

A Framework and Concept for a Decolonial Utrecht by Challenging Colonial Patterns



Utrecht is not often the first city associated with the Dutch colonial past, yet its public space contains many colonial references, including street names. These names shape how we relate to history by showing which stories and figures were considered worthy of remembrance. However, many of these histories are unknown to citizens of Utrecht. Because colonial structures are still present in Dutch society, the Municipality of Utrecht started a project to raise awareness of these hidden histories.

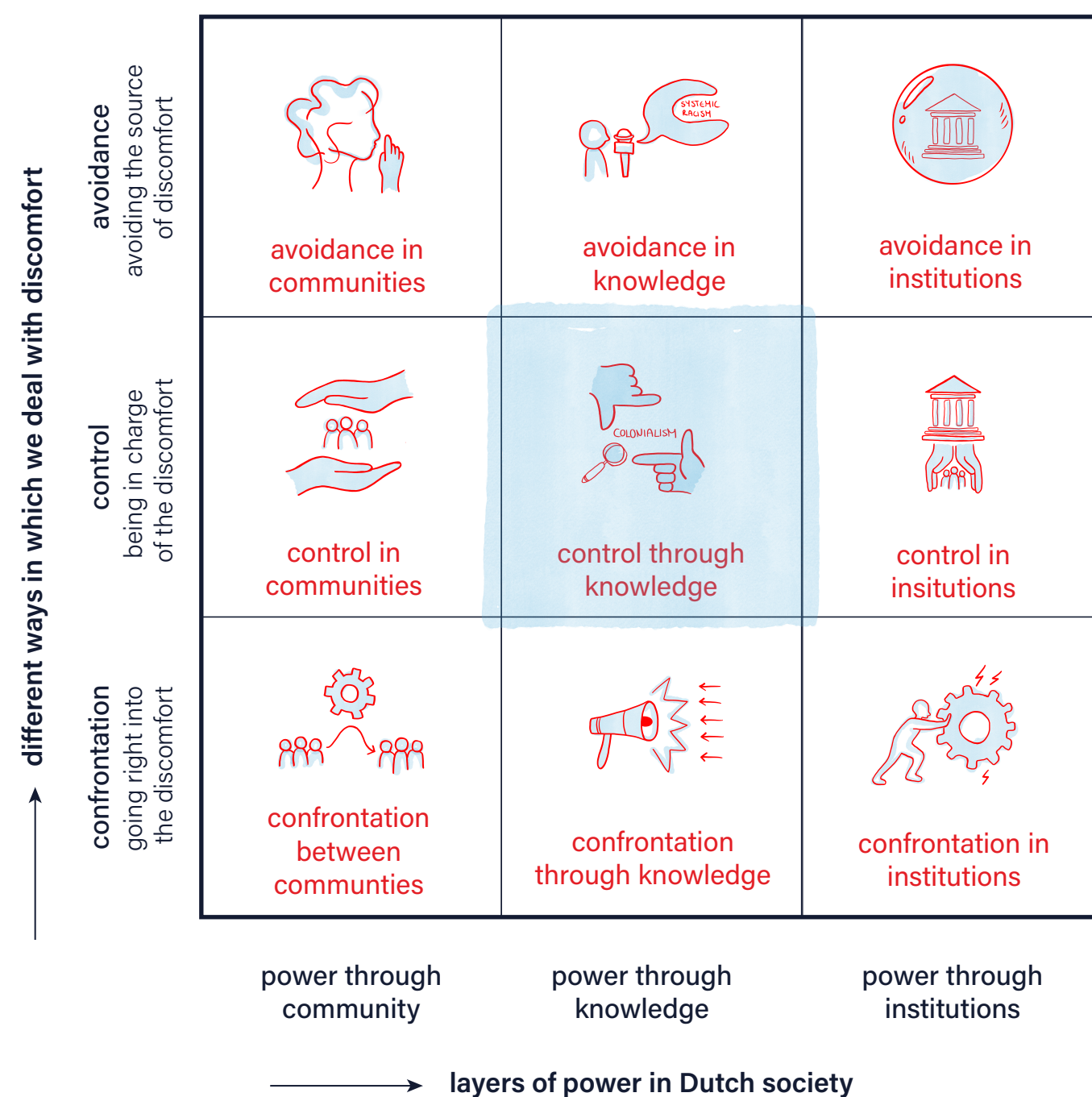
This graduation project took that initiative as a starting point, but aimed to move beyond awareness and take a step towards breaking colonial structures. A future-oriented framework was developed to understand how society relates to the colonial past, leading to a clear vision for a desirable future and a tangible design intervention.

FRAMEWORK

UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE CONTEXT:
HOW DOES SOCIETY RELATE TO THE COLONIAL PAST?



the 9 obstacles in reinventing Dutch identity through dealing with our colonial past



CONTROL THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

People often cope with discomfort around colonialism by **shaping and controlling narratives through selective language and partial truths**. As a **defensive mechanism**, this makes the topic feel more understandable, familiar, and emotionally manageable. Even when people recognise the colonial past as an important topic that deserves attention, their engagement can remain safely within dominant frames, **protecting existing power relations rather than challenging them**.

THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE

The dominant narrative at play currently is one shaped by the Netherlands, in which **Dutch responsibility is downplayed**, **colonial violence is softened**, and **colonialism is framed as incidental or even beneficial**. It presents the Netherlands as an **innocent and ethical nation** that can take pride in the 'Golden Age', while VOC generals responsible for the deaths of thousands are still honoured through street names and statues.

DESIGN STATEMENT

DEFINING A VISION FOR A DESIRABLE FUTURE



CONCEPT

HOW TO MOVE TO THE DESIRABLE FUTURE THROUGH A TANGIBLE CONCEPT?

I want people to recognise the 'lie' in the dominant narrative of the colonial past by shifting towards a multiplicity of histories. This means **recognising the harm in Dutch coping mechanisms**, **questioning the idea that the known story is complete and accurate**, and understanding that **all knowledge is shaped by perspective**. In doing so, **space opens for multiple histories to exist alongside one another**.

UTRECHT ONTFRAELD: a platform for hidden stories

PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS
WOVEN INTO DAILY LIFE,
INEVITABLE AND CONFRONTING

SERVES AS
A GATEWAY

PLATFORM WHERE 'ALTERNATIVE'
NARRATIVES ARE GATHERED
ACCESSABLE, OFFERS DEPTH AND COMPLEXITY

