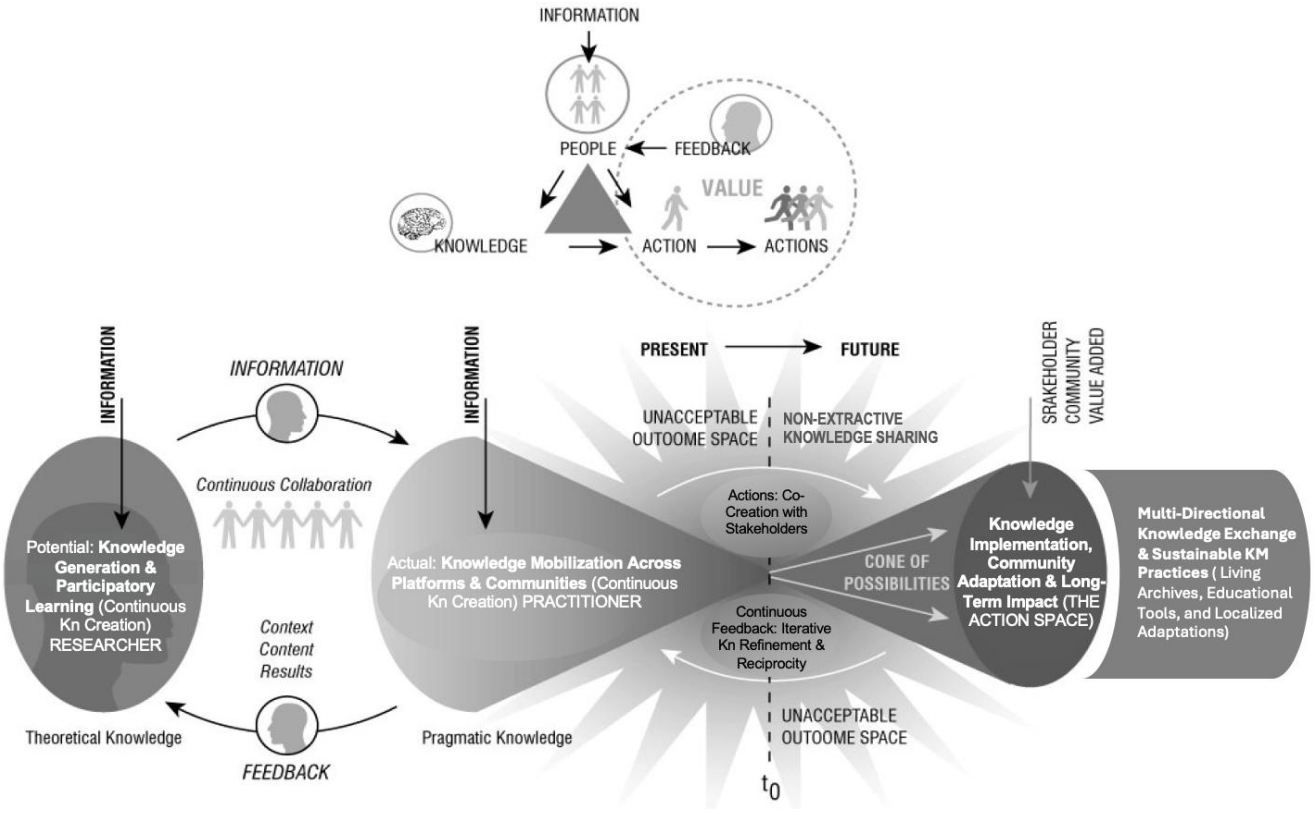

Fig.1. Knowledge Mobilization Model – Adapted from (Phipps, Jensen, & Myers, 2012), originally developed by (Bennet & Bennet, 2007), rendering the iterative process of translating research into action through collaboration, feedback, and stakeholder engagement[1].

The proposed knowledge mobilization (KMb) strategy is structured around a participatory, iterative, and multi-platform model that fuses interdisciplinary research, community engagement, and ethical knowledge dissemination. This framework is informed by the Knowledge-to-Action (KTA) model (Graham et al., 2006; Kitson & Straus, 2010), Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005), and participatory action research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019), affirming for knowledge to be co-produced, contextually adapted, and sustainably shared. It draws upon the (Bennet et al., 2007) framework on knowledge mobilization as referenced by Phipps Jensen, and Meyers (2012), which emphasizes the role of relationships in social sciences research in producing public benefit through multi-platform dissemination and engagement. Our strategy embraces digital space as a "constructive glitch" (Russell, 2020), disrupting hegemonic structures and nurturing fluid, decentralized knowledge-sharing. Informed by situated and embodied knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Neimanis et al., 2017; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014) and critical digital pedagogy (Risam, 2018; Watters, 2021), this strategy

[1] The original model from which this KM strategy is adapted makes clear distinctions between stakeholders, researchers, and practitioners. However, while we have drawn upon this model for structural guidance, the FEELed Lab does not adhere to strict separations between knowledge producers, receivers, users, or end-users.

rejects reliance on a singular platform, instead using the internet's potential for self-definition and counter-hegemonic engagement.

This pathway follows a structured yet adaptable process. It relocates the knowledge creation and dissemination process from knowledge generation and participatory learning to multi-platform mobilization, co-creation, and sustainable outcomes. Consistent with non-linear knowledge translation models (Mitton et al., 2007; Ward et al., 2009), this approach attempts to center iterative feedback loops, knowledge refinements, and local adaptations. Furthermore, by incorporating alternative infrastructures such as the FEELed Guide newsletter, living archives[2], and community-based dissemination strategies, the model addresses critically the limitations of mainstream social media (Bhattacharya, 2020; Tufekci, 2017), maintaining an endeavor to destabilize non-ethical and non-inclusive knowledge-sharing practices.

The first phase, *Potential: Knowledge Generation & Participatory Learning*, establishes the foundation for knowledge creation within the FEELed Lab. This stage is grounded in participatory learning theories (Freire, 1970; Leavy, 2020), centering practice-based research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and experiential methodologies. Here, knowledge production surfaces through workshops, interactive mapping, and co-research practices that merge multi-sensory engagement with place-based learning.

The second phase, *Actual: Knowledge Mobilization Across Platforms & Communities*, focuses on transforming theoretical and practice-based knowledge into multiple, accessible and adaptable formats. Building upon knowledge mediation theories (Meyer, 2010; Star & Griesemer, 1989), this phase centers the creation of boundary-crossing knowledge tools that engage diverse audiences. Multi-platform dissemination strategies including the FEELed Guide, living archives, and physical dissemination, validate that knowledge remains accessible beyond singular digital platforms that may be subject to homogenization, generalization, and inaccessibility. As this transition unfolds, it is our goal for *Actions: Co-Creation with Stakeholders* to ensure that knowledge is collaboratively refined through dialogical learning and iterative adaptation as modelled by Tuhiwai Smith (2021).

The final phase, *Knowledge Implementation, Community Adaptation & Long-Term Impact*, marks the transition from knowledge sharing to sustainable application. This stage is informed by knowledge-to-action frameworks (Graham et al., 2006) and slow scholarship principles (Mountz et al., 2015). Here, reciprocal, community-led adaptations of knowledge practices are situated as main characters of sustainable and ongoing KMb practices. Continuous feedback mechanisms support iterative refinement and encourage long-term engagement and localized applications. This phase also incorporates *Multi-Directional Knowledge Exchange & Sustainable Knowledge Mobilization Practices*, guiding the accessibility and adaptability of

[2] Living archives allow visitors of the FEELedLab website to see material and non-material 'tool-kit' breakdowns of existing and past workshop activities, as well as an option for past workshop participants to provide their visual/theoretical/sensory input on the workshops that they participated in.

living archives, educational tools, and locally adapted knowledge-sharing strategies to diverse learning environments.

Justification of the Model and Its Assumptions

This model is premised on the assumption that KMb is a dynamic, iterative, and relational process that necessitates multi-platform engagement and sustained feedback loops. In contrast to traditional KMb models that emphasize linear, uni-directional dissemination, our approach centers on reciprocal exchange, ethical dissemination, and localized adaptation. This framework figures knowledge not only as mobilized but as meaningfully embedded within diverse social and institutional contexts by, from, and with those who engage in knowledge at large. The pathway from research to impact should remain flexible and responsive to long-term, ongoing interactions between researchers, practitioners, and communities.

3. Results of our Exploratory Phase

a. Research & survey stage

This stage consists of research into alternative platforms and a survey with the FEELed Lab's audience through Instagram and the FEELed Guide. The following criteria were used to evaluate alternative platforms:

- Maintaining consistent communication and information dissemination within a stable community
- Ease-of-use and already established presence of target audience
- Supports sustained investment and not only rapid attention attaining
- Can potentially reach new audiences
- Mediatic multiplicity (being able to share, interpret and distribute different types of media formats)
- Mental health implications
- Respect of sourcing & authorship
- Ethical implications of algorithmic content moderation

Table 1 shows an overview of alternative platforms. The following platforms were excluded from the comparison:

X and Facebook were excluded as they have suspended their fact-checking policies, support billionaires and have algorithms that promote racist, antisemitic and sexist content while often suppressing marginalized communities (Risius and Blasiak, 2024). Mastodon was excluded as its user design is comparable to BlueSky, with a slightly more technical usability and a smaller user base. Slack was excluded as its usability is similar to Discord but has less features on the free plan.

Table 1: Overview of platforms that could serve as Instagram alternatives evaluated using the 4R framework adapted from Briggs et al. (2015).

Platform	Reach Which parts of the FEELed lab's audience can be reached using this platform? How many people could potentially be reached?	Relevance Who is excluded? Are there potential new audiences?	Relationship What type of relationship building can this platform support?	Results What would the scenario of using this platform look like? How does it align with the goals of this knowledge mobilization project?
BlueSky	Academics and practitioners ~100+ connections (no technical limit)	Potential to exclude non-tech-literate audiences Potential to grow global community with academics and practitioners	Supports information sharing, networking, more superficial engagement (microblogs) instead of encouraging discussion	Promoting information to a global audience to increase the FEELed labs global reach; Does not support finding a platform that does not potentially encourage social media addiction
WhatsApp (Community Feature)	Already engaged community members on global and local level ~20 - 100 connections (technical limit up to 5000)	Limited new audience potential	Supports information sharing, coordination for events and promotes dialogue and discussion	Coordinating participation in events on global and local scales, and encouraging intimate community building; Requires time investment for moderators; Continued dependence on Meta
Signal	Already engaged community members on global and local level ~20 - 100 connections (technical limit up to 1000 members in group chat)	Limited new audience potential	Supports information sharing, coordination for events and promotes dialogue and discussion, though set-up as single group chat not ideal	Coordinating participation in events on global and local scales, and encouraging intimate community building; Requires time investment for moderators;

Discord	Already highly interested tech-literate community members on global and local level ~20 - 500 connections (technical limit 250 000)	Limited new audience potential	Supports information sharing and archiving in structured ways, can be used to host workshops and virtual meetings	Hosting of virtual events and hangouts; Requires moderators or facilitators; Potential archive of outputs; Separate chats based on topics
Pixelfed	Probably few connections from already engaged more tech-literate community members ~100+ (no technical limit)	High potential to connect to new tech-literate artistic audiences	Platform with similar services to Instagram, but unlikely to consist of the same audiences as before	Focus on engaging new audiences; Potentially focus to promote this as an Instagram alternative to the current Instagram audience; Does not support finding a platform that does not potentially encourage social media addiction
Flickr	Potential connection with more artistic and photography-focused members of current FEELed lab community ~100+ (no technical limit)	Potential to connect to more artistic, photography-focused audiences	Supports sharing of artistic, content and connection to other artists	Repository for artistic outputs, enabling connection with potential new artists; Does not support finding a platform that does not potentially encourage social media addiction

b. Reflections from the Community Building Survey

To better understand the needs, preference and usage habits of the current FEELed Lab audience, a survey was created and distributed via the FEELed Guide Newsletter (Feb 13, Mar 19) and Instagram (post and story announcement Mar 19). As of 24 March 25, it had received 43 responses.

The survey offered both confirmation and complication for our planned departure from Instagram. On the one hand, many respondents expressed support for the lab's existing structures, particularly the newsletter, in-person events, and the FEELed Guide as meaningful and sufficient points of connection. Several participants also shared their own desires to step back from social media and appreciated the lab's direction. On the other hand, some raised important ethical and political critiques of our decision, inspiring us to consider some of the deeper implications of leaving Instagram. Despite these being fewer in number, these critical

reflections (around accessibility, privilege, and platform capitalism) challenged us to think beyond symbolic action, to consider what forms of engagement and community co-creating might truly be transformative.

We decided that this move called for us to engage more thoroughly with the conceptual and practical stakes of our transition, particularly what it means not only to *move away* from extractive platforms, but to *imagine our move otherwise*. What follows is a closer analysis of these critiques and how they informed our evolving knowledge mobilization approach.

4. Virtue Signaling, Bluesky and Alternative Social Media

The critical comments received in our survey home in on a crucial point that we have been grappling with in this project. There is no direct alternative to Instagram, so we will lose some people in this transition. The potential impact of our move is also difficult to assess – it has been demonstrated through the so-called network effects (Gehl, 2015) that people tend to use communication technologies and social media platforms because they are already being used by people they know (whether through personal or parasocial relationships). This means our presence on a platform will also impact whether people choose to use or remain on that platform. Many survey responses welcomed our announcement to move away from Instagram and expressed a desire to do the same, which is likely to have been amplified or encouraged through our project. However, there is a larger complication here as the question is – what is it that we hope to encourage those people to do? As part of our knowledge mobilization strategy and through the survey we have explored the possible use of alternative social media (ASM) platforms, such as Bluesky.

Instead of the billionaire-owned and commercial platforms belonging to Meta or X, ASM are often built based on decentralized protocols (La Cava et al., 2021) including Mastodon, PixelFed ("the ethical Instagram alternative") and Bluesky, the current most popular ASM (Yadizadeh, 2025). In contrast of user-optimized algorithms based on consumer-capitalism and neoliberalism designed to maximize user-engagement and screen time, ASM commonly offers alternative algorithms that are more chronological rather than based on user-preferences. However, this means that often ASM do not address the inherent issue of social media addiction, with resulting negative mental health repercussions, in their design, as they are still built on the premise of constant scrolling leading to the so-called "zombie scrolling syndrome". Instead, ASM simply offers a less-satisfying option for users, as their feeds on ASM are not as curated compared to commercial platforms (Yazdizadeh, 2025). Additionally, ASM are often less user-friendly and financially stable compared to commercial platforms, further discouraging their widespread use (Gehl, 2015). Therefore, even currently booming platforms like Bluesky are unlikely to replace Instagram (or other commercial social media platforms). However, Yazdizadeh (2025) argues that the point is not whether any given ASM could eventually replace Instagram, but to develop fundamentally different ways of engaging people, because the only way ASM platforms could replace Instagram would be by becoming it. Therefore, we have decided not to create new social media profiles elsewhere for the FEELed Lab, but to try and cultivate significantly alternate forms of engagement.

With regards to the other parts of this comment, we want to summarize central points in our response here, which might be incorporated more directly into the Instagram Legacy Post Series. It is important to acknowledge that the FEELed Lab is privileged in the way of not being reliant on Instagram as a source of income for example, which makes leaving the platform possible in the first place. These changes are also happening on the backdrop of larger conversations surrounding the development and future of the lab through the "Articulating our FEELed Lab Values" project. A part of these conversations is already exploring what possible pathways for reconciliation and returning stewardship of the land to the syilx community could be. Whether this is virtue signaling or not remains difficult to assess, however supporting Meta or not is still a material choice. Even though our account will remain open, it will serve as an archive and site of potential resistance, thereby not driving more engagement towards this platform, resulting in a potential reduction in profit for Meta. Despite this being an arguably small effort within a bigger system, we would argue one should try to do whatever possible in the face of interlocking systems of oppression. As Yadizadeh (2025) reminds us, meaningful alternatives emerge not by replication but by reimagination. We need collective creativity in the face of current algorithmic capitalism and should look for- and create sites of resistance and speculation for alternative futures wherever possible. The FEELed Lab remains committed to building such alternatives collaboratively.

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