

REPOSITIONING THE INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIAL SPACE

Utilizing Architecture as a Mediating Mechanism Between the Social and the Individual



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Research Proposal
A Matter of Scale
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Methods of Analysis and Imagination
A Matter of Scale

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Image 1



Image 2

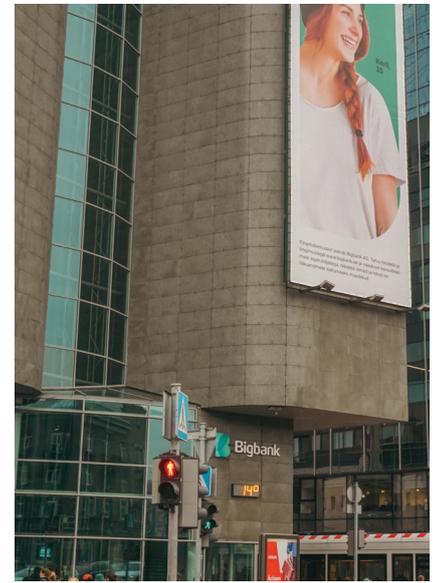


Image 3

INTRODUCTION

Walking through Tallinn one might notice a great variation in its structures and the mixture in appearance of its architecture. A long history of occupations with just two relatively short periods of independence is written in its stones and streets. Where societies and -regimes left their ideological imprints in space, and still seem to define its people. After totalitarian communism left Estonia people seized the newly attained freedom with both hands, constituting their new state following the liberal and democratic philosophy.

According to many Estonians, this (neo-)liberal capitalistic layout of society has improved general life standards substantially in comparison with the communist times. To completely separate these seemingly opposing ideologies within Estonia's history seems too shortsighted, as I still found the former have a reactionary character to the latter. The sentiment and pride towards freedom presented itself throughout the city of today. Take for example the car-centric character of Tallinn about which people told me the car still holds a symbolic value of freedom, as well a literal freedom of movement and independence from other forms of (public-)transport, a formerly rather privileged freedom as for the difficulties obtaining a car in the Soviet times. Or the gigantic malls that appear all over town, a seeming celebration of free consumerism. Half a century ago it was anything but obvious that one could just conveniently buy any product at the malls where families now spend their days out. While I certainly don't want to criticise this freedom, this sentimental position towards freedom, putting liberty on a pedestal, seemed to facilitate specific traits within society that might be worth evaluating further.

Before I visited Tallinn, I had heard about "Cowboy capitalism" as opportunist enterprises took off to these "new" economies where mass privatisation happened after the departure of the Soviet state. What I didn't expect to encounter was what seemed to me like it was still a bit of a Wild West situation in Tallinn. The small state or municipality seemed to not intervene much in the development of the city (lacking an overall and cohesive program for the city) and mainly facilitated the commercial market it seemed (e.g. the privatised paid parking lots in prominent places around town). Billboards displayed renderings of polished apartments on most of the vacant plots and -industrial complexes I encountered. That was if it hadn't been developed already. Housing that seemed to be targeted mostly at a middle- or higher-segment within society.

The (neo-) liberal philosophy where the open market with only minor governmental interference poses the foundation of individual freedom seemed to be present all around within Tallinn. It shines through its institutions and regulations where the country has adopted a complete flat-rate tax and a government is kept to a minimum, possibly a reaction to the former totalitarian state and its authority. Applying the economy as a regulatory force that guards the freedom of its participants, granting it a nearly authoritarian status. While many seem to be doing rather well within this system, clues pointed at a lesser wealthy minority.

The trend of unchecked development for the market seemed to be a fitting example of neo-liberal ideology taking on material existence through the practices of society. But this material existence, in this case, the built environment is not a mere articulation of an ideology. Architecture and the built environment can very well function as a producer of social space, the space where the social- and material spheres mutually influence and support each other.¹

¹ Kurnicki, Karol. 2014. "Towards a Spatial Critique of Ideology: Architecture as a Test." *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 38 (1): 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.3846/20297955.2014.893642>.

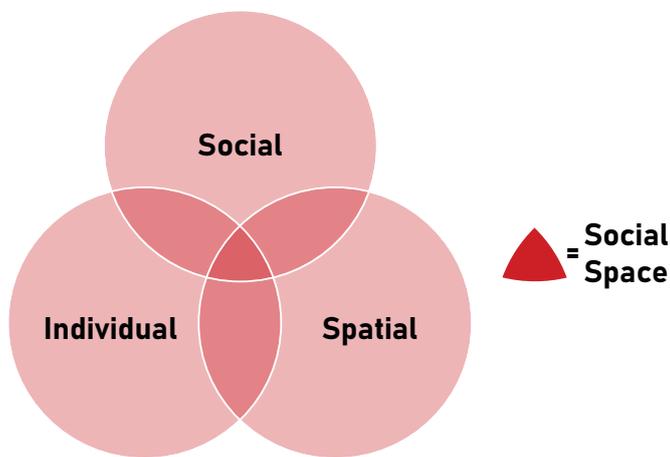


Figure 1: In this proposal, social space is not used to describe a space where social interaction happens, or at least not just that. The term indicates the space that goes beyond just the physical appearance with which we interact through our senses. It incorporates the virtual space that that material space embodies, of which it is simultaneously a product and a producer. Social space is where space evolves into something more than bodily interaction and it engages the subject in thought, acts or feelings, either as a direct exchange between the subject and the space or as a catalyst in the broader reality.

RESEARCH AIM

This current ideological model within Tallinn, like many other ideologies, tends to be fairly inflexible through its often fundamental role in defining the individual's reality or that of a social group. Ideology as values and ideas, shared by a social group, or even the very support to our reality itself, is often built upon personal realities that gain fundamental indisputable status, dogmas. The overarching character outlines the group more than it gets directly defined by those participating individuals, while at the same time facilitating hierarchical power structures where non-human entities (e.g. an economy or state apparatus) determine its program and ultimate goal. Within the built environment the user is often seen as the end of the process more than as a direct participator that actively shapes the space where the social and material meet. Through this linear thinking, the individual gets subjected to these formerly mentioned power structures, taking away from the potential and autonomy of the individual.

² Blagojevi , Mirjana Roter, Marta Vukotic Lazar, Vladimir Mako, and Miodrag Suvakovic. 2014. Architecture and Ideology. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Initially I assumed the concept of ideology was where the focus for this research should be, as it is so often associated with the above-mentioned dogmatic thinking and inflexible positioning of values and ideas. I was looking for something that surpassed ideology as a fixed system of values and ideas, an objective post-ideology of open exploration. Yet, the more I read about the matter, the more it seemed impossible for me to produce such a thing, as I myself wouldn't be subjective, and even if I were able to dispose of my personal values and -ideas, the question is if I would want to do this. I realised this subjectivity might just be how a more democratic and fluid approach to ideology within the built environment could be established. Encouraging and incorporating other's subjectivity in a more horizontal approach through more direct participation of the individual in the built environment. I assume it is not an inherent characteristic of ideology to impose a rigid way of thinking but that this is caused by a more linear, top-down character that marks certain ideologies, hindering critical evaluation of- and reflection on itself, and through that hindering further developments within social space within the built environment.

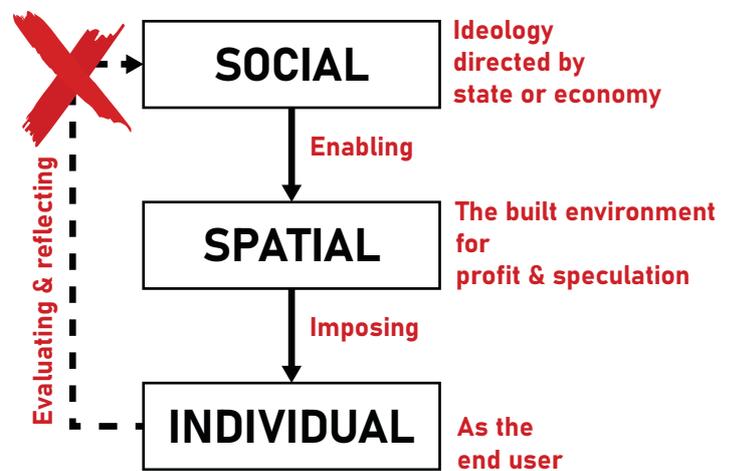


Figure 2: An imposing top-down social sphere as mentioned in the writing above.

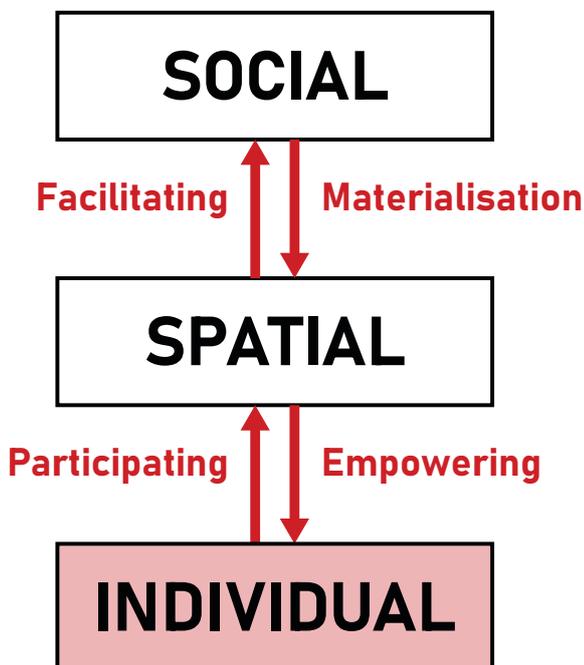


Figure 3: Mutual exchange between the social, the spatial and the individual.

From this preliminary research, I have seen ideology often being top-down imposed on the individual and its evaluation gets hindered by dogmatism. Directed by authoritarian entities like the former totalitarian state apparatus or economy, with the mechanism of the market put forward as the guardian of freedom, resulting in wild-west development for profit and speculation with the individual as a user at the end of a linear approach. This imposing character diminishes the freedom of individuals to directly shape the social sphere and denies its potential and autonomy.

That poses the primary aim of this research, is to reposition the individual within the creation of social space, taking the physical space as the product- and producer of the social sphere. This raises the question of how the position of the individual within the built environment can be redefined to utilise the individual potential and -autonomy to facilitate a more fluid and open relation between the social, the individual and the spatial. To do this certain secondary questions need to be looked into further. Firstly by establishing a more theoretical background on how the relations between these spheres function. Next up a study of the more practical and spatial implications will be done to establish how to facilitate autonomy for the individual through the agency in the built environment. After this further research will be done on the relations between the individual and the collective by looking at community-managed projects. In the last segment of the practice studies a deeper understanding is sought of how design can cause the individual to reapproach the above-mentioned power structures. Lastly, qualitative research will be done through interviewing local actors within Tallinn to gather information as well as verify hypotheses and receive feedback on the preliminary propositions that result from these.

By looking further into these questions ultimately architecture could be applied as a mediating mechanism between the social sphere and the individual to transform linear top-down power structures into a more circular system where exchange happens both directions between the social, the spatial and the individual. By facilitating self-evaluating and critical reflection, providing individual autonomy and utilising the individual's potential.

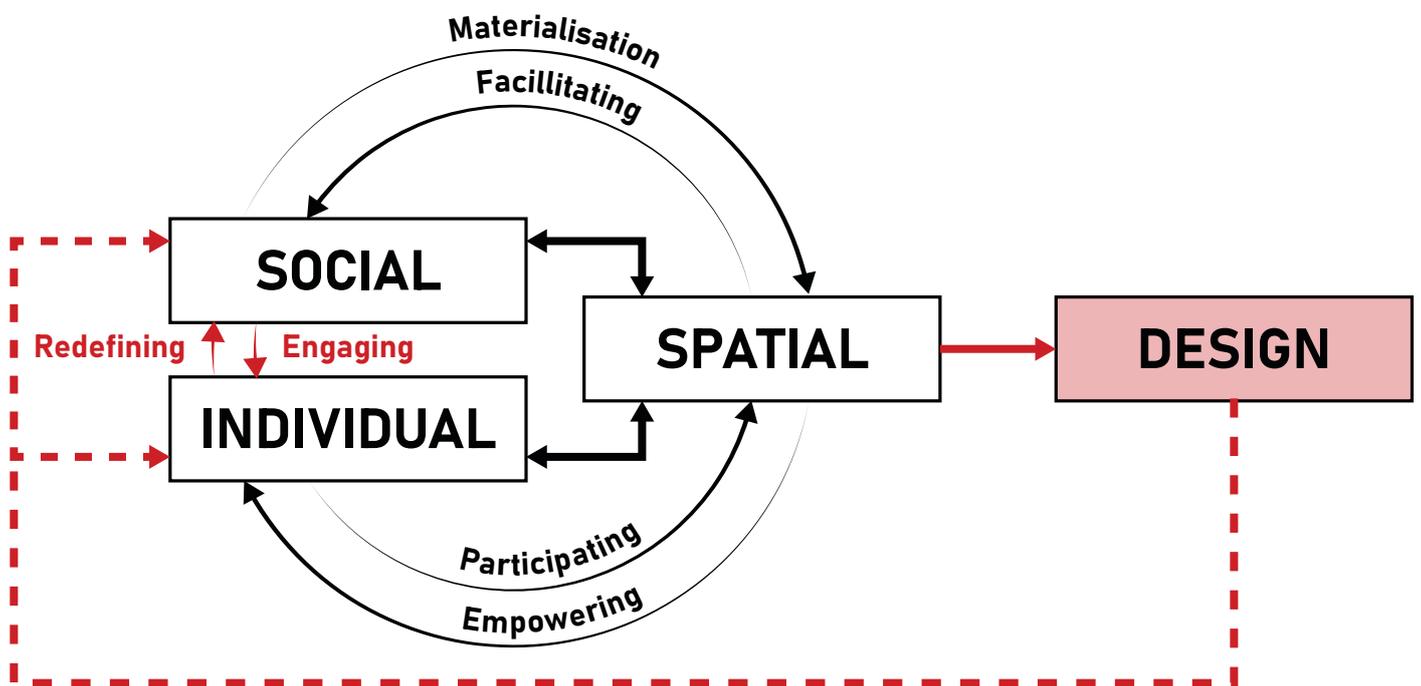


Figure 4: Architecture as a mediating mechanism between the individual and the social.

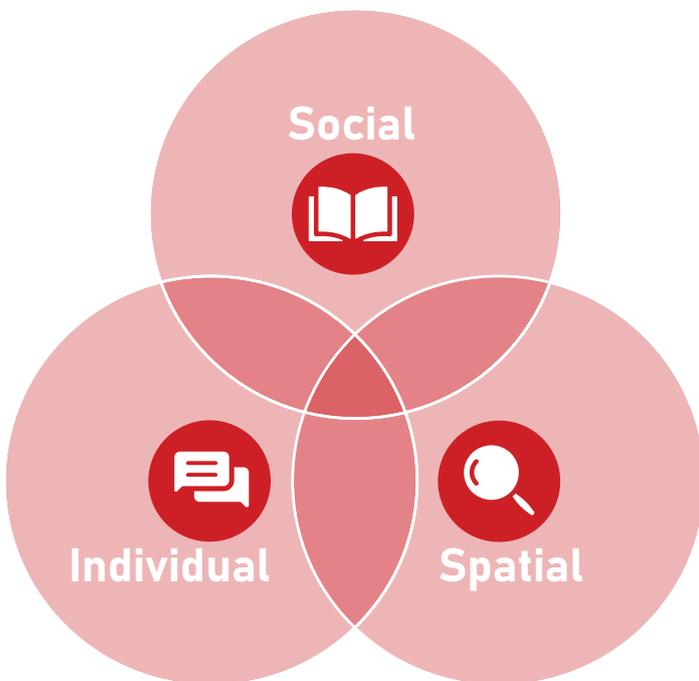


Figure 4: Different forms for different research

METHODOLOGY

To do this an understanding has to be created of the immaterial as well as the material, trying to construct a form that encompasses both. Firstly this will be done by looking further into the theoretical background of social space itself, architecture as a mediating mechanism, power and how to restore some leverage for the individual and communities, and different social potentials of design (e.g. engaging, interrogating and speculating). Thereafter I look further into the practical spatial implications by studying several projects that propose different approaches to individual agency and -participation, the interrelations between individuals and between the individual and the spatial, with this establishing a toolkit that transcends single components within social space and connects them. Finally, qualitative research will be done by interviewing different actors within the context to establish a better comprehension of the individual in Tallinn specifically. This last research is also used to test hypotheses and receive feedback on different propositions that come forward out of the research. This will result in a design brief that would empower the individual to directly participate in shaping the social space and finally exchange, more than an imposition, would promote an ongoing self-evaluation and reflection on the social sphere.

Theory and Mechanisms

Firstly a better grasp of the immaterial background and its systems and behaviour should be established. I will lay out a theoretical foundation based mainly on academic reading and deduction. Starting by looking into the relationship between the social- and spatial spheres will be further defined after which architecture will be established as a mediating mechanism between the two.

After this, the power relations of entities within the social sphere (human and non-human) will be portrayed following readings of theorists such as Levevre and Goonewardena.³

Following up with a short research into the social potentials of design, starting with the reading of Rubio and Fogué⁴ about the unfolding political capacities of design as enlarging, speculating and interrogating the cosmos of the political.

After this, the shift along the spectrum continues to a more applied theory on architectural practice of John Turner and Colin Ward, two theorists that tend to criticise trends in the built environment and rethink the position of the individual within it.

Continuing shifting towards the implications of these theories and mechanisms, a study will be done of this translation into practice. Here a subdivision is made based on different themes and looked into the successes and possible pitfalls.

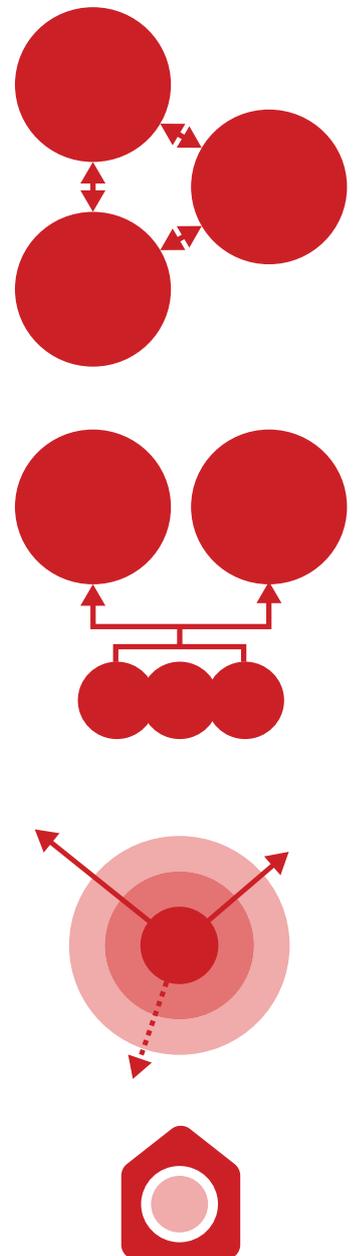


Figure 4: Different scales of theoretical research

³Kurnicki, Karol. 2014. "Towards a Spatial Critique of Ideology: Architecture as a Test." *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 38 (1): 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.3846/20297955.2014.893642>.

⁴Rubio, Fernando Domínguez, and Uriel Fogué. 2015. "Unfolding the Political Capacities of Design." In *What Is Comopolitical Design?*, 143–60. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315545721-17>.

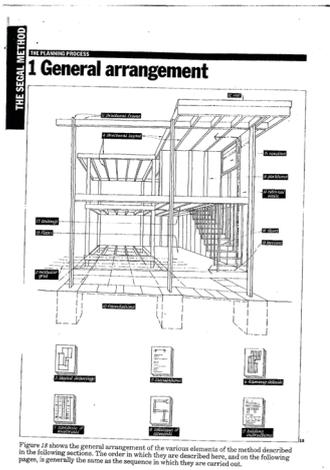


Image 4

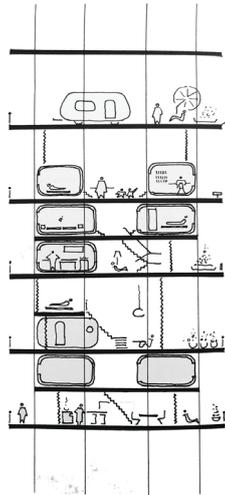


Image 5

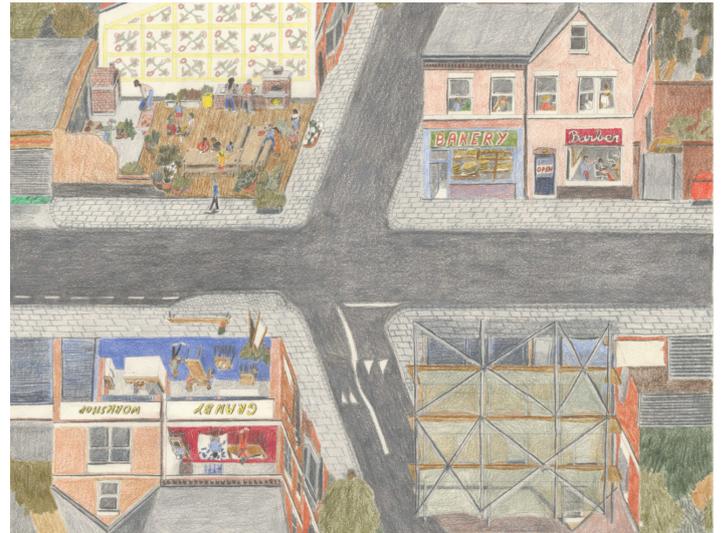


Image 7

Agency and Systemisation

As a follow-up on the theoretical background I will look into the reappraisal of architecture that considers the topic of individual agency. Firstly looking at architects who took a more systemised approach such as Walter Segal and Habraken who proposed the implementation of different systems to shape the built environment, the first more as a gradually implemented spatial system within the bigger social system while the second proposed more radical reform and replacement. Lucien Kroll will also be mentioned in this chapter as he did not necessarily take such a systemised model but put himself forward more as a mediator between the individual and the spatial.⁵

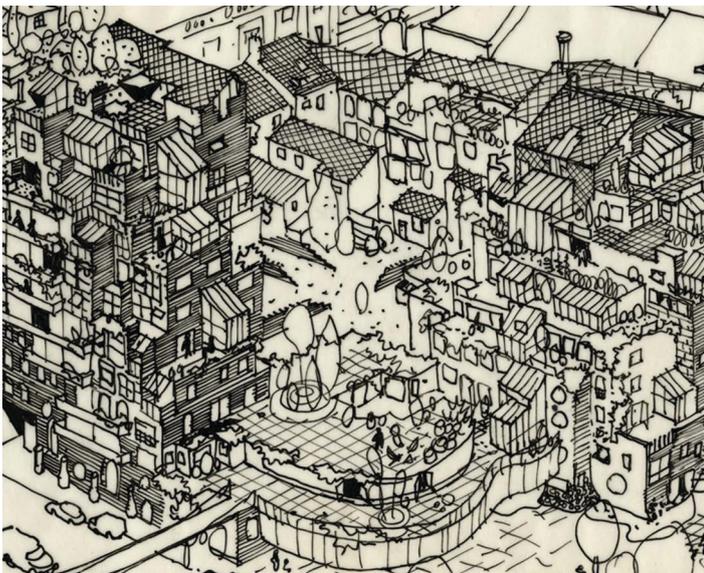


Image 6

Individual and Collective

After this, I will look into the reappraisal of the role of the individual and community in the realisation and management of more acupuncture catalysing projects and vice versa how these projects could strengthen and preserve social fabric. Here we will take a look at Atelier d'Architecture Autogenerée in Paris and Assemble Studio as projects that revitalise neighbourhoods and strengthen interrelations between its individuals.⁶



Image 8

⁵Awan, Nishat, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till. 2013. *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*. Routledge eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315881249>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



Image 10

Social Potential

The last part of the study on different practices dives further into the nonphysical capacities the material space holds. By investigating the provocative work of for example Anarchitecture Group and the suggestive intervention on a square in Madrid by Collective Zuloark as a means to create a more complete image of the social potential that design holds.⁷

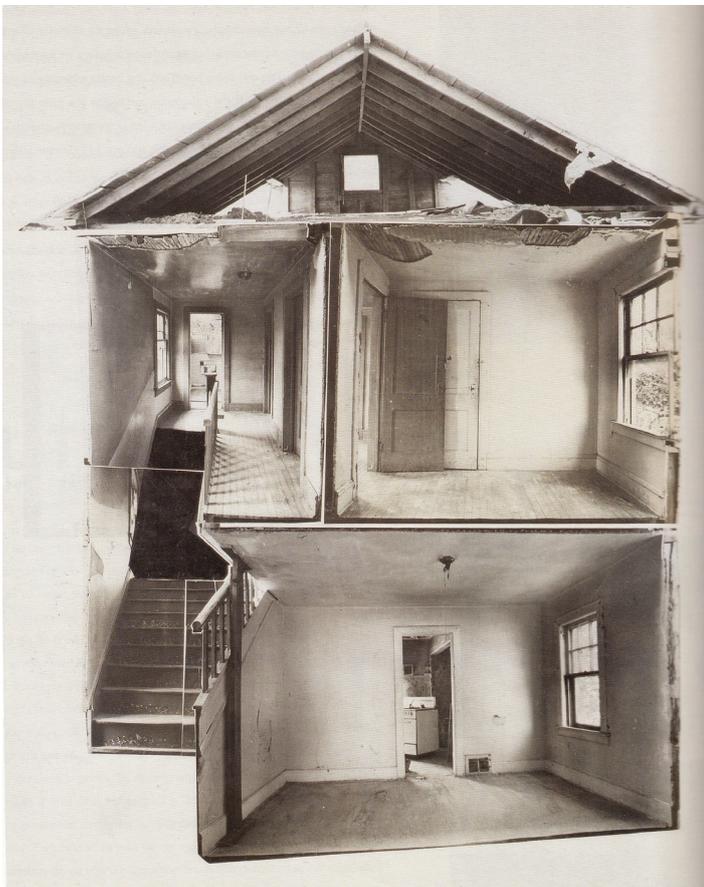


Image 9

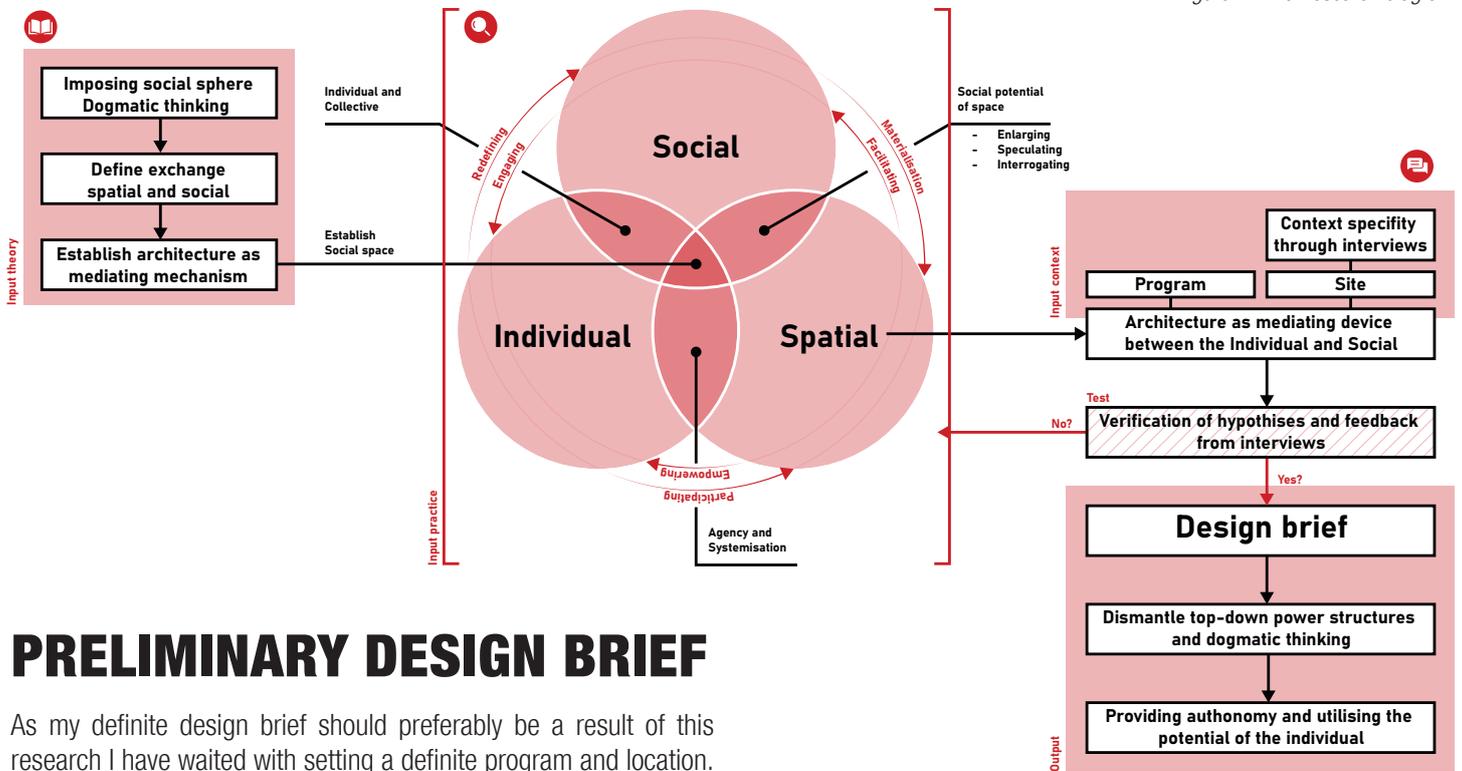
Interviews and Locality

Finally to include the local specificity of Tallinn, qualitative research will be done by interviewing multiple actors within the city. During the field trip, I have set up initial contact with several people in Tallinn whom I can interview about these topics and through which I possibly can organize a broader group of interviewees. In these interviews, the focus will be to verify my hypotheses as well as receive personal- and, where possible, a broader societal stance and feedback on the propositions I will make for my design. Subsequently, I have experimented with putting QR codes throughout the city, linking to a website on which interested participants can leave their contact information. Besides this, a brief review will be done of the history of the agency within the built environment of Tallinn. Where the responsibility for housing shifts between the state, industrialists, the individual and owner associations. By doing this research an image is sketched on the position of the individual within the built environment and social space of Tallinn.

This qualitative research is needed as I have to design for a foreign context which I cannot fully understand through only a relatively short visit and reading within the limited time, to create a site-specific and implemented design that not only consists of generic design decisions.



Figure 4: Final research diagram



PRELIMINARY DESIGN BRIEF

As my definite design brief should preferably be a result of this research I have waited with setting a definite program and location. Yet, from this preliminary research and the writing of this proposal, a basic framework can be established as a starting point to further narrow down as the research progresses.

Program

The program of the final project should empower the individual to actively shape their social space by providing agency through a (partly) flexible and participatory design. Next to this, it should open up opportunities to form bonds between individuals that could form networks and communities. Besides physically interfering in space it should stimulate the social sphere where ideas can be formed and evaluated through speculation and interrogation. Positioning the project as a mediator between the two to establish a relation individual and the social that can also happen outside of the spatial.

Location

After the fieldwork, several locations came forward that might be fitting for a design. The conditions for this should be that it is a space that is encountered within the daily lives of the individual more than it is a scarcely occurring activity like going to any podium or be based on idealist and optimist presumptions that people will actively choose to go debate at a forum every other Saturday. Furthermore, it should not be something that stands just on its own but is embedded within a bigger whole of society, able to function within while providing differently.

Image 11-14



Image 15-18

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APPENDIX I

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social Space

In this proposal, social space is not used to describe a space where social interaction happens, or at least not just that. The term indicates the space that goes beyond just the physical appearance with which we interact through our senses. It incorporates the virtual space that that material space embodies, of which it is simultaneously a product and a producer. Social space is where space evolves into something more than bodily interaction and it engages the subject in thought, acts or feelings, either as a direct exchange between the subject and the space or as a catalyst in the broader reality.⁸

Ideology and Scale

Regarding the research on the human scale within the built environment, ideology embodies somewhat of an ambiguous existence. An ideology can only exist through the individual who believes it, while at the same time, it extends beyond one's boundaries, as an overarching entity, something shared. Being nonphysical, yet to be contained within the material world, in the dynamic sense through actions, or within the seemingly static.

Ideology and architecture

In his article about Ideology, Karol Kurnicky, PhD candidate at the Institute of Sociology of Jagiellonian University in Kraków, attempts to analyse how to utilize ideology within architecture to create political force within space. In this article, Kurnicky cites Goonewarda about space being both a product as well as a producer mediating social relations. Suggesting an exchange between the built environment and the social spheres more than it the latter being a mere product of the former. A Similar relational approach between society, ideology and space is often associated with a more post-modern approach to the matter. Later Kurnicky draws on a theory of Bourdieu where ideology always exists in an apparatus that brings it into material existence through its practices.⁹ Seeing this material embodiment of ideology not as a linear process with an end product being the built environment, but as recognising an exchange between the social and the spatial, could indicate a continuous process.

Ideology and rigidity

But ideology is not always seen as such a propelling matter, Miodrag Suvakovic clarifies in the opening article of the book "Architecture and Ideology". To illustrate how ideology could be interpreted as the very support of reality more than a construct that opposes it. He puts forward Lacanian theoretical psychoanalysis that states the role of ideology is not to facilitate the subject with an escape point from his/her reality, but more to offer a fundamental social reality itself as an escape point from the 'real traumatic kernel in the midst of human life'. This is underlined by the following quote from Slavoj Žižek:¹⁰

"Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (conceptualised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as 'antagonism': a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolized."

By assuming ideology as an illusion on which we support our reality itself, irrelevant being 'true' or 'false', it gets embedded within our lives, hard to recognise. With that being, as well as someone rarely renouncing their own reality it makes for quite a strict foundation, not seldom built on pillars of unyielding truths or dogmas these realities are made inflexible by a rigid way of thinking.

Ideology in Tallinn

As I will portray more elaborately in the fieldwork description later in this proposal, the former totalitarian communist regime and the current (neo-) liberal capitalist layout of society definitely have left their imprints on Tallinn as a city and its residents. These, at first glance, opposing ideologies seemed to maintain still a continuous association through the latter, with its spatial and social implications on society, being a reaction to the former. And the societal values coming forth out of the sentiment that people still seem to have about their history.

Ideology and individual

If we take ideology as a shared construction on which a social group can base their own values and beliefs, ideology becomes somewhat of an umbrella term, posing general shared truths, thereby diminishing (inter-)individual exploration and self-determination to the status quo. To facilitate a different social structure in which this liberty is present to a greater extent, architecture might be a fitting mechanism to utilize.

Individual, not individualist

By recalibrating the built environment focusing on the individual does not necessarily mean this recalibration ends in an individualistic model. While the individual would be centralised, its relation to other individuals is not denied. Instead of attempting to group individuals by reducing infinitely complex identities to arbitrary abstract characteristics in an attempt to recognise patterns, this approach acknowledges a connection between two or more individuals as being expressed coming from the specific individuals. It also acknowledges the complexity and versatile social character of the individual that is not necessarily constrained to a specific group but makes different connections to different other individuals, weaving a complex network of interrelations.

Autonomy, not independence

In a similar fashion, I would like to emphasize that the autonomy of the individual here is meant as the freedom to choose, not necessarily as the independent, disenfranchised or isolated individual. Empowering the individual to choose and define themselves still enables them to establish new relations as stated above, simultaneously enabling them to build upon dependency or -interdependency within these social structures.

Architecture as a social mechanism

The amount in which this rigid way of thinking is embedded and intertwined with the daily lives of people asks for a rudimental different approach in an attempt to utilise the built environment as a tool to facilitate a more fluid and self-evaluating layout of reality, in the physical- and social sphere. Kurnicki briefly mentioned Leach, who argues that architecture is more bound to the social sphere than other forms of aesthetic expression and therefore is an instrument for social revolution.¹¹

In his text he refers to Bourdieu who mentioned the almost permanent inscription ideology makes when it materialises within the built environment and the tremendous effort it takes to modify it afterwards. This should not have to be a truth as it could be read as the built environment being too static of character and calling indirectly for a more physical fluidity within the built environment. Later one of Goonewardena's statements about the top-down power relations the 'market' and the 'expert have on the development of a project could be an indication of a revaluation of agency within the built environment. Finally, Lefebvre's point is repeated in which he states that "transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of space founded on the permanent participation of the 'interested parties', with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests. It thus also presupposes confrontation (...)". A different layout of the social space with special attention to the relations between its participants could be needed.¹²

⁸ Kurnicki, Karol. 2014. "Towards a Spatial Critique of Ideology: Architecture as a Test." *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 38 (1): 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.3846/20297955.2014.893642>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Blagojevi, Mirjana Roter, Marta Vukotic Lazar, Vladimir Mako, and Miodrag Suvakovic. 2014. *Architecture and Ideology*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

¹¹ Kurnicki, Karol. 2014. "Towards a Spatial Critique of Ideology: Architecture as a Test." *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 38 (1): 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.3846/20297955.2014.893642>.

¹² Ibid.

APPENDIX II

MY IMPRESSION OF TALLINN

The first impression I got of Tallinn was that of a city that appeared way less dramatic than I initially anticipated to encounter. Through the stories of my fellow students, teachers and readings I expected to arrive in a grave and complicated post-soviet state with clearly apparent scars left by the totalitarian communist regime. In preparation for the trip, the term “socialist trauma” came across more than once. Yet, while the traces of this gone regime are still very much noticeable on the city’s surface, the city also showed a certain busyness, an overall presence of the already developed and new developments happening. I don’t know if it is a particular resilience, as a society-wide reaction to the communist rule of the 20th century, a systematic thing where the development stems from the benefit of the individual, or if it may be the result of something else.

What did speak to me in the way that I expected it to, was the richness in ideology that was presented through the architecture of Tallinn. A diverse physical articulation of faded societies. Existing as parts next to each other, sometimes clashing, sometimes meeting and sometimes simply just co-existing. As mentioned above, the traces of these disappeared societies were still present, from the medieval city centre and wooden fishermen’s dwellings to industrial complexes from tsarist Russia and the Soviet concrete panel buildings. Between, the current society and its beliefs were clearly apparent. Where glass and concrete buildings arise and paid-for parking takes up prominent spots within the city of Tallinn. This is where I first caught a suggestion of the concealed and invisible layers of the city.

While I got to hear about mass deportations and totalitarian suppression in conversation with people I’ve met, this “socialist trauma” didn’t seem to speak too much through the daily lives within the city. At least not in the gravity that the word “trauma” might suggest. But that might also be because people in general tend to not start about their trauma in these short moments of conversation.

At the same time, I attempted to begin formulating certain hypotheses or explanations about the current liberal course of Tallinn’s society and maybe Estonian society in general. Before my visit to Tallinn, I had heard about “Cowboy capitalism” as opportunist enterprises took off to these “new” economies where mass privatisation happened after the departure of the Soviet state. What I didn’t expect to encounter was what seemed to me like it was still a bit of a Wild West situation in Tallinn. The small state or municipality seemed to not intervene much in the development of the city (lacking an overall and cohesive program for the city) and mainly facilitated the commercial market it seemed (e.g. the privatised paid parking lots in prominent places around town). Billboards displayed renderings of polished apartments on most of the vacant plots and -factories I encountered. That was if it hadn’t been developed already. Housing that seemed to be targeted mostly at a middle- or higher-segment within society.

A car-centric city

This made me wonder how- and why this was all right in this city, along with so many others. As clearly I projected different values onto this model. Until something started unfolding when someone told me the city is so car-centric nowadays because the car symbolises a certain freedom for a lot of Estonians. During Soviet times it had been difficult, if not impossible, to buy a car due to endless waiting lists. The papers themselves were sometimes sold off at the very moment that one got them as they became so valuable through it's scarcity alone. Since the independence of Estonia and the opening of the market people were suddenly able to own a car, freeing them from dependence on other forms of (public-) transport. I sometimes saw the most decayed little houses having the most shiny cars on their driveways.

The car automatically obtained a prominent spot within the city by seizing this freedom. It might be a telling manifestation of how society from the eighties until today dealt with its newly found freedom, with Estonian (neo-)liberalism being still closely tied to the former totalitarian communism. In the end, it is more of a reaction or -result than a detached or isolated phenomenon. These (hypothetic) connections between two seemingly disjoined, rather opposing ideologies started to draw my attention more and more.

Malls

I learned about how some Estonian families take their cars and go to the mall as a day out. In these shopping centers entertainment for the children is taken care of, while parents can draw their own plans, especially during the colder months of the year. Gigantic malls appear all throughout the city as a seeming celebration of consumerism, as a reaction to times when poor planning of production by the state didn't allow much room for consumption and caused shortages of specific goods every once in a while. Now these colossal warehouses are erected across the city, possibly saturating a market as within some of them almost half of the spaces are vacant.¹³ As a remark, I have to put here that this celebration of freedom to consume is a hypothesis coming forth out of my own empirical research.

Private property

After the withdrawal of the USSR mass privatisation happened and most of the formerly state-owned housing found new private ownership with the people that resided in it.¹⁴ With this independence, new challenges arose concerning ownership and responsibility. For example, in the upkeep of apartment buildings, the association of the private owners have to come to an agreement on the investments that have to be made to maintain the common elements and facilities of a building. It is often that buildings with multiple resident structures look worn down and decayed from the outside while the private quarters are well renovated on the inside. On the topic of redistributing private ownership, it might be interesting to also note

the extensive land reform after the First War of Independence. This expropriation of the (often Germanic) nobility made a lot of Estonians own a house and a plot of land somewhere in the country where they could grow crops and vegetables. Some people reason that this is one of the foundations for Estonia's relatively prosperous population nowadays.

Freedom and authority

Within the more governmental spheres, I also noticed possible hints of opposing the former communist authoritarian system. The capitalist liberal layout of society and its economy is in many ways a complete opposition to the former totalitarian communism. Focussing on Estonian-specific liberalism, in which they seemed to put quite some confidence and trust. Their complete flat-rate tax is a perfect example of the liberal mindset, facilitating the free-market economy and keeping the responsibilities of a government small and simple. People spoke quite negatively and distrusting about this smaller government, with it not functioning smoothly and not having an overarching- and futureproof agenda.

When we spoke to Bart Cosijn, a trained architect who now lives in Tallinn and is working in participatory processes concerning the built environment, he mentioned random citizen councils that get called upon to examine societal topics and suggest solutions to the municipality. This suggests a different approach to democracy where the citizen is more directly involved in governing themselves. Possibly a reaction to the former absolute- and authoritarian-state apparatus where governing is done in a more hierarchical way.

Segregation

Another legacy of the soviet occupation is segregation within Estonian society between native Estonians and a (mainly) Russian-speaking minority of immigrants, sometimes already living in Estonia for multiple generations. A topic people spoke about but wasn't discussed so easily. I heard about the government not recognising these Russian speakers fully as they can't get an Estonian passport without passing the language test. Learned about big upcoming reforms that make it mandatory to have 80 per cent of classes in Estonian. About wage gaps, spatial segregation, polarisation, nationalism and national militias. However, I have to point out that the severity depends on whom you might ask about this.

¹³ Err, Merilin Pärli. 2021. "T1 Stopping Tenants from Leaving: 'We Are like Hostages.'" ERR, September 16, 2021. <https://news.err.ee/1608340682/t1-stopping-tenants-from-leaving-we-are-like-hostages>.

¹⁴ Jcrites. 2018. "How Estonia Is Managing Major Housing Reform." Housing Futures. April 5, 2018. <https://housing-futures.org/2018/04/05/how-estonia-is-managing-major-housing-reform-2/>.

A first attempt to unravel

This whole description of Estonia, Tallinn, the people and their beliefs, is quite subjective and anecdotal. It is impossible to pour into a limited amount of words as it is infinitely more complex because we are talking about individuals that can't be easily subdivided by a set of golden rules. I am aware of the distance that I possibly create between myself as a researcher and designer and the people there as inhabitants and users of the city. This is why I am tempted to focus on deducing and analysing human traits more than cultural and historical ones. At the same time, I do not want to denounce intriguing local historical contexts, like the evolution of societal belief systems, or the beauty in cultural specificities, e.g. the pagan legacy and the connection to nature many Estonians identify with.

It is hard for me to take a position on some of the different values and beliefs characterising Estonian society for I can not fully comprehend it within the limited time I have for my graduation project and the distance. Yet I want to emphasize that most of this hypothesis is based on actual conversations and contact with people I have met there.

In the end, I encountered a sense of pride in the freedom within their lives and economy. The majority of people seemed to be doing quite alright and have seen a great increase in living standards over the past decades. It is not for nothing that Estonians like to be seen more as a Scandinavian country than a post-communist country from the Eastern Bloc. However, it seems to me like a bit of a mix-up in the definition of freedom. These Scandinavian countries are further away from traditional- or neo-liberalism and lean more towards somewhat of a Keynesian model where the government intervenes and regulates the economy, by doing so establishing more widespread freedom and well-being. But still, the majority of Estonians seem to be doing fine. Occasionally some protest happens but the wellbeing of the majority of the population also makes for general compliance among the population. This well-being is of course not a negative fact as long individuals that don't belong to this majority aren't marginalised further by it.

Images

Cover image: İha, Tadeáš, Laura Linsi, and Roland Reemaa. 2018. Nõrk Monument: Pjedaalialused Arhitektuurid. Park Publishing (WI).

Image 1: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Wooden houses. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Image 2: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Soviet panel building, Väike-Õismäe Kvartal. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Image 3: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Bank building, Rottermanni Kvartal. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Image 4: "THE SEGAL METHOD : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive." 2015. Internet Archive. August 20, 2015. <https://archive.org/details/THESEGALMETHOD/page/n7/mode/2up>.

Image 5: Shepard, Cassim. 2023. "Mass Support." Places Journal. April 11, 2023. <https://placesjournal.org/article/reconsidering-housing-theorist-john-habraken/>.

Image 6: "L'anti-spectacle de Lucien et Simone Kroll - AMC." n.d. <https://www.amc-archi.com/photos/l-anti-spectacle-de-lucien-et-simone-kroll,1718/lucien-kroll-cohabita-av-de.5>.

Image 7: "Granby Four Streets." n.d. Assemble. <https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/granby-four-streets-2>.

Image 8: "Spatial Agency: Atelier d'architecture Autogérée." n.d. <https://www.spatialagency.net/database/aaa>.

Image 9: "Gordon Matta-Clark." 2010. History of Our World. August 26, 2010. <https://historyofourworld.wordpress.com/2010/08/26/gordon-matta-clark/>.

Image 10: Frencken, Tov. 2023. City skyline from Kopli peninsula, Kopli. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Image 11: Frencken, Tov. 2023. AI generated impression community design centre, park Lasnamea, Tallinn. AI generated Image: Midjourney AI.

Image 12: Frencken, Tov. 2023. AI generated impression speculative docks to the island of Naissaare, Tallinn Seaside. AI generated Image: Midjourney AI.

Image 13: Frencken, Tov. 2023. AI generated impression self-built housing systems, parking lots, Tallinn. AI generated Image: Midjourney AI.

Image 14: Frencken, Tov. 2023. AI generated impression toolkit for a dweller, undesignated. AI generated Image: Midjourney AI.

Image 15: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Park with concrete panel building, Lasnamea. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Image 16: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Seaside cliff. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Image 17: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Parking lots at a mall, Lasnamea. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Image 18: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Abandoned industrial complex, Paldiski mnt 52. Photograph. Tallinn: Author.

Figures

Figure 1: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Social space. Diagram: Author.

Figure 2: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Imposing top-down social sphere. Diagram: Author.

Figure 3: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Mutual exchange between the social, the spatial and the individual.. Diagram: Author.

Figure 4: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Different forms for different research. Diagram: Author.

Figure 5: Frencken, Tov. 2023. Social space. Diagram: Author.