Deconstructing and Reconstructing Design Languages in Public Space Transformations: A Creative Method for Inclusive Design

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Abstract

This paper investigates how different design languages are inclusive and how they can enter into fruitful dialogue about the future transformation of contested urban areas. To that end, it puts forward a method allowing urban designers and planners to deconstruct different designs targeting the urban area in question and reconstruct them into a more inclusive design. The method was developed in a workshop setting confronting academic, municipal, civic and artistic designs for the Oeverlanden in Amsterdam. Results show the importance of a shared visual language, participation and the inclusion of social aspects beyond spatial development targets.

Keywords

design languages; visualisation; deconstruction; reconstruction; inclusive design

Introduction

Urban transformation processes feature a variety of designs, such as strategic plans and maps, but also simulations and visual narratives, as well as artist impressions and art installations. By creating these types of design objects, the designers of the urban environment strive to envision ‘better places’ that may be realized in the future. Urban design therefore requires to critically rethink expectations based on past experience, and to construct alternative projections of the future (Schön 1983; Cork et al. 2023). This raises the discussion about the notion of a ‘good place’ since there are normative aspects involved (Foroughmand Araabi 2016), as well as a number of important questions: What types of designs are needed? How should the designer facilitate the process of urban transformation and with whom? Should designs be created and implemented with a top-down or participatory approach (de Jorge-Huertas and de Jorge-Moreno 2022)? The well-known Moses-Jacobs debate in New York at the end of the nineteen-sixties is exemplary in this respect. In this debate on whether or not to build on a greater diversity of residents’ voices, Jane Jacobs (1961) resisted the master plan of Robert Moses for the Lower Manhattan Expressway—a 10-lane elevated highway to cut through SoHo and Little Italy—and proposed to plan the city with its inhabitants and build on their daily experiences. After more than half decade, this debate is still central to urban transformations worldwide and efforts to

formalise bottom-up design processes, as in the new Dutch Environmental Law in force since 1 January 2024, are still ongoing.

Reflecting this societal context, urban design literature discusses the role of non-professional urban designs and alternative urban designs that citizens' or others may come up with (see, e.g., Healey 2018; Forester 1988; Chapters 6 and 7 in Carmona 2021). When citizens or others oppose to the designs proposed by professional urban planners or designers, like in the Moses-Jacobs case, they may also start envisioning ways to make the area a better place. This may take shapes that are different from professional urban designs. Different styles, materials, but also different future narratives about the improvements of the area may be expressed. As such, when urban areas are being redeveloped, different types of urban design may start to compete about what is 'a good place'. All of these designs adopt various languages for understanding and transforming urban areas. These are always normative and therefore not neutral: they include specific types of ideas, values, but also knowledge, and people. Therefore, planning and designing is a form of practical communicative action (Forester 1988) and can be a way of making sense together (Forester 1988, 119). At the same time, imagining different futures comes with hurdles, particularly when they are collective processes and people talk past each other. Then the question is what languages might encourage collective imaginary processes (Moore and Milkoreit 2020).

The role of material components in these different urban design languages has been receiving increasing attention (Hoffman 2013; McFarlane 2008). Particularly, when taking into account that urban space is constituted by technologies and infrastructures, these physical matters – materialities – play also a role in the urban designs for the better places in the future. With this focus, we pose the question: What is the role of the elements of visual and material aspects of design languages in the inclusion or exclusion of ideas, values and knowledge in urban transformation processes? We aim (1) to understand how different urban design languages are more or less inclusive in their representations of future possibilities for the transformation of an urban area, (2) to explore the discursive/deliberative space that may emerge through the languages to enter into fruitful dialogue about different types of futures for fringe areas in particular, and (3) to develop a method for urban planners that aims to better take into account the including and excluding work that different designs do.

We do so by looking at a specific case in Amsterdam, called the Oeverlanden, a typical urban fringe or peri-urban interface (Simon 2008) because there is little formally designed or planned and a lot is organized 'from below'. During times of economic recession over the past decades, municipalities often welcomed this form of organization for temporarily keeping areas lively and occupied, as ways of 'place-making'. The Oeverlanden area provides a space for a diverse range of activities such as allotment gardening, cycling, swimming, boating, surfing and fishing. Part of the Oeverlanden consists of a cruising zone for homosexuals. More recently the Oeverlanden area has been a topic of debate about densification between 2020-2025. The municipality billed the area as a development location as part of 'Koers 2025' a strategic plan in which the municipal government aims to have built 50,000 apartments by 2025 (Gemeente Amsterdam 2016). In 2021 it was decided that a large part of the area was to be further developed as a 'landschapspark' and that some parts of it would be redeveloped for housing (Gemeente Amsterdam 2021).

In what follows, we elaborate on how the visual language of urban design is or could be inclusive of different ideas, values and knowledge in urban transformation processes and set

our sense-making analytical framework. We then describe the methodology of our investigation in the Oeverlanden. Then, after reporting on the results of deconstruction and reconstruction, we discuss the broader implications of our findings for urban design practice and point out further research trajectories.

Inclusion and exclusion in urban design

There are multiple styles and forms of urban design, and they vary in the extent to which they have been made in participatory manners. All sorts of urban designs are not just 'form giving' but they are 'activities of making sense together' (Forester 1985, 14). Drawing, sketching, revising plans, all are done in relation to others. Hence, designing is always—next to the material and visual aspects—a way of making sense of, for example, an area in its current state but also of its dynamics and projected or imagined futures. Barry and colleagues (2023) have argued in favour of creative research if inclusion of multiple voices in imagining alternative futures is a genuine concern and transdisciplinary approaches are taken seriously. Urban designs are some form of developing feasible, desirable and imaginable futures. As Donald Schon argued (1983), designing requires to critically rethink expectations based on past experience.

Very often, some form of visualization or creation of objects are part of the urban design. It is the multi-modality (text, visual, materiality, sometimes even sensory experience) that is used by the producers to make sense, and to convey meaning. It is often assumed that these multi-modal forms are more powerful than only spoken or written words (Coleman 2010; Schapiro 1996; Entman 1991). With designing and sensemaking, it is inevitable that framing will take place: certain elements of a (desired) future are emphasized more than others (Entman 1991). For example, sketches and close-ups visually frame differently than maps or abstract pictures taken from a distance, and a sharp colorful picture carries another message than a black-and-white blurred image. In other words, their shape and form – their materiality adds a layer of meaning-making to written or spoken texts. In addition to their style and direct depictions, designs also have a connotative aspect: they evoke meanings that are different for different audiences. This meaning is an additional layer, beyond the type of design and what is *in* the design – it is the message, the narrative and even an ideology that it may convey (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011).

Through this sensemaking process and visual and textual framing that comes with the design practice, design(ers) include and exclude meanings during the practice of designing and also beyond when the design is a sense-making device in a broader planning processes. As such, we consider an urban design practice as an act of mediation and translation (Gomeh 2023) but also sensemaking: it is a process in which different meanings of an area are negotiated by the use of a specific visual and discursive language. Urban designs including visualizations, are not only reinterpreted but may in fact be edited, reworked and republished by their audiences (Schneider and Nocke 2014). During their 'travel', visualizations can be framed or reframed in new or contrasting ways, either through editing or by being placed in different contexts (van Beek et al. 2020). In this broadened sense, urban designs—including artist impressions, but also the designs put forward by citizens and artists in urban areas—aim to make sense of and visually and textually frame possible, desirable, and probable futures (De Jong 2012).

We distinguish the following three layers of sense-making in our investigation of design languages:

- A denotative language (the design “is” …) aims to represent a probable future and is building on data and projections. Based on as accurate as possible descriptions (technical, factual, analytical), they project possible futures. However, these projections often struggle to consider uncertainties – and complex unthinkable courses of the future. we include here the stylistic-semiotic aspect.
- A connotative/normative language (the public space “should be” …) aims to represent what is desirable in the future. Often three or four desirable futures are created in decision-making/planning processes.
- A creative language that may be more inclusive (the design opens up new ways of thinking)

Materials and methods

The case the Oeverlanden had been selected to better understand how different types of urban design, and particularly their visual aspects (what they represent, mean, and what work they do) enable or hinder conversations about the area. The case is interesting as it is an area at the fringes of the city and not planned for in a top down way so far. The area became subject to a planning discussion in Amsterdam in which densification was considered necessary. The area in its state (and currently, 2023) has many different functions and users. We also had long-standing working relations with people from the area and the municipality and thus were able to organize workshops in which they collaborated in the analysis of four different designs, and reconstruction of two new designs.

Data collection and analysis

For the set-up of qualitative data collection in the workshop, we invited six designers, with different stakes and knowledge in the design of the Oeverlanden area, to present four different types of designs: an artistic design (Figure 1), an academic design (Figure 2), a municipal plan (Figure 3), and a civic plan (Figure 4). Although each of the designers presented a mix of different elements from the future-design languages identified above, they represented considerable differences, especially between the academic and municipal designs, on the one hand, and the civic and artistic designs, on the other. The artistic design, in particular, was considerably different from the other designs, as it focused on a much smaller scale and it was more tactical and bottom-up as opposed to the strategic character of the other designs. During the workshop, the participants were divided into two groups and each group was joined by one additional researcher and one facilitator.

Figure 1 **Artistic design** ‘Bospont’ Artistic design by Erik Hobijn. Photo by Jean-Pierre Jans. The figure depicts the ‘Bospont’, described by the artist as “a forest ferry, actually […] a floating bicycle path. When it’s on the shore, it’s an invisible part of the green surrounding. Use your phone, call and it will show up. A ferry island without a captain, it’s self-propelled and self-steering, just like a Google car, but in the water”. This ferry should bridge the fringe area with the Amsterdamse Bos – a formal recreational/nature area.

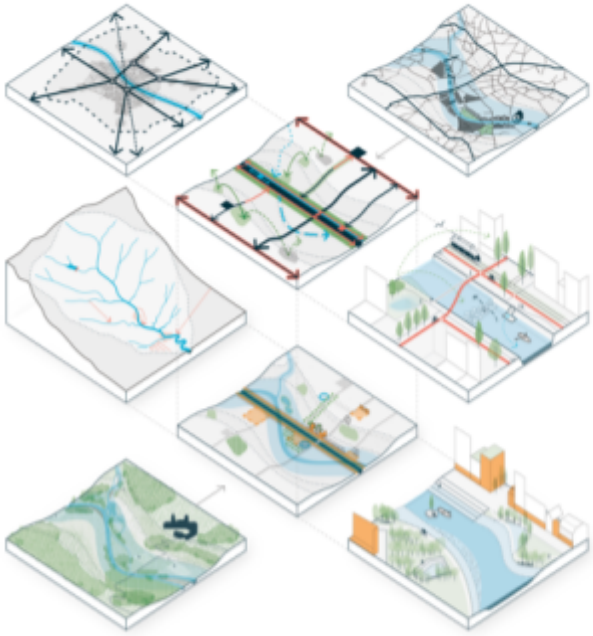

Figure 2 **Academic design** (Forgaci, 2018)

The academic design is a set of design instruments communicated visually in a diagram. The design instruments address social-ecologically integrated urban riverfronts and were previously applied to the case of De Oeverlanden in an international design workshop for students, young researchers and young professionals meant to explore the integration potentials of the area through design.

Figure 3 Municipal design (source structuur visie Zef Hemel, year) The figure depicts the densification plan of Amsterdam in two different scenarios. This is one of the images presented by the municipal designer as a development framework driving other aspects of city planning like public space quality.

Figure 4 Civic design – the Anthropocene (Koru Project 2018, Saris & Sijmons 2018) The foundation Nieuwe Meer developed a future design of the Oeverlanden and the bigger Nieuwe Meer area in which the Anthropocene area is celebrated, meaning that the 'boundaries between culture and nature are dissolving' and that in the design we need to take into account the rethinking of the human relation to planet earth

Collaborative analysis (sense-making) of the designs

In the first half of the day, a sense-making session called deconstruction, each designer presented a visual example of their work and reflected on it with the rest of the group by filling in an empty poster with six questions: What is it? What is in it? What does it mean to you? What does it mean to others? What does it exclude? What would you add/change? (Figure 5, left). The purpose of the sense-making was to identify and examine the denotative, connotative and inclusion language elements of the four design approaches. We used posters and sticky notes (Figure 5, right), photos, videos, as well as observation notes on the discussions surrounding each object to collect the data. The sticky notes were pre-coded with colours and letters so that each object presented in the deconstruction had a colour assigned and each person involved in the deconstruction was identified with a letter identifier. The presenters could also answer the questions about the objects they had brought to the discussion. After the six questions were answered and sticky notes were added to the six outer sections of the poster accordingly, the participants agreed collectively on a selection of the most important sticky notes and placed them in the middle circle of the poster. The selected sticky notes from each poster were used as input in the reconstruction phase.

In the afternoon, we used the insights from the sense-making session to actively combine the different designs for the future of the Oeverlanden fringe area in a collaborative designing session. This second part of the workshop was called reconstruction (Kuitenbrouwer 2018).

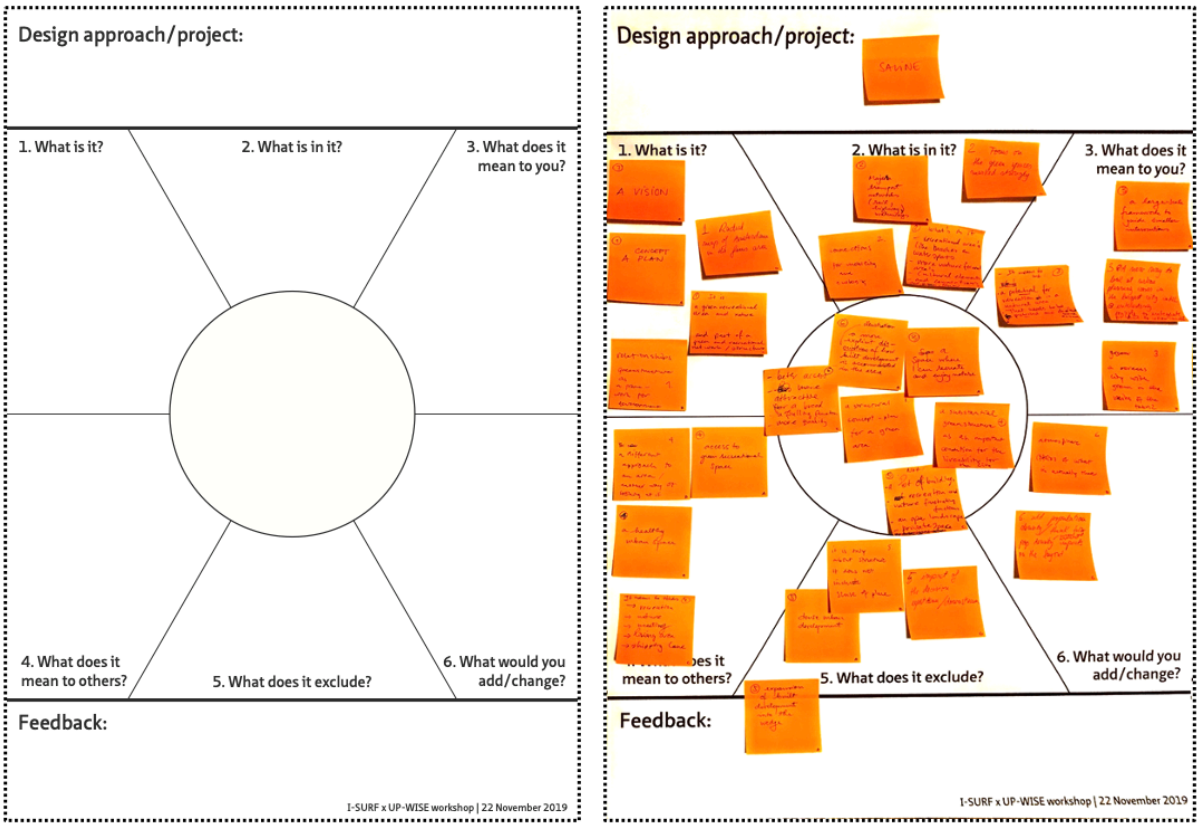

Figure 5 Posters used for sensemaking in the deconstruction phase of the workshop.

Coding by the researchers of the sensemaking

In order to identify different visual-linguistic elements in each design as made sense of in the collaborative part, we conducted a qualitative data analysis (QDA) in which we coded the content of the posters and observation notes. The QDA was carried out in the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti, versions 8.4.4 (Mac) and 8.4.24 (Windows), (Friese 2019) using a Straussian coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 as cited in Bryman 2016), i.e., a three-step process consisting of open, axial and selective coding meant to gradually develop higher-level concepts emerging from the data. The higher level code categories were: denotative, connotative, and inclusive as defined in the initial stage. The coding process was carried out by three coders. In the initial coding, two researchers coded four posters each; this way, two posters were coded by both coders. A third coder was involved to finalise the coding process. The third coder was not involved in the data collection process. Any updates on the initial codes were agreed upon by all coders.

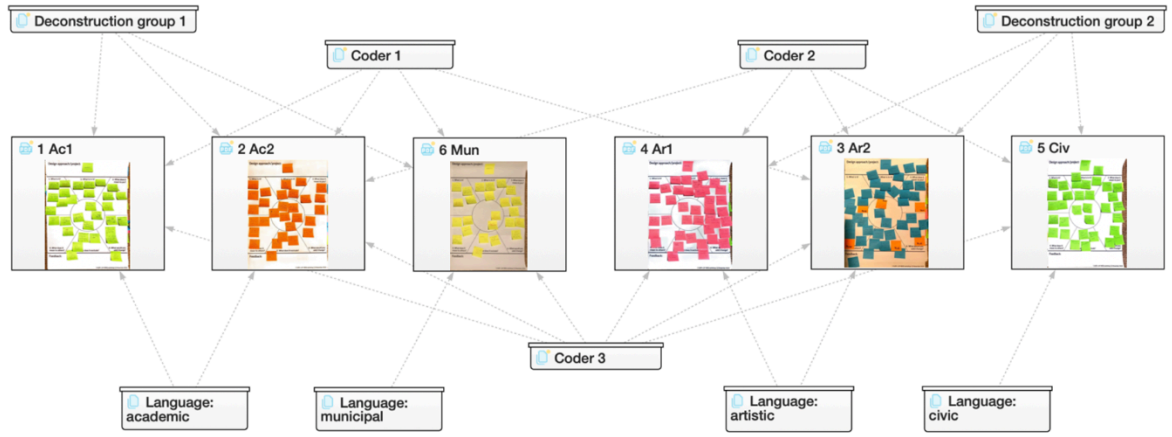

Figure 6 Assignment of designs to deconstruction groups and of coders in the coding process.

Results

We will first present the results of the deconstruction session, the participants tried to make sense of what was shown in the presented designs, and in the reconstruction session, we collaboratively tried to integrate different elements from each design into a new design.

Deconstruction

What is (in) the design

When discussing the question of what the design *is*, participants started by identifying what type of visual it is. The designs were described as a plan (municipal design), a diagram (academic design), or, on a more abstract level, as a concept (artistic design), tool (academic design) or process (civic design). When reflecting on what *is in* the design (the denotative level), the participants described what they thought was the content of the object. For example, the municipal design was interpreted as a "depiction of different goals for different functions in the city", while the artistic design was a "floating reedland".

Regarding the question ‘what is (in) the design’, most participants perceived **the academic design as a method** for experimenting, or for imagining the future. The design was characterised as *integrating* different ways of seeing, *connecting* the different elements in the Oeverlanden area, *drawing attention* to a topic that thus far received less attention, or

visualising the different recognized elements in the area. Participants perceived **the civic design as a small-scale process design** in which community self-organisation is important. This design highlights the need for top-down conditions to *leave more room for bottom-up expression* and to *acknowledge the time and effort spent by the community* in the process. **The municipal design was seen as being driven by a theme**: *public space guiding urban development* as a common ground for inhabitants as visitors. The content of **the artistic design was described as specific and innovative** in its response to *community needs* (a crossing over the Nieuwe Meer) and *societal challenges* (raising awareness about anthropogenic climate change).

Overall, the responses to the first two questions show different emphases in the different designs. **The academic design** is directed at the level of urban policy and planning combining different types of development targets of ecological, social and economic nature on multiple scales. **The municipal and civic designs** put more emphasis on a specific location or possible spatial interventions on a city and neighbourhood scale, respectively. **The artistic design** is quite isolated and niche by its size and reach, focusing on a very specific local intervention, a movable floating object that can function as a bridge between the Oeverlanden and the Amsterdamse Bos, which also fosters the introduction of different plants and a possible function of these plants for water purification.

What does the design mean to you/others

The connotative meaning of each of the designs was explored with Questions 3 “What does it mean for you?” and Question 4 “What does it mean for others?”

The responses of participants to Question 3 about each of the designs was that they are ways of discovering, learning, and understanding. **The academic design** was mostly considered a tool that is like "a bridge" meant to facilitate interaction with and between different stakeholders and to put together different "pieces of [the urban development] puzzle". **The municipal design** was mostly understood as a manifestation of the "goals that the city decided to work towards", mainly to "mitigate the threats of [built] development" and to ensure that there is enough space for recreation, water management, food production and nature. Interpretations of what **the civic design** means were more abstract and were mostly focused on "awareness of how [fast or long] processes take place" and to what extent "people are involved in the long term". **The artistic design** was considered "inspiring", prompting "local involvement", and awareness-raising of the challenges of the Anthropocene and the potential of nature-inclusive design.

When asked “What does it mean for others?”, many participants mentioned specific places/activities, such as the presence of meeting places (municipal design) or access to a green recreational space (academic and municipal design). Others indicated that the design informs and raises awareness (academic design), prompts participation (artistic design), or helps to create an image of a place (civic design). Together, answers to Question 4 highlight that the different designs are meant to raise awareness and stimulate engagement, hinting at the agency of a design to bring together the stakeholders involved in an urban transformation. Some responses questioned the definition of “others” and indicated that the workshop participants had difficulties with clearly differentiating between what the design means to them and others. As a result, there were overlaps between the answers to the two questions.

A number of agreements and disagreements can be observed in the answers of the workshop participants. The meaning of **the academic design** to others was understood in multiple ways. While the designer intended to inform people (awareness-raising, decision-support), others interpreted it as an implementable design (outcome) that promotes healthy urban environments with an ecological value, e.g., through greening, or with a social value, e.g., by creating diverse public spaces. **The municipal design** provides information for stakeholders involved in the design and provides quality public space for the citizens. However, it does not necessarily or explicitly engage the users in the development process. On the other hand, **the artistic design** prompts collaboration with experts/academia and engages locals or local initiatives either by providing a common image/future to all or through experiments in working together with them. **The civic design** is focused on getting the project realised in a technical/complex way which is not communicated in a way that is understandable by all.

What does it exclude and should include

In response to the question “What does it exclude?” (Question 5), most participants referred to participation, social aspects, and communication in the presented approaches. Some responses also indicated the lack of a specific aspect of a design. For instance, the **academic design** was considered to omit mobility and built density while the **municipal design** was perceived as lacking adaptability. The **civic design** lacked consideration of environmental aspects such as noise and larger plans including "the swallowing of the area by the South Axis". The **artistic design** was considered exclusive of a "modernist approach", the "market model" and "large-scale production". Mirroring to a large extent what was pointed out as excluded, responses to Question 6 “What would you add/change?” included participation, involvement of more stakeholders, as well as methods thereof for communication, participation or engagement. For the academic design, the main suggestion was the **inclusion of local citizens' perspectives, needs, wishes, and ideas** through **instruments of effective communication and participation**. The municipal design requires **more evidence**, **making the assumptions underlying the plans explicit**, and **more transdisciplinary interaction** involving academia and citizens. The **civic design** is expected to be more inclusive of relevant disciplines involved (e.g., landscape architecture) and to be more reflective. For the artistic design, the workshop participants suggested the inclusion of more **organisation** and **collaboration** as well as more consideration of **environmental aspects** related to water levels.

From a design perspective, a few patterns can be observed in the responses to the presented academic and municipal objects. It was pointed out that **the academic and municipal designs** lack specificity in certain aspects. This indicates that emphasis was put on different design objectives in those approaches. The academic design does not consider the participation of local actors while the municipal design could be improved by making more concrete visualisations and descriptions. Both the academic and municipal design need to consider built urban development and density more. The reasons for these topics not being included may vary, but it is very likely influenced by De Oeverlanden being generally perceived as a green open space that needs to be preserved. The **artistic and civic approaches** show a different set of observations. The author of the civic design thinks that the artistic design should become **more concrete/tangible**. On the other hand, the artistic design introduces a sound concept that the approach taken in the civic design excludes at

the moment. Probably because the artistic designer is a "niche-thinker" instead of a generalist, they start thinking about how the civic design can improve its specific acoustics-focused approach. At the same time, the civic design could also be more up-to-date by integrating people and working with landscape architects on new concepts for making ecological solutions.

The integrative design language in terms of public participation is a value expressed differently by the academic and municipal designs, and less by the artistic and civic designs. The artistic design shows a tendency towards a **concrete and tangible outcome of a design**. Participation in the artistic design is thus material rather than conceptual. The academic design values **experimenting and developing new knowledge** more than others. Not surprisingly, almost all designs aim at **innovating and creating something new**. The artistic design does this from the artistic field while trying to innovate in a niche subject. The civic designer is focused on finding a solution for a specific problem in terms of phasing and finding a way through the complex system to realise a project, while the academic design is interested in finding innovative solutions for academic issues, which are at a higher level of abstraction: integrating many stakeholders or creating an integrated framework. The municipal design is the least focused on innovation but strives to find a new way of working to create public space for people.

Overall, **some design languages are more focused on communicating and connecting with actors than others**. The academic, municipal and artistic designs are aimed at communicating/informing people involved in the design process. They involve project developers, water management experts and decision-makers. Citizens are not explicitly involved according to the responses, but instead, the projects designed should operate in their service: creating good quality public space. Involving "the public voice" would help to improve all three designs. The civic design, on the other hand, tries to engage with users and local users and uses them as a foundation for research which the designer translates into a future image for all.

Reconstruction

In the reconstruction phase the participants worked in two groups of five-six people from mixed backgrounds. In the meeting room, on a table on the side, a wide variety of materials was available to be used as input for the making of a reconstructed design. Participants were collecting materials that could, in their view, visualize what they wanted to bring in for a reconstructed design. What is ‘design’ becomes broad, at this point: it reaches beyond the physical aspects of the area. From the posters made in the morning session, prioritized sticky notes were assembled to start the reconstruction activity. The participants were asked to select sticky notes from each of the morning designs. At both tables, a conversation developed in which participants would point at an object that was added to the table, and ask what it meant, or how it connected to other objects on the table. The work and conversations were video-recorded and transcribed. Because of the composition of participants, one discussions was conducted in English, the other one in Dutch. Topics standing out from the sessions were (1) treasures, (2) permeability, (3) the unplanned, and (4) curatorium. We will address these one by one.

Treasures

In both groups, what are considered as already present qualities of the area featured strongly. One group called these ‘treasures’. This term had not come up in the designs discussed in the morning, and participants were talking about treasures for example in terms of ‘peepholes’ training the eye towards particular qualities, or telling stories about the area, or the traces left behind by the imaginary ecologist called ‘Hans’. One participant summarizes:

> “in summarizing the best qualities of the area, we concluded it is an area of conflict […]. It is actually one of the most inclusive areas of Amsterdam, because it is used by a big variety of groups, maybe not many people, but a big variety of people; that [variety by itself] is also a special quality.”

In taking over, another participant adds:

> "If you bike around you actually see specific people doing specific jobs, leaving a trace on the space. So there is Hans and he's working and you get knowledge of it, you actually see - when you look around, you actually see an area, a natural area, and you say: Oh, Hans has been active there. So this is something special. You don't have that in a park, because there's one company, and they do it through the rules. (...) (T)his craziness of these people gives a kind of treasure into the area."

The diversity and accompanying possibilities generated in the area, and the connections made possible through the treasures (stories, glimpses, small artefacts), were seen as assets that a reconstructed design should contain. It should not be fixed, participants emphasize, it can form a trail. So, while in the morning the history of the area, including, for example, the work of Van Eesteren, came to the fore in the municipal design and other ‘big’ structuring thoughts, in the afternoon the attention shifted to small things, the more difficult to observe qualities of the area that can only be known from an insider perspective and experiential knowledge. These are not designed into the area in the more top-down way discussed in the morning session.

Permeability

Another topic coming up in the reconstruction phase, although some of it was also presented in the morning as part of the artistic design, centered on permeability through so-called 'membranes', becoming most manifest on edges (of the area and the lake, but also symbolically when it concerns personal values). As an illustration of this, a string of wool cut in pieces was chosen in one group, and a transparent sheet in the other. This was to present that “nothing would ever be really finished”, on the one hand, but also to express experiences of a lack of connection with the municipal hall, where it sometimes seemed as if everything was already finished so that doors would be closed to new initiatives:

> "There is no membrane If a local initiative exists, there is no place, no membrane from the city council for example to actually knock on the door to say I have this initiative, and I need this knowledge, […] no road through the municipality. […] There is no place from the city council to knock on the door. What is behind ‘your door’. It is a very simple practical matter. Why isn’t that office around."

One of the two groups uses the materials to talk mainly about “organization, strategy, connections, not a physical design for the area”. Regarding permeability, the string of wool is cut in pieces to indicate that there is a frame (the word used), which stands for:

> “the frame means that there are certain things that are beyond discussion, because they are about personal interests. This is what I stand for and this is what you stand for. You have to feel where that boundary is, but it is fluid. You are talking to each other working with each other within some kind of frame, but it is not fixed, it has openings […] Through this (a piece of cushion filling), some people might find the connection, for example with people in the surrounding neighborhoods.”

The unplanned

Not planning everything and keeping some things vague is one of the strong pleas in the reconstruction phase. In talking about how the area should keep some of its ‘roughness’, A piece of transparent paper is used as symbolizing it, and green loose felt. Reference is made to fungi (schimmel) and mycelium.

> "Mycelium is the fabric that is changing all the time. It has the connection with the wider environment, it goes underneath, it is hidden, it is underground, like the trees that have a system of communicating with each other, making each other stronger, so that the system as a whole can survive.”

The element of cherishing the unplanned comes up new in the reconstruction phase. It contrasts with the contributions in the morning. Talking ‘through’ the materials, it might come up more easily, in a temporary setting that is not going to be perfect or neatly presented in diagrams or even art or pictures. Xxx camera and measure ribbon.

Curatorium

All the while, one of the participants is standing with an umbrella above the assembled pieces on the table of one of the groups. The umbrella stands for what the participants called the ‘curatorium’.

> “We need a curatorium (umbrella) – to protect the process you need a curatorium to organize the process and .. the quality and the process and be an ambassador to the outside. With interesting people who also act towards other interesting people."

Implicitly the umbrella also stood for how power could evolve when reconstructing the place with and in connection to its people and materials: in the setting of the workshop the participants experienced too little protection to what they considered valuable attributes of the Oeverlanden - not just physically, but also affectively and in terms of its governance - and so this element became an important element of the reconstructed design. This was as if to say to the designs of the morning to not become so prominent so as to overrule these values.

Discussion

To envision the ‘better places’ that may be realized in the future, multiple designs and design languages are relevant. In order to reconfigure (peri-)urban futures beyond simply projecting from current trends, the current taken-for-granted ways of thinking and knowing need to be

reflected upon and creatively changed. This is not simple, as mental models, routines and attachment to the certainties of the past may hamper engagement in imagining other futures than those projected from current situations (Cork et al. 2023). It has also been argued that the imagination of possible futures can be encouraged with images, other creative methods and experiences (Moore and Milkoreit 2020). The process that we presented in this paper is instrumental to unveiling such improved imagination through the use of creative methods. Nevertheless, the deconstruction-reconstruction method presented in this paper revealed a number of opportunities and challenges for inclusive and sustainable urban design.

The steps we took are the following. First, we took a close look at the existing designs to identify differences in how they made sense of the area. Second, we teased out the taken for granted aspects in each design, including valuations and knowledges. The dialogue gave a view also on what was *not* revealed through the design - thereby disclosing power differentials. Some abstractions, for example, were more normalized and common than elements referring to the specifics of a place. While deconstruction proved challenging, particularly because it required stepping back from what the participants had become accustomed to throughout their everyday practices, the reconstruction was *more* challenging because it asked for moving beyond those (cf. Cork et al. 2023). In the reconstruction, the objects aided in thinking outside of the box by allowing the objects present in the room to 'speak'. The interaction also became more playful and invoked creativity to not merely project from what was already known. By providing a common material language, participants were encouraged to pose questions to each other (“what do you mean with that transparent sheet?”, “should that string of wool be cut in pieces?”). The objects, and the stories and metaphors invoked through them, served as ‘glue’ to develop visions for alternative futures. These were still abstractions, but ones that connected people and the place Oeverlanden.

By using deconstruction as a method of scrutiny we revealed differences between designs in great detail. The deconstruction part of the workshop shows that the four urban designs are very different in how they ‘give form’ and make sense of the (future of) the Oeverlanden. Addressing denotative, connotative and inclusive elements of the designs separately is beneficial as it makes hidden or taken-for-granted aspects of the designs explicit and provides a framework of comparison and dialogue. Such an approach is beneficial for structuring the highly subjective process of interpreting designs as artefacts of a creative process. It also allows one to prioritize across the deconstructed elements (agreeing on placing the most important elements in the center of the poster) as an essential step towards reconstruction.

As intended, reconstruction does the opposite: it produces one big picture of a design or story that everyone can relate to. However, we saw in the workshop that that big picture goes beyond what was initially presented in the four designs during deconstruction, that is, it does more than reversing deconstruction. The umbrella held by one of the participants over their reconstructed design is illustrative of the inclusive and integrative benefits of co-design involved in reconstruction: it emphasized the relations between people and place. The language was also different during reconstruction; the shift from the design(er)-specific formal, visual and textual language to the tactile language of the threads, sticks, needles, and many other such objects created a common ground that all participants, regardless of their focus on any of the four types of design, could relate to. Moreover, stories (e.g., the fictive gardener Hans) or metaphors (e.g., mycelium as a metaphor for deep collaboration) were

much more central in the discussion during reconstruction. Another aspect that contributed to the inclusiveness of the reconstruction process was the shift of participant roles from *interpreters* of others' designs to *makers* of a design. Not surprisingly, such a participating role leads to a mindset that focuses more on finding a common ground than differences. It reminds us of the attention drawn by Jacobs to the vital role of inhabitants in bringing in what they consider as valuable to a place, and translating that into even stronger connections when being empowered to express these and (quite literally) build on their ideas.

While reconstruction was carried out with tactile materials, together with stories and metaphors, to bring people together, we might argue that it does lack the precision of the individual deconstructed designs. This means that the deconstructed designs, on the one hand, and the reconstructed design, on the other, are not mutually exclusive but can (and should) be complementary. The deconstruction-reconstruction process put forward in this paper is a way to support co-design processes in leveraging the benefits of individual designs while addressing synergies and conflicts where and when those designs meet. Moreover, to avoid that details are removed for the sake of finding consensus and building a story that all can relate to, reconstruction needs to embrace conflicts and differences. This is a message that was clearly stated during reconstruction. This prompts design principles such as physical and conceptual permeability across domains, groups of actors and spaces, and adaptability to change, both brought up during reconstruction. It also endorses the link between (substantive) design and process, and also introduces a role of different expertises, such as that of non-professionals.

The scope of the four designs examined in the workshop may be limited, as other types of designs or other manifestations of the presented designs may exist. Also, although the case of the Oeverlanden does illustrate the challenge of articulating conflicting designs, our findings cannot be directly transferred to other cases. Hence, the deconstruction-reconstruction process should be further experimented with in other cases and results should be confronted. The results and the deconstruction-reconstruction approach presented here provide a considerable empirical and conceptual starting point for such subsequent studies.

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