Changing perceptions on the role of academic research in urbanism education:

understanding the role of academic research in an area of design and planning practice

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What is urbanism?
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‘Urbanism’ can describe various types of understandings and professional qualifications to be found in continental Europe, Latin America and Asia with an emphasis on the design and management of the built environment.
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Professional and academic traditions expressed in the word ‘Urbanism’ as used in the Netherlands, for instance, are different from the spatial planning or urban design traditions prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon world.
Urbanism = Stedenbouw?

- There is a particular understanding of the discipline in the Netherlands, which is not always communicable to outsiders

- partly because practices are so ingrained that they become ‘invisible’ (those performing them are not aware they are different or notable)

- partly because those practices are the result of very specific societal practices which do not translate easily to other contexts.
Where do students come from?

16 different countries (2010)
Where do students come from?

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Where do students come from?

Per world region
Where do students come from?
Per world region

- East Asia: 23%
- Asia: 4%
- N America: 2%
- S America: 2%
- East Europe: 7%
- West Europe: 6%

NL: 56%
Wannabes

At the end of the masters course, I will be:
Wannabes

At the end of the masters course, I will be:

- student; 4%
- still myself; 2%
- stedenbouwkundige; 2%
- researcher designer; 2%
- planner + designer; 6%
- planner; 10%
- urban architect; 2%
- urbanist; 12%
- urbanist + researcher; 2%
- academic; 4%
- architect; 2%
- designer; 2%
- designer + developer; 2%
- designer + researcher; 4%
- developer; 4%
- don't know yet; 6%

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Wannabe (per area)
The “nature’ of urbanism
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The “nature’ of urbanism

- The stretched scope of urbanism, with its large range of inputs drawn from various disciplines, seems to create confusion about the nature and the form of an education in ‘urbanism’ at TU Delft (a technical university).
- We verify the existence of several communities of practice who value practice and theory differently.
- The development of a course in Urbanism (including both spatial planning and urban design as essential elements) has a high degree of idiosyncrasy (what we call an isolationist position).
An isolationist position

an isolationist position in academia promotes the view that a community or individuals doing research can establish their own parameters of assessment, without reference to other communities in academia.
As opposed to...

A situated position
Why is this a problem?

The lack of shared criteria with other disciplines makes it difficult to articulate an academic model of knowledge that reconciles values hold by the professional practice and values hold by the academic community.
The main questions
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How to conciliate the requirements of academic research with the needs of design and planning practices?
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If so, how do they relate to more traditional ways of doing research in the social and physical sciences?
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An approach based on the physical sciences?
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The ‘practical’ (or applied) approach would have, in a technical university, affiliations with the paradigms in operation in the physical sciences (especially engineering, in the Dutch tradition).
Design Practice

But urban design practice is not only relative to a technical world view, and urbanism also includes elements of planning, the arts, and elements of pure expression, etc.
The nature of the problem has changed

However, because the understanding of the nature of the problem has changed in the last few decades*, a purely technical or designerly approach based on the physical sciences or on the arts only is no longer possible or desirable in urbanism.

*the understanding of the complexity of spatial organisation of human activity over space, how and why to intervene
Ambivalence between practice & research

Other research paradigms have been incorporated in order to comply with the complexity of the problem, constituting a network of knowledge that is permanently changing.

There are new tools, new disciplines being incorporated and new problems to be faced.
An emphasis on design
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Design is about ‘problem solving’...But what about the ‘problem finding’?
An emphasis on research
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An emphasis on research DOES NOT EXCLUDE DESIGN (PRACTICE), but the ROLE OF DESIGN can be understood differently when there is a need to communicate with other disciplines.
Why make it more ‘academic’?

The necessity of academicization arises, in our context, from the perception that a practical education on design skills alone is insufficient to deal with the broader task at hand:

understanding the context, the role and wishes of stake-holders and the socio-political forces that ultimately produce ‘real world’ space.
What IS the contribution of design for an education in urbanism?

If design wants to claim a special role in an urbanism education, it needs to clarify how it contributes to the outputs in the course and how it is part of a sound methodological trajectory. Basic requirements have to be agreed upon.
The Question

This contribution could be clarified by asking questions such as:

What would you *not* be able to communicate if you did *not* design?

What would you *not* be able to *answer* if you did *not* do traditional academic research?

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Eight Tentative Criteria

Four ‘requirements’ of academic research (that apply to all disciplines)

Four ‘issues’ in areas of creative practice (discipline specific)
Generic Criteria for any academic pursuit
Generic Criteria for any academic pursuit

Question
Generic Criteria for any academic pursuit

Question

Answer
Generic Criteria for any academic pursuit

- Question
- Answer
- Methods
Generic Criteria for any academic pursuit

Question  Answer

Methods

Audience

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Generic Criteria for any academic pursuit

- Question
- Answer
- Methods
- Audience
Generic Criteria for any academic pursuit

Question  Answer  Methods  Audience

Knowledge
Discipline Specific Issues
Discipline Specific Issues

Role of Text and Image
Discipline Specific Issues

Role of Text and Image

Relationship of Form and Content
Discipline Specific Issues

Role of Text and Image

Relationship of Form and Content

Function of Rhetoric
Discipline Specific Issues

Role of Text and Image

Relationship of Form and Content

Function of Rhetoric

Manifestation of Experience
Role of Text and Image

1.5 Vision: Hong Kong-Shenzhen megapolis in 2047

According to the political vision, Shenzhen and Hong Kong were going to be further integrated. In 2047, since the implementation of Hong Kong will be accomplished. This situation brings the connectivity to provide the greater connectivity in the megacity. Shenzhen City will be connected to other cities to collaborate with Hong Kong. It means a dual core of urban and regional development of the megacity and a great level quality. Urban development and sustainable development among Shenzhen Mega City and Hong Kong in the south.
Relationship form and content
Function of rhetoric
Rhetoric

We use rhetoric as constituting things through language', rather than 'being a persuasive orator'.

Rhetoric refers to the impact that language has on what one can and cannot think (Wittgenstein 1971).

This means that how something is said, and indeed saying anything at all, begins to direct thoughts in a particular way.
This seems to be an objection of many designers, as they feel the potential for description, argumentation and outcome in the visual realm may be compromised by speaking, because these aspects of creation do not necessarily share the linear structure of language, for example (Lin and Biggs 2006).
Rhetoric?

Although this is an important objection, it does not mean that the work has to be left to speak for itself, because of aspects related to knowledge formation, inter-communicability and transmission. Academic knowledge is necessarily intersubjective.
Manifestation of experience
Manifestation of experience

Designers often consider manifestation of experience as one of the most important contribution of the object and that it therefore has an essential role in the outcome of urban design.

However, experience is a problematic component in research because of its philosophical subjectivity, by which we mean that it relates to the individual's personal experience.

What is experiential is first-person, and therefore non-transferable to other people. The question is, how to make it so?
Our guiding principles

1. The course must seek a situated position of urbanism studies in academia, not an isolationist position.

In other words, studies in urbanism must make reference to and take up parameters from other areas of knowledge and not only self arrogate its own parameters (e.g. Only designers understand designs, etc)

This is to avoid an inward-looking world view, disconnected from other disciplines and from other areas of knowledge dealing with the build environment.

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Our guiding principles

2. The emphasis of the course is on communication and communicative reasoning.

Design has a special and unique role here, different from textual communication.

However, both text and image need to converge and complement each other.
3. The emphasis on communication goes hand in hand with ideas on academic research: “a systematic process of collecting and analysing information to increase our understanding of the phenomenon under study. It is the function of the researcher to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and to communicate that understanding to others”, or in other words to add to the existing body of knowledge. (http://wps.prenhall.com/)
Our guiding principles

To which we can add the role of design research, which is propositional (imagining and materialising future possibilities in spatial/geographical realities).
Our guiding principles

- However, in our opinion, studio based learning alone is not enough because studio work generally does not guide students in doing situated research which can have relevance in the real world.
Our guiding principles

4. These ideas point at the role of research and design as eminently interactive/inter-subjective activities, where one needs to build up conclusions in communication with others but also in communication with a wider community of people studying, building, financing and living in cities.
The graduation year

The Graduation year is composed by three main courses:

1. Research and Design Studios (with their own sub-courses)
2. Methodology (Thesis plan)
3. Theory (theoretical Review paper)
Design and Research Studios former Output

PowerPoint presentation + Report

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Design and Research Studios Output: Thesis Report

changing economies
urban restructuring of the city of Mumbai in the context of changing economic conditions

Graduation Project Report
May 2000

image credits: Ashangir Shrabor; Ganesh festival celebrations at Chowpatty Beach Mumbai
Methodology Course Output: Research and design proposal

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Eroded public spaces: Impacts on public space by rapid socio-economic transformations in Eastern Europe.
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Abstract — This paper will review the literature regarding to socio-economic changes on public spaces in Eastern European countries after the fall of USSR. It covers the topics of privatization, commercialization, virtualization and mobilization that are the main process affecting the use of public space. Public space is the main focus of this paper and the main question to be answered is how public space was impacted and changed by rapid socio-economic transformations in Eastern Europe. Therefore this paper investigates the way society have changed and the way new elements which were introduced, such as car and virtual networks, after the fall of Soviet Union affect the behaviour and life style of the people which resulted how differently people started to use public space. Literature review on these elements and aspects will give an overview and suggestions how the public space is used and what are the threats and negative elements created by the processes of transformation that can be avoided or solved in later graduation project stages.

Key words – Public space, urban life, street vitality, meeting place, shifted centralities, Eastern Europe, urban society, privatization, car culture, commercialization

1 Introduction
This paper will explore the reasons why public space have changed and is still changing in state of transition from socialism system to capitalism one in Eastern European countries after the fall of USSR. Socialist cities had strict rules on how the public space had to be used and how society had to look like and be shaped. The use of public space was not only different in physical characteristics from the Western cities but also it was different how society was seeing it and using it. A sudden change after the fall of USSR led to number of interpretations and unplanned and chaotic changes in the way people were using public space. Soon after former limitations of public realms, public opinion and public politics in Soviet Union society

However ‘western culture’ didn’t bring only wealth and life quality, but on contrary it resulted in number of negative effects which are expressed in the way people are using public space. This paper will cover main reasons of the public space to be changing. Literature review will help to identify the changes and the affects on public space. The main question to be answered with this paper is how public space was impacted and changed by rapid socio-economic transformations in Eastern European countries.

This paper will start investigating the privatization of land together with privatization of former state economic activities was provoked by the need of relaying of your own. It resulted in physical
Eroded public spaces: Impacts on public space by socio-economic transformations in Eastern Europe.

Tadas Jonauskis

away from physical space to a virtual. Increased mobility created separation of the people from each other and segregated areas which are mono-functional and pedestrian unfriendly and car oriented. In the end we can conclude that cities started to change from open and collective to closed and individual cities. It changed from open city in terms of open and well accessible public space to a closed city in terms of privately owned and fenced city. Accordingly collective way of living was changed to a private ‘western lifestyle’ with the importance if individual rather than society as such.

To sum up, public space was important tool to create collective communist society but now it is not used and not understood as a tool to create and promote social interactions but in opposite it is resulted to be used as a tool to separate and alienate people and create the city for individualities.

10 Recommendations

The main intention of this paper is to determine the processes that are affecting the use of public space after the fall of USSR in Eastern European countries. It showed the way people are using public space under new social and economic conditions and how public space has changed in past couple decades. This given overview will give literature based argumentation for further site specific empirical research and will play a theoretical underpinning role in graduation project.

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How much design is design in a research by design education?
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Susan Raju’s thesis report (grade 9):
How much design is design in a research by design education?

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Susan Raju’s thesis report (grade 9):

100 pages
How much design is design in a research by design education?

Susan Raju’s thesis report (grade 9):

- 100 pages
- 70 pages of analysis

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- Susan Raju’s thesis report (grade 9):
  - 100 pages
  - 70 pages of analysis
  - 30 pages of design and strategy proposal

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How much design is design in a research by design education?

Susan Raju’s thesis report (grade 9):

- 100 pages
- 70 pages of analysis
- 30 pages of design and strategy proposal
- 19 pages with original drawings
Thank you for your comments

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