

REFLECTION

Under the track of Urbanism, the project was done in the cross domain studio City of the Future. The studio approaches urban design and architecture from an integrated viewpoint. How do different disciplines manifest themselves together in the design of space? At first I thought this studio would be a great fit. My topic would seemingly deal with urbanism, architecture and certain fields related to the digital realm, such as information technology, robotics, big data, et cetera. Though as I researched my topic more and more, I actually steered away from research into specific other disciplines. The digital transition was a societal change. Of course, an integrated approach to design is important in the city of the future when dealing with everchanging individuals. But there was an overarching theme that has to make us reconsider everything about design that we do up and until today. While the studio was a great learning experiences for me because I met some students with similar topics to mine, what I noticed was that their projects tended to steer towards a specific design whereas mine steered more towards a design method/ approach, or rather, a different way of thinking. It was about

rethinking the way urban designers approached any future design. I was looking for a method in which we can incorporate the needs of the individual, individuals that over time might change. Looking back at the results of my project, perhaps my project would have fitted better in the studio Explore Lab. Explore Lab focuses more on a obsessive interest, in my case the digital transition, and leads to theoretical and design research. Though I was unaware of this studio when I picked my graduation studio. Still this project fits in the track of overall track of urbanism, for it places into the discussion the whole contemporary approach of architects and urban designers.

Research & approach

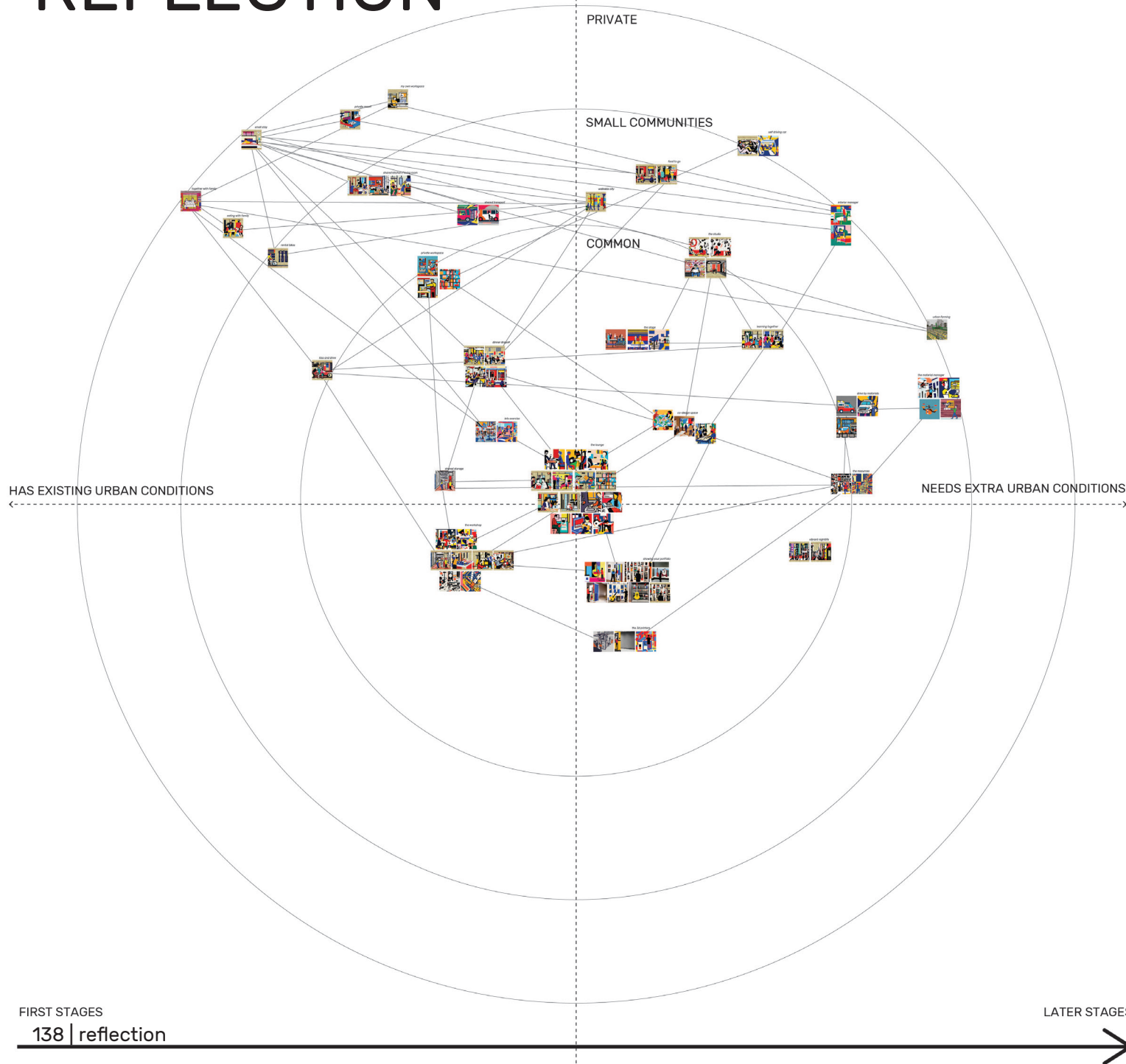
Most students are able to synthesize a design using their findings that they discovered over the course of their research period. Certain research would lead to this or that design element. Though this way of design is completely incompatible with my findings on how we should approach future design. While these designs might work for a certain period of time, what they do is assume certain 'static' individuals. Most would call them target groups. People that are not likely to change over

time, and thus do not have the need to change their environment. For me this leaves the user in a state of not being able to grow as a person. It does not feel ethical from my perspective. My research affected my design in that I tried to include an element of the butterfly effect into whatever I designed. One minor change, such as one different individual in my design could lead to a completely different design over time. I would spend weeks coming up with certain compositions, of how things could/ might/ may be. But there was never a definitive answer, much to the dismay of my mentors, I would always speak in could haves, might haves or may haves. I was looking for a way to express this different way of thinking in design, but even up and until today I'm not sure if I have conveyed this message. So, research about the digital transition heavily affected my 'design'. First of all, I found it at first more difficult than ever to come up with a specific design. I spent ages spinning back and forth between the design and research. This at the same time gave answers to my research questions. While it was speculative design, it showed that something had to change in the design approach to accommodate the needs of future citizens.

Looking back at how I approached the design from the perspective of the individual was for me an interesting approach, but not without its issues. The value of pattern language was tremendous. I believe this offers a perfect way for different individuals to compose space together. Though there are things that I could have changed if I had more time for the project. The storytelling method to design gave me a method to shape quirky and unique individuals with their own pattern set. This brought in a certain element of futurist design into my design. Though at the same time these individuals were rather speculative. I created their story based from my own perspective, so these stories are far from complete. At the same time I limited the stories to people of 'The Third Wave' people that already are completely desynchronised, delinearised and multispecialised. It would have been interesting to mix both the speculative stories with stories of real people inside the design area. This would have given me two benefits. First of all, the speculative personas made it difficult for me to really go into detail with the design. I was never entirely sure what these people exactly needed save for the first things that came into my mind

when thinking of these people. This mixed with the aspect of the butterfly effect that I mentioned earlier, made the design part of my project rather challenging because of the fuzziness I had to deal with. Talking with existing residents would have given shape to stories and patterns that are much more detailed. Second, integrating existing residents is important because the project is a transition design. It would have added an element of realism to my design, but perhaps this is separate from this project which serves more as a theoretical design and discussion to the overall approach of urban designers.

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REVISITING THE PATTERNS

Based on the results from the design I would alter the way I use the patterns the next time when I proceed towards a design.

A few patterns that are not introduced in the thesis are added here to show what I learned upon reflection.

I created two dimensions in which we can place the patterns.

First of all there is an axis of the degree of available urban conditions. As we learned, the patterns have all certain urban conditions they need to come to fruition, some have these conditions already in the area while some might need a bit more effort and change to the location to enable them. This gives us a time dimension in which we can understand which patterns will likely first come into existence. The patterns on the left require the least pushing power to create the space for the individuals, whereas the patterns on the right, even though they might be needed/wanted will require more effort to adapt the city to these patterns. Though what we see is that all these patterns are linked with each other. Patterns enable each other. They give a dimension of time that the designer can work with. Whereas some patterns on the right might seem difficult or near impossible to facilitate in the city at first. What we can do is enable that patterns on the left, which eventually create suitable urban conditions for the patterns on the right. This is especially helpful in these bottom-up scenarios of design by individuals who often lack the pushing power to reshape larger urban conditions.

The second axis is the dimension of individual - public. Individuals their patterns can cluster at certain points. They share a common environment in which they function, and thus the space can be used by multiple people. It is these places that require most coordination by the urban designer. I think if you place most focus on these common and small community spaces, then you can leave the outer circle (private spaces) more to the individual (of course, while ensuring that there actually is space where they can adapt). This helps the designer to understand which parts of the designed space will likely institutionalize and create a leading context in the larger area. It helps the designer think about what sort of individuals might get attracted to this space in later stages and thus think about what sort of spaces might be needed in the future.

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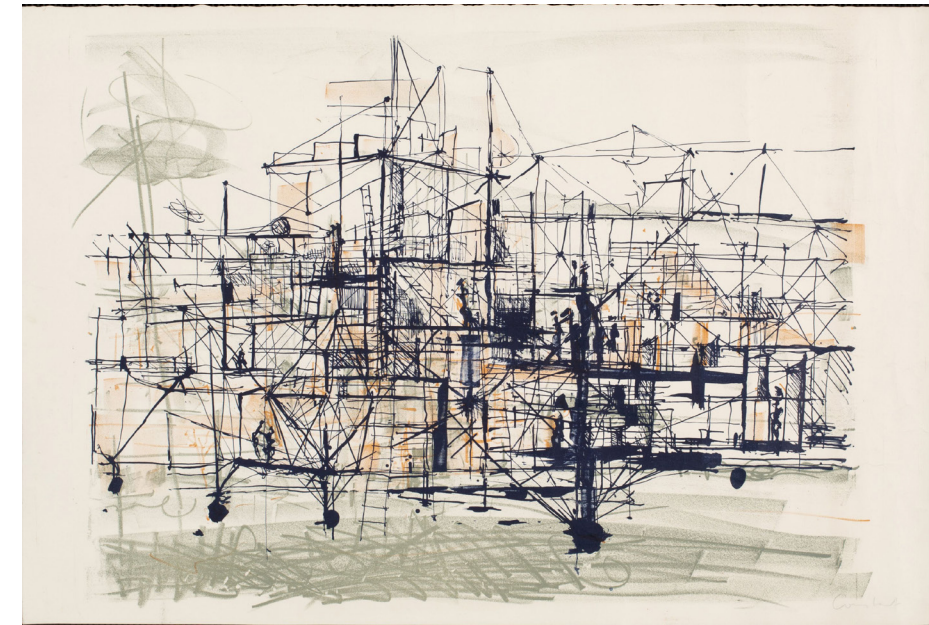
Value of the project

I argue that this project plays a role in social sustainability from both an academical and societal point of view. From an academical point of view, it challenges the status quo of urbanism. It opens the discussion of how we have to rethink design in light of the changing human psyche because of the digital transition. Right now urbanism tends to focus on environmental sustainability, but we are forgetting the whole social aspect of how our society is changing at the same time. The discussion of the digital transition saw a boom in the eighties, but it completely slowed down until the COVID-19 pandemic. Should we ignore these changes, then we would continuously have to adapt our city because it does not fit the needs of people. My hope is that this thesis opens up more dialogue regarding the changing 'digital' society, the challenges this society provides, but also the benefits and possibilities that we as humans will see from this when adapting our built environment to this 'new' society.

From a societal point of view I believe this project plays an ethical and sustainable role. I tried as much as possible to have individuals play a leading role in the design. I never

envisioned the design as a final product, but as a state that will eventually pass and be adapted by others again. Overall it was the process that mattered. What I did was that I changed the role of the designer. I as urban designer did not approach this area with a specific view of how it should be, rather I envisioned the possibilities it might bring when certain individuals play a larger role in this area. It removes the leading role of centralised organisation such as the municipality, it diminishes the role of the urban designer and architect who might have his own views of what 'right' public space is, all of this is mostly placed in the hands of the users of the space. Instead of designing for 'ideal' users, we design for actual real users.

My hope is that when looking at the overall thesis, it is not the eventual design that will stick in people their minds, but the approach that was used to lead to this design. That is the message I wish to convey to whoever read this project. Using this method I believe you can apply my findings anywhere on the globe. Where when designing a space for people, you start with individuals who give shape to the core patterns of the digital transition. Having these people you look for space for them in an area and help them through the process of developing space for them in a co-design method. You as designer play a role in overseeing this area for the rest of your life. Making changes based on the needs of individuals joining, changing and leaving the area, free from your own subjective views of what 'proper' urban design is.



Constant Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon*, 1961, litho. Collectie Het Nieuwe Instituut, archief Academie van Bouwkunst (ABAM). Copyright Pictoright.

In New Babylon there is no free time, because all time is active there. New Babylon is a passionate appeal to the untapped and often unconscious creativity that lies dormant in all people.

- Constant Nieuwenhuys, reaction to a letter, from <https://work-body-leisure.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/nl/constant-nieuwenhuys>

Conclusion

In this project I learned how urbanism over time has steered away from the needs of the individual. As weird as it might sound it is actually the digital era that allows us to make our cities more humane. To do this we have to change our design approach into a method that incorporates the individuals more. Pattern language is a great tool to have both existing individuals and future to-be individuals give shape to their ideal environment. It allows

them to come to develop their own patterns, filled with their own subjective views, allows them to discuss them with each other, and eventually to co-design with them. It changed my own perspective on the role of the urban designer. What we eventually do is in my view sort of resembling to a piece of art by Constant Nieuwenhuys. We as urban designers help people create a common structure, but it is eventually the people that decide how this structure is filled in.

With this project I tried to achieve a similar goal as to what Nieuwenhuys had in mind when developing his works of art.

Instead of a city that forces humans into a certain way of thought, a certain way of behaviour. I tried to achieve a way of design in which the city is a story of individuals building and giving shape to their own lives. Where public space and our way of living is not determined by what the machines of industry requires of us, but it is developed from our each individually different inner interests.