

The Sociocultural Value
of Tallinn's Nightlife

*Club Culture
in a Post-Soviet Context*

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Introduction

Night is a natural phenomenon, but through regulating, experiencing and using the nighttime, it has gained a socially mediated spatial dimension (Williams, 2008). It can be a shelter and a place for release. Night is whatever you want it to be, yet the regulations of a city are usually not considering its range of possibilities. It is seen as dangerous and is regulated according to the norms of diurnal society. In the case of Tallinn, the city does not see the value the nocturnal city could hold (Leivategija, 2020, p.149). Instead, night is approached through the lens of exclusion and forbiddance.

This is particularly a shame, as the night holds much more cultural and social potential than is currently acknowledged in Tallinn. By neglecting its potential, the city council fails to recognize the sociocultural importance of the night. An important aspect of this is club culture, which began to evolve in Estonia after their independence in 1991 and still finds its traces in the city's industrial spaces. However, as more and more nocturnal urban spaces have to make way for over-priced property, these unique places where club culture used to thrive in disappear one wrecking ball at a time.

Some of these unique places are former industrial sites. These vacant heritage buildings, no longer serving their original purpose, provide the perfect atmosphere and space for the alternative night life scene to cultivate in. They have done so from the 90s on, into what is now a diverse and visible scene in Tallinn. Unfortunately, it is sensitive to regulations and restrictions, which has only become worse over the years. In 2021, Tallinn banned alcohol sales from 2AM to 6AM during the week and from 3AM to 7AM on weekends (Vaino, 2021). Furthermore, the city council has officially defined what a nightclub must be which is confined and arbitrary, stating among others that it must be at least 450 m² with a separate cloakroom and that it requires an entry fee (Whyte, 2020). These legislations are harmfully generalizing and allows policy makers to regulate the night as a homogeneous scene. Although some of the problems which led to these restrictions were valid for some parts of the city, it disregards nightlife's sociocultural significance.

Apart from the legislative restrictions¹, there is an architectural potential to design spaces for nightlife to bloom in, opposed to restricting it even further. This research will focus on exploring this potential while considering the integration of diurnal functions to create a multifaceted and dynamic environment. This will be done with specific attention to the existing club culture and the integration of industrial heritage into the nocturnal city.

¹ One of the many ways to improve this can be through the installment of a night mayor, a function which “promotes a safe, an economically successful and a culturally diverse nightlife” and to lead discussions between various stakeholders, be involved in the development and to raise awareness (Mets, 2021).

The research addresses the following main research question:

How can a vacant industrial heritage site in Tallinn be repurposed to serve both diurnal and nocturnal functions while incorporating its historical and aesthetic values into the overall experience?

This question can be broken down in the following sub-questions:

Which site is the most suitable for the design project?

Which diurnal and nocturnal functions should be included in the program?

What are the key values of Tallinn's nightlife and club culture?

Which historical and aesthetic values are associated with this industrial heritage site that should be preserved or integrated?

The following sections will present the theoretical framework and methodology that underlie this research.

2 Theoretical Framework

While my research paper will delve deeper into the theoretical framework, I briefly introduce relevant topics to support the understanding of this research plan.

Club culture

Club culture in this sense refers to what is also known as the underground scene, or underground club culture, where people historically “created their own spaces of music and leisure, using the scarcely available resources creatively and adjusting them to their needs.” (Leivategija, 2020, p.143). It is where genres like house and techno began to emerge, and still prevails. It is also these type of clubs that this research will focus on to narrow the scope. It is important to note that club culture goes deeper than dance and parties. When Estonia restored its independence, house music² became popular in Estonian urban night. Allaste (2015, p. 125) argues that “*In Estonia, individualistic hedonistic value orientations—which are perceived as being in opposition to Soviet society and characteristic of Western society—are more likely to be followed*”. She further states that “*identification was based on the desired cultural practices at a global level and distinctions from Soviet practices at a local level. People stressed that club culture was providing a different context for going out without excessive drinking, violence or sexual content*” (2015, p. 130) it is here where she underlines the appeal of club culture, and contrary to mainstream belief, is not about excessive drinking, violence or sexual content. Leivategija (2020, p. 143) concludes that this club culture, “*while not consciously counter-hegemonic, was an explicit act of dismissal of Soviet values and ideologies, and signified the local youth becoming part of a much larger, more open and more individualistic world. New, individual values and newly gained freedom were embodied on the dance floor.*”

The Role of Architecture at Night

Researching nightlife begins by understanding the dual character of the city. On one hand, you find the city as how it’s planned, on the other hand, the nocturnal city has its own distinct atmospheres as “*darkness overlays the known city with shifting synergies of illumination and shadow.*” (Downey, 2020, p.20). The urban environment is both familiar and different, as “*cartography is retraced and rescaled*” (Dunn, 2016, p.14). This is not to say that the civic, cultural and commercial infrastructures allows all the inhabitants to interact equally with the built environment at all times (Downey, 2020, p.20). Beyond assigned infrastructure, Henri Lefebvre notes that city dwellers require alternative spaces and times of simultaneity, contact, and exchange that are not based only on profit (1996, p. 147). The unique characteristics of darkness, offer more difficulties in identifying alternative space-times because they are both physically linked to daily schedules and require more adaptable programming.

² House music, known for its very individual, sensuous experience, enable the dancer to concentrate on their own danceworld. People dance alone to the music, but still share a sense of unity as they see others being in the same emotional state. This can be considered an expression of horizontal collectivism, commonly found in other subcultural music venues (e.g. gabber, techno, breakbeat etc.) (Leivategija, 2020, p.142).

This is due to the fact that zones of activity shift at night, as buildings mostly shut their doors to sleep. Simultaneously, other spaces open, and noise and activity moves to new zones or “*overlay diurnal activity centers with alternate uses*” (Downey, 2020, p.21).

But even the spaces that have not been designed for alternate uses but appropriated by nighttime users, can provide valuable insights on how to design inclusive nocturnal interventions. It argues that we should also accept a participatory and fluid design response to meet people’s needs³ (p.25). Also, it argues that the change within the nocturnal city should not only happen in the diverse programs, but also in the physical environment. Through practical experimentation they can propose structures, either permanent or ephemeral, which will in turn create condition for social life (as praxis) to take shape (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 151).

Creativity in Industrial Heritage

The aforementioned industrial heritage sites are mostly vacant, and ready to be developed. As the first underground parties in Estonia took place in abandoned factories and basements, looking into these sites as potential design site could be useful. To formulate *why* this could be valuable, the following principle as stated by Cossons (2012, p.8) offers an explanation “*material heritage has intrinsic value as evidence of the past... the remains are the means of our understanding a past and a people*”. It further elaborates how specifically industrial heritage can hold a wider social and cultural significance as part of people’s lives, and thus provide a sense of history and identity. Currently, these abandoned sites appear inefficient, stripped of their original functions, and evoke a sense of chaos amidst the rubble. However, Jane Jacobs (1970) argues in *The Economy of Cities* that it is precisely inefficiency, chaos and confusion that offer cities fertile ground for economic development. Richard Florida builds upon this notion in his book *The Rise of Creative Class* (2002) wherein he considers creativity to be the most important generator for the 21st urban economy.

Taking Jacobs’ words literal and considering a vacant industrial site as a starting point, offers a fertile ground for innovation and creativity to develop. Building upon these grounds where club culture emerged would be a tribute to the history of club culture, as to honor the underground traditions of club settlement whilst keeping in mind that progression is allowed to take place. It is within a field of culturally available possibilities where invention appears. As Lavie, Narayan, & Rosaldo (1993, p.5) aptly note “*it is as much process of selection and recombination as one of thinking anew*”.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that club culture historically pops up in the previously mentioned places, and to disappear shortly after that. Diving into the essence of this

³ As an example, an appropriation might indicate the need for a garbage can, as deduced from the amount of garbage that can be found on the street. This can range from random food wrappers, to the consistent pattern of glass bottles or cigarette butts. Another form of an appropriation might point to the need for more street lighting or furniture.

notion, it is important to keep the ephemerality of club culture in industrial heritage in mind in order to design for it, to refrain from accidentally killing the very essence of club culture.

Unlike the focus of this research on repurposing vacant industrial buildings to house both diurnal and nocturnal functions, we are witnessing new developments for Manufactory Quarter and Peetri 6 as seen in figures 1 - 4. In both cases, existing nightclubs *democlub* and *HALL* will be removed, even widening the void of existing subcultural nightclubs. It shows how these nightclubs are being pushed out of the urban landscape, and opens up the discussion *where* they are allowed to settle, *if* they are at all.



Figure 1
Current state (2023) of former boilerroom of
Manufactory Quarter
(KTA, n.d.)



Figure 2
Development render of former boilerroom of
Manufactory Quarter
(KTA, n.d.)



*Figure 3
Current state (2023) of HALL
(Palmetts, 2023)*



*Figure 4
Development render of HALL
(Soopan, 2021)*

3 Methodology

This research aims to firstly identify what the potential of nightlife in Tallinn is and how architecture plays a role in this. This will be approached from the belief that buildings can fulfill both diurnal as nocturnal purposes. To research this, literature research (*theory*) will be combined with the contextual analysis as conducted during the fieldwork (*practice*).

Closely connected to nightlife, a close examination of club culture in the city is needed: from its development to its future. To do so, initial fieldwork in the city has already been conducted with the necessary preliminary conversations with actors involved. To take this a step further, more in-depth interviews with stakeholders (e.g. organization of a club, visitors, DJs) should be conducted to paint a better picture of how the current club culture in Tallinn looks like. This will be combined with literature review, on club culture in general but also on its relation to architecture.

Thirdly, the role of industrial heritage in the city will be researched. While visiting Tallinn, I have visited a few industrial heritage sites: *the Luther Quarter*, *Volta Quarter*, *Krulli Quarter* and *the Manufactory Quarter*. At the *Volta Quarter* for example, I found several newspaper clippings, magazine, and booklets from around the 80s which were very telling of its former use. In regard to the more recent appropriation by other ‘visitors’, I could conduct that these places were attractive for drinking and general hanging out. Guided tours at *Krulli Quarter*, *Luther Quarter* and *Manufactory Quarter* informed me more about the architecture and about its history.

Combined, all the information was quite useful and enhanced the general experience of the different Quarters. To continue the research, these sites will be mapped according to the value matrix by Kuipers & de Jonge (2017) as seen in figure 5 in order to identify their historical and aesthetic values. By assessing these sites through this matrix, comparison between the sites will be simplified.

To enhance this comparative analysis, I will examine nightclubs located in former industrial sites as precedents. By focusing on this overlap of aspects as visualized in figure 6, this examination will provide insights into the architectural interventions required to house a nightclub in an industrial heritage site.

Suitable precedents are, but not limited to: *Les Docks Cité de la Mode et du Design* in Paris, *Maassilo* in Rotterdam, and *Berghain & Tresor* in Berlin.

	RIEGL +	AGE value	HISTORICAL value	INTENTINAL COMMEMORATIVE value	NON INTENDED COMMEMORATIVE value	USE value	NEW-NESS value	(relative) ART value	RARITY value [+]	OTHER relevant values [+]
BRAND +										
SURROUNDINGS / SETTING [+]										
SITE										
SKIN (exterior)										
STRUCTURE										
SPACE PLAN										
SURFACES (interior) [+]										
SERVICES										
STUFF										
SPIRIT of PLACE [+]										

Figure 5
Value matrix
(Kuipers & de Jonge, 2017)

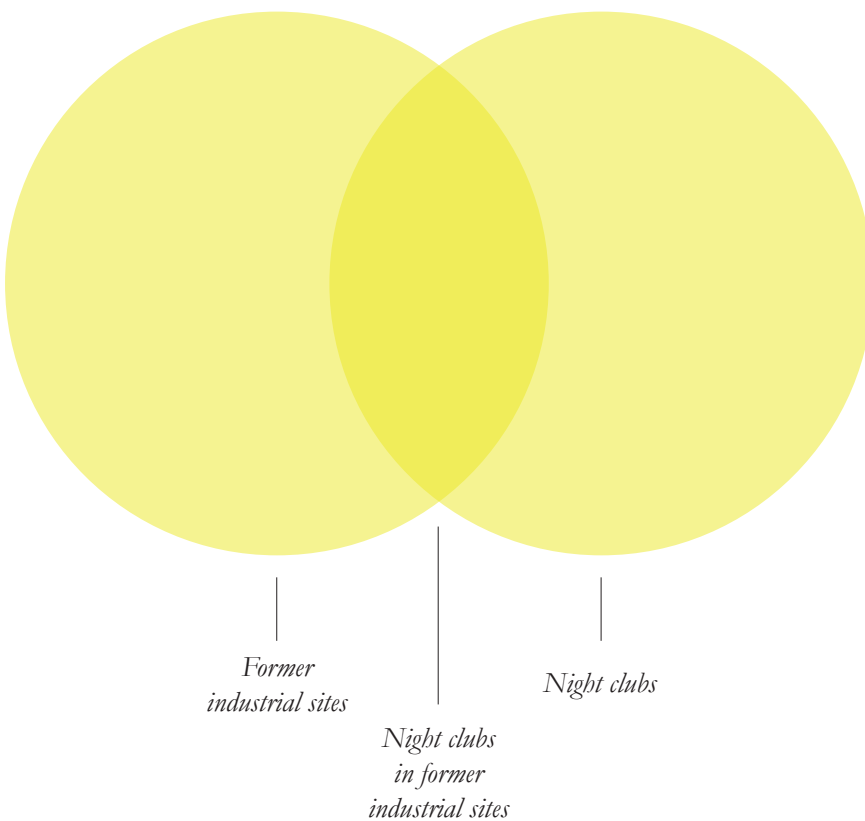
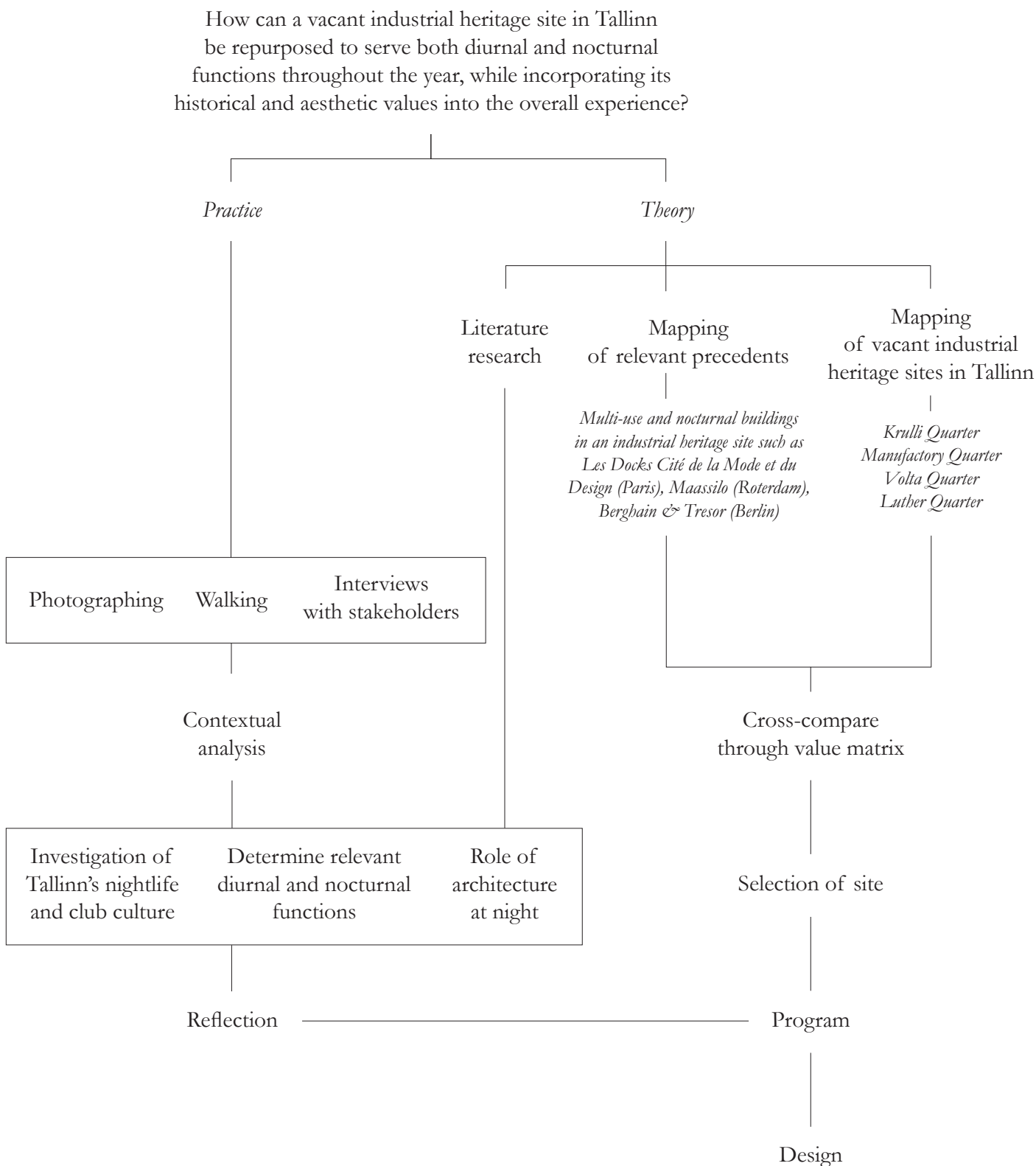


Figure 6
Visualization of overlapping fields
(Veerman, 2023)

After the cross-comparison a suitable site will be selected for the project. Together with the research on Tallinn’s nightlife, relevant diurnal and nocturnal functions, and the role of architecture at night, a program for the project will be devised. Backed with the conducted research, the design phase will take place after most of the research has been completed.

Figure 7 shows a visualization of the research plan, showing the methodology.

Figure 7
Research diagram
(Veerman, 2023)



4 Conclusion and Reflection

The chosen methods for this research are appropriate, as the mix between theory and practice cover a wide-ranging analysis. Even though the research diagram suggests a linear design process, I do consider the option that in practice the research process may involve more overlap or interweaving with the design phase, as new insights can be gained along the way and design ideas can be tested.

My design proposal can result in a repurposed industrial multi-use building, suitable for diurnal and nocturnal purposes. Functions may include an exhibition center, restaurant, terraces and a night club. A place where one can create one's personal time and space.

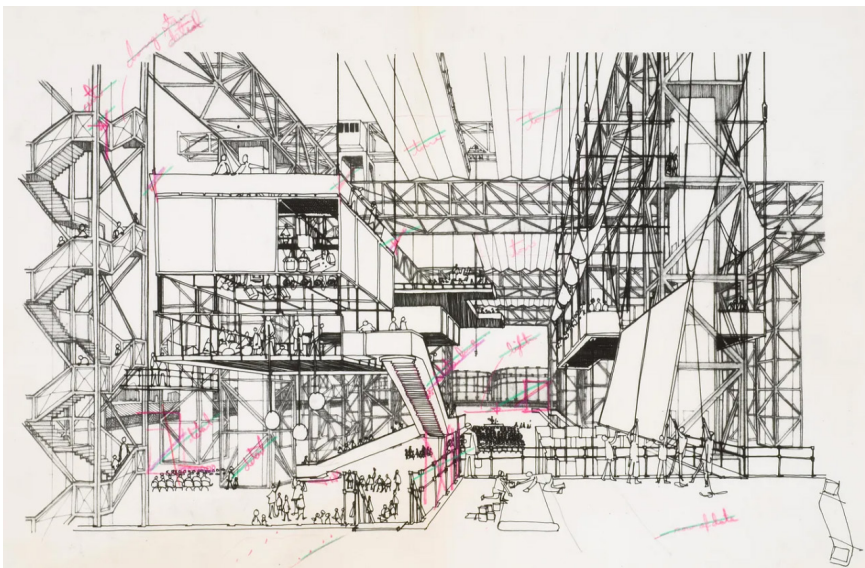


Figure 8
Fun Palace
(Price, 1961)

The Fun Palace, a project by Cedric Price (figure 8), serves as an inspiration to my design program. Designed as a flexible framework into which programmable spaces can be plugged, the structure is adaptable for change according to the wishes of the user, as a laboratory for fun. My goal is to design something alike, as the space I envision lends itself for the creativity of its user.

However, as I plan to design for a subculture, I should be aware of not killing its essence in the process of the design. Therefore, it is important to keep the option open that the design might not result on a fixed building or program.

Specific interventions will become apparent after the conducted research, as the value matrix will determine which site will be picked, and which interventions are suitable. Possible architectural interventions may include the extension of the mass, adding a separate structure to the site, making changes from within the existing building, or spreading the program over different sites as

a means of an urban intervention.

This research aims to enhance our understanding of nightclub architecture within the context of Tallinn's industrial heritage. This is of specific importance to this city, where club culture is increasingly smothered by legislations and debris. While focusing on Tallinn, my hope is that the findings will transcend its boundaries and provide broader insights into the matter.

5 Proposed Structure of Research Report

All of the findings of the report will be processed in a research report. The content is planned as follows:

I. Introduction

II. Theoretical Framework

- a. Club Culture
- b. The Role of Architecture at Night
- c. Industrial Heritage

III. Methodology

- a. Practice
 - i. Photography
 - ii. Walking (Living the City)
 - iii. Interviews with Stakeholders
- b. Theory
 - i. Literature Research
 - ii. Value Matrix

IV. Design

- a. Site
- b. Program
- Wc. Architectural Intervention

V. Conclusion

VI. Discussion

VII. Future of the project

VIII. Reflection

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