Home of Art

Artists cohabitation bringing creativity back to Keilehaven.

Introduction

Theme of investigation: Housing struggle for creative individuals

In any circumstance, it is a fact that things rarely pan out as expected. We must adjust and transform. We learn to adapt to our ever-changing realities. Human beings have constantly shifting demands, and choosing where to live is one of them. No matter what age or profession, we go through a process of striving to satisfy our varying necessities, being on the move due to the societal changes we face. This could result from taking on new challenges, shifting career positions, or starting a family. Such situations affect our social and spatial needs for what we consider home. Sometimes, it forces us to instantly relocate to a place that corresponds to our new criteria. Because most of the options provided in the housing market do not offer the spatial flexibility or affordability that most tenants require in the long term. This issue particularly arises for young adults in the creative field. Creators at beginner stages cannot afford to make art, as they are hustling to pay their rent every month among other bills and living expenses. Not to mention that not all dwellings offer the spatial requirements that this group needs in their careers over the years. Stacey Esklein, an American romantic novel writer, believes that the lack of affordable housing is killing the arts because, in order to make a living, such talented individuals tend to give up on their creative work and turn it into a weekend hobby instead. (Esklein, 2021).

Fig(1) - Residential revolt in Rotterdam 2021

Problem statement:

What makes a person creative?   According to Deleuze, French philosopher, any generative discipline that introduces new concepts and productions is accounted as creative. This creativity is hence driven by a necessity that differs from one group to the other according to the type of connections and articulations that they deal with (Deleuze, G. 2013). Usual stereotypes picture a highly creative person as eccentric not only in thinking but in appearance, dress, and behavior. Donald Mackinnon, Scottish philosopher, and theologian, states in his article *What makes a person creative* that such unproven stereotypes present the creative individual as "*a true neurotic, withdrawn from society, and inept in his relations with others.*" (Mackinnon, D. W. 1996, P152).   However, as studies on human creativity progressed it became abundantly clear that creative people seldom represent fully any of the common stereotypes. Groups of highly creative people are thus only differentiated according to their employed type of intellective functioning patterns. For instance, this differs from spatial intelligence for architects to Verbal intelligence for writers. Furthermore, this research plan will take Arthur Escobar's ideas on creativity mentioned in the book *Designs for the Pluriverse* as a starting point. Hence, introducing "*all creation as collective, emergent and rational*" (Escobar, A. 2018, P.17). Therefore, the focus will be on the collective production performed by creative individuals in the field of art, culture, and architecture.

What contribution is brought to society by the creative class? In the book Warhol Economy by Elizabeth Currid, American author, it becomes clear how different types of art can drive contemporary urban redevelopments when investigated in the city of New York. Arts had a role in accommodating the wide variety of the city's social networks by bringing people together at different meet-up points (Currid-Halkett, E., (2020). This is then further emphasized by Richard Florida, American urban studies theorist, in his book *The Rise of the creative class* by outlining the high correlation between a population of creative class members and the cultural amenities that they bring along. Hence, he highlights how cities plan to attract the creative class to create higher urban growth. (Florida, R., 2002)

What makes the housing of these individuals such a great challenge? Each and every person who opts for a career in craft and creation embarks on a journey that is challenging yet unique to each one of them. Such a journey paves the way for artists to develop their own creative language which speaks of their passions and fascinations. Although it might be a rewarding route, artists frequently encounter many hardships, struggles, and barriers along with following their desires and needs. Creative persons are usually driven by their conscious desires to affect their surrounding world with artistic expressions. In terminology, this is then accounted as a model of existence rather than means of production. Consequently, it becomes essential to think of the way living and inhabiting options are devised for this group of people, outlining the issue as an architectural problem. Such challenges include;

First of all, young starters in the creative field tend to face **financial struggles** constantly. Lasse Steiner, a researcher at the University of Zurich, wrote in his book 'Economic ideas you should forget' that "... *the artistic labor market is marked by several advertises, such as low wages, above-average unemployment, and constrained underemployment.*" (Steiner, L, P.135).   Lasse further explains how average salaries for starters in the field are lower than those with comparable degrees and similar qualifications in other professions. He adds that there is a bigger disparity between artists' earnings and those of their reference group. Nevertheless, the field of arts continues to attract many young people. (Steiner, L, 2017) Susan Jones, a doctoral researcher on the creative class, argues that this results from the absence of collective bargaining mechanisms that cause such exploitation. Next to that, previous research showed that artists are more commonly motivated by artistic fulfillment and personal well-being than financial reward which causes an increment to the problem. (Romer, C. 2019)

Second of all, regarding **social mobility**, Daniel Chekalov, a visual artist and videomaker, writes in his article for 'Evolve Artists' that most talented individuals experience the common feeling of loneliness that comes with being in the creative field. Generally, the reasons go back to the number of hours that such artists spend working on their individual projects. However, this social isolation delivers serious consequences on the quality of their work. Because it raises internal struggles of self-motivation and lack of inspiration. Hence, posing significant obstacles throughout their career journeys. (Chekalov, 2020)

Third of all, many artists struggle to fulfill the **spatial requirements** that correspond with their living environment. Vianne Szabo, painter, and author at the 'Fine Art Views' newsletter, argues that every artist needs a sacred space at home, an area claimed for all crafts and creative work. She explains its importance to be ready for sudden inspirations and daily practices. The spatial criteria of such a space differ depending on the type of profession in the field, therefore the design of such areas should aim to be inclusive, and flexible. (Szabo, V, 2017)

Fig(2) - Scarce space: artist desk as illustrated by Disney

In this research, the aim is on designing alternative urban systems and city blocks that address such societal issues and complex challenges for collective production while forming scenarios for the port city of Rotterdam. The focus is put on the Makers district in the Merwe-Vierhavens (M4H), acting as a potential site for the investigation. The area is currently undergoing a transition phase from its industrial history to a dynamic living, working, and learning environment.

The rich history of the area's development has paved the way to introduce a new community dedicated to facilitating new starters in the field of art and culture. In the nineties, the Keilehaven area in the M4H was inhabited by a group of artists in search of affordable ateliers, renting large industrial halls and turning them into workshops and galleries. Artistic figures from this group like Joep van Lieshout, a Dutch sculptor, and designer, grew to become professional star artists. Hence, attracting more artistic and cultural institutions to the area, giving the M4H its unique urban character. The popularity that this district gained made it less available for young adults entering this field. High rents for workshops, ateliers, and galleries lowered the opportunity for this group of creators to participate in the cultural output produced. (De Architect Podcast, 2022). The fundamental issue is that new starters fall in between not being able to qualify for social housing/subsidies or being able to afford mortgages. Therefore, as an attempt to fill this gap and reconnect the site to its history, a community for creative individuals where they can live, create and engage is proposed to be designed.

Target group: who will live there?

Fig(3) - Illustration of the target group

The target group considered in this thesis is; young starters in the field of arts, culture, and architecture who are increasingly facing problems in the Netherlands while attempting to buy or rent a (residential/working) property. These issues originally range from governmental laws and regulations to the inherent condition of the inhabitant. The current starter is typically characterized as a flexible young adult (20-30 years old) having a low to moderate income, taking on temporary employment job positions or working part-time in the field, and (possibly) having student loan debts (Rigterink, 2017). In August 2022, the Dutch property association VEH outlined the struggles that this target group faces when entering the housing market and stated that "the Netherlands needs a minimum of 10.000 new starter homes". (NI TIMES, 2022)

Research question and sub-questions
The main goal of this research plan is to create a systematic understanding of how to design a community where creative individuals in their starting careers can live and work together. With a broader aim to find a new balance for the M4H district to become a more inclusive city where people with different conditions can coexist.

Initially, the creative field offers various types and categories of professions that range to include careers in design, music, literature, painting, and many more. Consequently, one of the main characteristics that such individuals would seek is their freedom and flexibility within their properties. Therefore, I would like to investigate the design of **adaptive dwellings and workspaces** and its effect on the younger generations of creators in supporting their careers and shifting living situations over time. Moreover, additional research will be put into investigating what **mixed-use architecture** of different typologies for tenures, housing, production spaces, and other facilities would best provide for the involved target group. Meanwhile offering a valuable addition to the livability of the urban block and enhancing its social cohesion among inhabitants. Because a diverse mix of users according to MVRDV's essential philosophy brings different types of activity to spaces at all times throughout the day, contributing to the city's vibrant character. Therefore, such establishments can not only create an efficient way of using space but it goes further to enrich the block's social cohesion.
Drawing on the combination of both these conceptions, this thesis concentrates on creating a livable urban block for creative individuals with various mixes of functions. The designs included in the scope of research are the ones following the categorization suggested by Hollis - in her article; 'The Workhome' - to be listed as home-dominated urban blocks. Hence, the primary function of the employed architecture is to offer adaptive residential dwellings, having inhabitants as the main user group. The main focus of the research will be put on fulfilling artists' spatial, social and economic needs both in the residential units and the urban block. Therefore, the study will be addressed with the following research question:

How can a community of creative individuals in the field of arts, culture, and architecture cohabit in the Makers District of Merwe-Vierhaven? And how can such cooperative living provide new sustainable Opportunities for this group of starters?

Corresponding to the following subquestions:

- Which stakeholders are involved in the urban block's sociology?
- Which qualities make a (living/working) space suitable for new starters in the creative field? How does the 'scarce space' play role in it?
- How can architecture become more responsive to the shifting demands of its users in such a community?
- How can the program and spatial adaptability of a home-dominated urban block improve its social cohesion? Or relate to social dimensions?

Research framework

Theoretical framework
It is believed that architecture is about finding imaginative and creative solutions to improve people's quality of life. Alejandro Aravena, Chilean architect, discusses in his press conference at UNSW Built Environment that architects could solve societal problems in the world like inequality, loneliness, and poverty. Because they have the skills to deal with such challenges if they listen to all the forces at play (Aravena, 2016). Therefore, to answer the question of how to design the artists' community, we first introduce relevant theoretical terms and practical references.

Social individuals
Humans are identified as social individuals, "*beings both independent and interdependent units that are unified into larger wholes*" as Margaret Gilbert, British philosopher, defines in her book 'Living together'. When brought into communities, we live our lives in terms of two distinct standpoints; the personal and the collective. The first is explained by humans striving to achieve their personal goals, like breaking a high score or writing a book. But we also participate in group efforts, where we take a collective standpoint to achieve a goal that is <u>ours.</u> When living together, the two standpoints tend to overlap in our daily lives, therefore they should be taken into account. (Gilbert, M, 1996, P.3)

Social infrastructure:
It is the physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact, therefore it fosters face-to-face interactions which form the basic building blocks of public life. Developing an understanding of the required social infrastructure of such a program is essential in order to solve the social struggles that artists face, like solitariness. Designing such spaces could promote new behavioral patterns that encourage social interactions. (Kleinberg, 2018)

Spatial Adaptability
Adaptability and flexibility are quality characteristics of a space, which allow it to follow up with the shifting spatial behaviors of users. It is essential for changes when the existing situation yield dissatisfaction for users or when new demands appear. Flexible spaces propose a solution where users can personally arrange their spatial components. In dwelling designs, it is usually defined as "*potential for space adaptability without physical change, and capability for internal changed according to zoning decisions*". (Oszoy, A, 1997, P.317)

Collective production:
Based on the ideas of Ruangrupa, an artistic collective based in Indonesia, introducing alternative ways of working to create a globally oriented, collaborative, and interdisciplinary art and culture platform. It focuses on a community-oriented model of sustainability in ecological, social, and economic terms, in which resources, ideas, or knowledge are shared, as well as social participation. (Teh, D., 2012)

Methods
Meeting creators: what do artists really need?
I would like to study how this particular group of users relates to the place, where they live, create and engage. Looking into people that live in artists' communities among other similarly minded individuals but also young artists living independently. The aim of this study is to reach a common ground in understanding the group's demands and needs while comparing different spatial/social settings. This will further be illustrated in a graphic novel, by drawing their 'scarce spaces'.

Case studies: WOW Amsterdam; talks with artists in residence (community), Sokkary; Interviewing the DJ and music producer (individual).

Fig(4) DJ Sokkary [1]

Precedent analysis: topological study
Investigating similarly functioning urban blocks by studying their geometrical properties and spatial relations. Hence, researching the employed mix of tenure, housing typologies, working stations, and other facilities in one urban block. I would like to focus on the social consequences of such systems, and how programmatic distributions could be used for promoting user interactions and engagements within the block on a small scale and within the local neighborhood on a bigger scale. This will be expressed via topological diagrams that display the actual connections among different functions, the sequence of spaces within such areas, and how it affects us as social individuals. In addition, I would like to also focus on the praxeology of sharing space and the notion of how it creates reflexive behavioral patterns and unintentional actions.
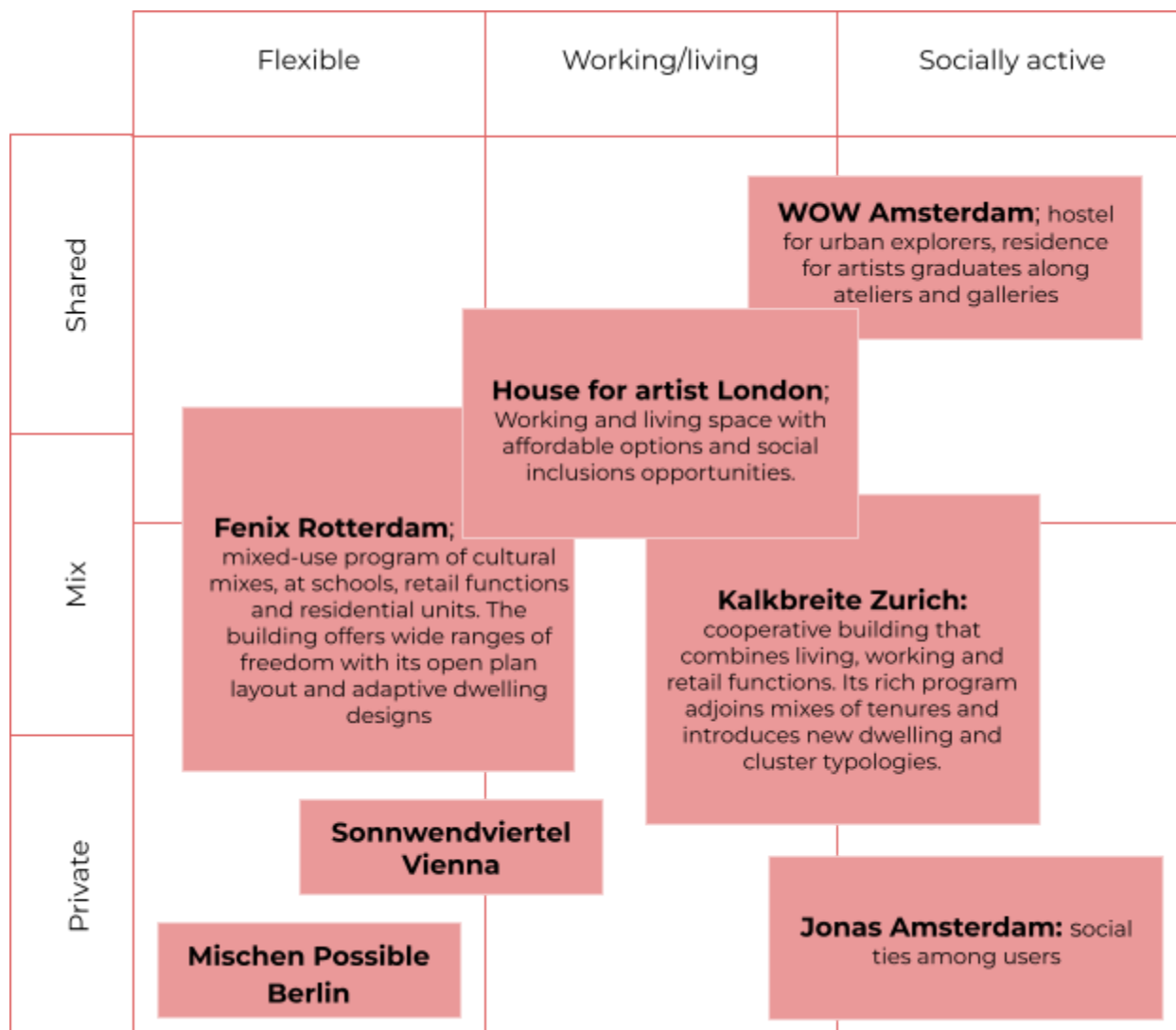
Case studies: House for artists in London, Kalkbreite cooperative in Zurich, Jonas complex in Amsterdam.

Literature research: spatial concepts
Investigating spatial concepts that enhance the residential and working satisfactory level of communities' inhabitants, while coping with its shifting demands. This will be achieved through researching secondary sources that deal with spatial flexibility and adaptive dwellings while aiming to discover the design techniques and methods that allow for such freedoms. In addition, buildings that offer such qualities will further be studied and analyzed.

Case studies: Fenix in Rotterdam, Sonnwendivertel in Vienna, Mischen Possible in Berlin

---

[1] Egyptian DJ starter based in Rotterdam and Doha simultaneously. Currently sharing a dwelling with other members of his team in Blaak.

	Flexible	Working/living	Socially active
Shared			**WOW Amsterdam**; hostel for urban explorers, residence for artists graduates along ateliers and galleries
Mix	**Fenix Rotterdam**; mixed-use program of cultural mixes, at schools, retail functions and residential units. The building offers wide ranges of freedom with its open plan layout and adaptive dwelling designs	**House for artist London**; Working and living space with affordable options and social inclusions opportunities.	**Kalkbreite Zurich:** cooperative building that combines living, working and retail functions. Its rich program adjoins mixes of tenures and introduces new dwelling and cluster typologies.
Private	**Mischen Possible Berlin**	**Sonnwendviertel Vienna**	**Jonas Amsterdam:** social ties among users

Fig(5) - Mapping out involved case studies

Preliminary conclusion and relation to design

In my research, I tried to address the societal challenges that young artists and creators face when searching for a place to live or work, and particularly projecting it on the site of Keilehaven. In an attempt to give starters back their opportunity in entering the Makers District, a new community for creators is proposed to house a safe home for their passions and ambitions. This will opt to reconnect the site to its history while moving parallel with its transitional phase toward introducing residential functions. The Urban block aims to perform a dual role as both a public and domestic building, where it will accommodate an ongoing public art program supporting the forming of communities both inside the building and within Keilehaven. Furthermore, the building will aim to act as a social catalyst by implementing a mix of functions in the building tissue. This would include (shared) living units, workshops, gathering /communal spaces, and other retail functions that introduce visitors to the building. The distribution of such a program focuses on forming a community with strong social ties, wherein people can engage in accidental and free-from interactions. Furthermore, the spatial composition should enhance the building's flexibility and adaptability to users changing needs and requirements. As a consequence, I expect to conclude with the introduction of a new mix of functions that allow such qualities to coexist, with a focus on how its spatial characteristics can correspond to this particular group of starters.

Bibliography:

Artist, E. (2021, June 8). *You Need Community as an artist... here's why!* Medium. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from https://evolveartist.medium.com/you-need-community-as-an-artist-heres-why-483707b37961

Aravena, A. (2017, September 6). *Architecture can help solve poverty, inequality, segregation*. UNSW Newsroom. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/art-architecture-design/architecture-can-help-solve-poverty-inequality-segregation

Boelhouwer, P. (2020). The housing market in The Netherlands as a driver for social inequalities: proposals for reform. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, *20*(3), 447-456. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19491247.2019.1663056

Bostrom, J. A. (1987). *Adaptable housing: a technical manual for implementing adaptable dwelling unit specifications*. The Office. https://books.google.nl/books?hl=en&lr=&id=tBNQAAAAMAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP9&dq=adaptable+dwellings+&ots=jt98ZDXJJp&sig=EAIWtyZrX6-oochHwlimtpLT2dY&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=adaptable%20dwellings&f=false

Braide, A. (2019). *Dwelling in time: studies on life course spatial adaptability*. Chalmers Tekniska Hogskola (Sweden). https://www.proquest.com/openview/42b95c091a185d586de2fd921405918d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Currid-Halkett, E. (2020). The Warhol economy. In The Warhol Economy. Princeton University Press.

Eskelin, S. K. (2021, May 31). *Lack of affordable housing is killing the arts*. Medium. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from https://medium.com/cappuccini/lack-of-affordable-housing-is-killing-the-arts-425f5609cbf6

Kleinberg, E (2018), Palaces for the People - how social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life. The crown publishing group, LLC, New York

Femenias, P., & Geromel, F. (2020). Adaptable housing? A quantitative study of contemporary apartment layouts that have been rearranged by end-users. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, *35*(2), 481-505. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10901-019-09693-9

Florida, R., Harris, D., (2002). The Rise of the creative class and how it is transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Escobar, A. (2018). Designs for the Pluriverse. In Designs for the Pluriverse. Duke University Press.

Hollis, F.(2019), Het Werkhuis/ The Workhome - An Architecture of Dual-use. DASH, Delft Architecture Studies of Housing

Kliment, S. A., & Barr, V. (2004). *Building type basics for retail and mixed-use facilities* (Vol. 4). John Wiley & Sons.https://books.google.nl/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NfglUyGCCF4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=mixed+use+building&ots=hTmaKejlxc&sig=ckAk1jtc8-9nO1w-Yh7z38Uk73A&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=mixed%20use%20building&f=false

MacKinnon, D. W. (1966). What Makes a Person Creative? Theory Into Practice, 5(4), 152–156. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1475125

Narvaez, L., & Penn, A. (2016). The Architecture of Mixed Uses. *Journal of Space Syntax*, *7*(1). https://deuslabs.com/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/7-0bc7da55aad7a8343a7ce4bb288c99d3/2022/02/The_Architecture_of_Mixed_Uses.pdf

Netherlands needs 10,000 new starter homes per year, says homeowners group. NL Times. (2022, August 18). Retrieved October 17, 2022, from https://nltimes.nl/2022/08/18/netherlands-needs-10000-new-starter-homes-per-year-says-homeowners-group

Nur Esin, A., & Özsoy, A. (1997). Spatial adaptability and flexibility as parameters of user satisfaction for quality housing. In *Building and Environment* (no. 5, Vol. 33, Ser. 315-323). essay, Elvsier sciences.

Romer, C. (2019, January 11). *Only a third of artists' income comes from their art, research finds*. ArtsProfessional. Retrieved November 9, 2022, from https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/only-third-artists-income-comes-their-art-research-finds

Steiner, L. (1970, January 1). *Artists are poor and thus unhappy*. SpringerLink. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-47458-8_58

Szabo, V. (2017, September 5). *Why artists should blog | fineartviews*. Fine Artist Need A Sacred Space. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from https://fineartviews.com/blog/147176/why-artists-should-blog

Teh, D. (2012). Who cares a lot? Ruangrupa as curatorship. *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, (30), 108-117.

WOW. WOW Artists in residence Comments. (n.d.). Retrieved October 17, 2022, from https://www.wow-amsterdam.nl/artists-in-residence/

List of figures:

Title figure; drawing by the author