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# Overcoming Disciplinary Stupidity: Collective Creation for Diversity and Inclusion in Public Space Design

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## Abstract

This article explores the challenge of designing public spaces in hyperdiverse cities and argues that including knowledge often considered 'stupid' is key towards inclusive design approaches. It discusses recent shifts towards co-creation, co-design and placemaking by highlighting the importance of engaging with collective stupidity beyond presumed disciplinary intelligence. The integration of stupid or unconventional ideas in collective creation processes could help better problematise design challenges in public spaces and better engage with diverse perspectives to address diversity effectively. First, we will sketch the main societal pushes and academic turns supporting the enhancement of stupidity through the collective creation of public space for contemporary inclusive and hyperdiverse cities. Then, drawing on a comparative literature study of key authors introducing paradigmatic shifts for today's theoretical framing and understanding of collective creation, diversity and design

ethics in public space, we propose a non-conclusive series of design capacities for public space designers. These designer capacities are situated in contextual and sociocultural awareness, sensitivity to socio-spatial relations and narrative inquiry, and designing with the tacit, hence with empathy and responsibility. Finally, we highlight the relation between stupidity and failure in urban design and present relevant success practices. However complimentary to traditional design capacities, we conclude that these ethico-aesthetic approaches might challenge traditional notions of intelligence, beauty or authorship in design in favour of diversity and inclusivity.

## Keywords

Public space, urban design, diversity, stupidity, co-creation, co-design

## The challenge of designing public spaces in hyperdiverse cities

Over the last decades, there has been an increasing interest within urban design in getting closer to citizens through civic engagement practices. Building on a longer trajectory of participation, particularly co-design and placemaking have drawn the attention of design research and practice in an attempt to create better living environments together with citizens.<sup>1</sup> These design approaches align with late-modern academic calls to end current urban planning practices. The aim is to recreate the concept of the 'city' as a collective resource or, as Patsy Healey puts it, 'to build governance capacity around shared debates on the multiple qualities of "place" and the diverse ways these are experienced'.<sup>2</sup> Attempts to avoid physical determinism lurk in the high-modern concepts of 'city' and 'planning', which together with the shift towards the idea of creating 'our city' by building 'shared contexts' favourably contribute to redefining the practice of design.<sup>3</sup>

As the definitions around public space design are continuously contested, revisited and interpreted by researchers and practitioners seeking to revise and recreate collective spaces, so the conception of design itself is also scrutinised.<sup>4</sup> Despite differences in approaches, these attempts share a common goal: to productively gather insights from individuals as well as recognised authorities into public space design processes.

In a democratic belief and value system, any issue concerning the public should be discussed by the public as a collective, especially when considering possible future changes.<sup>5</sup> From this angle, the gathering of collective intelligence insights is essential to informing co-design and placemaking.<sup>6</sup> Collective intelligence in design also responds to the contemporary idea of decentralised and collaborative decision-making processes involving diverse perspectives and expertise.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the current question – key in this article – is not whether urban designers can contribute to the co-design of public space and placemaking processes, but in what capacity they can harvest collective intelligence to increase citizen inclusion and improve design outcomes for specific public spaces in specific neighbourhoods. It is essential for urban designers to prioritise this issue, as they bear the ethical responsibility of transforming cities into collective resources.

The question of designing for citizen inclusion has become increasingly important to local urban societies around the globe over the past decades.<sup>8</sup> This has been articulated, for instance, in the launch of UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme in 2012, and the now well-known definition of Sustainable Development Goal number 11, 'Sustainable Cities and Communities', adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The target to provide universal access to inclusive public spaces by 2030 is a pressing force for change among design professionals around the globe.<sup>9</sup> Particularly, the practice of inclusively co-creating public spaces has become urgent when considering the diversity of local people and their rights to the city.<sup>10</sup> Since public spaces are per se and per definition shared, where people in situated contexts collectively negotiate their values, designers' approaches toward public spaces must be especially sensitive to such diversity.<sup>11</sup> Urban designers have considered diverse human associations in cities – public life – as being cities' nature for nearly a century. However, as urbanisation continues, designing for modern life, with its diverse populations, has also become increasingly complex.<sup>12</sup> It is largely since the 1990s that urban populations underwent significant change, leading to a state of 'hyperdiversity (or hyperplurality) that is beyond anyone's ability to understand adequately'.<sup>13</sup> Today, this

diversity or hyperdiversity is defined as an unprecedented intense diversification of the population in socio-economic, social, cultural and ethnic terms, while also concerning lifestyles, behaviour and human activities. An increasing number of people do not belong to a single identity.<sup>14</sup> Public space designers are challenged to respect the continuously emerging complex relations in cities. Accordingly, hyperdiversity entails a great challenge and opportunity for public space design. Yet, this is not an easy task, since designers are faced with a complex interplay of cultural dynamics, including both tangible and virtual elements, at the intersection of local and global spheres defining these hyperdiverse communities. To effectively incorporate hyperdiversity into their designs, urban designers could start by understanding the current multiplicity of overlapping collectives through collecting community insights. Including collective creation approaches in design processes appears as a way to consider diversity as a productive difference.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, there is a shift in the sensitivity of an urban designer: turning towards a multiplicity of societal dimensions to produce more inclusive urban environments.

The plea to include collective approaches to re-create the 'city' as a collective resource parallels a particular Anglo-Saxon academic debate on urban planning. From one angle, Healey's voice resonates with Christine Boyer's fundamental critique on planning, which is always trying to escape from the meanness of the city's chaos, yet always generating veiled promises of technical utilitarianism. While diversity should be the designer's framework, current participative processes are limiting the scope, because they usually only involve limited key citizens and technical experts disconnected from the local community and culture. Such an approach does not serve all social groups and therefore does not represent its urban diversity. Thus, from another angle, Healey builds upon Dolores Hayden's understanding of cities as locales that collect people's 'my places'. Cities are assemblages of places where people hold memories. By eliminating the technocratic approach to planning, the design of public spaces can portray communities and shared memories, framing their ideas about their present and future.<sup>16</sup> In this manner, without intending to oversimplify Hayden's work, she calls for an engagement with diversity and for collaborative approaches in which experts coordinate without formalising procedures, like Boyer envisioned. Both approaches aim to optimise collective resources for participatory, democratic governance.<sup>17</sup> In both, the emphasis on diverse values and perspectives affects entire organisational structures and challenges expert authority.<sup>18</sup> Yet, instead of reducing

diversity to pre-organised public involvement, active engagement opportunities, and specific consultations or activities, the scientific challenge in urban design now revolves around expert judgment and knowledge, insight and skills within a diverse world.<sup>19</sup>

The shift in urban designers' sensitivity demands that they combine social factors with the usual variety of technological factors presupposed in urban design practice. The sensitivity shift complements the capacities that designers currently learn, centred on technical and expert knowledge, focused solely on scientific factors. With the increase of technological tools, especially making use of human-centric urban big data, as promised by smart cities and AI urban design, some believe that technology might be the answer to the explicit aspiration for inclusive design.<sup>20</sup> Enlarging the capacities of designers to engage with diversity and include others and otherness is not a mere technological action. It seems unlikely that digital policy and computer applications suddenly make urban designers engage better with citizens to understand and respond to diversity. What could make the difference is how they use digital tools together with their capacities. In the development of this article, the question explicitly emerging is what capacities designers should possess to combine – and sometimes even overrule – their disciplinary theorems with the situated non-expert knowledge of hyperdiverse communities.

Designers are never value-free agents, nor do they start designing tabula rasa, since from the start of their education, they develop normative preferences.<sup>21</sup> More often than not, designers have different ideas and values than the people for whom they design. In philosophy, the quality of being different defines the key to designing for diversity. As Gilles Deleuze put it in 1968, difference is productive, generative, and allows a sense of becoming, of fluid development that allows for change.<sup>22</sup> This immanence was embedded in a broader French school of thought at the time, advocating for a general shift towards radical, open democracy in both academia and society.<sup>23</sup> The notion of diversity within democracies began to fuel the discourse on the right to the city or *droit à la ville* as pronounced by Henri Lefebvre at the time, and it questioned the role of designers in democratic societies.<sup>24</sup> The notion of diversity also generated a notable search for richer relationships in cities, other than the sovereign relation between the people and public authorities and those relations traditionally empowered in urban life. With provocative concepts like *société autogestionnaire* or self-organising society as articulated by Jeannette Laot, experts, institutions and government were challenged to open up to other forms of living together, among others within the community.<sup>25</sup>

Such pioneering yet episodic understanding of what is or should be a city seeded contemporary calls for universal access to inclusive public spaces as well as questions about designers' capacities to produce those. Inclusive public space is therefore not only a consequence of design, but should extend to designers themselves, their approaches and tools. Designing for diversity is a rhizomatic approach that is always in flux, never fixed, and it generates a multiplicity of possibilities and potentialities.

Everything in the rhizomatic realm of multiplicitous urban realities is interrelated. Since diversity is nourished by the principles of connection, heterogeneity, and continual (re)emergence, diversity itself can be understood as an in-between or unfinished estate.<sup>26</sup> Thus, design for diversity must acknowledge its unfinished nature and allow for novel connections to appear through open-ended processes. Conventional urban design approaches based on hierarchical disciplinary structures block such rhizomatic development through authority and therefore create multiple mismatches with the viewpoints of the local people. These mismatches derive from ideas that the hierarchy considers 'senseless' and thus refers to as 'stupid' ideas. Even with good intent, designing public spaces by applying textbook solutions covers situated multiplicity and therefore blocks the representation of local diversity in design. We call for incorporating in design the knowledge of the presumed 'idiots', private citizens, or laypeople – those with no professional design knowledge – to overcome experts' stupidity in answering today's main challenges in urban design. In designing for diversity, the idiot may be a commoner, a citizen without specific training or technical understanding of public space, or an amateur with an interest in urban matters. The knowledge of experts and idiots together can become a non-hierarchical, transdisciplinary assemblage of ideas that enhances productive difference to respond to hyperdiverse urban environments. Broadening the search for collective intelligence to usually unheard voices and applying that knowledge in design could improve design processes and outcomes to better represent the multiplicity of and diversity within cities.

A comparative literature study of key authors introducing paradigmatic shifts for today's theoretical framing and understanding of collective creation, diversity and design ethics in public space elucidates how stupidity could benefit public space design for inclusion and diversity. We therefore conducted forensic examinations of the works introducing paradigmatic shifts, searching for indications of distinctive ideas and novel concepts as well as connections and influences among the writings of those authors. Special attention is given to the

widespread concepts of participation, co-creation, co-design and placemaking.

### Collective creation as collective problematisation

The concepts of participation, co-creation, co-design and placemaking are mentioned in the same breath when talking about including citizens in urban design processes. While all these terms refer to approaches of collective engagement, it remains particularly important to differentiate between them. The notion of citizen participation refers to any level of involvement in a collective process. Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation from 1969 establishes the levels of involvement in governance ranging from manipulation to citizen control.<sup>27</sup> In citizen-control situations, local people can govern from within the institution or defined hierarchy. Yet, important roadblocks towards inclusivity like racism, paternalism, power-holder resistance, and the ignorance and disorganisation of many low-income communities do not disappear.<sup>28</sup> Beyond participation levels, co-creation and co-design are notions that speak about collective creative processes, which – as argued below – are non-hierarchical in definition and institution. The difference between the notions is that co-creation is any act of collective creation, and co-design implies a continued collective effort between professional designers and those who are non-trained designers.<sup>29</sup> Branching off participation, co-design emerged through what Alvin Toffler called 'a destiny to create'.<sup>30</sup> Since the Co-Design Society was formalised in 1979, co-design has become a manifest approach to engage citizens alternatively.<sup>31</sup> Co-design aims to design the future together, incorporating the needs of local people early in design processes to address variations in interpretations and the diversity of human value systems.<sup>32</sup> More recently, the notion of placemaking emerged out of a non-governmental pro-active expert initiative, Project for Public Spaces, which aimed at 'the enhancement of the community's image, both literally and figuratively'.<sup>33</sup> Design has been one of the essential elements of placemaking promotion, next to building leadership and working together, in terms of selling a public space as an existing place, and de-structuring economics.<sup>34</sup> Placemaking is 'a process that produces a new (or renewed) sense of place by connecting space with the communities that inhabit it'.<sup>35</sup> It happens, therefore, not necessarily through co-design, co-creation or participation, although often through collective action.

All these approaches to collective engagement in public space – co-creation, co-design and placemaking – help to problematise the existing situated knowledge and create a public collective. This kind of problematisation in design, following Deleuze again, involves the identification and exploration of problems without prescribing specific

solutions.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, problems are never fixed entities, but rather dynamic constructs that trigger thought and understanding in people, and problems give rise to multiplicity, as well as resulting from this, especially in hyper-diverse environments. As problems are productive and generative as well as manifold, problematisation becomes both the means and the ends of design, allowing for a creative engagement with physical, ethical and socio-spatial constraints and considerations. Problematisation thus becomes designing itself, by critically engaging with the limits shaping disciplinary theory and practice in an ethical act that enables a deeper exploration of complex societal issues.<sup>37</sup> Collective problematisation does not necessarily imply that design results are deemed 'intelligent', especially from disciplinary perspectives. Rather, using collective knowledge in public space design leads to a better understanding of the urban complexity present in hyperdiverse cities, which could eventually lead to design outcomes that interact better with local people and their realities.

Collective creation or co-creation seems to play a crucial role in problematising and conceptualising urban issues through empowering collective intelligence. Whereas designs as artefacts commonly have a well-defined design process, collective design processes follow changing steps, since they adapt to the citizens' intentions and input. Co-creation acknowledges that design's meaning and significance are added by society and relate to social or cultural differences. Yet, instead of searching for objectivity, collective creation also engages with subjectivity. Collective approaches in city-making presume an understanding in semiotic expression, language and meaning within cultures, as much as abilities to acquire community knowledge and capacities to learn and apply new context-situated techniques. Collectively proving and developing these relations, abilities and capacities builds the designer's so-called *intelligence sociale* or social intelligence, as Bruno Latour pointed out in 1994.<sup>38</sup>

Critiquing design outcomes that claim intelligence, it is the actual capacities of the mind that hold the greatest importance in design processes. Pierre Levy's notion of 'collective' intelligence came to the fore against the backdrop of the emerging internet as a more accurate term to embrace the existence of origin and authorship pluralities at the time. As digital information networks and interactive multimedia heralded change in the forms of communication and multiplied access to knowledge, people's identities and social bonds quickly flourished.<sup>39</sup> This awareness started a quest for a new device in our 'collective intellectual life', as Latour would later call it, to support the search for matters of concern, as opposed to matters of fact. Today, still unfinished, this approach allows experts

to engage 'with more, not with less, with multiplication, not subtraction', while it departs from narrow-minded disciplinary disapproval of 'blind idiots' not aware of social domination, or say, race, class, and gender within the discipline itself.<sup>40</sup> Instead of designing alternatives or options that focus on the elaboration and emanation from 'factual' contextual analyses of experts, design and creation should focus on the process of establishing collectives around matters of concern: common issues, interests and worries. Generally, design still revolves around matters of fact that are objective, scientifically established truths as opposed to collective intelligence, which focuses on matters of concern and is considered subjective input connected to stupidity and irrationality.

Still, as John Dewey already said in 1927, a single unified collective does not exist. There are only contrasting unions of distributive constituents and distributions of and within collectives.<sup>41</sup> The urban designer's role in creating inclusive public space requires a deeper understanding of the discrepancies between absolute truth and opinions subject to intermediaries and criticism. Dewey has been key to the further development of Latour's thought about a new, highly specialised kind of representation to accommodate greater diversity.<sup>42</sup> The discrepancies between truth and opinions and the difficulty of conceptualising a single collective should make urban designers aware that people in situated contexts relate to problems diversely and therefore to problematisation as well. As Jane Bennett states, 'problems give rise to publics' because people can affect and be affected by them.<sup>43</sup> Since designers are people too, they become part of the public and therefore part of the problem. Designers engaging with the collective can then affect the problem while also inevitably affecting themselves. Because they design for a shared problem, they cannot do problematisation from their desk. In co-creation processes, all actors sit around the same collective table dismantling hierarchical structures where viewpoints are equally validated, not equalised. The point of collective problematisation is not to agree but to agree to disagree. That is how a public appears. These processes can entail, for example, collectively sharing meaningful memories and experiences, collecting ideas or gathering visual references. Co-creation feeds the collective imagination of what people desire the city to be in a fair attempt to rethink intercultural cities.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, co-creation has got some critique for also being a ruthless, even unscrupulous act of saving public expenditure by out-sourcing public services to well-meaning citizens.<sup>45</sup> This has become evident ever since the notion came into vogue in the 1980s.<sup>46</sup> Opponents hold that co-creation could dismiss urban designers from their jobs, and exempt the government from its responsibilities,

thus leaving cities without the appropriate technical expertise to oversee both design and public administrative accountability. In this article, we see co-creation as an enlargement of the designer's responsibility towards citizens, communities, cultures and the city to collectively constitute both a public and a common ground.

Incorporating hyperdiversity in design through sources considered stupid defies urban designer's capacities. In an obsolete way of thinking, these capacities assemble around aesthetical, technological and administrative capacities. Designing inclusive public space demands diverse capacities, because to include diversity one must first acknowledge its existence and that one is part of it. For example, if a designer wants to include the perspective of children in the design, they must learn to interpret the tacit layers from a naive drawing of a house, street or playground. Such positioning asks for unusual ways of looking, to see something productive for design where there seems to be only absurdity. Designers of inclusive public spaces embracing 'idiots' and laypersons' viewpoints can help mediate between design expression and public space sociability. The multiple viewpoints and problems inherent to hyperdiversity are pushing urban designers not merely to open to all and everything in the city, but rather to design for diversity, through identifying provisional identities, mapping viewpoints, experiences, values and imaginations. Eventually, in the search for collective intelligence, designers will have to enter processes of subjectification, of rebuilding social relations at every level of the socius, and of accepting the open spectrum between natural and artefactual worlds. It's a major turn towards 'new collective modes of expression and challenging forms of sociability', as design theorist Hélène Frichot describes it.<sup>47</sup> Not only do such co-creative processes in public space maintain the designer's agency, they also endow them with the task to design aesthetically and ethically.<sup>48</sup> She combines Latour's relational approach with the ethico-aesthetic concept encompassing a sensitivity toward the mental, social and environmental ecologies in which designers act, as Félix Guattari presented it.<sup>49</sup>

One way in which ethico-aesthetics have translated into urban design practice is through the notion of commoning or of common space. In this, public space is the common ground of collective negotiation; it is seen as the ultimate ground for the commons or commoning, since it appears as the clash between the private and the public, individual and collective interests.<sup>50</sup> The commons model challenges the dichotomy of public-private and makes space for citizens to engage in collective action through self-governance, empowerment and self-determination.<sup>51</sup> Commoning in public spaces inevitably implies

collective problematisation. Defining the common goods and public values at stake is how a collective or ecology becomes a commoning actor and actant. Commoning sees 'urban enclaves not as closed, rigid spaces, but rather as thresholds of negotiation, ... that uncover the potential of constant transformation via the formulation of porous borders of inclusion.'<sup>52</sup> Commoning is an act of collective problematisation turned by designers into an ethico-aesthetic practice. Over the last decades, different forms and degrees of commoning as a co-creation practice have appeared in urban design. More recently, placemaking has inherited the tradition of participatory practices, absorbed practices of commoning and made it into a global success.<sup>53</sup> However, the avid production of knowledge around these topics shows that there is still a big gap between theories closely related to participation, co-creation, co-design and placemaking and how to design for diversity in public space. As Gerhard Bruyns and Stavros Kousoulas put it, 'the question and theorisation of shared (collective and technological) capacities will remain part and parcel to the future of design thinking and doing.'<sup>54</sup> In what follows, we aim to expand designers' capacities for the broad range of collective approaches to designing inclusive public spaces.

### **On the designer's capacities to design for diverse public spaces**

The shifts in urban design presented above – including the social and technological turns – come together in the co-design of inclusive public spaces that contribute to personal, social and human equality, by including all actors and actants. Co-designing inclusive public spaces challenges the traditional capacities of modern designers who focus on scientific knowledge and give preference to 'smart' and 'expert' ideas over 'stupid' and 'amateur' ones. For this reason, in this article, we make a plea for collective stupidity, not as the opposite to collective intelligence but as complementary to it. Smart or expert knowledge is usually related to technical capacities that may relate to specific disciplines. By contrast, the challenge of designing public space for diversity demands a set of capacities that surpasses such disciplinary divisions and touches upon intrinsic human capacities to engage with one another. Cities may be best understood as highly relational environments of interconnected actors and actants and, drawing on Foucault's work in this regard, habitats of material-discursive practices.<sup>55</sup> In our view, practices of co-creation, co-design and placemaking actually intend to favourably connect amateurs and experts with collective stupidity, and even idiocy.

Specific designer capacities – distinguishable from but connected to traditional designer capacities – can help to

(re)connect to the diversity of citizens, communities and cultures in a situated context. The inclusive design of public spaces starts with communication as the capacity to discuss and unfold dialogue in order to exchange values, ideas, perspectives and expertise, as well as discuss the physical-material attributes of a diversified public life. To navigate hyperdiversity, designers may rely on diversity studies that focus on socio-economic, social, cultural and ethnic differences to understand personal, social and human differences. Understanding diversity can help design for inclusion through equality regardless of gender, age, heritage, income, lifestyle, behaviour or activities.

Especially when public space is not created but re-created or re-purposed, before intervening, inclusive design approaches must understand and foster relations between human and non-human actors, as Bruno Latour would call them.<sup>56</sup> Designs, designers, the people for and with whom they design, and all design concepts and underlying values are interconnected actors or actants in dynamic networks. All these layers come together in Guattari's three ecologies: mental ecologies, social ecologies and environmental ecologies.<sup>57</sup> In the context of inclusive public space design, the mental ecology refers to the diversity of citizens, the social ecology to the diversity of communities, and the environmental ecology to cultural diversity. As Elizabeth Sanders, one of the pioneering advocates of co-design already said in the early days of the concept, the expert mindset of designers needs to change to an egalitarian mindset.<sup>58</sup> To make this change, urban designers need to be able to incorporate affects that are 'embodied and embedded, relational and affective', as Rosi Braidotti calls it; designers must enlarge their capacities, agencies, and technologies.<sup>59</sup> In her post-humanistic approach Braidotti sees the lines separating humans from non-human actors as less apparent, and thus calls for converging viewpoints beyond the human-centric: 'a "we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same" kind of subject'.<sup>60</sup> Looking for the common 'matters of concern' and including affects often considered irrelevant, personal, irrational, or bluntly stupid could support the design of public spaces that better contribute to our urban living environments.

Still, the actual practice of collectively creating inclusive public space is often hindered by the lack of concrete and explicit design approaches. Below, we explore some possible capacities that designers could incorporate to increase their agency, by expanding on Isabelle Doucet and Hélène Frichot's call for situated, relational and embodied perspectives.<sup>61</sup> We argue that to contribute to more inclusive public spaces consequently, designers need to develop the capacities of situated and cultural awareness, sensitivity to individual and community experience, and designing with the tacit.

Primarily, designing for inclusive public spaces is situated in a specific context and time. Urban designers need to be aware of the situated context in which they work. Donna Haraway's notion of 'situatedness', key to Braidotti's reasoning too, enables understanding diversity without being bound to a fixed geographical location or position.<sup>62</sup> It can be situational in societal sense too. A situationally relativistic attitude and thus a capacity to contextualise any social group or cultural practice as such helps urban designers to co-design inclusive public spaces. Maps, for example, may document people's movements across public spaces over time as citizens engage with physical surroundings, other individuals and groups, and other actants. Mapping is then a method that serves the understanding of dialogic actor-actant relations. In these ways, designers will recognise that urban design is not created in isolation. By employing a socioculturally situated lens, public space designers can merge insights from design, the social sciences and the humanities with technical parameters. Setha Low introduced such a merged and operational approach to public space design in the spatialised employment of ethnography. Also building upon the notion of situatedness, such embedded approaches merge spatial and social relations through which designers can prioritise a fluid concept of culture.<sup>63</sup> Equally, designers could contribute to the calls in the social sciences for an ethnographic practice more committed to social justice goals.<sup>64</sup>

Second, designing for inclusive public space involves understanding the unique experiences of the socio-spatial relations in situated communities. In addition to the capacities mentioned above, designers must be affective as well, hence attuned to the needs of individuals and communities, as well as mindful of the social-spatial situation of neighbourhoods. Yet, because spatial experience is embedded and embodied, people 'cannot live other people's lives, and it is a piece of bad faith to try', as anthropologist Clifford Geertz already concluded in the 1980s. What designers can do is 'listen to what, in words, in images, in actions they say about their lives.'<sup>65</sup> Developing such conscious listening skills enhances the designer's capacity to understand the needs and perspectives of those for whom they design. Methods such as narrative inquiry, directed dialogues and storytelling can reveal valuable individual and collective experiences and views in public spaces within the cities. For Shelley Evenson, listening to individual and community stories in such experience research can reveal consistent patterns in people's collective knowledge to inform and validate co-design.<sup>66</sup> As a mnemonic device, storytelling approaches help to explore obstacles to the inclusion of certain communities and sum up diverse expectations

for the neighbourhood, which may help to envision alternative futures and design for it together. As Dolores Hayden underlines, these approaches do not only transform traditional roles but also advance interdisciplinary work.<sup>67</sup>

Third, the latter capacity involves an essential human capacity which designers should aspire to cultivate, namely empathy. Designing for inclusive public space must involve all kinds of citizens. In line with Healey's premise that empathetic understanding is essential to re-create the city as a collective resource, urban designers must embrace the diversity in personal experiences and values.<sup>68</sup> The ability to take on another's perspective, to understand, feel and possibly share and respond to their experience is crucial in the co-creation of inclusive public space. Being empathetic to personal thoughts, emotions, bodily expressions and inner beliefs fosters a deeper understanding and connection to the stories, the people and the place. Inspired by Haraway's positioning, María Puig de la Bellacasa speculates on a broader ethics of care in its transformative, non-innocent, disruptive ways. Although not built on the notion of public space, but rather of 'soil', she underlines the use of 'care' to tackle the dominance of technoscientific future-oriented thinking by recognising (temporal) diversity at all levels.<sup>69</sup> Ecological care is a radical turn away from the anthropocentric perspectives that envision design as an object, thing, entity, relatum, or physical imprint of a design ideology. Instead, care ethics underpins the idea that design can only be inclusive through its performative metaphysics. This approach fosters a continuous flow of agency through design, allowing the human act of worlding through design to present itself in diverse ways to others. The process is ongoing and open-ended, constantly evolving into both stable and unstable forms.<sup>70</sup> Assuming that co-creation, co-design, and even placemaking are essentially acts of sympoiesis, where actors and actants are themselves also collectively being co-transformed by 'becoming-different-together'.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, designing inclusive public space involves an ongoing reshaping of design dynamics where there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, an inclusive approach demands that designers have the capacity to be flexible, adaptive and capable of anticipating and responding to evolving needs and continuous change.

Last, designers need to be able to turn the insights gathered in collective creation about the context, community and citizens into signs and significances. According to Low, community interactions in specific cultural contexts help embed global and local power relations into physical space. The situated and embodied spatial negotiation of these relations is what gives meaning to that



space. Design language and semiotics together with material and metaphorical expressions in design can transform a physical space into a place with meaning. If design is not developed with the community, disputes about furnishings, use and ambience could turn into an openly visible platform for expressing cultural conflict, community change and even citizen exclusion.<sup>72</sup> In parallel, the perception of design has shifted from purely focusing on semiotics towards an interest in the tacit. There is a 'growing awareness that abilities and unstated habits and assumptions are equally formative for our intellectual understanding as the more formal, codified things we learn', as architecture theorist Lara Schrijver has observed.<sup>73</sup> Tacit knowledge, or the unspoken or implicit understanding, skills and assumptions that people possess but may not be able to articulate, explicitly remains the biggest challenge in the coding and decoding processes of design. If design is a process of coding and decoding that is self-referential, where signs and meanings are repeated within a specific networked group of designers until they are pronounced as truths, designing for diversity means not taking the usual as the norm.<sup>74</sup> Urban designers have to deeply explore the specific tacit embodiments in the situated environments where they intervene. Ultimately, design intends to create material arrangements.<sup>75</sup> Designing for diversity then consists of collectively decoding the context and community to eventually code it back into material arrangements holding relevant significance for all citizens. Yet, any material arrangement is temporal because society, and therefore its diversity, is dynamic by nature, and so is space. This extends Karen Barad's claim that embodiment is not a matter of 'being of specifically situated in the world, but rather being of the world in its dynamic specificity'.<sup>76</sup> As being able to translate the tacit may be the ultimate capacity in designing for inclusive public space, it assumes that the designer has understood the context, the community and the citizens, has gathered insights, and can recode them into material arrangements such as co-creation activities like workshops or spatial design interventions. Parting from the conventional basics of design practice and education that usually revolve around working with data, references and physical objectivity, working with tacit knowledge necessitates unique design tools tailored to each process. This entails a sense of design agency, or what Haraway calls response-ability.<sup>77</sup> From a designer's viewpoint, an ability to recognise interconnectedness, acknowledge ethical responsibilities, value diverse forms of knowledge, build coalitions, and take action to address pressing issues in our world defines the pathway to designing for diversity.

### **Success and failure: two sides of the ethico-aesthetic approach**

With an eye on current practice, with or without these capacities, how can urban designers successfully distance their *modus operandi* from the focus on smart and successful solutions? Perhaps they can not. If designers embrace collective stupidity for more inclusive public space design, they will have to make their peace with failure too. Far from being an unfortunate result of design, failure is a critical component behind the proposed shift.<sup>78</sup> Through collective creation for diversity and inclusion, public space design emerges only through daring to fail and learn from other design failures. In this, every actor involved can learn from failures through reflection on problematisation and on alternative ways of operating. It could even be argued that the biggest failure for a collective creation process is to succeed without struggle, since that would hinder the impact of the collective transformation in material and immaterial terms. Success may be to failure what intelligence is to stupidity. If one were considered good and productive, the other one would be bad and useless. Introducing more stupidity in urban design would unavoidably include more (apparent) failure, more discomfort, more challenges. It is up to the designer's skills to make those consequences generative for co-creation and in co-design.

Although collective creation approaches for diversity are not yet generalised in urban design practice, there are examples of alternative design practices exploring these approaches and capacities across Europe. Far from staying within theory, Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (AAA, Paris) designs with a participative approach which enhances diversity and inclusion. Their dedicated situated and multicultural approach unites with citizen science while they provide environmental education. This is seen in their R-Lab public space project in Paris as well as in the WikiLab project in Saint-Denis. Their approach revolves around participation and includes participatory mapping and the mapping of sharing practices as well as experimentation with methods of self-management and co-construction.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Raumlabor (Berlin) designs through participation, with the aim to create mutuality among diverse groups and initiate common engagement with public spaces. They introduce embedded experiences into design. Participants in their design of the Mathildenhöhe public space in Darmstadt investigated chances to live and experience the appropriation of a space through varying levels of experience: inviting sixty participants to settle there for three weeks. Taking a slightly different turn in their design for Floating University in Berlin, they extend their targets to a more-than-human approach. Beyond being recognised by disciplinary

awards and being embraced by community and critics, the project led 'to that community being three times larger than it used to be'.<sup>80</sup> The work of Recetas Urbanas (Seville) displays familiar situated approaches to public space design, which provoke self-managed cities as well. They co-create temporary spaces with communities by incorporating their experiential knowledge and with an aim to unite those communities too. Although experiences had been developed over time and before the project started, Recetas Urbana's public space intervention in the Baldomer Solà school in Badalona near Barcelona may serve as an example. It anticipates in collective judgement of the neighbourhood and the communities' needs. The particular needs of each actor, including the designer, are made compatible with the needs of others, which implies an exercise in empathy and tolerance. In addition, by demonstrating positive attitudes towards their alternative approach, citizens make their projects visible and share experiences with other communities.<sup>81</sup> These practices lead to different and often surprising ideas on the concrete spaces and helps to identify topics that affect people's environment. Still, it remains unclear whether such co-created practices will be absorbed by established 'success' practices or whether such approaches will become popular and eventually common practice.

### **Navigating diversity: recommendations for designing inclusive public spaces**

Designing public spaces for inclusion in today's hyperdiverse urban environments demands a design approach that integrates ethical considerations, aesthetic sensibilities and collective intelligence, which often entails dealing with the apparent stupidity of non-experts or other disciplines. To address this challenge effectively, it is recommended that urban designers first acknowledge their own stupidity and prioritise collective intelligence in the design processes to overcome it. This involves actively engaging with diverse local actors – including experts as well as 'idiots' – to contribute to designing inclusive public spaces through a process of shared problematisation. To do so, designers need to enlarge their practices, and thus their capacities towards an ethico-aesthetic approach or relational practice with complementary capacities. We found these capacities to be situated and cultural awareness, sensitivity to individual and community experience, and designing with the tacit. By fostering collaborative efforts, discussion and dialogue, designers can create public spaces that better reflect the needs and values of the people they serve. The illustrative cases of situated practices that focus on collective creation to create inclusive public space show potential to change the modus operandi of urban design with community values

at heart. Such approaches show that incorporating diversity in design by embracing idiocy and failure in commoning practices can facilitate the designer's contribution to meaningful social interactions and foster a sense of ownership and stewardship among cultures, communities and citizens, eventually improving urban living environments.

However idyllic an inclusive approach based on relational design capacities seems, such practice deeply challenges two main points of design education and practice: authorship and beauty. Designing as another actant of ecologies without hierarchical power may take away design's self-imposed responsibility for socio-spatial beauty. When design focuses on process over product, on values over composition rules, the recognition of styles, schools and geniuses might become challenging. In the inclusivity turn, beauty and authorship have retreated in favour of collectivity and impact. Perhaps, in this new paradigm of relational, affective and diverse design, design education, design practice, and even design research may embrace humility, selflessness, modesty or even anonymity for the common good.

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Affiliated to the chair of Urban Design at TU Delft, Maurice Hartevelt's work focuses on public space. His theoretical concepts of 'interior public space' and 'interior urbanism' has brought different design disciplines together while pushing the boundaries of urban design in particular. Subsequently, his developing thoughts on 'domesticated public space' overlap with cultural anthropology, urban sociology and environmental psychology. This push guided him to develop transdisciplinary and subjective methods. Maurice is thematic lead on Mixed Methods and Design Strategies of the LDE Centre PortCityFutures, leads the Design of Public Spaces research group, and has been leader of research projects City of the Future and Post-Pandemic Public Spaces. His work extends to the Delft Design for Values Institute, and Delft Deltas, the Infrastructures & Mobility Initiative, and to several places and positions around the globe. Next to this, he works at the Netherlands Architects Register.