Cities of the Future: Societal by Nature

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City of the Future Graduation Lab

Experiences in Multidisciplinary Education

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City of the Future Graduation Lab: Experiences in Multidisciplinary Education

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As part of their graduation projects, some parts of the texts written by the former students can be found in the repository of the TU Delft.

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Cities of the Future: Societal by Nature

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Cities and their challenges are societal by nature because cities are creations of humanity, and thus when faced with the question of what will be the future of our cities, this implies three aspects:

First, there will be no single mind able to produce and envision answers alone. At least not in isolation, nor behind the desk. Aware of this, when designing for the city of the future today, we are informing ourselves in multiple ways and on different levels. Thanks to digitalisation, we have not only the availability of a million sources on a topic or place online, but we also have spatially near real-time insight. We can trace and track virtually every person, represented by those people sharing their activity patterns and likes, we can experience situations in simulated models, and we can easily reach out to local experts and street-wise citizens to know more. We have to keep in touch with the world around us. Most directly, sensing changes in public life within the urban fabric *ut ubi est* forecasts what will be next best. That is to say, the ongoing change is best recognisable through public space, and often in greater detail... if conditions remain the same.

Second, from a multidisciplinary–even interdisciplinary–point of perspective, we see more at all levels of detail. Professionals represent different views on societal challenges and interrelating this viewpoint help to find better and more accurate answers. This may have a bigger societal impact, as we can coordinate socio-spatial intervention strategies in constellation with others. We see, for instance, where people continue to rely on car transit out of socio-spatial necessity generated by the urban condition, architectural programme, infrastructural design, and logistic systems. It contrasts urban areas where people are able to use public transport or shift to sharing vehicles and making use of other mobility services. A different multidisciplinary perspective may help to recognise and locate where for example particulate matter by e.g. urban and architectural design is reduced in contrast to areas where heavy traffic and industry affect community health issues through pollution. We also would challenge the lack of public space quality in dense areas or social potentials in developing areas.

Thus, from these well-informed multiple disciplinary angles, thirdly, we want to design for better futures. In the cases like the examples given, unjust differences may desire an alteration of the forecasts. While designing for the mobility transition, the health transition, or e.g. the material, energy, or demographic transitions, the aim for better liveability for all people and sustainability of urban life comes along. Thus, city-making in times of big transitions is societal by nature. We design for society. Hence, by means of design, we aim for a better future for the urban population, interconnected to the peri-urban, *urbinum*, rural, and all *orbi*. We keep everything together and give everyone a place. Inclusivity, facing diversity, inequality, and equity, is thus both a premise as well as given.

Our perspective on what may be the *città ideale* on a misty ever-changing time-horizon has become multi-perspective *everyday urbanism*,[1] in which the ugly and ordinary at "the meeting of interior and exterior forces"[2] bring professionals and people together with respect to differences. Still, whereas, we still aim for better societies in a kind of Corbusian premise of designing *the city of to-morrow and its planning* (1929)[3] on the base of the *ville contemporaine* (1922),[4] the professional mind shift is enormous. Societal reasoning on future cities has become the inverse of what it once was. It is not so much different in the intent. This hardly changed. Clearly, for instance, the objectives of the ground-breaking Dutch design research *Stad van de Toekomst, De Toekomst der Stad* led by Alexander Bos (1946)[5] are not so contrasting in comparison to our own contemporary *Stad van de Toekomst / City of the Future* design research study (since 2016).[6] The past guiding paradigm, the neighbourhood model or so-called *wijk-gedachte*, has merely evolved into a new paradigm based upon hybridity, dynamic social networks, and day-to-day experience and perception of public space.[7] To a much greater extent, its seminal contrast lies in the mirroring image of the Modern *starchitect*, pretending to have all the answers and glamorously guiding society to the next level. This does not give any effective design results anymore at the present. Even so, this professional positioning, which is still alive in some minds, appears to be misleading and falsifying the complexity of reality today. In current times when growth, globalisation and universality are facing its limits, we better investigate the local conditions, without losing the bigger picture. Simply following complexity theory, we navigate in a dynamic, sometimes maybe chaotic, society and recognise the potential of (re)design of specific areas in the city. As a consequence, designers and engineers operate each time in different but place-related social networks and their projects are approached multidisciplinary, while other professionals and locals co-create along. Together we can know and do more in the city of the future.

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1. Chase; Crawford; Kaliski, 1999
2. Venturi, 1966
3. Corbusier, 1929
4. Corbusier, 1922
5. Bos et al., 1946
6. Berkers; de Boer; Hinterleitner, et al., 2019
7. Graham & McFarlane, 2014