Problem statement
In the Hybrid Buildings graduation studio the assignment is set to fill gaps in the urban structure, to search for missing links and to try to bridge these by subtle architectural interventions. These missing links do not necessarily have to be physical, but might be programmatic or social. Architects can fulfil a key role in the development of public space in the city, by applying this approach. In the project area Amsterdam east a patchwork of mono functional fragments is found, the challenge is to identify malfunctioning spots and to provide fitting solutions for those locations. In order to find potential locations for architectural interventions, the area is carefully studied in order to define encounter spots in the city.

Goal
Creating a greater sense of community among the inhabitants of the Amsterdam East area by establishing valuable encounters between different people. These encounters can take place in a location where flows of people meet one another; at this location an architectural intervention with a mainly public and communal character could have a positive effect on the interaction between people whom would otherwise interact to a much lesser extent.

Process
Method description
Studying flows of people from a praxeological approach is appropriate in given location, as many people pass through by numerous means of transportation. Rather than having a top-down approach towards developments in the urban fabric, by designing a master plan for an great area as if one were sitting in an helicopter, designing while riding a bike, walking through the streets, sitting in a train or driving a car will lead to a far more user-friendly approach towards new city developments.

Literature and general practical preference
This phenomenological approach can also be found in the works of Gordon Cullen, like his 1961’s Townscape, in which he shows really evident sketches, which show his view on the city following specified routes through it. By showing the perception of the designs and showing the impact from a user’s point of view, he manages to visually found the argumentations for his recommendations.

One interesting site in the study area of Amsterdam east, where many different encounters take place, is right next to train and metro tracks that are located on an overpass over the site. In the tradition of Alison Smithson, who perceived her surroundings from behind the steering wheel of a Citroën DS in
As in DS, an eye on the road, the perception of the future project while passing by in the train is very important in this case. Furthermore the idea of the user-made city is viewed as a durable alternative for the large-scale master-plan approach for area development. Urhahn Design’s *The Spontaneous City* and the bottom-up approach of for instance the Urban Think Tank are guiding references for the development direction of the chosen location.

**Figure 1** Chosen project location

**Reflection**

**Relevance**

The project investigates the borders of this new strategy for city development, in which the initiative for the improvement of the living environment is given back to the users themselves for a large extent. There of course have to be some guiding principles and it certainly does not mean the role of the designer is diminished. As a director of an improvisational stage play needs to anticipate on as much as possible outcomes of specific starting points, the architect could do the same for urban development. The architect therefor needs to define these starting points, opening up possibilities for user’s initiatives in the near future, without exactly defining the complete result. This way the design would have to have a great flexibility as well. How exuberant and vibrant city-life could become as a result!

**Final design, no finished project**

The whole idea of the project has been that the site should become a meeting place for many different kinds of people. That these encounters would lead to an exuberant and vibrant city-life, which evokes new (and unpredictable) demands by the users. The hope for this *final* design therefor is, that it is not finished at all, that the flexibility that it possesses will leave room for exciting future expansions on the project.

In the design there are different strategies that play a vital role in the sustainable development of the site. First of which is analysing the flows of people and see how new relationships might lead to valuable public space. After this the new public space could be defined and the next strategy could be put to use, focus on the perception of the users of the space. This perception is what makes people want to stay or leave a location, and it therefor plays a key part in making public space that ‘works’. In the design process this lead to a historical stocktaking of the potentialities of the site, old pictures, city maps and building plans were studied, in order to get to the core potential of the location.
The site has become underused over the years, since it is perceived as being unattractive because of the proximity of trains and cars and the noise that this leads to. Nevertheless, the location in the city and the fact that the surrounding areas are being developed into new residential and office blocks, leads to the conclusion that the potential is definitely there. It just has to be shown to people.

In order to showcase the potential of this – or any other underused – space, one has to diminish the negative aspects of the space and enhance the positive aspects. A great aspect of the site that is negatively perceived, are the dark under passages that are used as storage boxes currently. The true essence of the portal structures however is that of a passageway from one side to the other, in the original plans for the railway bridges these structures even are called ‘under passages’ and not storage
units. This lack of activity on the west-border of the project location is what completely diminishes the perception of the true potential of the site. In the design 4 of these storage boxes are transformed into passages, two for cyclists and two for pedestrians. This opens up the space towards the other side of the train tracks, thus creating a connection between two previously separated – and very different – fragments of Amsterdam East.

The public space forms a triangular square that opens from the entrance through the passages towards the water on the south side. But making the connection is not enough, in order to establish public space in which people interact with each other in new ways, they have to stay in the location. Activity needs to be added to the equation. In order to activate the square the 6 storage boxes on the west side of the square, are redesigned to become workshop spaces for innovative, creative enterprises. These 6 under passages are fitted with moveable canopies, which can be wheeled out in summer and used as exhibition space, but when they are retracted they can function as thermally closed working spaces in winter.

Another big disadvantage of the site is the lack of proper parking facilities, when adding program on this site there will be too little and therefore a parking garage will be realised below the square.
The strong triangular gesture of the square is currently diminished by the lack of proper building mass on the north east border of the site. On this side a multifunctional building block of 4 storeys is designed, providing the square with a well defined border, in which activity is showcased in the form of the extension of the pre-existing café-restaurant *De Omval*, a grand public stair that leads up to a roof terrace and functions as amphitheatre and retail spaces in the plinth. Above that there is a multiplicity of different housing typologies, which brings together students, families and starters into a collective dwelling area.

On the square a collective space is created for these inhabitants of the building block, on which a raised plant holder is a shaping element that emphasizes the routes over the square and welcomes collective urban gardening.

*Figure 5* Relationships between private, collective and public play a key role in the design

The goal to bring together different kinds of people and establish interesting interactions is strived for in bringing together the different housing typologies in one building, but also in moulding the exterior space and the zones in between. The collective spaces of the project play an important role in the project, being a true celebration of interaction between people.