



Creative Fellow 

## Nina Martin

UrbanFutures – an anti-monumentalist exploration of collectivity, care and imagination

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Lastly I want to acknowledge the support that Chat GPT has provided me in not being intimidated by the blank page.

## Main argument and insights regarding the cultural and creative economies

**How might we foster the pluralist potential in European urban planning through investing in peripheral artistic-activist expression?**

**How might we learn from the disruptive forces of love, the ephemeral, the collective by infusing these principles into anti-monumentalist game design challenging the status quo of our cities?**

Urban space, in particular public space, still is a contested area, marked with in/visible histories in the built environment, present dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, laden with the potential for dystopian and utopian futures. Fissures and cleavages across our societies are nowhere as present as in the crowded places of encounter in urban centres of the void so clearly felt

across arbitrarily designed residential areas. “We’ve limited our imaginations of what cities can be for too long. Predictive and persuasive modes of speculation have resulted in urban spaces that perpetuate the status quo” declares Hoffmann (2022, Conclusion, 1/9) in her call for a more equitable approach to urban planning. Like Hoffman, Mariame Kaba (2021) as well as heritage specialist Loredana Stasisin point out that transformational change is a long-term process in our urban societies, although driven by present-day needs.

Inspired by the many feminists this report refers to, this creative endeavour is driven by actionable hope, love, care, intimacy, the erotic, utopianism, speculation and affirmation. Feeling, experiencing, sensing, imagining, desiring and demanding alternative urban futures is possible (Hoffman, 2022), is needed and is implemented, as a prototype in this project and transnationally by activist, artists, cooperatives, designers, creative researchers, urbanists, archivists, community leaders, civil society and more.

This creative collaborative endeavour not only works towards a pluralist future but it is imbued with a pluralist framework across the methodological, epistemological and ontological

concepts shaping this practice-oriented research. This multi-method iterative process applies reflexive frameworks derived from the critical theories and incorporates queer\*feminist, anticapitalist and antiracist values.

In an antidisciplinary fashion I aim to co-construct a dialogical platform, a digital game, collecting creative contributions of resistance and speculation by FLINTA/SLINTA\* (female/sapphic, lesbian, inter, non-binary, trans, gender) folks from across European urban spaces. This curated process involves a careful selection of urban practitioners, transparently co-facilitated gatherings across physical and virtual spaces, ongoing conversations to address the layers of urban complexity as well as a close collaboration with a social justice oriented game designer. Linking this approach to the cultural and creative industries (CCI) and particularly the area of creative policies, I conduct interviews with interdisciplinary feminist urbanists, architects and planners.

One of the main positive findings that jump out at me is the increasing relevance of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), artistic expression and experimentation and activism within CCI. The urgency of these intersections are taken more seriously by policy makers, planners, researchers, development experts and media representatives when discussing the needs of their communities, with a larger portfolio of successes they have achieved over the years in European cities.

A driving factor behind and throughout this project has been the application of speculative design to the field of urban planning as a whole. The work by Johanna Hofmann has been guiding the design methodology for this creative endeavour largely as she not only calls for greater political and social imagination in urban design, but so clearly centres justice and equity in her proposed framework (2022).

A desired side effect of these interdisciplinary approaches to reshaping cities is the shift in how we perceive a European identity. The ongoing decolonisation efforts, led by diasporic, migrant and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) civil society initiatives over the years are bearing fruit in reducing the impact of Eurocentricity on the perception of a continental identity.

However, it would be naïve not to mention the increasing polarisation in European societies, the higher number of seats right-wing politicians and thinkers hold in municipal, national and transnational forums of governance and the accompanying shrinking interest in fighting climate change, social inequities and more.

As this project has shown, a focus on political imagination, justice and equity, creativity and care as well as transnational strategising within an expansive definition of the CCI is however giving me the hope that approaches such as those demonstrated by the CIRCE fellows are the right steps to take to more inclusive futures.

# Creative Endeavour

## Research problem theoretical ideas relevant to this creative project

Mapping, the design of urban space and monuments are powerful tools in constructing perceived truths, such as to maintain the dominance of the status quo, of history already written, not to be challenged (Vergès, 2023). Yet these structurally exclude marginalised groups in these processes of history writing and future making, e.g. Berlin administration and policy makers are far from representing the 35% of the local population with a biography of migration. Similarly queer and trans individuals and families still need to navigate cities gendered and built for cis-hetero nuclear constellations.

Fields of research, cultural practice and policy making agree that cities are not only where the majority of the world's population resides but they are also hubs of knowledge production, dissemination and conflict in society (Kutz, 2020). Similarly, they are places of political and civic action and resistance. Civil society across Europe has leveraged collective action over the past years and has reached successes across cities, such as the renaming of the street, from

where I am currently typing, to Lucy-Lameck-Straße<sup>1</sup> and has shed its colonial predecessor thanks to neighbourhood and civil society coordinated action, particularly the Tanzanian community. This lengthy process is countered by a polarisation in society and an increase in voter numbers for right-wing movements. Even Berlin has had a change in government ideology toward the political right for the first time in over 20 years<sup>2</sup>. Beyond the municipal levels pan-European coalitions attempt a networked approach to counter this polarisation and social injustices and inequities in cities, e.g. with the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism<sup>3</sup>, the European Network Against Racism<sup>4</sup>, and the Eurocities network<sup>5</sup> advocating for “cities [as] genuine partners with the EU to create a better future for all.” This decolonisation process in cities needs to be intersectional and include all areas of urban life, public space, public services and municipal staff (Vergès, 2023). It is important to really understand the multifaceted, pluralistic identity of a city through its inhabitants, human and non-human alike. It is “the stories and their

significance [...] that allow us to locate points from which utopian possibilities might be generated” (Kutz, 2020) and can thus shape urban design, planning and strategy building processes locally and transnationally. As Harvey traces this back to Lefebvre’s concept of heterotopia, he points out the spaces for opportunities that arise for urban resistance and renewal movements as momentum that stems from “what people do, feel, sense, and come to articulate as they seek meaning in their daily lives. [...] We do not have to wait for the grand revolution to constitute such spaces” (Harvey, 2019, p. XVII). Here Harvey also hands over opportunity, responsibility and a space for imagination to those who inhabit and thus fully experience the city. How does this large range of experiences get attention from those in power of shaping public urban design and legislation? How can there be an equitable distribution of access to shaping our urban hubs after our “heart’s desire” (ibid) when the rift to communities at the margins seems to continuously widen from a top-down perspective while bottom-up initiatives are working hard to build bridges? Across the globe cities are seen as “spaces constantly in flux, caught in processes of becoming” (Minty et al., 2021) where “art and cultural production make space for precisely the work of imagining other kinds of tools, for creating pockets or temporary resistance, in order to begin the work of dismantling the master’s house” (Khan, 2021), in reference to Audre Lorde’s monumental quote. It is here that my attention has been drawn, to the space of speculative opportunity at the intersection of artistic practice, community-led activism and

urban development. I focus on art as a relational practice that engages profoundly with its environment, identifies and reshapes crevices in the system and to thus explore its potential for the political (Kisić & Tomka 2021). The artistic and creative practices this research project employs are serving a community, society, beyond the creator. I believe that this urban creative practice can embody especially an ephemeral nature, such as “temporary occupations of public space, be they commercial, recreational, sexual or of any other type” (Peran, 2008). This anti-monumentalist and multipurpose environment is conducive to examining culture as an (urban) development factor more closely, as culture itself still evades just one sole definition and may encompass all layers of communication across and within societies. Clammer explicitly includes artistic movements when he states, “Culture is a collective project, as are social movements, and while the directions that imagination might take cannot be predicted, better conditions for its flourishing can indeed be socially and politically achieved. And this is perhaps a good definition of development” (2012). Yet, “while culture remains globally hailed as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, the manifold ways in which creative and cultural practices simultaneously shape and are profoundly shaped by urban societies remains poorly understood” (Minty et al., 2021). This I identify as the field I would like to contribute to with this creative project.

Anti-monumentalism as a practice is tightly linked to the movement of the Right to the City and has even been taking into the digital sphere over

the recent years. As such it clearly investigates this relational element Minty et al. address, as can be observed in prior academic analysis<sup>6</sup>, artistic exploration<sup>7</sup> and civic education projects<sup>8</sup> among others. While anti-monumentalism and counter-monumentalism are confused at times, this project focuses on the radical, subversive and bottom-up nature of anti-monumentalism as a creative practice and a methodology that derives power from its unknown temporality (Copeland, 2022). With this approach, artist Lan Florence Yee associates reciprocal solidarity as a fundamental goal and key driver for substantial transformation in public space and the society that interacts with it (Pham, 2022).

This temporality or ephemerality transports into the digital sphere, be it through augmented reality, social media campaigns or digital entertainment, e.g. games. Digital games are a key component of mainstream entertainment and associated hardware can be found in many households of today's European urban households. Where art, activism and games intersect is particularly in the independent games sector, with hundreds of self-published games entering the market in the EU each year ("2020 European Video Games Industry Insights Report," 2021). This number would be incredibly higher, were student projects as well as experimental development and artistic research in games taken into account. "Games are technologically, economically, aesthetically, socially, and culturally important" (Raessens, 2006) and not only mirror contemporary

culture but have the potential to enter into a dialogue with society. Games still elude one final definition, so are loosely understood here as an interactive medium employing narrative, ludic, spatial Games have an underlying and all-encompassing queerness to their production and usage processes, be it through their facilitation of worldbuilding, breaking of bodily and environmental normativity, defying of hegemonic regulations or bending of the space-time-continuum and large political imagination (Ruberg, 2019). This creative endeavour aims to fully immerse into this queer theory. This allows for the game design process to facilitate a "countermapping that traces spatial injustices in the city" (Cosby & Van, 2023) and turn those into equitable alternatives. What follows after injustice and inequalities have been brought into the spotlight? As a consequential step "What if we sought the expertise of those most vulnerable, with the most to lose, to design a shared reality that benefits everyone?" as Pérez (2023) asks. Pérez here proposes a mother-centric approach that resonates deeply with myself as a mother and is a relatable approach to the participants of the project as it translates well into other forms of social dependency and familiar support systems, a clear focus in feminist work.

Challenging the notion that the physical and virtual are separate worlds, I am inspired by the Glitch Manifesto by Legacy Russell (2020), who draws a clear image of how the virtual is no less real than the physical and is more than a mere extension of the self. This expansive



view highlights how glitches in the systems of dominance can be seen as a way to refuse, to reshape and demand anew (Russell). Infusing the system, be that urban planning or community engagement by public stakeholders or policy makers in this context, with works of refusal and creative reconfigurations, is a growing place of opportunity for mobilising towards collectivity (Russell). As Russell curates artistic expressions of glitch that reflect upon and address our worldly challenges, Olufemi similarly notes how art and culture align so clearly with the feminist transformative drive, namely that “we do a disservice to the power of art and artistic creation when we assume that it is less important than political intervention” while also highlighting that art alone cannot move us into the next phase of liberation (2020).

To activate this creative endeavour at the intersection of art, digital design and politics and society, I embrace a collaborative approach based on my conviction in love- and care-centric understandings of collectivity. The potential laid out here for community-driven imagination of alternative equitable urban futures is guided by a feminist and speculative design research process. As Ghandi (2006, Conclusion, p. 3) points out, for centuries the speculative expression of utopianism in the Western canon has had to struggle for a place of credibility, creativity and play against racist, sexist and adultist judgement, and yet has managed to embed a socialist justice element through anti-colonial and anti-imperialist critique. Here

‘politics of friendship’ are relevant as a concept for ‘invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment’ and that act as ‘embedded politics for a collective future’ (Ghandi, Introduction, p. 15). Friendship as a political concept that bridges differences and builds solidarity independent of social assimilation is not new to queer thought, which I find drives my thinking first and foremost. Breaking free from the dominance of a cis-heterosexual nuclear family apparatus as the only desirable social and domestic formation to strive for and instead to pour resources and care into ‘queer relationships, community, and friendship [as] modes of love, connection, and intimacy’ is a revolutionary act (Zhu, 2022). Similarly bell hooks proposes love as a way to heal social cleavages beyond the domestic space and across society at large (2001). Facilitating introspection into intimacy and how it hegemonically has been confined into a suppressed state, Audre Lorde frees us from this confinement by unlocking the power of the erotic as a transformative and collective power “for the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing” (1978, p. 54). Lorde extends this notion far beyond the individual sensation but rather highlights the utopian, transgenerational and speculative potential of the erotic (Lorde, p.55).

Desire, a word embodying the erotic, is deeply embedded in design methodologies and has taken a leading role in futures work, surpassing design’s otherwise equally uplifted values of feasibility and viability. Leyes et al. consequently

point out that “the question of desirability is an urgent one and requires a multifaceted answer. There is no one desirable future for all” (2021). This to me is a call to action. I draw from this the research question on how we might unlock the pluralist potential in European urban planning through investing in peripheral artistic-activist expression. I hereby respond with a multi-method approach linking network building with creative urban practitioners across Europe, uncovering urban fault lines along with creative expressions of urban desires to be presented in a digital game and assess this approach’s potentials and its shortcomings through interviews with urban planning experts

## Footnotes

- 1 German description here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://kolonialismus-begegnen.de/geschichten/die-lucy-lameck-strasse-in-neukoelln>
- 2 Retrieved on 29.09.23: [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/04/26/berlin-swings-right-for-the-first-time-in-over-two-decades\\_6024439\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/04/26/berlin-swings-right-for-the-first-time-in-over-two-decades_6024439_4.html)
- 3 Learn about their action plan here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://www.eccar.info/en/10-point-action-plan>
- 4 Learn about their activities here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://www.enar-eu.org/the-role-of-cities-in-fighting-against-racism>
- 5 Learn more about their mission here: <https://eurocities.eu>
- 6 Read here: Alizadeh, P. (2020). The Democratization of Public Space: Anti-Monumentalism Through an Augmented Reality Based Mobile App [MA Thesis]. Concordia University. [https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/987194/1/Alizadeh\\_MDes\\_2020.pdf](https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/987194/1/Alizadeh_MDes_2020.pdf)
- 7 Project Monuments AR by Mikala Hyldig Dal and Farhan Khalid, retrieved on 29.09.23 <https://monuments-ar.com>
- 8 Monumental Shadows by Various & Gould with SAVVY Contemporary, retrieved on 29.09.23 <https://monumental-shadows.net>

# Creative Process

## Methodological considerations, research and design activities and preliminary outcomes

In this creative process pluralism is the overarching umbrella for the methodological, epistemological and ontological concepts shaping this practice-oriented research. Acknowledging the existence of multiple truths and perspectives and the importance and validity of diverse societies and populations and knowledge systems (Cotnoir & Edwards, 2015), I found myself employing both an inductive and deductive creative approach. In this reflexive fashion I gathered learnings from various feminist, anticapitalist, antiracist and anticolonial thinkers and practitioners through their papers, books, artistic outputs including brochures and pamphlets, podcasts, videos and memes. Engaging with the participants, artists, activists and thinkers has proven to be equally rich in acquiring and exchanging learnings, so deeply rooted in lived experiences, in collective struggle and hope. It is this antidisciplinary nature of their practices that I view as rich in potential for worldbuilding, crafting new frameworks, allowing for new understandings and speculations - as it uncovers the space between, beyond and within

disciplines and interdisciplinary constellations (Cooper et al., 2018). At Oyouun<sup>1</sup>, the cultural centre I co-founded, this is a philosophy of practice we adhere to, as it allows an expansive approach beyond the Western canon of art and culture. It comes as no surprise then that the research design and the design of the final game followed a participatory, collaborative and reflective approach, with analytical methods rooted deeply in constructivist, subjective and relational approaches.

This creative process is a continuation of my MA Thesis<sup>2</sup> titled "The Activist's Game. How do intersectionally marginalised independent game designers contribute to social justice movements?". Having understood independent games, or more importantly, the game designers as agents of political change, I now enter this creative process at an earlier meaning-making stage, namely the qualitative research, collective design and finally curation stages for the design of a game.

As the field of speculative design still remains more of “an approach [...] than a formal methodology” (Iaconesi, 2019) it truly embeds the notion of antisciplinary to allow for the flexibility needed to imagine alternative futures (ibid). However, as all design processes it is not free from an ideological charge infused by the designers in question, most likely informed by Western, Eurocentric school of thought (Khandwala, 2019). I want to articulate how my moral and ideological starting point within intersectional speculative feminism as presented in the preceding section has been applied to the speculative design and facilitation methods and frameworks within this creative process. This involves a reflexive process that makes use of the self-evaluation framework as provided by Oliveira and Prado (2018) that closely aligns with other self-critical approaches around Critical Whiteness - though none of them make me immune to reproducing harm.

As a feminist designer and researcher in this process, I made the decision to involve FLINTA/SLINTA\*<sup>3</sup> collaborators only, who, despite forming the majority of any urban society in Europe, are also the largest community with a shared sense of a lack of security, safety, ownership in public space<sup>4</sup>. Of course intersectionality is key here and I ensured to include a group of people with varying lived experiences across sexual orientation, race, class, education, social status, religion, migration status, disability and more - some perspectives are inadvertently missing as the physical gathering limits the expansiveness of

space and locality to some extent.

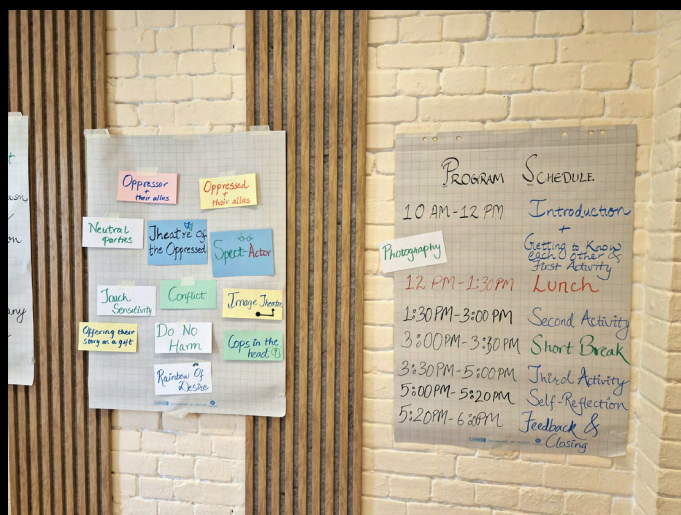
I trusted my community and network as I reached out to both already familiar and some newly recommended urban practitioners who I considered as such and for them to become participants in this process. This includes people who occupy vacant spaces in cities, explore and countermap spaces through genderqueer expressions, utilise social media tools to fight injustice on the streets, design buildings, document and blur the lines of the domestic space as private toward the public, proudly repaint city walls, perform and ephemerally redecorate the urban fabric, dance in public, organise marches, challenge urban policies and monuments, create alternative cultural and social spaces, care for others, who are movement builders. Folks join physically and virtually from cities across Europe and beyond, namely London, Helsinki, Madrid, Barcelona, Brussels, Paris, Zagreb, Prague, Ramallah, Belgrade, Tokyo and Berlin. Not many call themselves urban practitioners and it is not a label I attempt to force upon anyone. It is in my view a way of being within, around, along and beyond urban conflicts and continuously working for resolution. In that sense I see hope and utopianism within this group of people I reached out to, shared space with and conversed with, all 21 among those who participated in the gatherings, interviews, email exchanges and who contributed works to the final digital game. Here I refer to hope as a discipline, as articulated by abolitionist Mariame Kaba (2021), as something

that can strive despite despair, that knows of the dystopian and yet works towards the utopian. As Kaba states, “hope doesn’t preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion [...]. Hope isn’t an emotion, you know? Hope is not optimism”. The kind of space I aimed to host provides room for all those emotions and their transformative potential.

I have experience facilitating gatherings that involve activities around speaking, writing and drawing and can situate these well within the field of design justice<sup>5</sup>. However this project called for a more physical and somatic approach to explore the embodied elements of care, love and intimacy and to really activate our senses in imagining alternative futures. Knowing the limits of my ability and comfort I reached out to Berlin-based Pooja Lama as a co-convenor and facilitator of the first intensive all-day physical gathering with 12 participants, including one awareness expert who would be able to care for people should an incident of discrimination occur. Pooja, whose expertise spans cultural, diplomatic and development work, is an experienced facilitator utilising community forms of theatre, such as Theatre of the Oppressed<sup>6</sup> and Playback Theatre<sup>7</sup>. With the former being deeply rooted in social justice work, it did seem the most fitting approach to deconstructing the theme of current barriers of the urban environment, across the built spaces, the human and non-human lifeforms, as well as unlocking modes of speculation around alternative futures.

The design of the space, the nourishment, the group, the agenda all took into account the framework of cultivating safe spaces, as highlighted by Elaine Alec (n.d., 2023), who points out love-based practices of promoting inclusion, validation, well-being and freedom. This all resonates with how Pooja and I framed and held the gathering in July in Berlin. Based on her expert input we had decided on image theatre as a main element of the Theatre of the Oppressed methods due to its impactful visuals considering the limited time of just one full day on the 16th of July at Oyoun.

#### Workshop Impressions







An initial reflection of the workshop is that the group was really well curated in their alignment of values<sup>8</sup> and was open to the intense group bonding that was facilitated by careful sharing and holding of conflict/trauma and its transformation into radical joy and care. These stories all relate to the idea of space, reflected in personal items of relevance each participant brought along with them. While participants may not have discussed strategies, they did highlight the complexities and struggles of how cities are designed and consequently experienced by those not considered in the design process, nor honoured on pedestals or in history books.

The participant group signalled that they enjoyed the emotional yet empowering session and would like to stay connected to foster an ongoing exchange around community organising and strategies so that we learn from each other's practices and can call on each others' support in times of urgent crisis and conflict, in communication campaigns, in skillsharing, in archiving.

One week later for the second gathering the same participants gathered online. Due to the intimacy and trust built in the first workshop and the format and short timeline and timing of the second workshop (Sunday evening, 2 hours, on Zoom), broadening the number of participants may work against the group dynamic.

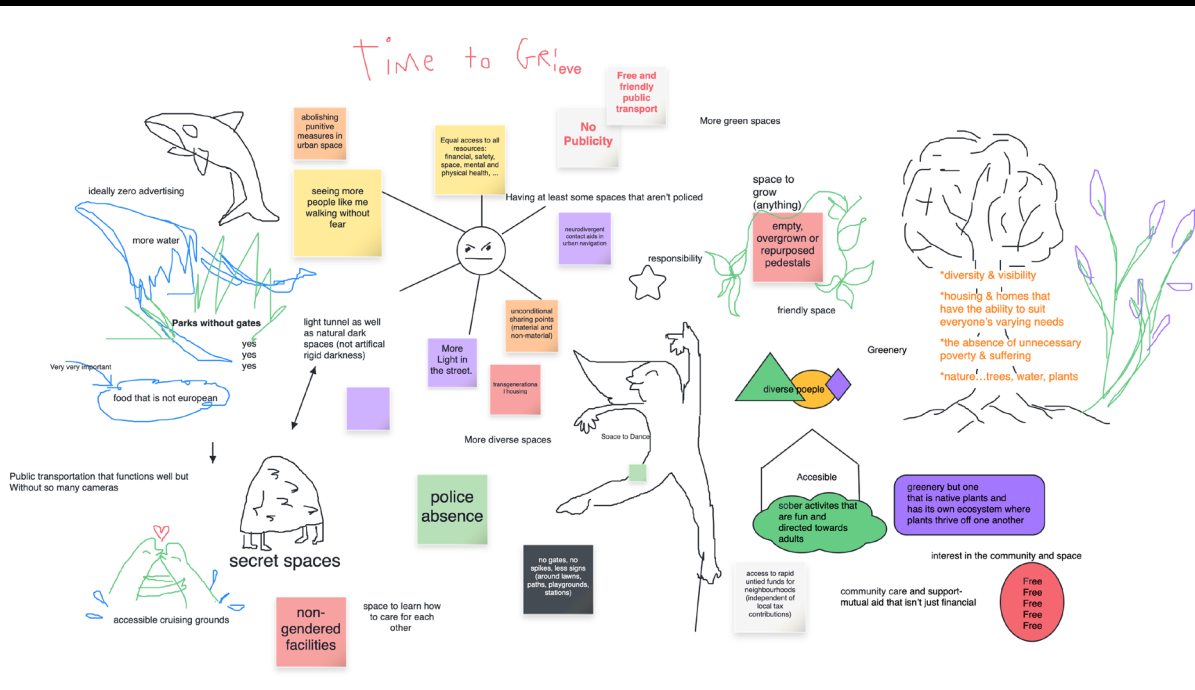
The second workshop focuses more on uncovering urban dynamics that may carry

conflict and to apply our perspectives through the five senses to each scenario. The included incidents in public space that highlighted a lack of security, harm to one's health, the intrusion of others, ignorance in social dynamics and more. Using our senses we re-articulated the scenarios from varying perspectives. This way we expanded our layers of perception beyond our dominating sense and subjectivity.

The workshop also brought forward stories of urban dynamics that highlight a lack of solidarity and accountability among and between marginalised communities in urban space. This once more highlighted the need for intersectional strategies across localities to build bridges across urban societal cleavages.

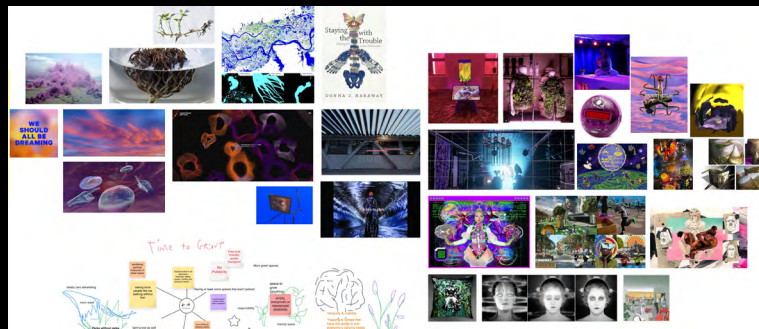
Finally, we collaboratively created a digital collective sketch on urban futures, as seen below. The concepts of care, love and intimacy clearly appear in these.

Collective Sketch



Based on my readings, including multimedia texts, the gatherings and the sketch I created a moodboard for the feel of the digital game, also seen in the figure below.

Moodboard



At this point I invited the game designer gabbah baya<sup>9</sup>, an interdisciplinary intersectional designer for digital interactions, to collaborate. Within our cooperative working style my role as a curatorial researcher left space for their artistic freedom.

Simultaneously in conversation with all (potential) participants I presented the brief for works to be contributed to the game as a response to the theme either based on the workshop and the collective sketch or a sheet of future-oriented

“how might we” questions that arose from the workshop analysis. They can be found in the appendix.

The final 14 contributions grapple with



heritage and memory in urban space, reflect on and challenge the status quo and concisely articulate alternative urban futures of conviviality, as seen in previews below:

Photo Documentation by Rhianna Ilube & Coney



Photo (plus additional song) by Liadland



Collage by Jacob V Joyce



Documentation by Marina Amada & Marie Liesse





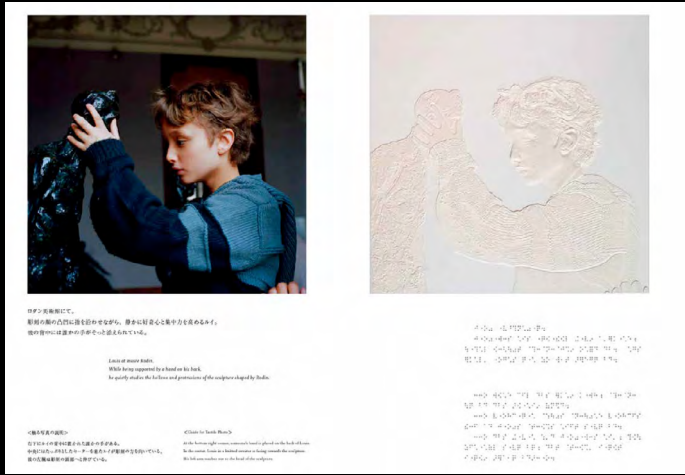


Photo Novel Research by Fernande Njonkou Njanjo



... exploring fiction through the photonovel gave me the opportunity to accentuate the issues that I had previously been able to identify in the domestic space. (...) As the work progressed, I myself was invaded by the fiction that covered the walls of my bedroom.



In its relationship with intimacy, the domestic space is less subjected to outside surveillance. It is therefore the space in which our identities and individualities can be expressed most freely.

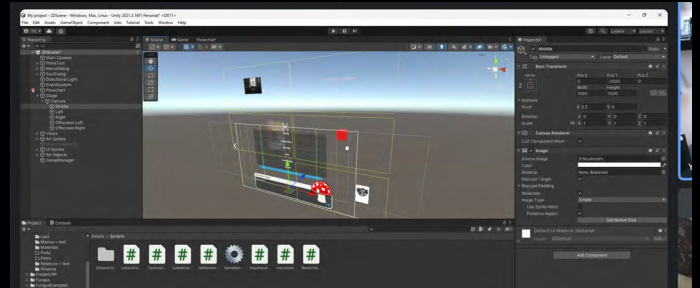
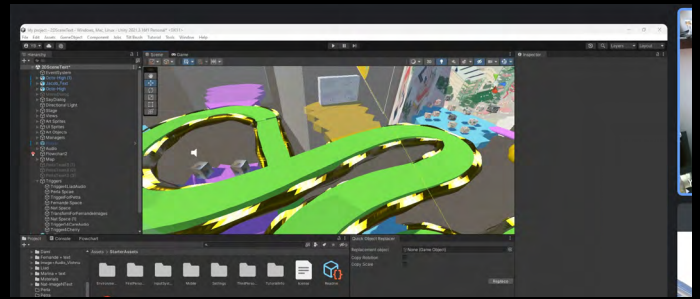
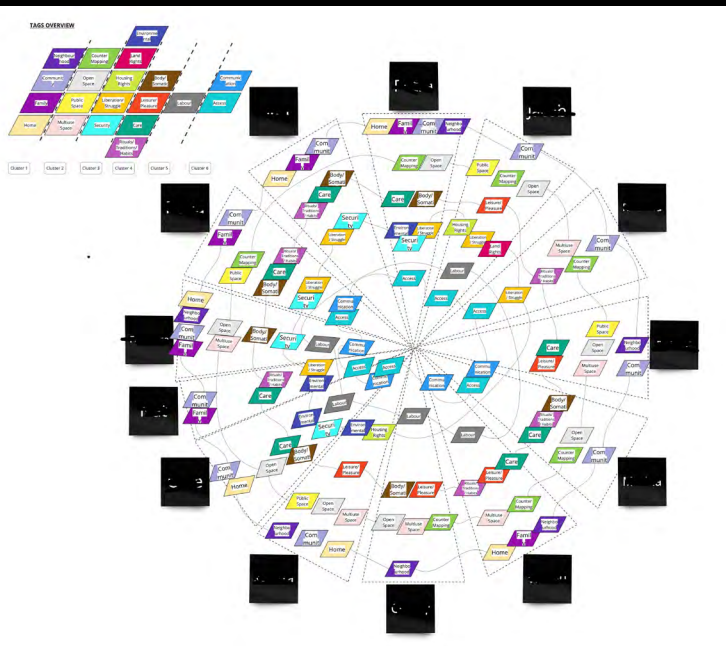
Architectural Concept by Rebecca Odewole & Christian Vornholt



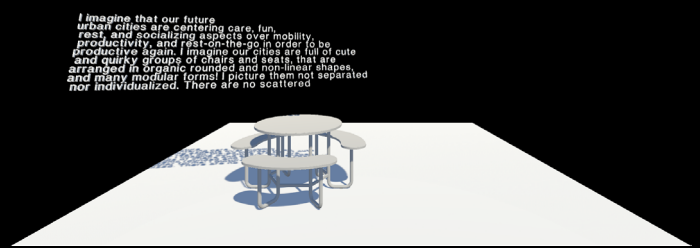
The remaining contributions by Dami Choi, Nat Skoczylas, Vishnu Vardhani Rajan, Petra Matić, Lo-Fi Cherry, Elia Diane Fushi Bekene (Care) and Perla Naomi are mainly audio, prose and poetry or 3D renders, to be viewed in the actual game.

In order to create a path of experience and linking the contributions and to apply a pluralist method of analysis and identify patterns, I coded these contributions and saw various clusters emerge, as can be seen below (anonymised).

Coding/Mapping of Contributions

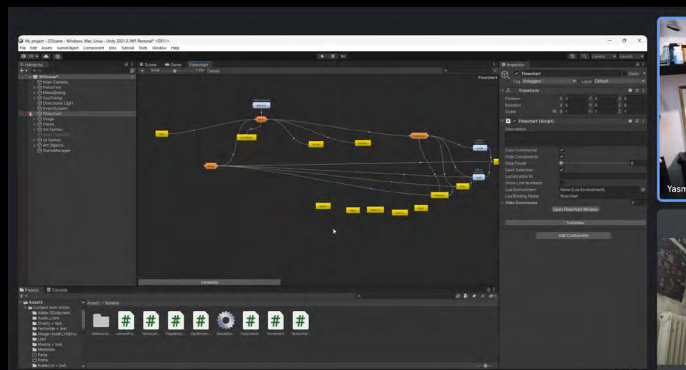


Work in Progress on Contribution by Adele Jarrar



Following this clustering and mapping these contributions were placed in the virtual space by gabbah baya to be experienced as an anti-monumentalist browser game. While it is far from an eloquent worldbuilding process with its rules and regulations, it does provide a starting point for that to happen.

Screenshots of Collaboration on Game Design



Work in Progress on Contribution by Fernande Njonkou Njanjo



With the development of communication technologies, work is no longer confined to a single location. As a result, productive work is returning to the domestic



Our interior space is supposed to reflect who we are, our personality. But housing and interior spaces have become generic. If we look beyond certain formal



In parallel I conducted interviews with three selected feminist urbanists with proven expertise. I had constructive conversational exchanges with Amsterdam-based Loredana Stasisin<sup>10</sup>, architect, digital curator and cultural manager as well as technical expert advocating for sustainable, beautiful and inclusive approaches; as well as Faezeh Mohammadi<sup>11</sup>, urbanist, urban planner and programme maker for 'Designing Cities for All' & Creative Industries at a social and cultural centre in Amsterdam; and Safaa Charafi<sup>12</sup>, architect urbanist and research fellow on urban inclusion, based in Brussels. We took time to unravel the place JEDI (justice, diversity, equity, inclusion) work has in urban design and planning, to discuss the potential of artistic and creative approaches to expressing urban desires and their downfalls or limitations when it comes to reaching engagement with policy makers, the shift in perspective when art is involved. We also discussed concepts of transnational and pan-European solidarity, knowledge sharing practices between urban practitioners and the potential of collective action, from the perspectives of creatives, activists, planners and policy makers alike and how this connects to the CCI at large.

Overall the process remains fairly close to the initial proposed outline. An overview of the changes occurred and reasons why can be found in the appendix of this report.

## Footnotes

1 <https://www.oyoun.de>

2 Completed in 2021 for the MA Communication for Development at Malmö University, Sweden. Last retrieved on 29.09.23 and openly accessible at <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1566113/FULLTEXT02>

3 F/SLINTA\* is an acronym commonly used in Germany to encompass female/sapphic/lesbian/inter/non-binary/trans identities

4 See projects by Gendergerecht Mobil, Take Back the Night, Feministische Skateprojekte in Halle, Feministischer Streiktag Berlin etc. for initiatives fighting discrimination against FLINTA\*

5 Find the Design Justice principles here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://designjustice.org/read-the-principles>

6 Find an explanation here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://imagination.org/media/our-methods/theatre-of-the-oppressed-2>

7 Find an explanation here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://www.londonplayback.com/what-is-playback>

8 Aligned with Oyouun Code of Conduct, retrieved 29.09.23 <https://oyoun.de/en/code-of-conduct>

9 Find their portfolio here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://cargocollective.com/gabbahbaya>

10 More here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/loredana-stasisin-86b2371b>

11 More here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/faezemohammadi>

12 More here, retrieved on 29.09.23: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/safaa-charafi>

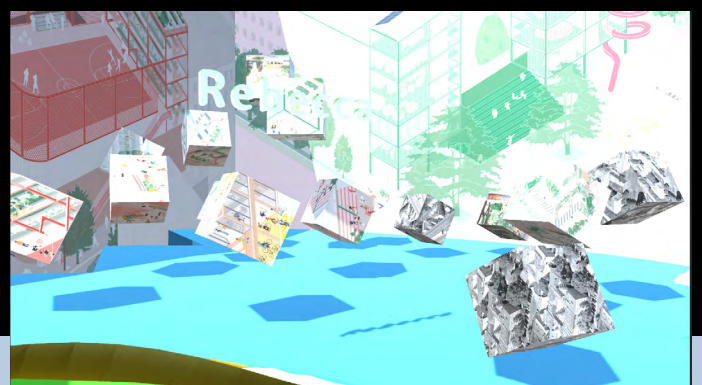
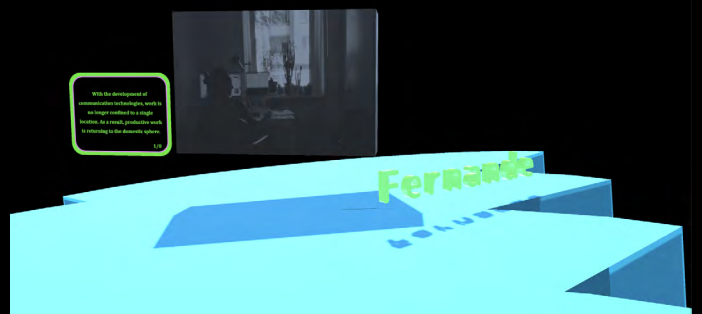
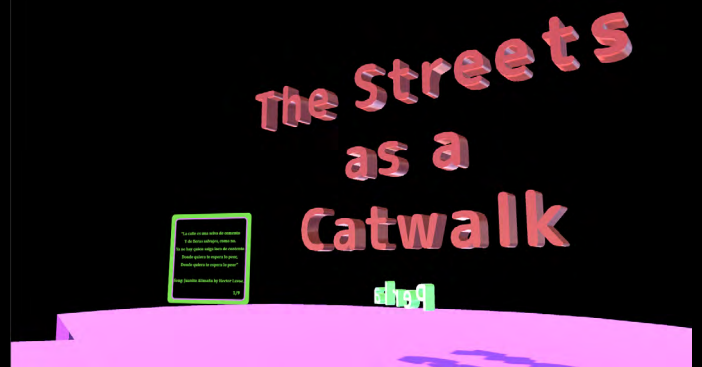
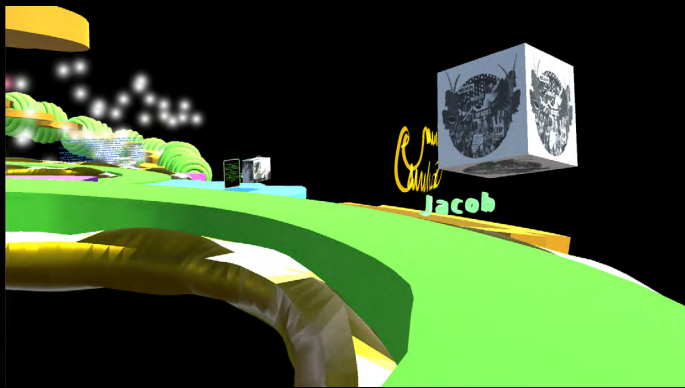
# Creative Output

Presenting the final prototype of the anti-monumentalist game on alternative urban futures

Link to screen recording of the game:

<https://youtu.be/VvMh-CkuVyl>

Screenshot of the game experience





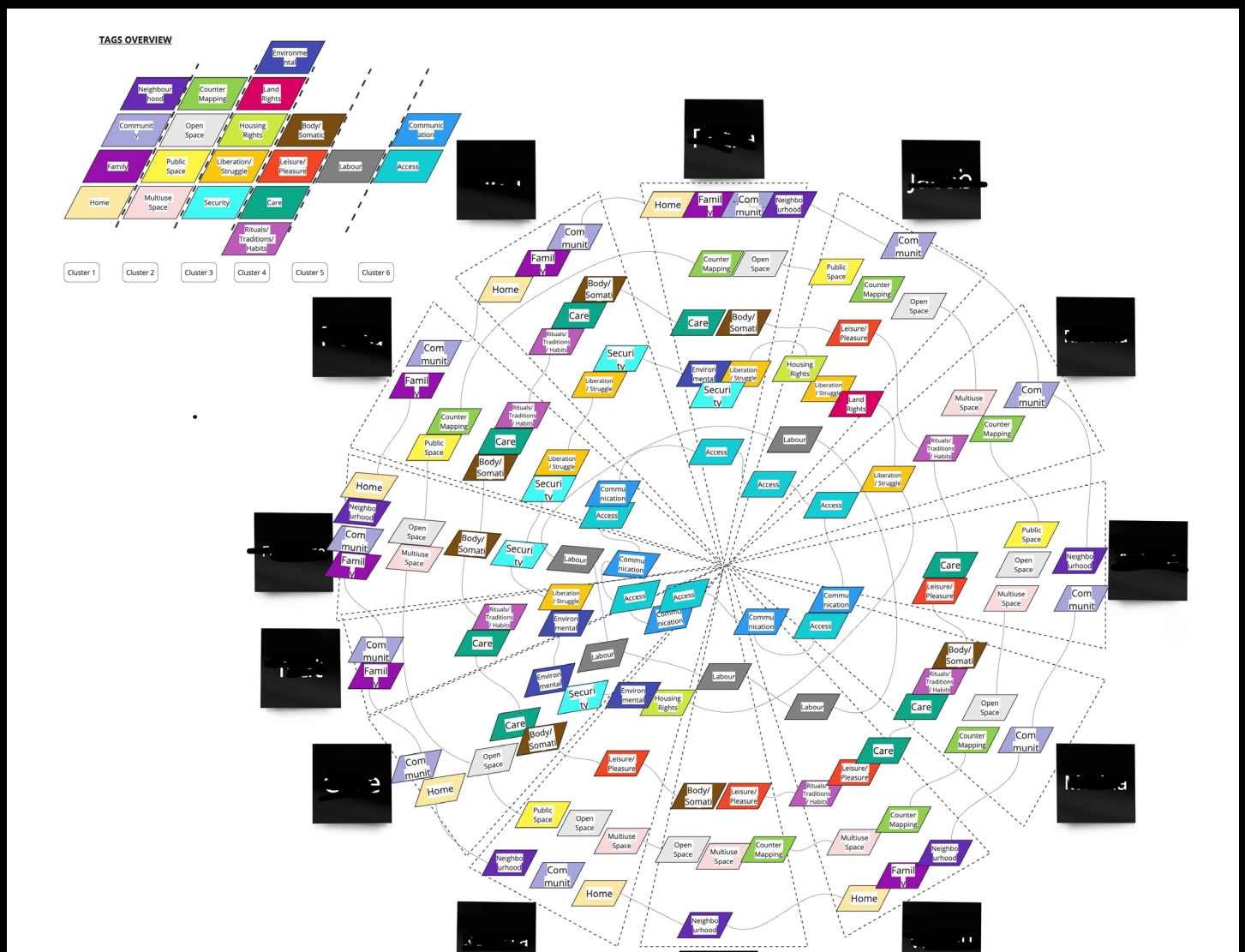


# Analysis and Main Insights

## Insights, analysis and main take-aways

Having leaned on feminist and grassroots principles led to creative outputs in line with this ideological thinking. The six clusters that I identified from coding the curated collection of creative contributions and expressions during the workshops and interviews could be defined as follows:

The first cluster is mostly concerned with spatial, social and emotional proximity and included subcategories such as *home*, *family*, *community*, and *neighbourhood*. This included more depictions of communal living and generally the mother-centric/guided way people move through places inconsiderate of mothers\*.



The second cluster includes elements of spatial practice, such as *multi-use space*, *public space*, *open space* and *countermapping*. This politically loaded cluster houses elements of *security*, *liberation/struggle*, *housing rights*, *land rights* and *environmental*. It is the latter cluster that shines a light at how activist the practices of the participants are. Even though one participant stated that “we have lost many activists to academia”, I believe that activism transcends the spatial dimension of public space and may (have to) continue, even though transformed, across other fields such as economic, academic, cultural and other sectors.

Moving closer to the individual’s corporeal experience the fourth cluster presents subsections such as *rituals/traditions/habits*, *care*, *leisure/pleasure* and *body/somatic*.

Here elements of ancestral knowledge, spiritual beliefs and worldviews, sexual and platonic intimacy and its manifestation in public space come to light. These often remain underrepresented in urban planning discourse, however with these deeply ingrained human needs, they deserve a place at the table.

The remaining two clusters were smaller and include concepts around *labour* and finally *access* and *communication*. These terms can be understood a little more loosely. Especially communication here was key when addressing social conflicts, such as the reception of and struggle against the dominant gaze, when discussing different political ideologies and just

how one would be able to educate another, or how to read and write markers and signals of any given city.

Most participants and their contributions touch on almost all of the aforementioned clusters, especially the ones connected to the emotional and somatic experiences. This clustering lays the groundwork for the structure and interaction in the digital game.

These clusters can be viewed in close link with the quite expressed need for transnational solidarity and strategising by the participants. Seeing how well trust was built in the physical sessions and how clearly synergies between the creative works surfaced in the design and development of the game, it appears that the next step of this project would be to not lose the momentum of the group. This does not require a sole facilitator of this continuity or each participant carrying activities forward. It is more to focus effort, resource distribution and point of analysis on how capacities, practices, learnings and demands are expanding, shifting, transferring after such projects end. I find it delusional to assume that we continue with the same energy after the end of the fellowship, and without its financial support. Artists and activists alike have livelihood costs to cover and need to subsequently reduce or prioritise focus, which in turn is often a reason why borders are successful at separating our collective efforts.

The workshops, the curation of works, the conversations and the design of the game have

been constructed with an expansive idea of care and trust. The project serves as a platform for constructive, critical and empowering dialogue for FLINTA/SLINTA\* participants. The design of this project resonates with how DiSalvo refers to the Arendtian table as a metaphor of bringing about dialogue, however the “considerations should include all manner of made things: communications, events, environments, systems, and so on” (2021, p. 261). As such “designed things then serve to both mediate and bind us together” (ibid) in a critical and collective manner to affect societal transformation at last.

I consider the “critical potential of the ephemeral” (Athanasίου, 2021, p. 270) as the complementary twin to this binding power of the table. It relates extensively to the struggles of liberation against the dominant perspectives in society and the individually and collectively experienced societal rules, regulations and exclusions. As Athanasίου points out, the “ephemeral might be used as a partial and provisional lens through which to claim spaces for collective political visions of change” (ibid) which translates to how those with decision maker power are by way of their responsibility obliged to listen to the lived experiences of and the daily resistance by those who breathe urban life.

In my interviews with Safaa Charafi, Loredana Stasisin as well as Faezeh Mohammadi, this last point was clearly present as well. In their practices they may apply slightly different communicative approaches, however all use

dialogical means to present these missing perspectives to relevant stakeholders by including values of inclusivity and intersectionality, community leadership and knowledge as well as disruptive demands. Across their practices they are continuously facilitating access and communication around the sustainability elements of urban planning, specifically social sustainability.

This analysis underscores the essentiality of continuous dialogue, learning, reimagining, and collaborative endeavour in shaping urban spaces that are inclusive, equitable, just and reflective of diverse narratives and experiences, paving the way for transformative changes in urban development paradigms.

In line with this project’s carefully facilitated coming together of urban citizens from across Europe all interviewed experts emphasise the role of involving local communities and civil society representatives in debating transitions and decision-making processes. They converge on the belief that community engagement is crucial and all give credibility and relevance to the involvement of artists in such engagement. As each of them have slightly varying engagement with stakeholders of public and international governance bodies there is no monolithic understanding of the role art and digital media play in urban transformation.

While one of the experts specifically highlights the link to the New European Bauhaus values of



sustainability, inclusion and beauty as a cross-cutting priority in European projects, I argue that each of them apply this framework in one way or another, such as through facilitated events that include local community, artists and designers and representatives of housing and urban development agencies, experts on ecological sustainability and more, as shared by Faezeh Mohammadi. While Loredana Stasisin shares insights into her work with photography and theatre performance in architectural heritage research, Safaa Charafi refers to the potential of artists' "acts of visual resistance" in shaping public space and its perception.

None of them view art as the sole way to convince policy makers as the key approach to present radical, disruptive and community-based needs and desires. Each attributes a crucial role to art, such as in the translation of the complex and complicated into an emotional, experiential and digestible format; or to provide a new lens through which to view specific urban issues; or for designers to place greater emphasis into which challenges an artwork or design solution is actually responding to with imagination. As one interviewee articulates well, we collectively aim for a future in which the involvement of artists as community leaders, as local researchers and urban visionaries is no longer a point that requires debating.

In a hopeful interpretation of these three conversations I there seems to be a growing interest in their practice, their methodology and

frameworks. In addition, each is continuously and increasingly involved in transnational corporations around knowledge sharing, capacity bridging, intercultural communication and strategising. While there is still a need for expansion within like-minded and constructive network building, this provides insights into how the momentum of this project's gatherings can be utilised and expanded as well.

Additionally seeing how well the interviews harmonise with some of the questions that arose from the workshops felt nourishing. The question "How might we design urban futures that amplify the power of reclaimed tangible cultural artefacts to challenge traditional norms, fostering a continuous dialogue between heritage and progressive change, and enabling diverse communities to craft their own narratives of empowerment and connection?" appears to be thoroughly addressed by Loredana Stasisin. When Faezeh Mohammadi introduces the work of Parkhuis, I am reminded of the question of "How might encourage urban futures that actively engage with their inhabitants, facilitate environments and platforms that not only acknowledge the duality of cultural practices but also catalyse their transformative power, enabling communities to reclaim, reinterpret, and celebrate these practices as symbols of empowerment, resistance, and shared identity?". Lastly, in discussion with Safaa Charafi about responsible, anti-capitalist and inclusive design, I recognise elements of the question "How might we facilitate urban futures that reimagine the world of design

and architecture to be more in harmony with our planet, prioritising holistic perspectives and values over capitalistic and Eurocentric norms, so that passionate designers can contribute without compromising their conscience?”.

As a continuation of this project I aim to place the game online as a tool for data collection to gain insights from users who interact with the works and respond to them through survey-like tools. Additionally I plan to follow up on the research through exploring some of the strategy building ideas expressed by participants collectively. I work to nudge us closer to a state of conviviality, satisfying diverse citizen needs rather than extracting resources (Barkin, 2019, p. 136), through queer love building “alliances proactively with the common struggle” (Narrain, 2019, p. 286) and body politics facilitating “ways to re-imagine and remake the world” (Harcourt, 2019, p. 106). Additionally accessibility considerations will play a central role in the project continuation of this working prototype of a digital anti-monumentalist game.

# Link to CIRCE

## Role of the cultural and creative economies in the crises of today and tomorrow

Over the past six months my understanding of the expansiveness of the creative and cultural industries (CCI) evolved. I had considered the multifaceted intersections of creativity, culture, and economic frameworks to frame CCI, in line with the NESTA<sup>1</sup> model as shared by cultural policy researcher Eliza Easton during her talk with the CIRCE fellows. However there I also came to learn about the vastness of who would be considered a practitioner within the CCI. Seeing the inclusion of Content, Services, Original and Experiences in the CCI visualised and validated my approach of connecting architecture/urban design, performance, visual arts and the like with design, games etc. as a multi-modal and multimedia toolkit for societal transformation. Additionally, becoming acquainted with the 39 other CIRCE fellows and Creative Impact Fund projects paved the way for a refined understanding of the breadth of CCI, emphasising the importance of creative endeavours across varied sectors and their impact on society, politics and the economy. While frequently the focus here lies on innovation, I can only partially warm up to the concept of innovation as it is so often coupled with growth, optimisation, efficiency and general concepts of scale. Instead I am more interested in the “innovative” linkages one can uncover across CCI when explicitly narrowing in on the contributions

of grassroots and bottom-up practices and such supporting a more anti-capitalist or degrowth agenda that may be desired by policy-makers at first. I would argue, as have many done before me (Lunz, 2022), that much constructive policy change stems from the tireless work of (intersectional) feminists and fellow activists, thus I advocate for more vocal appreciation of their contributions to the relevance of CCI and associated policy developments. CIRCE has done a step in a similar direction, considering how these fellowships “aim [...] to tap synergy effects in the interplay with other economic sectors and various policy fields and to identify opportunities for cooperation”<sup>2</sup> to address the current and future crisis of our time, as stated on the CIRCE website. With these goals in mind I believe there remains much to learn from the approaches of (platform) cooperativism<sup>3</sup> that can be applied across economic sectors that encompass CCI. Similarly the Platform Coop School for the first time specifically included artists as their target audience in this year’s call for their fellowship<sup>4</sup>, placing particular importance on the activist, economic and transformative power of community-driven arts. While a particular political ideology cannot be associated with the cooperativist approach, the knowledge hubs have clearly linked the CCI with the economic shift they are advocating for. It is

here that many artists and activists are turning to cooperative entrepreneurship with teams often made up of creatives, particularly artists, curators, designers and creative researchers such as art.coop initiative<sup>5</sup> and regional platform coop hubs<sup>6</sup>. Claiming an economically non-extractive contributing role to CCI and the demand for policy innovation it is here that I would situate my research project within the CCI and the framing provided by CIRCE.

Additionally I can say that the expressed focus on diversity, equity and inclusion within the CIRCE fellowships resonated with me and gave me the sense that this rather experimental and artistic research of my creative endeavour is well-situated within the CIRCE initiative.

This exploration of the CCI component illuminated the way that (pan-)European projects and initiatives have continuously expanded the inclusion of artistic practice in community engagement, the communication of speculative desires and the potential for urban renewal. One such example is the Re-Imagine Europe<sup>7</sup> project that also applies artistic facilitation to foster critical engagement with one's environment to develop solutions for contemporary crises across a consortium of 10 organisations. Artistic and cultural approaches to international cooperation highlight further "that a European identity cannot be Eurocentric" as new narratives continuously expand this identity (D'Ancona, 2017).

This development is most clearly articulated

in the call for a Cultural Deal for Europe<sup>8</sup> by a coalition of European initiatives and cultural stakeholders spotlighting the relevance of art and culture for a reflexive analysis of the past, present and future and that demands "mainstream culture in key EU policies". Knowing from experience many of the participating organisations and funding bodies and their support for activist and experimental artistic and cultural interventions, I do identify more closely with the CCI's disruptive potential.

## Footnotes

1 NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts UK), retrieved on 29.09.23: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Refined-model-of-Creative-Industries-Reproduced-from-NESTA-2006\\_fig1\\_249033727](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Refined-model-of-Creative-Industries-Reproduced-from-NESTA-2006_fig1_249033727)

2 Retrieved on 01.10.2023 on <https://creativeimpact.eu/en/fellowships/>

3 A knowledge hub about platform coops can be found here, retrieved on 01.10.2023: <https://platform.coop/about/pcc>

4 View this year's cohort, retrieved on 01.10.2023 <https://platform.coop/blog/meet-the-2023-2024-icde-fellowship-cohort>

5 Learn more about their support for artists fighting for economic justice here, retrieved on 01.10.2023: <https://art.coop/#artists>

6 The Berlin-based platform coop lab is co-founded by creatives, retrieved on 01.10.2023: <https://platformcoop.de>

7 More information can be found here, retrieved on 01.10.2023: <https://re-imagine-europe.eu/about>

8 Read the full call here, retrieved on 01.01.2023: <https://culturaldeal.eu>

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# Appendices

## Original Timeline and Changes Occurred

Original timeline and process	Changes occurred	Reasons for Change
<p><i>April-June // hybrid:</i></p> <p>Roundtables with 10 potential collaborators from urban feminist and anti-colonial thinkers and practitioners on the goals, method and outreach of this fellowship project</p>	<p>Conversations with potential participants were held and it was decided to focus on the physical somatic engagement instead of an initial roundtable.</p>	<p>As not all participants view themselves as urban practitioners or have differing definitions, it became clear that a workshop based on Theatre of the Oppressed would have higher chances of creating a space of trust and engagement.</p>
<p><i>May-July // hybrid:</i></p> <p>Structuring, execution and documentation of Theatre of the Oppressed session for up to 15 participants</p>	<p>The roundtable and ToO workshops were combined into two sessions (1 full day in person; 2 hours online) using ToO with the same group of more than 10 people instead of two completely different sessions. Both took place in July rather than spread across more time to not lose momentum in the group.</p>	<p>With the ToO methodology being rooted in social justice work it carries more potential for the group. Also splitting the group into two (slightly) different groups of participants could have destabilised the trust that was built in the first workshop and was crucial for the online interaction that followed.</p>
<p><i>June - September:</i></p> <p>Design, prototyping</p>	<p>Design and development started in</p>	<p>Availability was a key reason for the temporal</p>

<p>and development of virtual environment using the Unity engine serving as the online accessible backdrop for participant narratives to be developed</p>	<p>August, rather than already in June due to availability issue, however design brief and moodboard were already done at end of July, the process was documented using notion and the game designer worked in Unity</p>	<p>shift of the design and development period. Additionally the artistic contributions to the game came in continuously so that the virtual environment was in a constant iterative state.</p>
<p><i>July-August:</i> Workshops on digital creation using open-source tools and rapid prototyping methods at Oyouun MediaLab to creative first usable designs for the game environment</p>	<p>The digital literacy component was removed due to time, resources and accessibility across geographical distances and because instead of an open call, this was a more curated process / curatorial research, so that a conversational approach was continued from the first engagement with practitioners to their final contributions.</p>	<p>One reason was the incomplete state of the Oyouun MediaLab at the time being, as this only launched in September. Utilising additional infrastructure would have come at additional cost. Additionally literacy was not a concern among the selected contributors. Opening up the submission to a larger group is still feasible as a next step, however it make sense in retrospect to first finalise a functioning state of the virtual environment to better understand future worldbuilding principles.</p>
<p><i>July-August:</i></p>	<p>Instead, this project took</p>	<p>This was mostly due to the</p>

<p>Open call inviting remote participants to submit their designed narratives</p>	<p>on the scope of a curatorial research project with more articulated concept of inclusion and exclusion of participating artists.</p>	<p>conversational approach centring trust, care and solidarity, that it was more lending itself to bringing together practitioners already in conversation rather than a complete opening up of the reach.</p>
<p><i>September:</i> Roundtable discussion with 6 selected participants and 5 policy makers/urban planners to discuss method, goals and next steps</p>	<p>Three feminist interdisciplinary urban planners and policy makers, or urbanists, were invited for interviews and their views on integrating art into urban future making.</p>	<p>The reasoning here was to really give the floor to those already building bridges across communities, institutions and decision-making levels to better understand the translation work needed to invest into peripheral artistic expression.</p>

How might we create urban futures that preserve and leverage the individuality of hyper-local cultures, community bonding, and a strong connection to nature while embracing the values of giving and gifting as expressions of love and unity, similar to the patchwork fabric that symbolises collective effort and interconnectedness among neighbours?

How might we envision urban futures where individual gender expression is not just accepted but is the very fabric of community identity, crafting cities that organically adapt and celebrate every evolving self-expression?

How might urban futures in a post-conflict world evolve as sentient entities that anticipate and respond to community needs, healing past wounds and crafting spaces that seamlessly blend cultures, memories, and aspirations?

How might urban future spaces intuitively connect with and adapt to the often complex mental and emotional journeys of their immigrant inhabitants, creating organic healing sanctuaries that transcend linguistic and cultural barriers, offering solace and understanding?

How might we cultivate urban futures that both recognise the significance of personal tokens that bond us to our communities and also champion a deep sense of empathy, ensuring individuals can traverse these spaces feeling both protected and ready to assist others compassionately?

How might we imagine urban futures where passive observation has evolved into an instinctive collective responsibility, with systems and tools in place that seamlessly transform individual doubts into collaborative actions of solidarity against systemic challenges, all rooted in community accountability where justice and unity are inextricably linked?

How might we envision urban futures that are not just spaces, but empathetic entities — recognising the traumas and emotional burdens of its inhabitants, and adapting to create environments that catalyse healing, promote feelings of liberation, and transform ordinary daily experiences into powerful moments of self-discovery and renewal?

How might encourage urban futures that actively engage with their inhabitants, facilitate environments and platforms that not only acknowledge the duality of cultural practices but also catalyse their transformative power, enabling communities to reclaim, reinterpret, and celebrate these practices as symbols of empowerment, resistance, and shared identity?

How might we design urban futures that amplify the power of reclaimed tangible cultural artefacts to challenge traditional norms, fostering a continuous dialogue between heritage and progressive change, and enabling diverse communities to craft their own narratives of empowerment and connection?

How might we design urban futures that enable individuals to maintain connection with and honour lost familial identities, ensuring that captured moments and rituals serve as bridges between legacies of the past and the present?

How might we envision urban futures that are rooted in love, respect, and understanding, where marginalised communities unite or support one another to rewrite narratives, and divisive behaviours are replaced by collective empowerment and shared future crafting?

How might we envision urban futures where communities collectively define, affirm, and support the fluid journey of parenthood transcending current legal barriers, emphasising communal commitment and shared responsibility, to foster a next generation nurtured free from prejudice?

How might we facilitate urban futures that reimagine the world of design and architecture to be more in harmony with our planet, prioritising holistic perspectives and values over capitalistic and Eurocentric norms, so that passionate designers can contribute without compromising their conscience?

How might we design urban futures that adjust to the diverse mobility needs of its inhabitants, while integrating sustainable, heritage-driven materials and rituals, ensuring that local communities, particularly women\*, become central stewards of this adaptive urban metamorphosis?