2050: The future wellbeing of cities in a world in crisis

Introduction

Innovation in education is at the heart of this 5-day intensive course. You will work in groups on a project to challenge your views of the notion of wellbeing in cities as is today and what it could be in the future.

By working in transdisciplinary teams you will investigate **The future wellbeing of cities in a world in crisis** topic from various perspectives with a specific challenge: developing an innovative proposal for how a future city (2050) could address the global challenges *related to sustainability and human and non-human wellbeing.*

You will creatively explore through a Design Thinking process, where investigation and extrapolation follows a systematic approach that advances step by step from an open phase of discovery to definition of the problem, ideation and a final tangible manifestation of your future vision. Also, by applying dialogic Creative Pedagogies that place at the forefront: ethics, embodiment, transdisciplinarity, communality and agency, you will be guided to move from how things are, towards how things could be or ways in which we might encourage them to emerge ("what if?" thinking).

As a group, you'll then communicate your vision or ideas for future cities in a world in crisis using an experiential or speculative prototype, a storyboard, a performance, or any other creative medium. You will present this idea at the end of the course. Both the proposal and its communication need to be credible propositions of innovative ways to support the wellbeing in cities or for a broader vision for the future of cities, based on an exploratory activity and/or evidence gathered, and on creative extrapolation. You will learn about all of these consecutive steps during the course.

Cities in the age of the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is a proposed descriptor for the current epoch that humans are said to have created by our interactions with the planet which have resulted in irreversible alterations.

The acceleration of planetary changes, the massive growth of fossil fuel use and extraction, radioactive fallout, overconsumption of plastics and other man-made materials, the disruptive forces of digitalisation and globalisation and the more recent Covid-19 pandemic have set in motion what is becoming a global existential crisis. It is hard to point to anything that is stable—the environment included. This volatile and uncertain moment raises questions of purpose for our current ways of living in urban environments and how they can address societal and environmental challenges to support the well-being of citizens and the planet.

"According to scientists, it is a time when the functioning of ecosystems and the well-being of people are at risk, and adequate responses are needed to address complex and ambiguous issues. Those global challenges represent persistent problems in our society. In order to respond to those challenges, scientists recommend exploring new pathways beyond the growth-based economic model driving our societies, and call for planetary stewardship and for a societal transition towards more responsible ways of relating to people and [the] planet, and of operating, researching, and innovating (Tassone et al. 2018)".[1]

This project is an invitation to critically reflect on current values and perceived needs to identify emerging aspirations and behaviours that can shape sustainable models for the cities of the future. Exploring this future includes developing an understanding of what objects, technologies, and ideas will be important, and which actors (human and non-human) will make up cities in the future. In 30 years, ways of living will be different. People will have different views and life experiences, and will have grown up in different technological, economic and social climates, with different family structures, friendships, and relationships. These differences are very important to consider when exploring the future well-being of cities.

Technology and the future of cities

The expansion of digital and smart technology has led to novel forms of environmental interaction. Technology, by definition, serves to augment human capacities and in so doing alters the environment in which we act. In the past four decades technology has fundamentally altered our lives: from the way we work, think, and learn to how we communicate and behave. Emerging technologies have not been without controversy

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[1] Tassone, Valentina C., et al. "(Re-) designing higher education curricula in times of systemic dysfunction: a responsible research and innovation perspective." *Higher Education* 76.2 (2018): 337-352.

pushing society to explore new pathways beyond the growth-based economic model and to reflect on how technology can be applied for social good and address environmental challenges. You are invited to reflect critically about the use of technology to design future cities and to not just employ technology for its own sake:

How can the application and design of technology be valuable for the well-being of future cities?

By learning about people's behaviours and interactions we can often develop a rich understanding of their lives; we can gain insights into what they find meaningful or significant and learn how personal and social behaviours shape everyday experiences. With such knowledge, one not only has a framework within which to address current needs, but also a means to speculate upon alternative or innovative ways of living; one has an opportunity to design innovative artefacts, services, environments, experiences and collaborative interactions.

These are some questions that can guide you along the process:

How can the design of future cities reflect on pressing issues related to sustainability and human and non-human wellbeing? And how should we determine what makes an ideal city? Can there be an ideal city?

How can scientific knowledge, arts-based knowing and creative practices interweave to promote the well-being of cities? How might play be used within this to design our city spaces and experiences?

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To help you in this journey towards the City of the Future centred around well-being , think about:

- The identification of a target user-group, whose essential characteristic should be distinctive and clearly defined. This defining characteristic might be a particular demographic group, but equally might be a subject matter, a specific interaction or experience happening in a city, a specific challenge/opportunity related to the well-being in cities; the user group might also be the natural environment within the city; the user group might be the technological networks that are enmeshed in and support the city…..

- If you use an entrepreneurial mindset: how do you turn an idea into a practical output that can benefit your identified target group? Also think about how it can be realistically implemented. What funding would be needed? And from where would

that money come from: government, EU funding, the users themselves (or their parents/guardians)? Moreover, one of the design outcomes next to desirability and feasibility is viability. So next to funding, how would you determine viability? Could other incentives next to money be part of that negotiation between stakeholders?

There is no right or wrong; this is a speculative, short project. The purpose is to collaborate on a common goal in a transdisciplinary way, and to be immersed in a creative environment where, with the use of creative processes, artistic and scientific methods and different tools, you will discover ways to navigate "the not yet" and move from current challenges and needs towards ideas proposition and creative communication of these ideas.

Remember, this project is about how '**we' will live** (thinking about 'we' in the very broadest sense), not simply how we do live, at present. Our starting points are today's challenges: not to solve them for the short term, but the longer term. The same holds for the present technological and social arrangements. What do you think is necessary for the future and what should be developed and how?

Bear in mind that if you are considering technologies specifically, you are not asked to invent future technologies perse, but rather to think about how existing and emerging technologies can be used to support more sustainable models of cities and mediate innovative personal/social behaviours and interactions (Science Fiction Vs Social Fiction).

It's not about predicting the future. It's about engaging with possible future scenarios to gain actual human insights. These insights can reveal how users feel about specific futures and indicate where we're heading. We don't design for how the world is; we design for how we'd like it to be. Signe Bek

Thomas Wendt, on the other hand, comes at the question of decentering the human from a more ecological perspective, focusing on the inherent unsustainability of human-centered design in capitalist society. In a critique of empathy, he writes :

The crux of human-centered design is that human needs should be considered before business and technological needs. If a design does not meet a defined human need, then its business viability and technical feasibility don't matter. This human-business-technology model ignores other components of design, such as sustainability, ethics, and egalitarianism. Thomas Wendt

PROJECT TIMELINE

During this course you'll have some time allocated each day to work in different teams on this project.

The project follows a design-led process and each day you will go through 5 different steps of this process: Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver, Communicate. It is also driven by the Creative Pedagogic principles of: dialogue; transdisciplinarity; ethics and trusteeship; risk, immersion

and play; empowerment and agency; individual collaborative and communal activities for change; balance and navigation and possibilities.

DAY 1: DISCOVER

- Gaining a contextual understanding on the topic of Wellbeing, Cities and the future (2050).

- Immerse yourself in primary research to understand the context directly from observation and direct experience

- Brainstorm to start populating your "LogBook" on Mural

DAY 2: DEFINE

- Using your LogBook, define a specific question/challenge you'd like to address around The Future Well-Being of cities in a world in crisis

- Define a specific theme, a demographic/target users (e.g. elderly people, children, teenager, or specific communities or ecosystems), a specific need/challenge/topic related to this target, a specific interaction/experience happening in the future city, a specific subject related to the well-being of cities (mobility, air quality, social inclusion, biodiversity, creativity etc) and a specific challenge related to the well-being in cities

DAY 3: DEVELOP

- Explore and develop possible opportunities that address your research question and how they interact with behaviours, aspirations, values and needs of 2050.

- Develop future scenarios: think of the Technological, Environmental, Political, Sociocultural, Artistic, Scientific future context where your vision for the well-being of a city will emerge and why it is needed.

- Develop the essence of the future well being of cities.

DAY 4: DELIVER

- Iterate on your essence through art, science and entrepreneurship. How insight from these fields critique your essence?

- Finalize your idea by defining the details (e.g. the name of service, vision, proposal, the target, the physical form, the interactions etc.) and by finding ways to make the idea viable with an entrepreneurial mindset.

DAY 5: COMMUNICATE

- Communicate your idea: explore with your team how to create an engaging narrative and how to communicate your future vision through a visual and tangible manifestation.

AFTER THE COURSE: SCICULTURE MEETS

Aim: To communicate to a select audience/target groups the process and content your team developed together when exploring 2050: The future wellbeing of Cities in a world in crisis.

This will be part of efforts to grow the SciCulture Ambassador network (and note: more details will be presented at the end of the course).

Target audience: 40 people
Goal: To engage an audience not directly associated with the academic environment - entrepreneurs, artists, policymakers and other interested stakeholders

Think about SciCulture Meets throughout this course. The communication process is open and emergent: these are just guidelines and there are no rules set in stone. Don't be shy to explore, to work with your team and incorporate your own creative ways of developing and communicating your final idea.

Suggested resources:

- https://nextnature.net/magazine/story/2021/future-cities
- https://www.centreforcities.org/future-of-cities/
- http://futurecitiesdesignlab.com/
- https://placemaking-europe.eu/consortium-placecity/
- https://nextnature.net/magazine/visual/2021/geodesign-the-timeline
- Why we need to imagine different futures- Anab Jain
- Aldo van Eyck's Playgrounds: Aesthetics, Affordances, and Creativity
- Posthumanism and Design-Laura Forlano
- The future of cities: Opportunities, challenges and the way forward. European Commission. April 2019. ISBN 978-92-76-03847-4. doi:10.2760/375209.