

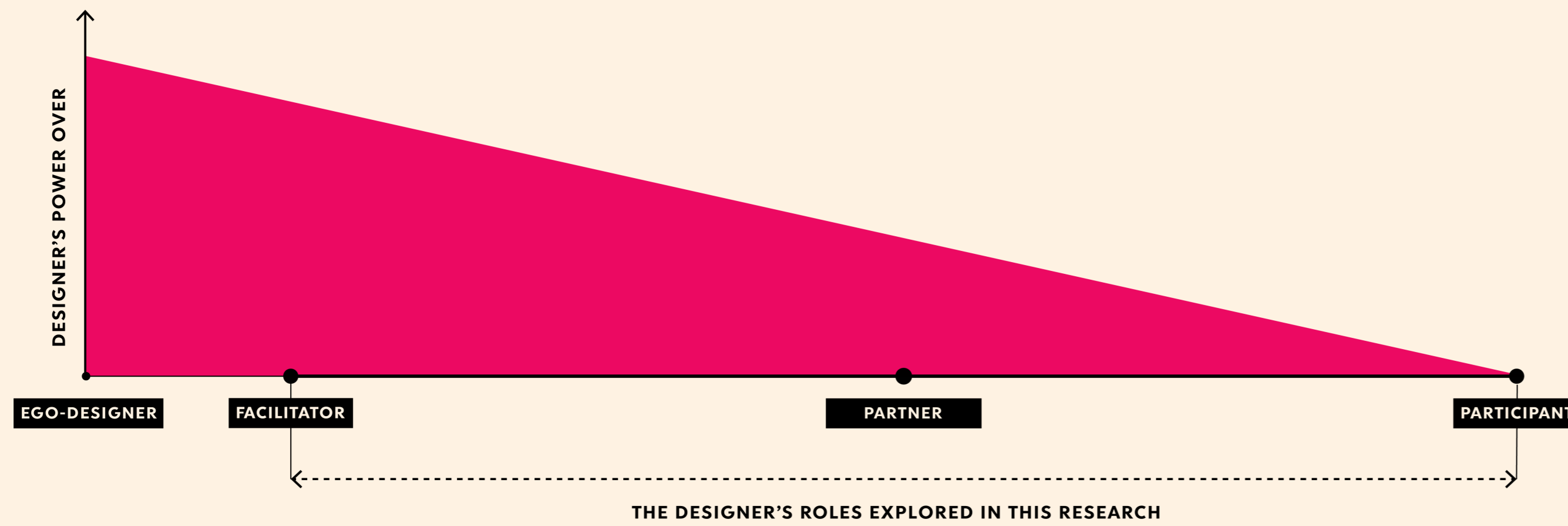
BALANCING POWER

Explorations towards a more decolonial Participatory Design process

This research project had the goal of proposing a new understanding for a decolonial PD process that accounts for more power balanced and socially just relationships between designers and marginalized communities.

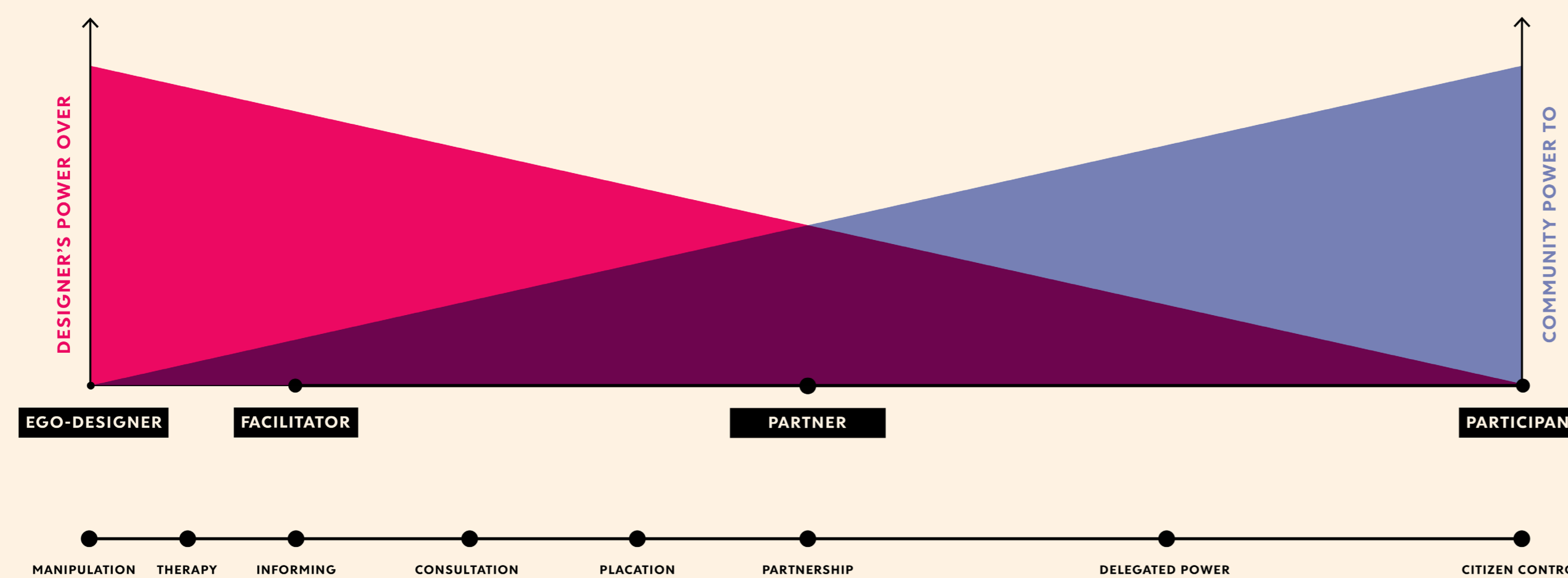
To accomplish this, a research for design was conducted to then develop a series of explorations in Afrikaanderwijk (Rotterdam Zuid). By taking a RtD approach, this project analyzed what practices in the design process could exercise oppression over marginalized communities and what new practices could be proposed for a decolonial PD process.

Soon in the investigation in the context it was realized that to propose a decolonial PD process, the designer in that process also needs to be decolonized and the process itself can be proposed if and only if it's done together with the community. To accomplish this, the role of the designer was delinked from the normalized, assumptions and ways of doing while exploring new forms of engagement with the community based on dialogues.



This graph represents the different roles of the designer explored in this research. Taking into consideration that PD claims to change the role of the designer from the “ego-designer” to the facilitator, this axis shows how the role in this project was pushed till the one of the participant-designer. This role implies engaging with communities by participating in activities already happening in the context giving importance to the relational aspect before a project is even proposed.

By being a participant, the designer can eliminate the aspects that gave them power over the community like the imposition of methods, framings, problem definition and so on.



The axis of the role of the designer is now compared to Arnstein's ladder of participation. The less power over (the project and the community) the designer has, the more power to (control, act, develop, define, etc) the members of the community have.

The middle point of the role of the partner entails interactions where power is shared inside an activity. In the new understanding of a PD process, the project is understood as a collaboration in which the designer and the community can have different roles depending on the moment of the project but its all established by a mutual understanding.

At the end of this investigation 5 personal statements were established in order to understand better the proposal for a decolonial PD process:

1

A DECOLONIAL PD PROCESS IS BUILT WITH THE COMMUNITY

2

FOR A DECOLONIAL PD THE DESIGNER NEEDS TO BE DECOLONIZED TOO

3

THE DESIGNER IS DESIGNING JUST IN COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

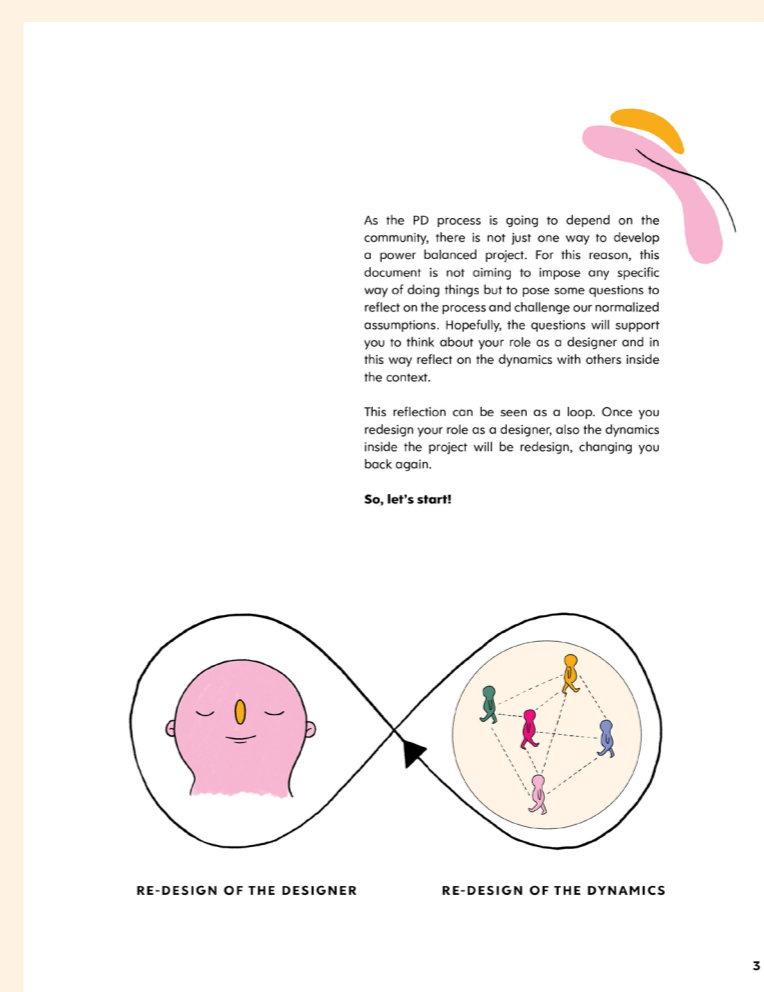
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A PROJECT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IS MORE THAN WHAT CAN BE FRAMED BY DESIGN

5

A DECOLONIAL PD PROCESS NEEDS TO BE BUILT IN REFLECTION AND ACTION

To make the findings of this research more practical and useful for other designers practitioners, a series of reflective questions were developed. These questions were gathered in a document and have the purpose to make designers challenge their assumptions and think of PD process in a different way.



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Explorations for a more decolonial PD process
14 December 2020
MSc Design for Interaction

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