

# TAKE [A] PART

*Urban design of physical public spaces  
from a social perspective*



# ABSTRACT

Social cohesion is perceived to be under pressure in the Netherlands, especially in its larger cities. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced and deepened the socio-spatial divide between vulnerable urban areas and the rest of the city, which not only affects the residents of the area and of the city, but also starts to affect the cohesion of the society as a whole. In light of the large scale spatial transitions that will also need to take place in these vulnerable urban areas, the Dutch government has issued the National Programme for Liveability and Safety, a long term, integrated and multidisciplinary urban regeneration approach to tackle the liveability, safety and social issues within the vulnerable urban areas. To achieve the overall improvement of the quality of life of the residents, it is stated in the Programme that interventions in the spatial domain should reinforce policy objectives in the social domain and vice versa. The objective of this graduation project is to explore to what extent urban design of physical public spaces in urban areas can facilitate the formation of social cohesion. To do this, literature research was conducted to define social cohesion, and to translate the concept to the local community level into specific urban design objectives. For this, the Social Cohesion Radar of the Bertelsmann Stiftung was taken apart and operationalised into requirements and a description of the ideal situation. From this, it was concluded that the design objectives consist of certain types of social interactions with specific characteristics. Furthermore, using relevant theories from environmental psychology and sociology, it was researched how the environment affects human behaviour. Combined with urban design theories the findings from the theoretical exploration and the operationalisation were used

to develop a framework to analyse a physical space from the lens of social cohesion. In this analytical framework, the central point through which urban design interventions connect to social cohesion is through social interactions. Through the design of specific elements the defined social interactions could be directly facilitated, or would be facilitated via the improvement of characteristics of the space. The type of space that is analysed sets the expectations for the interactions that are likely to occur, and sets expectations for the characteristics and elements to be found there. For the implementation of the framework a guideline was developed, as well as an overview of typical settings to be found in Dutch urban areas, and a set of possible design interventions for social cohesion. The use of the framework to analyse a physical public space in an urban area should provide an urban designer with a decent understanding of the potential of the space to facilitate social cohesion, and provide the designer with possible spatial improvements. The framework provides the urban designer with an instrument to develop explicit and specific hypotheses regarding the facilitation of social cohesion through urban design.

**Keywords:**

Social Cohesion Radar | Physical Public Space | Urban Design | Behaviour Settings | Social Interactions