Key Activity

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DESIGN AND RESEARCH THEME

The recent housing market and social trends have changed the houses from large family homes to small single-dweller apartments. In Northern Europa almost 50% of the adult live alone. This is mainly caused by social factors, such as the increase of divorces, later parenthood and less cohousing in general. In addition, the increased globalization and online influence gave us the options to only interact with people that are similar and have the same opinion as us, wherein were not willing to befriend our direct neighbors anymore. This does not mean that online connection have no social value. Far from it, it can be very important for socially isolated people to have an easy way to communicate and feel part of something, but this does not have the same effect as the connection with physical spaces (Klinenberg, 2018).

Although living alone does not necessarily mean that solo-dwellers are lonely, they are more at risk of social isolation which can cause loneliness. It has especially been mentally taxing for people that lack strong social skills or are less likely to approach other. Before these people could more easily rely on family, community or certain social groups, however this change to a more individual society has left them more and more alone. This loneliness can develop in harmful mental and even physical health problems (Cacioppo, 2018).

These societal problems asks for a more collective society, wherein people work together. Some communities do not believe they can influence or improve their situation. We often seem to be victims of circumstances beyond our control, however it has been proven that a strong communities can better their future (Phillips & Pittman, 2008). Community-driven living with shared facilities and activities can address the great social, economic and sustainability challenges that household face today. More than just reduce the social isolation of a few (Nelson, 2018).

As a rather quiet person myself, it helps when others take the initiative. I see organizing activities for the neighborhood is one of the most important factors keeping people from feeling lonely or left out and just being around people can help a lot in my experience. Therefore I want to focus my research on bringing together neighborhoods. Creating stronger neighborhoods that help each other, work for each other and increasing the social cohesive.

Certain communal activities can help to bridge the gap for people that lack social skills. To enjoy a game, one often only needs to know the rules and the interaction with others can come more naturally than just putting two people together. Chess has been one of the most popular game used to support these social interactions. It allows to people from anywhere to play, unrelated to their age, gender, physical ability or social situation. Many public spaces have incorporated chess boards in their design and has for a long time used to promote social inclusion (Agustina Iñiguez, 2021). However, just a chess board in the middle of a square does still leave a large incentive to actually connect with strangers. This is where organized activities come in. It creates a clear sign, that the intent is to include the entire neighborhood and nobody feels unsure if they are part of it.

Therefore my research will focus on people that are socially isolated because of their lack of social skills. Not the elderly that are mainly socially isolated, because of their physical inabilities. People that are forgotten and often stay quiet about their problems. For these people the feeling of belonging is of great importance. Being part of something, not simply interacting with people. The

residents should be given the feeling that they belong in their neighborhood. That their inclusion has meaningful impact on their neighborhood. But for this inclusion, putting the same people together will not solve the problem. This design also requires people that have strong social skills and are willing to organize these activities. So my design will have to incorporate a variety of culture, generation or even personalities, supported by different housing typologies (Huang, 2022).

There is a need for a better diversity in typologies. Not just a neighborhood with only family houses or solo-dweller apartments. More flexible typologies that leave room for family expansion and more collective housing types. A place where you can live your whole live and change your house to your needs over time. I intend to design a neighborhood with a large variety of services and facilities nearby. Owned and Supported by the community themselves. With Basic needs as goods and food nearby, promoting social interaction with your neighbors. Taking inspiration form ideas like the '15-minute neighborhood'. The area will mainly have housing, but also many shops, cafes. Even flexible workspaces, school and day-care if possible (Moreno, Allam & et all., 2021).

For these communities to work there will be two important requirements. The first one is a common goal. Something that can be worked toward and maintained that is beneficial for all the residents. From Small thinks like rent reducing for resident that help maintaining collective space or do other chords for the community. To larger community defining activities, such as large focus on recycling, urban farming or even product making (Czischke, Darinka & Huisman, 2018).

For such larger activities, architectural designs are much different and need to be adjusted to these activities, which brings us to the next requirement. The communal spaces that support the organization of the activities. Spatial and programmatic tools that can used to design spaces promote the public spaces to be appropriated by the community and used for different activities (Czischke, Darinka & Huisman, 2018). Therefore the main research question will be:

"What role can communal activities play in helping the inclusion of socially isolated people? And which architectural concepts can be used to support these activities?"

Sub-research questions:

- Which activities provide easy accessibility to participate for people that lack social skills?
- How can architecture design to support the organization of communal activities?
- What role can communities play to help solve major global issues, such as climate change, material scarcity and housing crisis?

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This research will make use of several terms used in the field. To start the term community is important to specify. Community is a grouping of people who live close to each other and are united by common interest and mutual aid (Phillips & Pittman, 2008). The communal activities, the main topic for this research will be defined as all activities organized by the community themselves with the main goal to strengthen the bond between residents. My main target group, socially isolated people, are individuals that have a lack of for them perceived meaningful social interaction or relations (Cacioppo, 2018). For the main typology of cohousing the definition "neighborhood-based collective living where each household occupies a private domain, often a discrete apartment or house, while using and managing shared space" is used (Nelson, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This research will be divided into three parts. The introduction will aim to get a better understanding of the terminology and what is currently known about this research by doing literature studies. What is known about the source of social exclusion and how can we give these people a sense of belonging? How can a community be developed and maintained. What other methods have been used to promote participation and help to understand how activities can promote participation?

After the introduction this research will analyze several case-studies. Firstly, case studies focused on communal activities. How can these activities both support the participation of socially isolated people as well as the initiates taken by the community to organize these activities? These case-studies focus around urban farming as an activity, to see the effect of the common goal as a motivator to support these activities and their participation.

The case-studies used to analyze these activities are The New Farm in Den Haag and the community farm in the Afrikanerplein in Amsterdam. The Afrikanerplein was chosen because of its strong ties to the local community. Set-up and maintained by the neighborhood with no commercial usage. The farm is now operative for 10 years and the resident have stated that it have majorly improved the identity of the neighborhood. This is rather rare for urban farming with no financial benefits and therefore most seems to be canceled after a few years. The farm was initially founded by a small group of residents to reduce the crime and drug dealing in the area. While the initiative seems to struggle to include every social group the benefits for the neighborhood cannot be understated and the farm has become a strong place for social interaction. While food production is not the focus, the food that are produced can be used for own usage and does benefit the rather poor neighborhood (Afrikanerplein, 2010).

The New Farm has a much different identity. The farm contains a large building with different floor that house a large variety of maker start-ups with on its rooftop a large farm. This case-study has much more focus on higher production and thereby a more economic focus. Despite of this, the building also has created a large amount of social meeting places for the surrounding residents. This is a rather large contrast with the other case-study, but can provide a view in how to transform a community farm as 'hobby' to actual food production for and proved by the neighborhood. Having a strong tried to the collective goal, which is in important concept for this research. The food production on the roof can also be interesting space uses for the rather dense program for my design (The New Farm, 2016).

The main ways of analyzing these case-studies will be observing them, but also interviewing different residents on their experiences with the urban farms. There will be research in the different blogs and articles written about these case-studies. The main focus will be the influence of participation, promoting of social interaction, the benefit of the produced food and how these project are able to found and maintain themselves, wherein others failed. Supported by literature research that can help to further understand these project.

Next, several building case-studies are chosen, that focus more on the architectural design facilitating activities. Analyzing the architectural concepts, which were used to enhance the strong communities, that could be used for other designs. For this research the architectural case-studies Kalkbreite and Zwicky-Süd were chosen.

These projects where chosen, because they both have created strong communities supporting them. Kalkbreite is a cooperation containing around 250 residents, divided over several clusters. Connected together by the inner circulation spread over multiple levels, with communal indoor and

outdoor spaces to bring the community together. Kalkbreite's inner circulation and the appropriation of space is an important design aspect, fitting the my current design proposal. Further research into the many architectural concept present in the design can be beneficial for with the activity based design concept (Kalkbreite, 2015). The second case-study is Zwicky Süd, which focusses a lot more on shared housing. The building has an interesting mix between private and collective spaces through multiple walking bridges connecting to the communal spaces in the middle for a large variety of users. This is reminiscent of my current design proposal. In addition, does the building provide a rather high-density needed for the design program (Zwicky Süd, 2018). These case-studies will be analyzed through two methods. Firstly, spatial studies on appropriating spaces and social gathering spaces. Secondly, Mass/program studies wherein the form follows the support of the desired activities.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION AND RELATION TO DESIGN

My design goal is to reduce the social isolation that is increasingly present in today's society with communal activities and use this to improving the sustainability of a neighborhood. Mainly with activities such as urban farming and local product making. This way these small, self-sustaining, community can even help solve global problems such as climate change and limited available land. Reducing the need for infrastructure can decrease the energy usage for transportation. Material scarcity also has become a big issue, so working on more independence on other countries. Therefore promoting communities through these activities would be very beneficial for the future.

In addition, collective housing can also have a large impact on the affordability of houses. When everyone lives alone and shares less space, the amount of houses that are needed also increase. A strong community that shares space can make the usage of space much more efficient and support people to learn with less space.

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CASE-STUDIES:

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