

THEATRE OF LIFE

a research project by
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Urban Architecture graduation studio | TU Delft

INTRO

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“[...] the interweaving of human patterns. They are full of people, doing different things for different reasons and different ends in the view, and the architecture reflects and expresses this difference. Being human is what interests us most. In architecture as in literature, and the drama, it is the richness of human variation that gives vitality and color to the human setting. Considering the hazard of monotony; the most serious fault in our zoning laws lies in the fact that they permit an entire area to be devoted to a single use.”

Jane Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities*.

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Cureghem, Anderlecht, Belgium, personal photo

ABSTRACT

There is only a small amount of things able to depict the evolution of society like cities do. As the editors of the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research explained: “*cities are in effect screens for reading ‘layers of societal textual and image-based information’*”. The living spaces, especially those with an urban nature, can tell the story of a place and how the human patterns have changed in time.

For the P1 phase of the Graduation studio my research was oriented towards the study of the relationship between living and working as well as the impact of such mixed-use spatial organization on the very lives of the population of Anderlecht, in Brussels. In a way, a mixture of uses can be sufficient to sustain the city’s safety, public contact and cross-use. However, it emerged how the lack of public life can lead to residential monotony and danger, which might cause fear of the streets after dark. Moreover, the different urban places might lack commercial choices as well as any cultural interest. From our site visit and interviews we could sense very well how fatal is monotony.

But can we say that the population of Anderlecht is monotonous? No, on the contrary, it is very proliferous in terms of culture, religion and age.

This is why my personal research wants to investigate life in a selected public space of Cureghem in Anderlecht and make an attempt in understanding architecture from the standpoint of how the public realm is experienced, how it affects individuals and communities emotionally.



INTRODUCTION

The connection between public life and public space is strong and undeniable, often leading to the creation of new public areas and new life patterns.¹ It becomes clear how the work of urbanists as well as architects is truly sewed to the way life unfolds in the public realm. With the aim of analyzing the behavioral patterns in relation to physical settings, this research tries to link the studies about the morphological analysis of public space with the most current anthropological theories.

After a theoretical overview, the main questions to be answered will be:

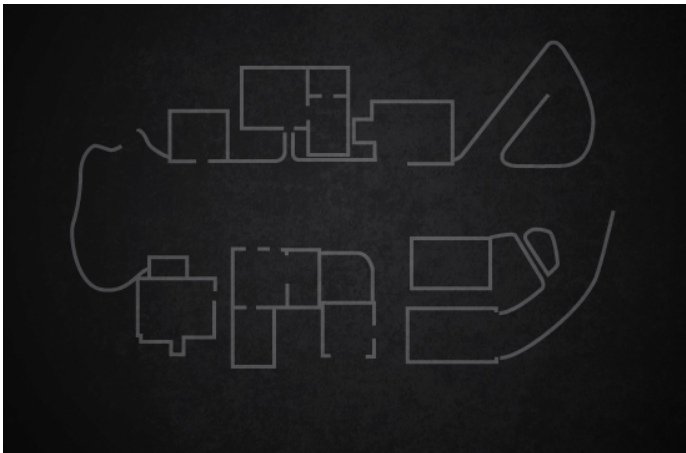
How does the morphology of the public space impact on the different activity patterns in Place du Conseil, Cureghem?

What is the relationship between the public life, the public space (built environment) and the social mixing?

1. Carr Stephen, Francis Mark, Stone Andrew, Public Space, edited by Cambridge University Press, 1992

THEATRE OF LIFE

The title of this research is inspired by “Dogville” a film directed by Lars Von Trier, where the physical setting of a village is artificially built, C. The scenography is composed of a few elements: houses, streets and spaces in the most general sense, defined by lines and writings on the floor and clearly visible light sources. The observer is therefore aware of the morphology of the space but his attention is captured by the play, the slow unfolding of life in its true essence. Through my analysis, the chosen case study (Place du Conseil, Anderlecht) will be treated as a theatre, a fixed scenario taking the form of a typical Belgian square in which the play (life) is constantly changing, showing the many facets and colors of the kaleidoscopic neighborhood. The square will therefore act as a representation of the bigger multicultural picture, focusing on how the population lives, loves, plays in the public realm.



Reference: set plan, Dogville, Lars Von Trier

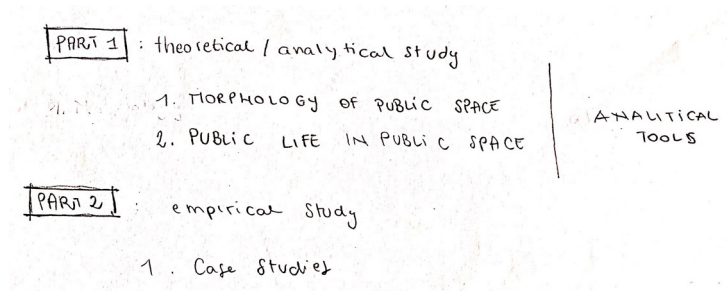


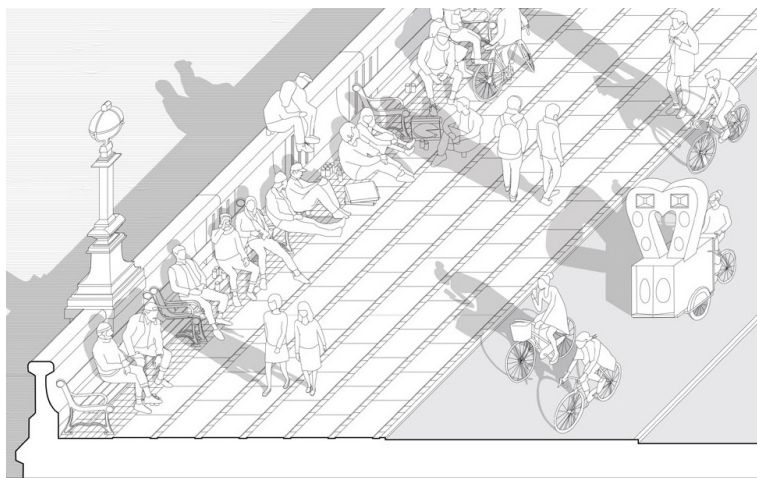
Reference: Dogville, Lars Von Trier

METHODOLOGY

The initial phase of the analysis is structured in two parts: the morphological study and the exploration of life in the public realm.

In a second phase, the research method falls in the field of praxeology. My study will be mainly based on actively acquired knowledge as the core value to understand a specific situation. The process begins with a familiarization with the environment, in order to gain an initial overview of the space and observe a targeted public reality. In this perspective, the fieldwork stage aims at assessing the nature of the neighborhood via: the organization of the public space, the casual formation of semi-private realities and their physical composition, the fixed, semi-fixed and free spatial elements. While participant observation could be thought of as a 'passive method', an ethnographer can never really be passive. In fact, one of the key focuses of my research will be considering the importance of mapping the space in a way that allows me to understand how it responds to the lives of a wide variety of residents.





Reference: Architectural ethnography, Atelier Bow Wow

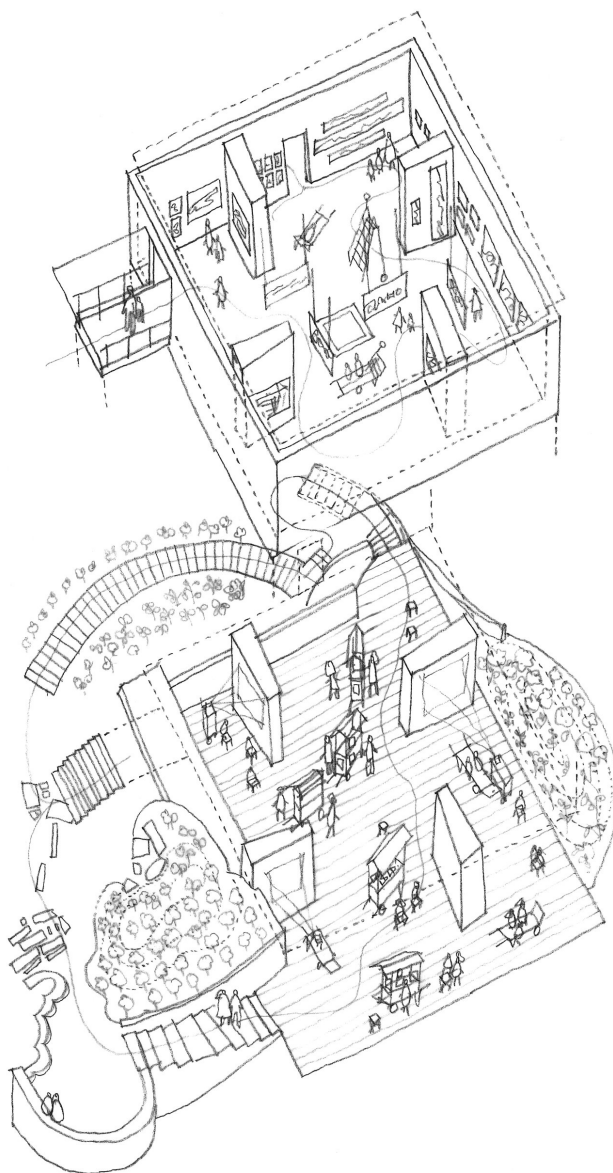
WHY CUREGHEM?

Cureghem, district of Anderlecht, is the perfect example of the Brussels' multiculturalism, with more than 100 nationalities on its territory. Its proximity to the Midi station has made it the arrival area for the various waves of immigration that have succeeded (and still succeed) in Brussels. Today many communities inhabit the district, maintaining sometimes rich, sometimes tense relationships. Walking through its streets, you travel the world.

For these reasons, it is the ideal ground for discovering multiculturalism, the public realm and the challenges arising from their friction.

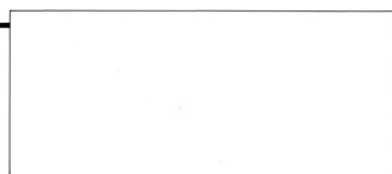
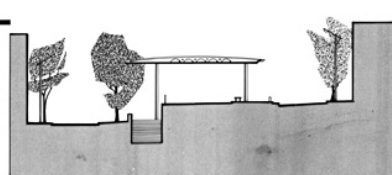
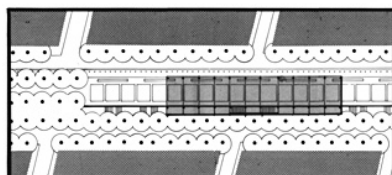
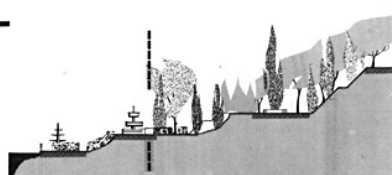
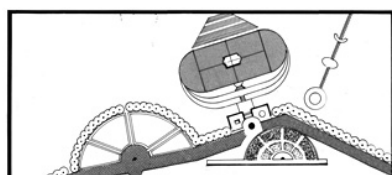
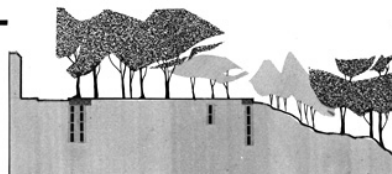
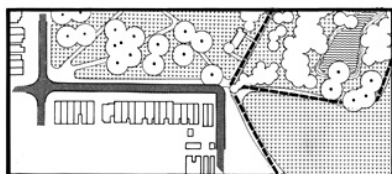
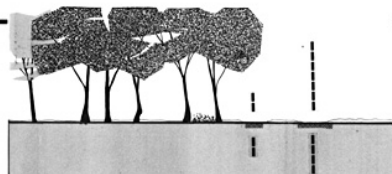
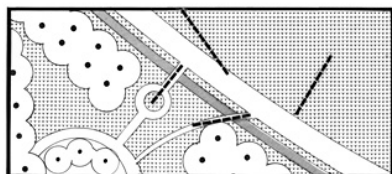
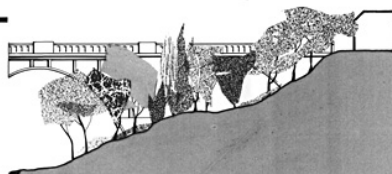
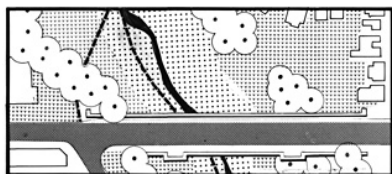


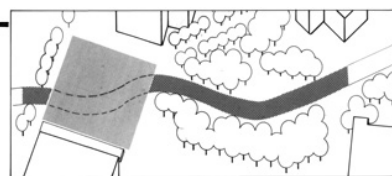
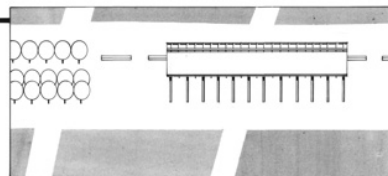
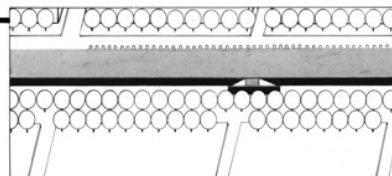
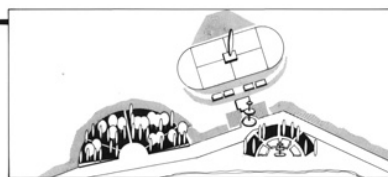
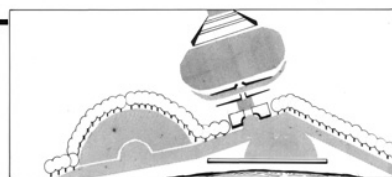
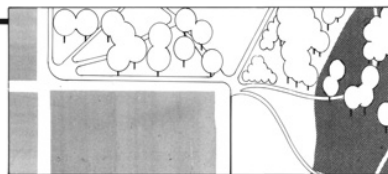
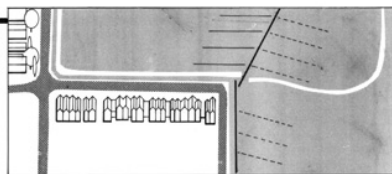
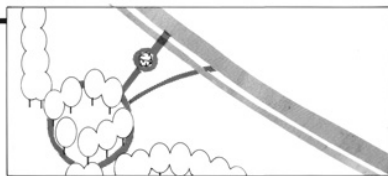
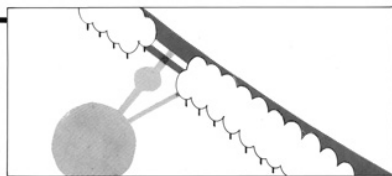
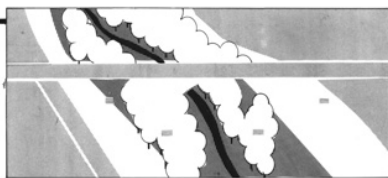
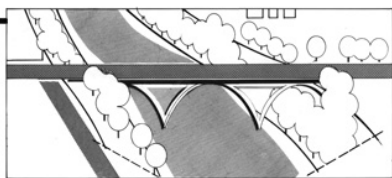
Cureghem, Midi train station, personal photo



2018, Feb, 01 /

Reference: Architectural ethnography, Atelier Bow Wow





Reference: The Public spaces of Toronto, Brown + Storey architects

PHASE I

How to: public morphology analysis

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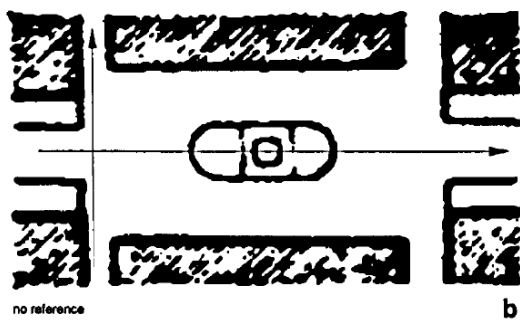
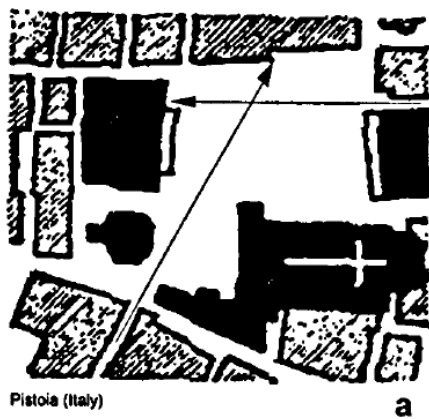
CAMILLO SITTE

There has been a great number of attempts in time to define the types and configurations that public space can entail. Camillo Sitte embodies one of the key figures in these studies, who presented some of the most important ideas in his research on the urban morphology of the typical Italian piazzas. In fact, his insights on the theme have had a huge impact on generations of theorists that came after him. In studying the architecture of typical public squares, he seeks to understand the “failure” of the contemporary ones in being meeting spaces when compared to the medieval ones. His goal was to create a balance between modern techniques and the creative methods of the past. To achieve this, the architect investigates the physical layout of the Medieval and Renaissance squares with both adjoining streets and important built elements, combining them with examples from the end of the 19th century.¹ He states that the limitation of contemporary squares is to be found in the lack of basic features present in the traditional examples.

In his vision, traditionally the piazza is characterized by two main elements: enclosure and irregularity. For a better understanding of the first element, Sitte examined the spatial layout of the streets connected to the square. In order to achieve this result, there is one singular street entering the square at the corners and, if more are necessary, they might adjoin the public space in different angles. This enclosure is, in fact, not existing in the late nineteenth century squares in which typically, the streets are joined perpendicularly at the corners.² Another way of obtaining this effect is given by the massive presence of built elements: the sense of a closed perimeter becomes stronger when the corners are more built up, while the more exposed the edges, the less the feeling of enclosure.

1. Campos Arruda, *Urban public spaces: a study of the relation between spatial configuration and use patterns*, doctoral thesis, Published by: University of London, 2000.

2. Ibid.



Entrances, Sitte Camillo , City planning according to artistic principles, 1889

In relation to past approaches, Sitte also stressed the importance of restricting the views from the inside of the square in order to restrict the possible number of scenarios. This argument is also linked to his question regarding the role of monuments in public spaces.³ Sitte explains that, in order to ensure enclosure, the ideal place for buildings overlooking the square is at the walls and not to the center. This theory is reinforced by his analysis of two hundred churches in Rome, of which only six are not connected to another building and stand isolated in the middle.

The second key aspect defined by Sitte is the irregularity. The effect is characterized by the interruption of the uniform disposition of the built elements surrounding the square. He stresses in the importance of this effect because of its contribution to a picturesque look. In this way, the visitors are constantly presented with new and unpredicted views while moving through the space.⁴ On the other hand, the irregularity makes it easier to insert statues or similar elements in recessed areas within the square. Some other theorists after him noted now, a minimal change in the alignment in plan of the buildings surrounding the square can have unexpectedly strong impacts in the third dimension and in the perception of the space.⁵ In a way, the idea of serial vision was a similar concept as the one of unexpected views.

Overall, Camillo Sitte to understand which spatial characteristics and elements made the traditional Italian piazzas have such an incredible success. To achieve this, he identified the morphological features and techniques which might have contributed to the result.

3. Sitte Camillo, *City planning according to artistic principles*, Edited by Phaidon Press, 1965

4. Campos Arruda, *Urban public spaces: a study of the relation between spatial configuration and use patterns*, doctoral thesis, Published by: University of London, 2000.

5. Cullen Gordon, *Concise Townscape*, Edited by: Architectural Press, 1961



VERONA:

1. Piazza d'Erbe



VERONA: Piazza Erbe

Irregularity, Sitte Camillo , City planning according to artistic principles, 1889

RAYMOND UNWIN

Raymond Unwin's urban design observations led him to investigate the various compositions of open spaces. As his predecessor in the study, he also shared his love for the medieval squares in a number of books. What he analyzed and focus on was their success in attracting congregations of people. To achieve the result, he noted that the public square must be situated at, or very close to, a middle point between the main traffic lines. In this way, the piazza is never deserted and the creation of deadly spaces is prevented.⁶ He examines a variety of typical medieval squares and concludes as well that enclosure was an essential morphological attribute. When this effect is achieved, the built environment around the square creates a perfect framework for the insertion of monumental buildings. At the same time, it gives a sense of inclusiveness and safety.

Furthermore, from each access point, the 'spectator' should not entirely have a view on the opposite street. He claims that in many successful cases the axis of streets is slightly bent at the junctions. In this way, several fractured perspectives are generated.

On the other hand Unwin has a different opinion on the irregularity: he criticizes the irregular models of the twentieth century examples, which often are avoiding regularity for no reason. He claims that the 'picturesque' result can be achieved with more conventional forms.

Unwin highlighted how the attention of urban planners as well as designers should be directed towards the search for an artistic expression that responds to the demands and desires of the community, and not try to impose his personal visions on the city.⁷

6. Unwin Raymond, *Town Planning in Practice: An Introduction to the Art of Designing Cities and Suburbs*, Edited by: Andesite Press, 2015

7. Smith Roger, Brach Philip, *Urban environmental planning and alternative technology: A speculative discussion*, Article, Published in: *Urban Ecology* 5, April 1981.



Illus. 140.—Ravenna.



Illus. 141.—Salisbury.



Illus. 142.—Dresden, Market-place.



Illus. 143.—Pisa.

Medieval Squares, Unwin Raaymond, Town Planning in Practice, 1909

PAUL ZUCKER

Paul Zucker defined the spatial form of the piazza as a 'containment structure for human interactions'.⁸ He stated that the public room, like for the precedent theorists, is the result of its enclosure effect. This is accomplished, he claims, by the uniformity and diversity of the surrounding buildings and their interconnections. Therefore, the proportions between the dimensions of the built elements, the length and width of the square acquires an incredible importance. He argues that the amount of enclosure would have a significant effect on the human movement through the space and would thus influence how people will experience it. Like he stated, the visual and sensory relationships determine whether a space is a 'whole' or a 'hole.'⁹

The theorist pointed out that there have been a variety of different square types through history, but the public human behavior do not automatically generate from the same physical form.

As a consequence, Zucker made a distinction between five common 'artistically important' forms of urban squares¹⁰:

1. Enclosed square: this is an urban room with a total enclosure effect, broken only by the streets accessing it. It is distinguished by its usual geometric shape and architectural elements following a pattern or rhythmic order around the perimeter. Examples of this sort are the richly decorated built corners framing the entrance points.
2. Dominated square: in this case the space is controlled by a representative element or a spectacular view. This could be a single building, a number of buildings or some significant sculpture.
3. Nuclear square: this is a space shaped by a central component which is more important than the borders.

8. Zucker Paul, *Town and Square*, Published by: Columbia University Press, 1959

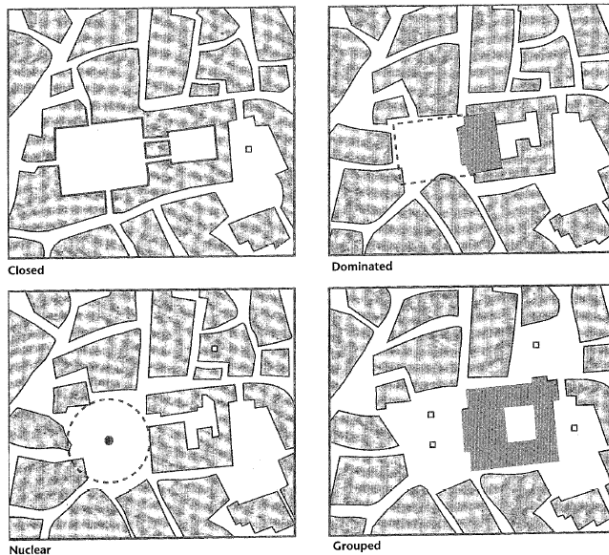
9. Campos Arruda, *Urban public spaces: a study of the relation between spatial configuration and use patterns*, doctoral thesis, Published by: University of London, 2000.

10. Carmona Matthew, Heath Tim, Oc Taner, Tiesdell Steven, *Public Places Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design*, Edited by: Architectural Press, 2010

4. Grouped squares: these are squares organized in a sequence - each one anticipates another. This configuration creates important transitional areas allowing a series of views. Such system could be axial, non-axial, grouped around a dominant object.

5. Amorphous square: this is a formless space that does not meet any of the previous definitions.

After outlining this guideline, Zucker stated that squares almost never fall within a single type, in fact they generally have mixed features of two or more of them.



Square typologies, Zucker Paul, Town and Square, 1959

ROB KRIER

Rob Krier through his morphological studies defined a clear separation of the urban space into two parts, street and square. He compared them to corridors and rooms in a house. They are equivalent in their geometrical qualities, but different in size and in the activity patterns.

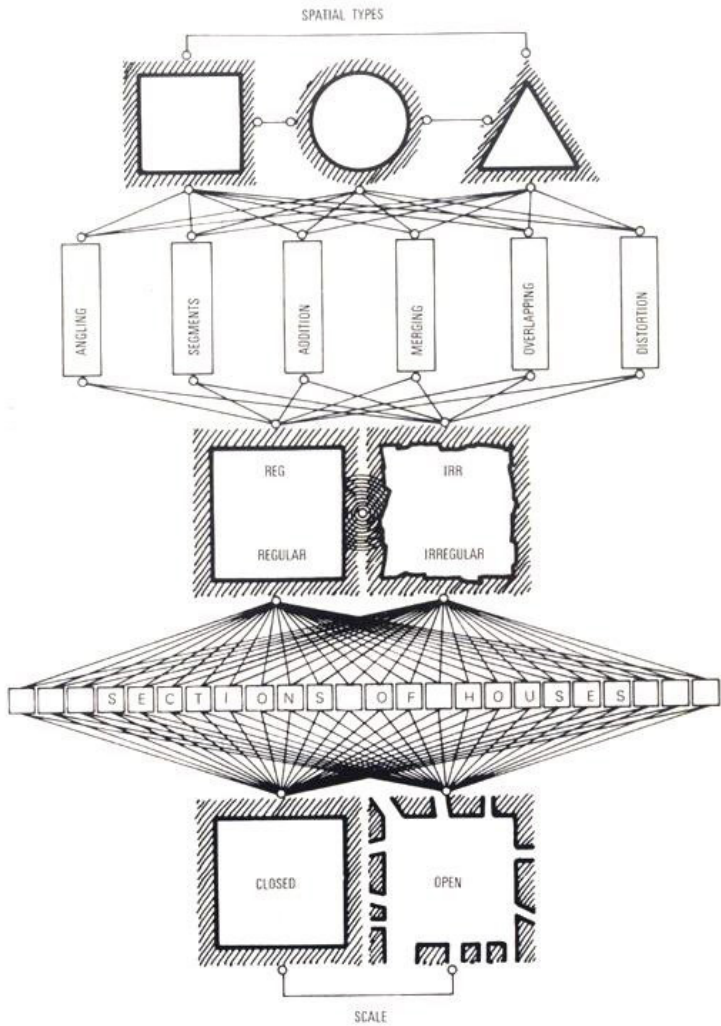
He made a considerable attempt in describing the various possibilities and layouts of the public space.¹¹

While describing the physical typology of the urban space, he separates the architectural forms and their equivalents into three groups according to the basic shapes on the ground plan: rectangle, triangle and circle. The three shapes are represented by a matrix of modulating variables such as angles, segmentation, extension, combination and distortion, which may generate normal and abnormal effects for the spatial forms. He states that the size of urban space is also related to its geometrical characteristics.

In addition to the study on plan configurations the architect analyses also building sections. The interaction between the urban room and adjacent buildings affects the quality of space at all the levels of modulation. He also studied the elevations of the building with their solid and void ratio, the orientation of the doors and windows, as elements that multiply the relationship between the public and private spaces.

In short, he concludes the studies stating that there is an almost infinite range of possible square types, often seen in historic cities. Many different urban spaces can be generated from the same basic form.

11. Krier Rob, *Urban Space*, Edited by: Rizzoli International Publications, 1979



Spatial configurations, Krier Rob, Urban Space, 1979

GORDON CULLEN

Gordon Cullen defined cities as a “dramatic event”. Following his stream of thoughts, in order to release this drama all the aspects of the environment should be considered together, in relationship with others. In his research therefore, Cullen explores a series of structures, natural features, streets, advertisements etc., through the lens of a pedestrian who walks through the neighborhood. From the study of their relationship, he questions modern designs that had been influenced by the industrialization. In his vision, if the built elements were letters, most of the designs would not generate meaningful words, but a sequence of ‘AAAAA!’ Or ‘OOOO!’.¹² The architect also established ‘townscape’ as a spatial analytical tool, which could lead to a better comprehension of the urban landscape.¹³

Other than that, he introduced the study on how the urban setting generates emotional reactions. He stated that the senses and the perception are not only useful but indicative of memories and experiences. In a way, those feelings are capable of arousing the human mind. This could happen in three ways: ¹⁴

1. The first way this is concerning how the city introduces itself to the visitor as a collection of views generated by turning corners, alleys, or portals, and shifting from a space to another with different effects, whether by transitions or by the spaces themselves. This as previously highlighted by Sitte, is called serial vision.

2. The second way indicates the results of the interaction between the individual, his location and the surrounding context. The architect provides a comprehensive explanation for these effects which are generated by connecting current views (here) to new ones (there) created by an alteration of the spatial characteristics

12. Cullen Gordon, *Concise Townscape*, Edited by: Architectural Press, 1961

13. Porteous Douglas, *Environmental Aesthetics: Ideas, Politics and Planning*, Edited by: Routledge, 1996

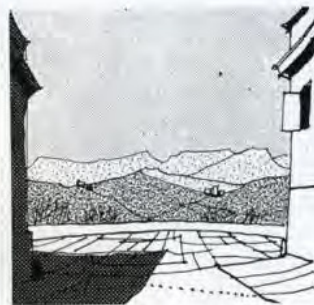
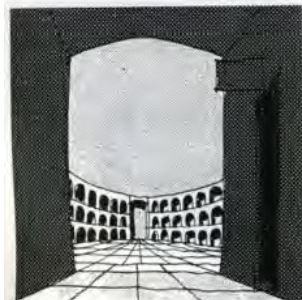
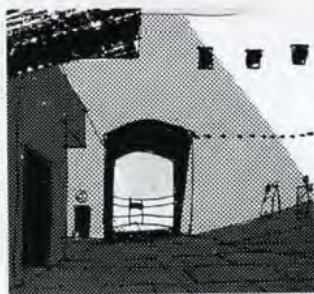
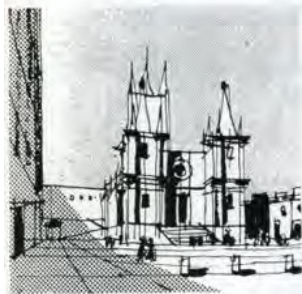
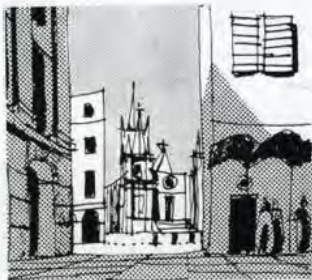
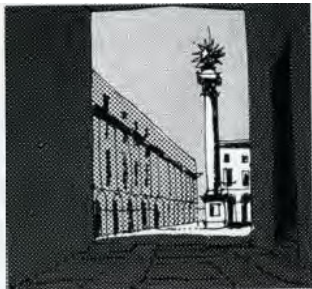
14. Cullen Gordon, *Concise Townscape*, Edited by: Architectural Press, 1961

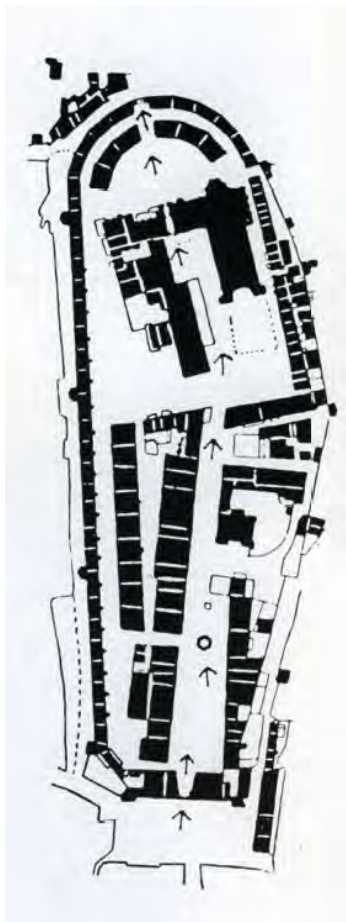
of the environment. He addresses this interaction in two sections. The first type is the relationship between the known here and the known there, the second between the known here and the unknown there.

3. In the last way, the spotlights is shifted on the city and its elements: color, design, size, form, atmosphere, identity and uniqueness. By trying to manipulate these features, the architect can discover the effects of juxtaposition, immediacy, causality, reminiscence, exposure, and intimacy. Cullen also pays attention to the role of vegetation and advertising in creating different effects in the environment.



Here and There, Cullen Gordon, Concise Townscape, 1961





Serial Vision, Cullen Gordon, Concise Townscape, 1961

PHASE II

How to: public life analysis

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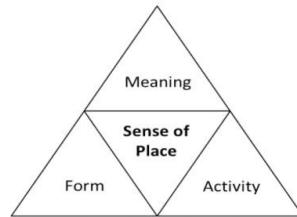
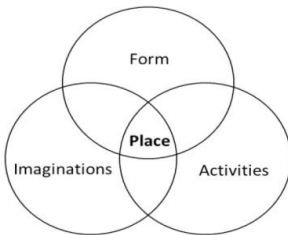
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THE SENSE OF PLACE

Through images and photographs we are able to depict the physical elements of a public space. With a strict observation, people can be recorded and documented in their different activity and behavioral patterns. On the other side, the researcher who observes such objects and events is able to grasp their significance in another, important respect: he sees them in a meaningful way. To the observer, they might result fascinating or not, fun or boring, belonging to the private or to the public realm, and so on. For these reasons, Edward Relph defines the identity of places as something that is formed by the physical setting, the activities, and the sense. The first two of these elements may be clearly appreciable, but the sense component is more difficult to grasp and hold. ¹

Starting from the Relph's research, David Canter adds an extra element to the definition of behavioral setting calling it 'the theory of place'. According to Canter, the environments or places are described and interpreted as the physical properties of the location, the events that take place in them and the various meanings (the sense of place) that they offer to the people. ²



1. Relph Edward, Place and Placelessness, Edited by: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008

2. Metha Vikas, Lively Streets: Exploring the relationship between built environment and social behavior, Published by: University of Maryland Libraries, 2006

RELATION BETWEEN PUBLIC SPACE AND ACTIVITY PATTERNS

The research field regarding human behavior in public space remained unpopular and unexplored until the late '50s. These researches ranged between social studies and morphological ones. From then, there has been a multitude of theorists who tried to give their contribute in understanding the relationship between the public realm and the activity patterns that animate it. One of the first ones has been Gregory Stone, who entered the public space theories through his analysis of urban consumers in order to understand the movements and the social integration of local residents.³ He described how, the chances of establishing relationships with the vendors could make the inhabitants associate themselves with the community and therefore make them feel a sense of belonging.⁴

On the same stream of thoughts was the Jane Jacob's research within her native community in Greenwich Village, Manhattan. Through her studies, she noticed the neighborhood's need for a built environment that ensured the social well-being of the inhabitants. Her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*⁵, can be seen as a honest criticism towards the effects and results of the urban planning of the period. For these reasons, it became a pioneering work for planners and designers who want to make positive changes in the public realm.⁶

She argues that designing a city cannot be a mere work of art, claiming that if art is a representation of life, the environment that incorporates this life is often more complex and intense. In order to discuss the elements of the built environment, such as sidewalks and parks, she conducted a close observation of the citizens' behavior. Her studies highlighted how, successful and massively used

3. Lofland Lyn, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory*, Edited by: Transaction Pub, 1998

4. Stone Gregory, *City Shoppers and Urban Identification: Observations on the Social Psychology of City Life*, Published by: American Journal of Sociology 60, 1954

5. Jacobs Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Edited by: Vintage books, 1993

6. Carmona Matthew, Heath Tim, Oc Taner, Tiesdell Steven, *Public Places Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design*, Edited by: Architectural Press, 2010)

spaces have all in common these three man characteristics:

1. Intricacy: reflects a variety of reasons why people are using a public space, which could include shopping or eating.
2. Centering: indicates a space with a clearly identifiable center
3. Sun: indicates a space where sun is provided during winter days and shading in summer, as well as spatial enclosure.

Eventually, in her book she gives a series of recommendations for architects and urbanists to improve the richness of the city in a way that makes it more vibrant. For her, livability can be accomplished through the implementation of mixed uses, compact blocks and urban density. Jacobs asserts that the combination of these measures makes the neighborhood diverse and productive.⁷

While these two authors were pioneers in the study of the public realm, Erving Goffman was the first who conducted a such research based on daily activities. He was particularly concerned with the analysis of the everyday social interaction between residents of the same urban realm. He claimed that what happens to people walking on the street, even when they don't know each other, is as intimate as what happens in a relationship between two lovers.⁸ Goffman therefore identified the different elements of each and every activity in the most dynamic public spaces. He suggests that, in order to study such interactions the emphasis should be put on body language. The central argument was that strangers generally do not recognize each other so they rely more on gestures than on verbal communication. As a consequence, he eventually introduced the concept of 'tie-signs' to illustrate that social relations are characterized by a large number of relationship types and ties between people. These relations provide each person with the

7. Jacobs Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Edited by: Vintage books, 1993

8. Lofland Lyn, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory*, Edited by: Transaction Pub, 1998

knowledge they need in order to properly behave in a specific interaction.⁹

Furthermore, he explains how the human patterns in the public realm can cross without ever touching one another. His studies show that the public space is not only characterized by openness but also from specific ambiances such as churches, malls, cafes and subways. Here the idea of civil inattention becomes clear. As described in his book *Behaviors in Public spaces*¹⁰ 'civil inattention' is more than a mere 'visual courtesy', and it does not consist solely in respecting other people's privacy but it gives the urban public space an eminent quality of hospitality.



On the idea of 'civil inattention', Stanley Kubrick, *Life and Love on the New York City Subway*, 1946

9. Aelbrecht Patricia, *Rethinking urban design for a changing public life*, Published in: *Journal of Place Management and Development* 3, 2010

10. Goffman, Erving, *Behavior in Public Places: notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*, Edited by Simon & Schuster, 1 Sept. 1966

KEVIN LYNCH

Kevin Lynch is one of the most well-known figures who implemented the aforementioned theories with practice in planning and design.¹¹ He developed a revolutionary method for urban observation and study in his book *The Image of The City*.¹² Despite its restricted applicability since it mainly deals with visual aspects, it has given valuable insights on how individuals use mental maps to find their way around cities. He asserts that the human perception of the urban form is defined by five main spatial elements: roads, borders, building blocks, nodes, and landmarks. He researched the nature of social perception and awareness in cities on a macro scale, finding out how people have recalled and identified them.¹³

In addition, Lynch shows his concern towards the modern urbanists, who are primarily concerned with form and not with life. He claimed that this way of designing generates spaces where individuals have problems in doing what they really want. He defined the human observation as a fundamental step in the design process. In this way, it is the designers' responsibility to acquire the role of 'actor' in the urban play and grasp the common desires and preferences. We can say that he shifted the focus from design elements such as walkways, parking lots or bus stops to actions and activities such as standing, moving, or talking. With this change, the architect's attention turns immediately to the users of the square.

Furthermore, he confirmed the existence of a strong link between how enclosed is the space and its success, trying to identify the reasons behind this relationship. First, he claimed that small public spaces with the main dimension shorter than twenty-two meters work better than larger ones. Then, surrounding these areas with

11. Burgess Jaquelin, *Place Making. The Contribution of Environmental Perception Studies in planning*, Published in: *Geography* 64, 1979

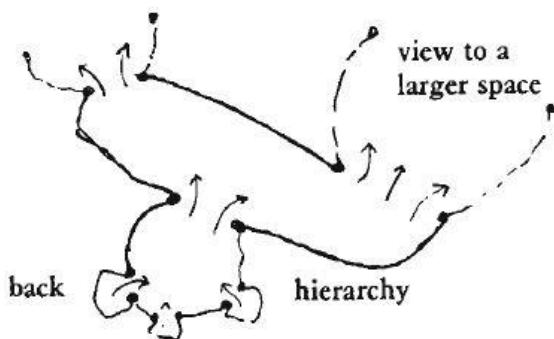
12. Lynch Kevin, *The Image of The City*, Edited By: MIT Press, 1960.

13. Lynch Kevin, Hack Gary, *Site Planning - Third Edition*, Edited by: MIT Press, 1984.



*Buildings that create negative, leftover space .
buildings that create positive outdoor space.*

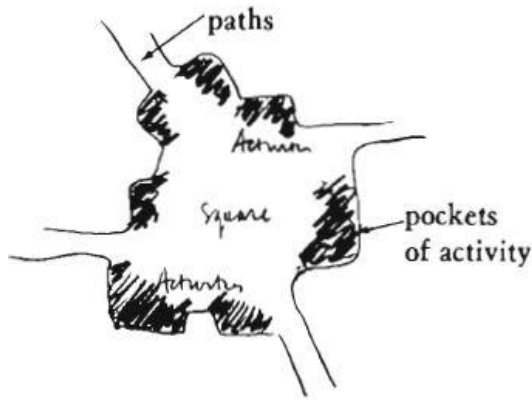
Positive and negative space, Alexander Christopher, A Pattern Language, 1977



Spatial hierarchies, Alexander Christopher, A Pattern Language, 1977

a ring of activity pockets helps the residents to easily get involved. He understands that activities naturally take place around the perimeter of a public square.

In the same way, having a built element in the middle of open spaces encourages life by providing people with something to protect their backs when sitting like they do around the edges. In addition, he states that as people move constantly through different urban scales, the transition acquires an importance supporting activities and influencing the liveliness of the public squares. Therefore, physical elements such as arcades, windows, vitrines and public building-fronts enhance the creation of interactions between residents, thus confirming the Jane Jacob's theory of 'eyes on the street'.¹⁴

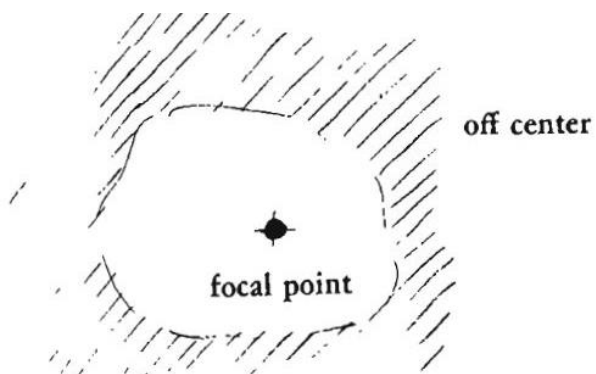


Activity Pockets, Alexander Christopher, *A Pattern Language*, 1977

14. Jacobs Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Edited by: Vintage books, 1993



*As the activities grow around the space,
it becomes more lively.*



The center and the edge, Alexander Christopher, *A Pattern Language*, 1977

WILLIAM WHYTE

Later, it was William Whyte who studied the public realm with an emphasis on social interactions in urban settings. Focusing on small urban realities, he examined spatial variables that can serve as key factors in promoting the use of public space by attracting people. His techniques focused mainly on photography, mapping, video recordings and pedestrian counts.

He explains that some individuals do not feel comfortable and get hostile noticing that they are being observed. Therefore, by considering people as objects of the analysis, together with his collaborators he tried to stay invisible and unnoticed, almost never interviewing passersby. Furthermore, Whyte states that observing people during off-peak hours gives the best insights about their preferences. In fact, a person sits wherever it is available when the area is congested. Therefore, that could be not the place he would usually choose to sit. After a certain place gets quiet, the singular choices acquire a more meaningful significance.

He also makes the point that a square needs to be socially pleasant. This includes allowing the choices of being in the center, on the back or on the side; opting to sit in the sun or shade; visiting in group or alone.

He therefore defines which are the elements that attract people and thus allow a particular public space to become more lively¹⁵:

1. Sitting places are one of the most important elements in urban space. Whyte says that the seating ought to be physically and socially comfortable. It is important to provide choice and versatility by including a range of choices.
2. Food improves the liveliness of the space by attracting users that in turn attract more users. He suggests that there is a connection

15. Whyte William, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, Edited by Project for Public Spaces Inc, 1980

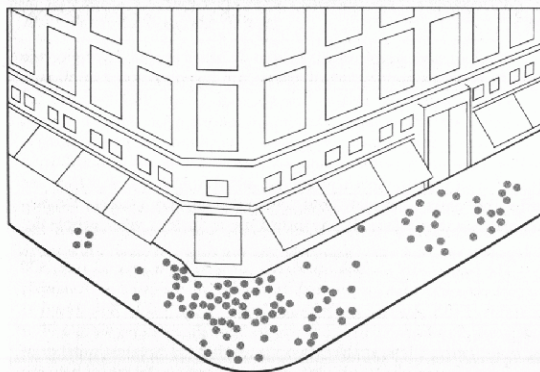
between successful social spaces and the presence of food vendors.

3. An unexpected or unique element that induces strangers to stop and talk to each other helps to attract more visitors. He discovered that the position of a built element, decorative or not, changes pedestrian patterns because it creates new ways of engagement with it. People often look at it, touch it, chat or sit to wait next to it.

4. Trees paired with sitting places offer not only visual attractiveness but also enclosure, shelter and sun shading.

5. Water features bring life to the urban space when left free for users to touch splash or play with. Furthermore, the waterfall blocks traffic noise making the space more pleasant.

6. Eventually, in terms of street accessibility, he suggests that there should be no strict division between the street and the square. The observations demonstrated that active corners bring people, and that building fronts are mostly used when they offer seating opportunities: people like observing other people, even when they state the opposite.



Location of street conversations lasting two minutes or more at Saks Fifth Avenue and Fifth Street. Cumulative for five days in June. Note main concentration at corner, secondary one outside entrance.

Whyte William, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, 1980

RECENT METHODS

Currently, the closest representative of the Whyte approach can be found in the work of Jan Gehl and his collaborators.¹⁶ He focuses on the human factor within the urban design. Through his studies, he showed a particular interest in details and small structural elements such as short posts that can be used to lean on, or steps that can be used as chairs. Such elements encourage people to slow down and stay in the public space instead of rushing through it. He noticed that what attracts people is the possibility of sitting or standing easily and observe the others.¹⁷ What captured my attention is the fact that, like Jane Jacobs, he suggests that basic activities are important to encourage a wide variety of secondary, casual and spontaneous ones. In this respect, he individuates three types of activities that take place in public spaces: essential activities, optional activities and social activities.

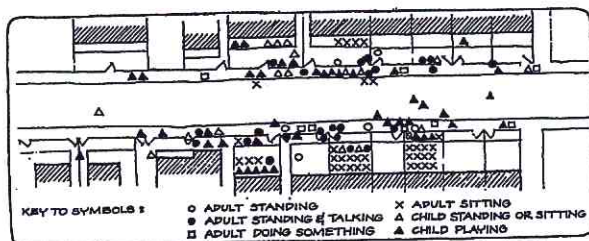
Essential activities involve those that are required for everyday tasks. These are therefore slightly affected by the nature of the physical environment. Optional activities on the other hand, are significantly affected by the aspects of the physical environment. Almost all of the outdoor events in public spaces are included in this category. Social activities are of a different character: these are in fact caused by the occurrence of other activities.

Through years, Gehl and his partners have developed a framework and a methodology to study the human behavior in the public realm. Their methods include direct observations, mapping, counting and quick surveys adapted to different scenarios. This resulted in practical guidelines for each situation, in addition to common studies that analyze public life in different realms.¹⁸

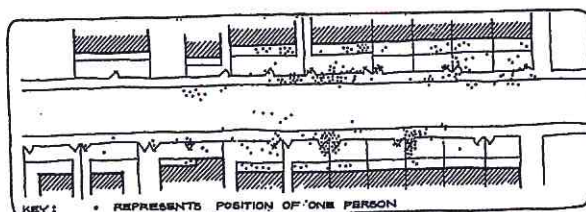
16. Johnston Katrine Leigh, *Public Space and Urban Life: A Spatial Ethnography*, Published by: Portland State University, 2013

17. Gehl Jan, *Cities for People*, Edited by: Island Press, 2010

18. Gehl Studio, *The Public Life Diversity Toolkit 2.0*, Published by: Gehl Institute, April 2015



MAP A SHOWING POSITIONS OF ALL PEOPLE IN AREA AT 38 PREDETERMINED TIMES ON SUNDAY & WEDNESDAY



MAP B SHOWING POSITIONS OF PEOPLE PERFORMING INTERACTIONS & ACTIVITIES - SUNDAY 8:00-6:30

EXCERPTS FROM SUNDAY DIARY

- 1.59 FIVE KIDS ARE NOW SITTING IN N° 12; THERE IS A CHAISE-LONGUE ON THE VERANDAH. KIDS ON AND AROUND IT.
- 2.06 MRS N° 12 COMES OUT, CHATS WITH KIDS, GOES INTO N° 10, DOES NOT KNOCK, WALKS STRAIGHT IN.
- 2.26 MRS N° 16 HAS BEEN TALKING FOR THE LAST HALF HOUR FROM HER VERANDAH ACROSS ROAD TO 2 LADIES IN N° 13, ALSO TO MRS N° 20
- 2.47 LADY BLUE JUMPER WALKS THROUGH FROM NORTH & INTO 12. COMES OUT OF 12 INTO 10, WALKS STRAIGHT IN, RINGING BELL ON THE WAY.
- 12.06 3 MEN TALKING AT N° 13. 2 IN GARDEN, 1 ON FOOTPATH. MAN ON FOOTPATH EDGING AWAY. STILL CHATTING.
- 12.10 MAN STILL EDGING AWAY. MAN HALFWAY DOWN NEXT-DOOR FENCE - STILL CHATTING
- 12.13 MAN FINALLY WALKS OFF. ONE OF GARDEN MEN GOES NEXT DOOR; THE OTHER STAYS LEANING ON FENCE 13.
- 2.34 V. OLD LADY 17 SWEEPS FRONT VERANDAH. PUTS BROOM OVER GATE AND SWEEPS FOOTPATH A BIT (STILL STANDING IN GARDEN) LOOKS UP & DOWN. STOPS SWEEPING & JUST STANDS THERE (10 MINS)

PHASE III

Place Du Conseil

a research project by
Daiana Ristanova

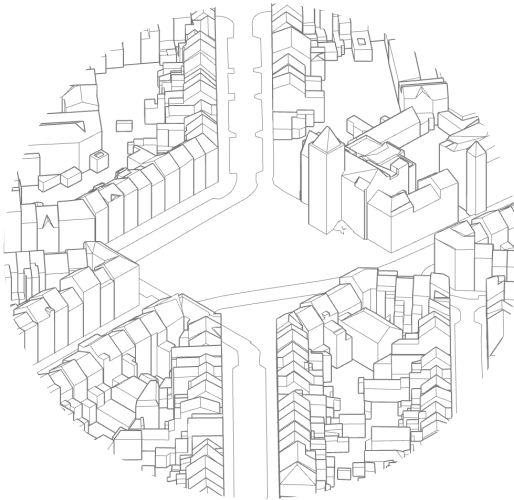
Urban Architecture graduation studio | TU Delft

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. the 'play'	22
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INTRO

PLACE DU CONSEIL



According to the aim of this research, I selected one of the most representative public realms of Cureghem for my empirical study.

The Nolli-esque map shows how Place du Conseil, standing in front of the Anderlecht's Townhall, is placed in the exact middle point between the Gare du Midi and the Abbatoir, acquiring a certain relevance as a transitional point.

Given its shape and position, surrounded by Schools, Churches and Mosques, not only it attracts tourist activities but it is also part of the identity, tradition and history of Anderlecht.

ABBATTOIR

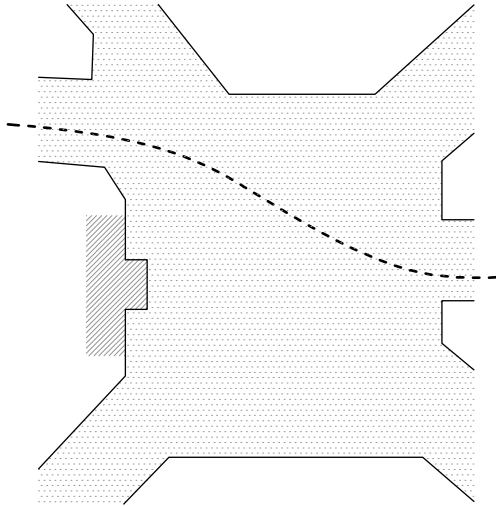


GARE DU MIDI



THE 'SET'

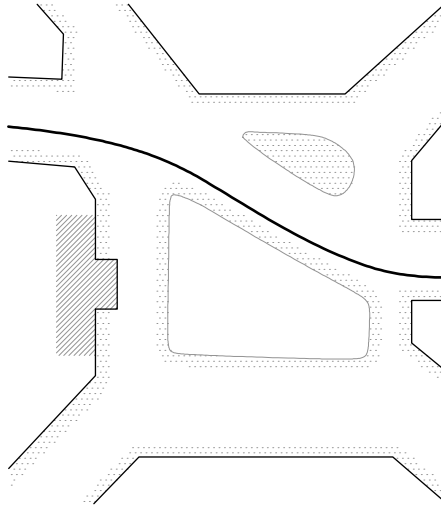
1910 to 1950



Since 1910 Place du Conseil has been a public space of modest dimensions (6000sqm) enclosed by residential and commercial buildings . The regularity and the position in the city has made it become a clear passageway between the Townhall and the centre of Brussels. At the time, no distinction was made between the pavement and the street.



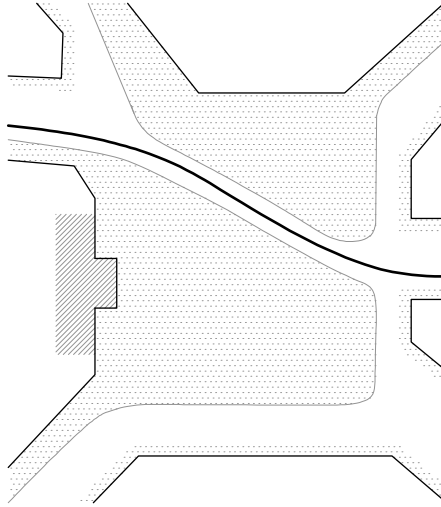
1970 to 2011



From 1970 a tram line was introduced following the main direction, creating a sort of a green roundabout, with parking slots and traffic occupying most of the space. This intervention left no room for tourists or residents to enjoy the square like in the early days.



2014 to today



Today, the square has been redesigned, connected to the main facade of the townhall and completely freed from the traffic. On the south it is delimited by a double row of ash trees under which benches are placed. On the north side, beside the tram line there is another triangular pedestrian area.



FIELDWORK

The fieldwork consisted in unobstructive observations, maps, surveys and interviews. For three days , since 8:00 am until 18:00 pm I overlooked at life unfolding in the square by from the balcony of the Townhall, just like in a theatre.

Overall, I can say that the collection of photographs represents the heart of this analysis. We live in a world of images, which reception can help us build an academic knowledge on different areas of study such as residential segregation, ethnic group formation, citizenship and belonging. My goal was to document human interaction trough photographs, tell the story of multicultural neighborhoods and how they meet in the public realm. Therefore, the research moves through visual products: from drawings to still frames; from a technical approach to an anthropological one; from an understanding of the space to an overview on how it is occupied.

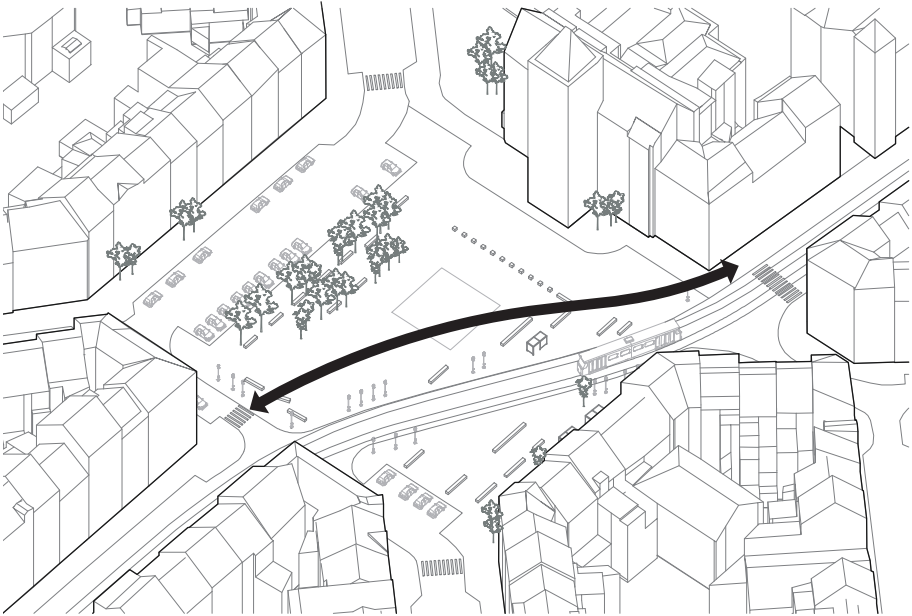
I believe that this kind of approach guided me in creating a data-rich portrait of the social diversity in Place du Conseil.



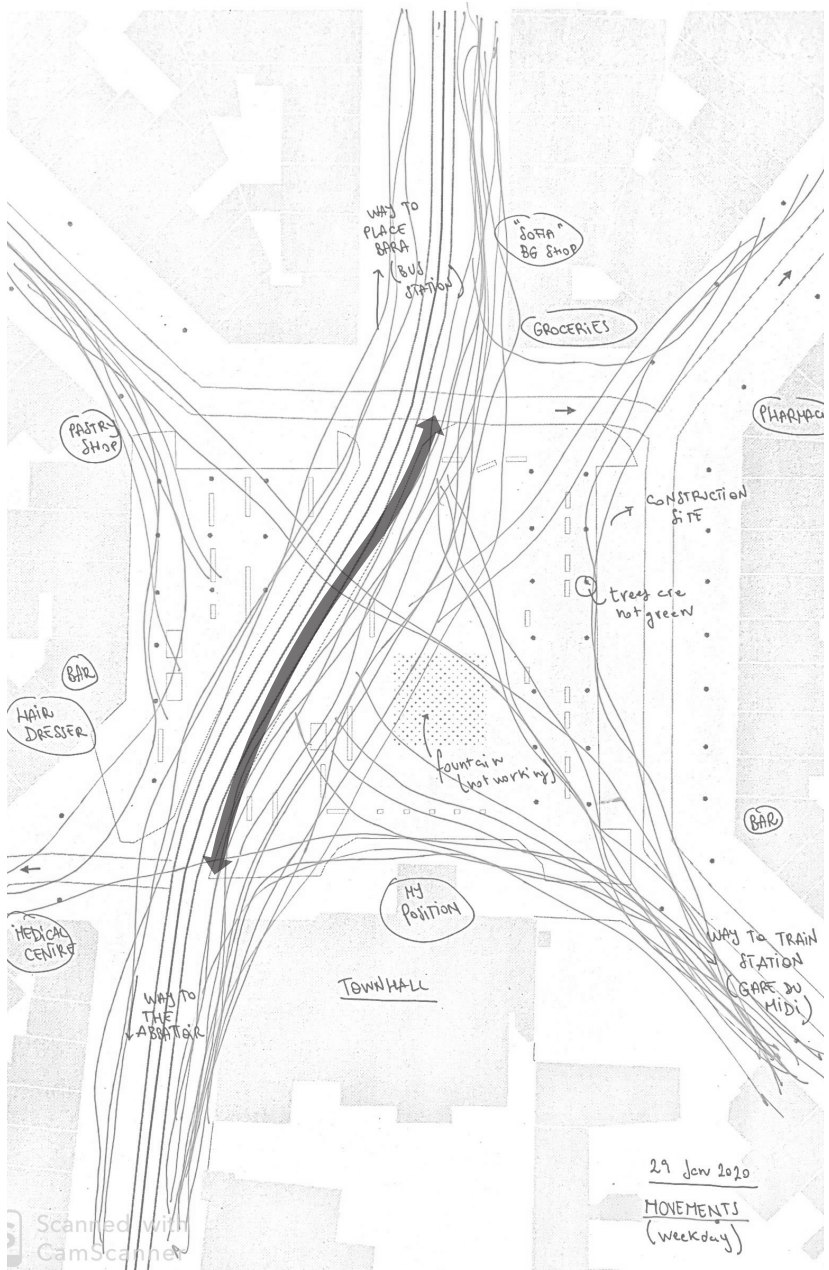
observation point , balcony of the townhall, Place du Conseil, personal photo

MOVEMENTS

WEEKDAYS

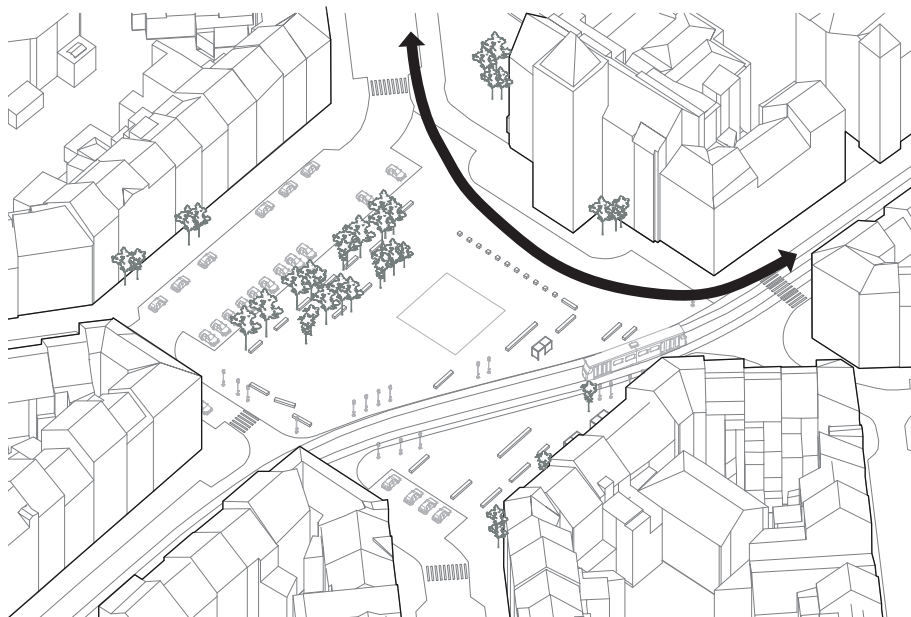


From the observations, I could perceive how during week days the pedestrian movements are mostly aligned with the tramline. The visitors, coming from Place Bara (bus station) either walk through the square to reach the center or take the tram in the same direction.

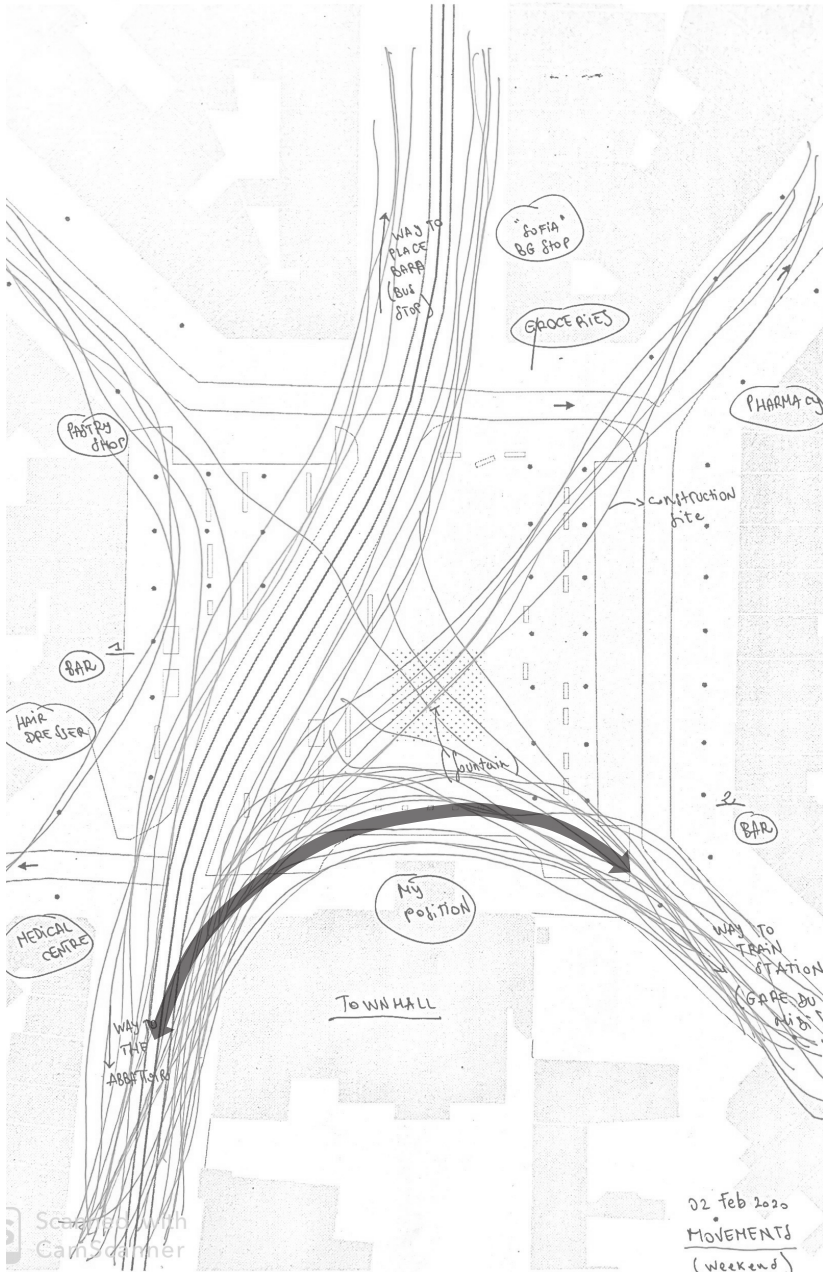


MOVEMENTS

WEEKENDS



During weekends, however, even though the tramline flow is still present, the main circulation goes from Gare du Midi (train station) to the centre, which is also the quickest way to reach the Abbatoirs. On sunday, the amount of population passing by the square with a shopping bag or cart is impressive.



PERSONAL DIARIES & NOTES

29 January 2020, Place du Conseil, Anderlecht

H. 13.00

Despite the cold, I can see the sun rays hiding behind the clouds and ready to come out. It is lunchtime → the square is crowded and everyone is running somewhere.

I can see a man exercising at the end of the square, most of the present people are waiting for the train.

A group of teenagers is chatting on a concrete bench.

H. 14.30

As the sun came out, brought a lot of life. As the square is getting busier, the number of interactions grows = there is a couple sitting and laughing, there are some kids playing "hide & seek", and an elderly couple slowly enjoying a walk in the sun.

H. 16.00

At this time schools are closing and Place du Conseil is full of kids with their parents, running to catch the train. The square becomes totally a

scanned with additional point.



CamScanner

30 January 2020, Place du Conseil, Anderlecht.

11.11.00

Today is very cold, and since I arrived the square has been almost empty. I can spot an old woman patiently waiting for the train while drinking a take-away coffee. On my left, there is a teen sitting in the outside tables of the cafe, smoking. Feels like the square hasn't awoken yet.

11.13.00

Place du Conseil is still quiet, despite the time. Two young boys are enjoying a sandwich on the cold concrete bench, and a couple is arguing next to the car, parked on the south of the square.

11.15.00

The square is getting livelier. I can see a lot of women returning from the shopping and groups of teens gathering in circles.

H. 16.03

It started to rain but all of a sudden the space becomes bustling, alive. Children coming back from school are invading the square: falling, crying, running, hugging their parents.

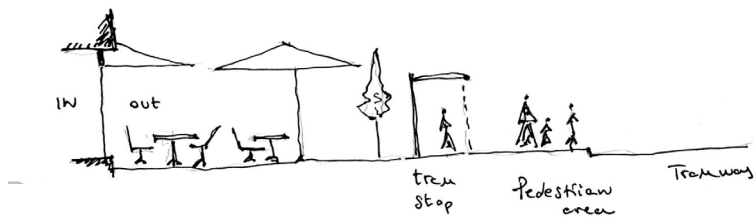
A lot of people are waiting for the train.

31 January 2020, Place du Conseil, Anderlecht

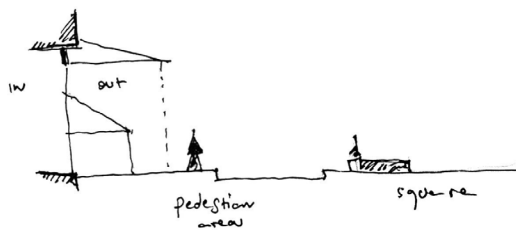
LIST OF ACTIVITIES

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • WAITING FOR THE TRAM | • MEETING FRIENDS |
| • PLAYING | • COMING/GOING TO SCHOOL |
| • KISSING | • PLAYING FOOTBALL |
| • HUGGING | • TALKING ON THE PHONE |
| • SKATEBOARDING | • CARRYING THE GROCERIES |
| • JOGGING | • EATING |
| • RIDING A SCOOTER | • SITTING |
| • RIDING A BIKE | • SMOKING |
| • JUMPING ON THE CONCRETE BENCHES | • LISTENING TO MUSIC |

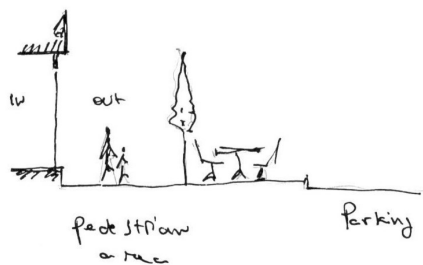
CAFE 'AU BON CONSEIL'



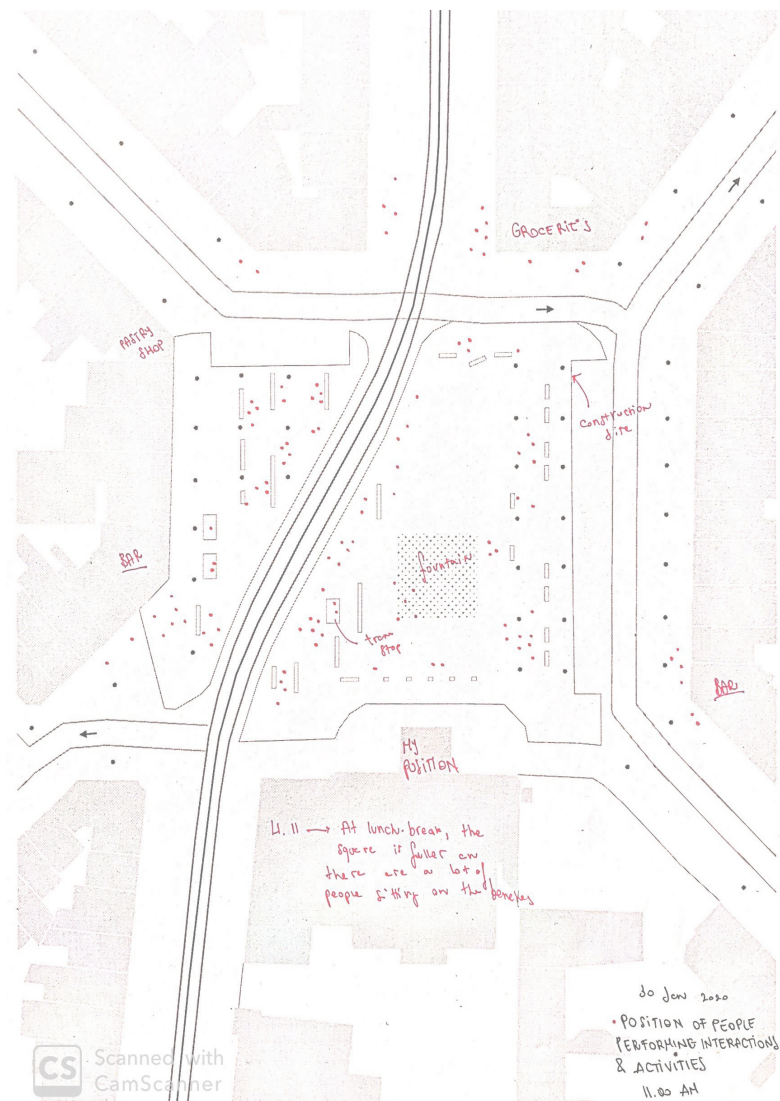
GROCERY SHOP



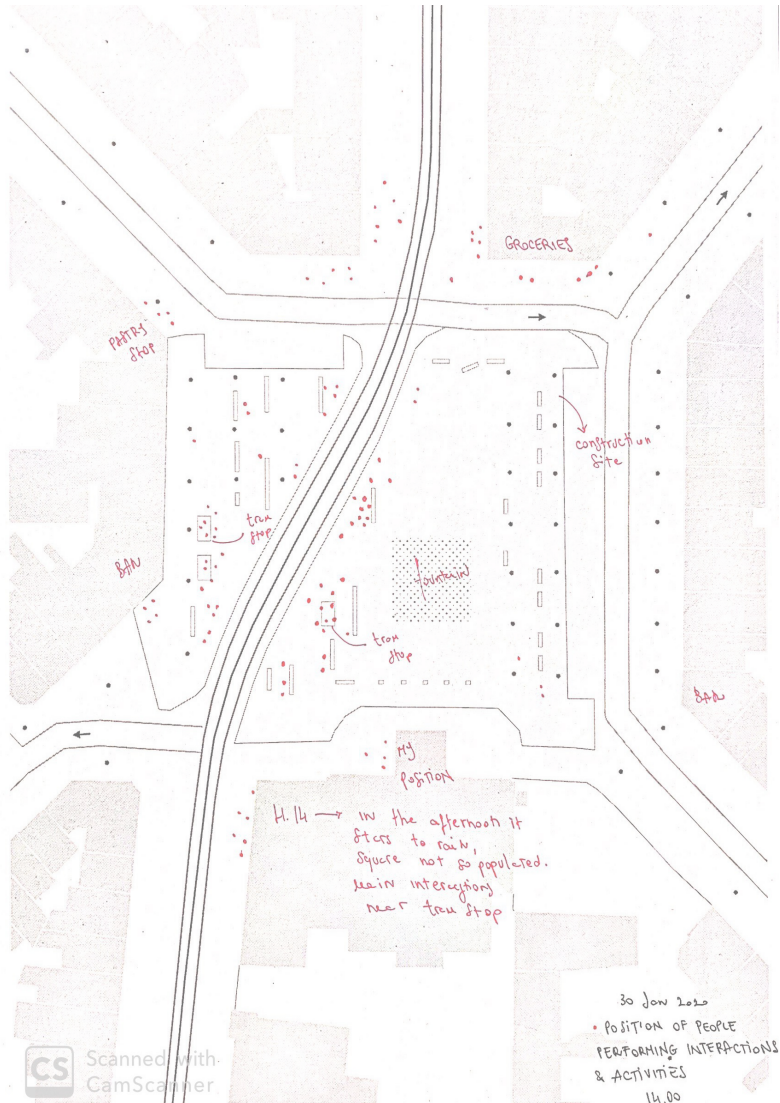
CAFE 'LE CONSEIL'



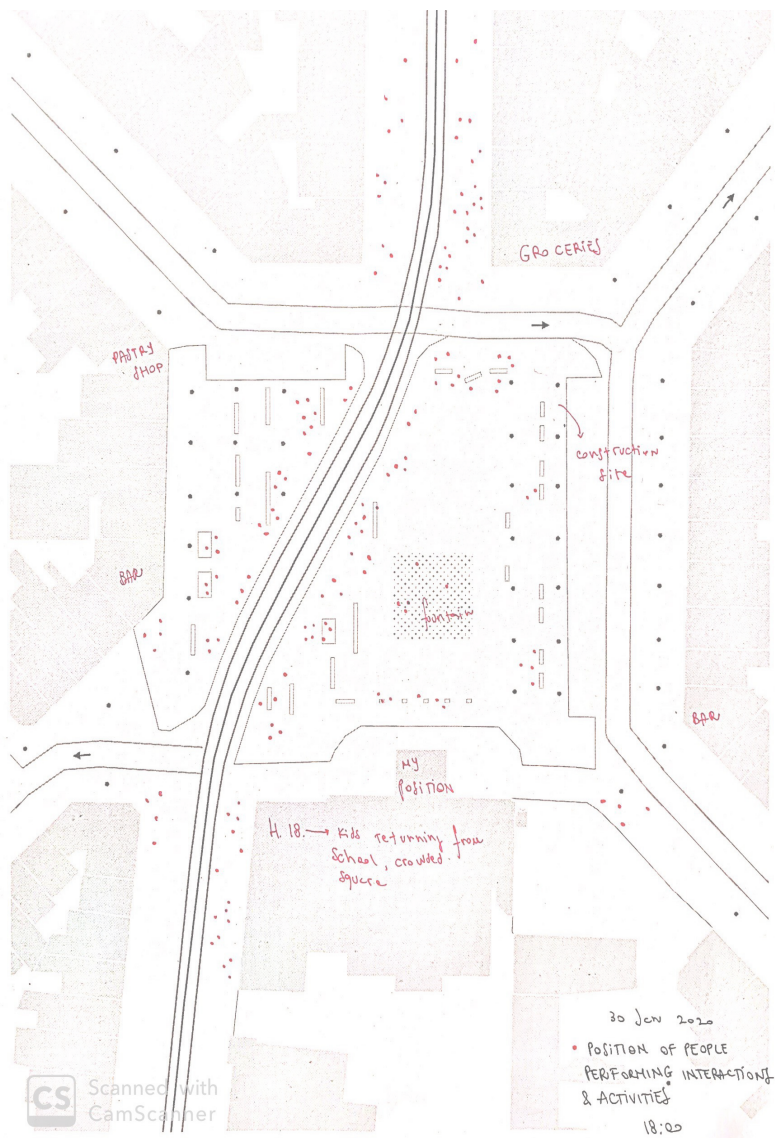
position of people performing interactions and activities
30.01.2020- h 11.00



position of people performing interactions and activities
30.01.2020- h 14.00



position of people performing interactions and activities
30.01.2020- h 18.00

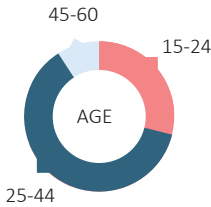


SURVEYS

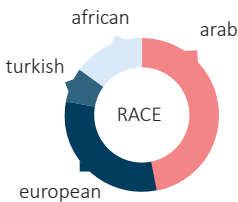
To better understand how this public space is perceived and lived by the Cureghem residents I prepared a simple survey. After my vivits I was able to collect 15 samples, which, despite the limited number, gave me an insight on the existing relationship between public life, public space and the social mixing.

All the samples (translated in French) can be found at the appendix of this research.

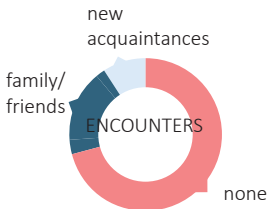
From the surveys, it emerged that:



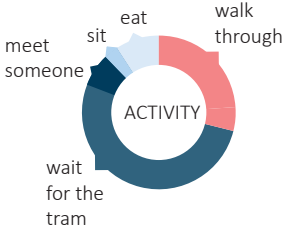
- the average age is between 25 and 44 years
- most of the interviewed is a renter and lives in Belgium from more than 10 years



- the majority comes from an arab country
- the square's peak activity moments are weekday's mornings



- the majority of the visitors reach Place du Conseil either walking or by tram
- the square is perceived by everyone as an important place for Cureghem



- the average time spent in the square is less than one hour
- only a few of the interviewed recognize familiar faces or have made acquaintances; most of them do not recognize other people
- the majority of the visitors walks through the square or waits for the bus

Place du Conseil

Survey (ENG)

1. Do you identify as **Male / Female / other** ? (circle)

2. Age (circle)

0 - 14 years

45 - 60 years

15 - 14 years

65 + years

25 - 44 years

3. How many years have you lived here? _____

4. Are you a **homeowner / renter / homeless / other** ? (circle)

5. What race or ethnicity do you identify with? _____

6. Typically, I am in this square (circle all that apply)

weekday mornings

daily

wekday afternoons

weekly

weekday evenings

every few months

weekends

rarely (once a year)

6. How did you get to the square? (circle)

walk bus tram bike car taxi

7. Is this square an important public space for Cureghem? **Y / N** (circle)

8. How much time do you generally spend in this square? (circle)

less than one hour one/ two hours more than two hours

9. Do you recognize or get to know people from the neighborhood here? (check)

YES, I recognize a few faces but have not talked to anyone

YES, I have made a few acquaintances

NO, I don't recognize or know people from the neighborhood

10. What kind of activity do you generally perform in this square? (circle all that apply)

sitting

eating

walking through

waiting for the bus / tram

playing

meeting friends / family

THANK YOU!

INSIDE STORY

Kiril



At the entrance of the 'Sofia' store, right at the edge of Place du Conseil, a 'Welcome' sticker welcomes the customers. By crossing the doorstep, the packaging of Bulgarian products forms a colorful mosaic in sharp contrast with the rainy greyness outside. On the shelves and walls, wire sculptures and landscape drawings give the small shop a warm and homely feeling. In a corner, forgotten newspapers seem to have been piling up for several months.

Kiril, the store owner, waits patiently behind his counter. "Hello," he says cheerfully. The customers, few in number that day, meet and chat in Bulgarian. Some of them, curious of my presence and my camera, ask me about the reason behind my interest in the shop. After a general conversation, I began to dive deeply into Kiril's life.

He left Bulgaria in 2008 to join his brother in Brussels. Upon his arrival in Belgium, he began to work as a volunteer in a retirement home. Like the majority of his compatriots, he used to buy products at the Sofia store, which at the time was located two blocks from his apartment.

In 2012, he took the plunge and changed his status from habitual client to full-time employee, eventually becoming the owner. In fact, Kiril seems to have always known his customers. “They are my friends,” he said generously.

In Ludogoret, his hometown in the north-east of Bulgaria, Kiril worked as a social assistant. In the absence of a diploma equivalence in Belgium, he had to give up on this profession. He murmurs: “I miss it ... I don’t know why but I like people. “ However, from time to time, he rediscovers his primary vocation, helping some of his customers. “ If I can, I do it” he explains.

At this point, a man enters the store to buy sausages . Akif exclaims: “Sausages are the most sold here... And ah, they are not Bulgarian but they’re cheap, that’s why! “ However, food is not the main reason why the client came today. He needs to have a document translated into Dutch. Speaking four languages, Kiril is ready to give a hand, just like for other matters. For example, if a client needs medical advice, the 45-year-old merchant has a list of Bulgarian-speaking doctors.



As a zealous worker, Kiril also fights against clichés in the neighborhood. In Cureghem, the Bulgarian community regularly faces criticism. He wants to make it clear that the Bulgarians are not lazy. To support his words, he catches one of his friends on the street and brings him to the store. “He was a professor at the university in Bulgaria!” The man, smiling, explains how he had to give up this function upon his arrival in Belgium.

At this point, I ask him an opinion on the square right next to his shop. “It changed a lot during the years!” he exclaims “I have to admit that the area is not the safest, but it has always been an important space for Cureghem”. I conclude my interview asking him if he is planning of going back to Bulgaria. Kiril tells me that, even if he dreams of returning, he remains deeply attached to this neighborhood. In the end, he owns his ‘little Bulgarian corner’ to remind him of home.

CONCLUSIONS

Place du Conseil offers a beautiful urban image and breathes life into the neighborhood.

From this analysis I can conclude that this urban room, despite its central position, spatial enclosure and importance, is used and perceived by the residents mainly as a transitional point. The design elements and the trees offer both openness and shelter. During my stay the water element was not attractive because of the cold temperatures, but its potential attractiveness in summer is undeniable.

The main commercial activities present on the perimeter are two cafes and one grocery store. Being distant from the centre of the square, they create activity pockets on the borders but do not really have an influence on the liveliness of this public space.

The main attractor is, therefore, the tramway.

Overall, the population is heterogeneous in terms of race, gender and age. However, it is very rare to notice ethnic mix.

PHASE IV

Direct observations

LOVING

a research project by
Daiana Ristanova

“Most importantly love
like it’s the only thing you know how
at the end of the day all this
means nothing
this page
where you’re sitting
your degree
your job
the money
nothing even matters
except love and human connection
who you loved
and how deeply you loved them
how you touched the people around you
and how much you gave them”

Rupi Kaur, Milk and Honey

















































PHASE IV

Direct observations

MEETING SOMEONE

a research project by
Daiana Ristanova

“If you have carefully examined hundred people you met in your life journey, it means that you have read hundred different books! Every person you know is a book; world is full of walking books; some are boring, some are marvellous, some are weak, some are powerful, but they are all useful because they all carry different experiences of different paths.”

Mehmet Murat ildan

























































PHASE IV

Direct observations

PLAYING

a research project by
Daiana Ristanova

Urban Architecture graduation studio | TU Delft

“The boy planted his hands on his hips and a broad smile lit his face. “My name’s Peter. Can I play too?”

Brom, The Child Thief

























































PHASE IV

Direct observations

WAITING

a research project by
Daiana Ristanova

“Are you an habitual “waiter”? How much of your life do you spend waiting? What I call “small-scale waiting” is waiting in line at the post office, in a traffic jam, at the airport, or waiting for someone to arrive, to finish work, and so on. “Large-scale waiting” is waiting for the next vacation, for a better job, for the children to grow up, for a truly meaningful relationship, for success, to make money, to be important, to become enlightened. It is not uncommon for people to spend their whole life waiting for something.

Waiting is a state of mind. With every kind of waiting, you unconsciously create inner conflict between your here and now, and the projected future, where you want to be.”

Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*

























































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a research project by
Daiana Ristanova

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Place du Conseil, Cureghem, Belgium, personal photo

