MARK TURNBULL
TRAVEL AWARD PORTFOLIO
SAMUEL CORTIS
The Mark Turnbull Award

Mark Turnbull was one of Scotland’s most eminent Landscape Architects, and winner of the Landscape Institute’s Gold Medal Award. The beginning of Mark’s career was shaped by his opportunity to travel to America through the Fulbright Scholarship and study under Ian McHarg in Philadelphia. This award has been established in his memory and inspired by his travels and conversations abroad which have been so informative.

This award granted me the opportunity to travel to seven European cities starting in Bordeaux and finishing in Berlin, with Lyon, Paris, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Amsterdam in between. Like Mark Turnbull’s experience abroad, one of the greatest and most enriching experiences of the trip were the conversations I had with Landscape Architects, municipalities and local community groups. It was fantastic to be exposed to the subject of ‘social spaces’ from so many professional and cultural perspectives.

This portfolio reflects my experiences, and I hope it may be used as a tool to address some of the challenges faced by Scottish community spaces.

LUC

I would like to thank LUC for the support they have offered me for this award, without which embarking on my travels would not have been possible.

Corona Virus...

It would be impossible to recount a trip taken at the beginning of 2020 without referencing the Corona Virus pandemic. When I left the UK, I could not have imagined that by the time I returned we would only be a week away from the nationally enforced lockdown. I was highly fortunate that it did not affect my trip too severely, with changes being enforced only when I arrived in Berlin, limiting the number of practices I could meet with and public spaces I could visit. Overall however, I consider myself to be very fortunate.

Unfortunately, these days the word ‘community’ is being used by the media in reference to the ‘community spread’ of the virus. When these times are behind us however, social spaces will be more relevant than ever as we return from our global hibernation. It also presents the fantastic opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities for the urban spaces we inhabit.
Making room for social spaces; how can community and collectively focused landscapes shape development strategies for Scotland?

The Research Question

On a personal level, I experienced the true potential of community spaces through growing vegetables for the first time. The opportunity was offered to me by a community group who set up thirty raised beds on an abandoned bowls pitch which had been lent to them by the local sports club. As I witnessed people coming together, sharing knowledge, developing skills and establishing social networks, I came to understand the potential of community spaces. Yet I was also struck by the fragility of this space which was managed by a community group dependent on funding for its survival, existing on temporarily borrowed land. There is no doubt that these community landscapes offer a huge amount of opportunity and vitality to the local area, but I wondered if these spaces could shape and influence future developments if they were granted a more permanent status.

When considering the state of our contemporary European cities, space is becoming an ever more precious resource and it is community space that is being marginalised by the need for new homes and infrastructure. Yet most cities have visible swathes of dormant landscapes, places where once specialised activity took place but which now lie in the twilight zone between abandonment and development. This experience has granted me the opportunity to explore how community and collectively-focused spaces (in all their various forms) can reinvigorate these places in the short-term, whilst also shaping the long-term development, social structure and sense of place in urban areas.

Shaping development strategies for Scotland

Scotland currently has about 11,000 hectares of vacant and derelict land, a legacy of its industrial past. From my professional experience at LUC I have witnessed the potential damage that these types of spaces can cause for communities. The North Toryglen project is a key example of this. In the first instance it is a community that has become isolated by road and rail infrastructure creating barriers between itself and other areas of the city. This isolation is compounded by the fact that it is also surrounded by underused and vacant land. Through our consultation process, we learnt that many residents felt that it is unsafe to leave their houses after nightfall. Abandoned spaces often quickly collect negative reputations which make them of little interest to private developers. The consequence is that many of these spaces have existing behind fences or as featureless expanses for decades. If the market is not a solution for creating change then maybe it is time for forces that lie outside of the economic world to take ownership of this current burden.

Community and collective spaces are, in many cases, a potential solution to this dilemma. They are also spaces that have the capacity to generate far-reaching benefits for a neighbourhood. This can in turn shape development strategies for Scotland as it paves a way for other forms of growth to follow.

This line of research has the potential to satisfy many current Scottish objectives. The Landscape Institute’s recently launched as Landscape Alliance are examining these key topics, each of which can be positively affected through community and collective-focused landscapes;

- Landscape and Healthy Communities
- Landscape and Resilience to Environmental Challenges
- Landscape, Land Use and Economy

On a national level, the Scottish Government’s ‘Program for Scotland’ as well as the ‘National Performance Framework’ have also stated national interest in;

- Community empowerment
- Place
- Health and well-being
- Resilience and adaption to climate change and other environmental challenges.

I believe this makes community and collective-focused landscapes a highly relevant area of exploration for Scotland. I hope that this portfolio can act as a source of inspiration for alternative development strategies.
I first became involved in the North Toryglen project when I joined LUC in September of 2018 after graduating from MMU in the summer. Initially, we produced a successful Green Infrastructure and Sustrans funding application, and since then we have developed a construction package with works due to start in the summer of 2020. This experience has informed two major areas of interest, leading to the development of my research question.

Firstly, I witnessed how community-owned and managed landscapes can shape the process of development through working alongside the community group Urban Roots who manage the local nature reserve. They are a key community resource, providing numerous services and opportunities for the local people. As well as stimulating local social growth, it was also their activism that brought attention to the area and created funding opportunities which ultimately led to our involvement within the area’s regeneration. Here we see how an ecologically diverse and community-led landscape has acted not as a barrier to development, but as a stimulus for positive growth.

Secondly, throughout the design process Urban Roots have enriched and informed the experience. Their knowledge of the community improved our consultation process, helping us reach a greater and more diverse audience of local people. Although there have been many large-scale developments within the neighbourhood, this was the first time that the community had been consulted on proposals. To work alongside an active community group was, as Landscape Architects, able to get a more detailed understanding of the social landscape we were designing for. Through this process, I came to understand the value of vibrant community groups such as Urban Roots for creating relevant developments.

The Toryglen Masterplan aims to reintegrate and reactivate the space, with new shared paths designed to bring people into and through the neighbourhood. We have also transformed the derelict land of Toryglen Park into an activity space with a new play area, pump track, running circle as well as meeting points. We have designed numerous features such as gateways throughout the site and a sculptural park frontage to Aikenhead Road to strengthen the sense identity across the site. Within the Malls Mire Woodland, new outdoor learning spaces have been created as well as a feature stone trail with engravings of local wildlife. Finally, new areas of woodland have been planted to improve the biodiversity across the site. The community have been consulted at every stage of the design and there is a sense of optimism for proposed designs and how they will help shape the neighbourhood.
Collective, Community & Ownership.

‘Collective’, ‘Community’ and ‘Ownership’ are three terms that are at the heart of my question and must be further examined and defined for the purpose of clarity. The complex nature of social space means that in almost every example that is referenced within this portfolio, there is an interaction between all three elements. Nonetheless, it is important to define them as individual aspects in order to fully appreciate the potential of these landscapes.

**Community**

Being part of a communal network is an intrinsic part of being human. To fully understand its importance within our life, it is necessary to turn to our evolutionary past. Since the beginning of humankind, we have been great collaborators. We evolved from the African Savanna which was a dangerous place with large predators. We survived despite being slower and weaker thanks to our ability to collaborate and capacity for mutual aid. As described by George Monbiot, our brains were hard-wired for communal survival through natural selection. Physical pain and emotional pain stems from the same neural circuits. The emotional pain we suffered when apart from our community, where we were vulnerable to predators, caused us to return to the fold. Our modern, globalised world has eroded many values of localism and weakened our connection to the idea of community. I believe there is a need to emphasize and design for the importance of community within our modern lives. The more the field of landscape architecture can embrace and practice this concept, the more this role will be valued within our constantly changing cities.

Community spaces are areas that are built on the foundations of a social networks. They are a shared resource where local people can come together to pursue shared interests and values. They are by their nature highly diverse, and often ecologically importance spaces, that have far reaching benefits for the community.

1. George Monbiot, Out of the Wreakage

**Collective**

A ‘collective landscape’ can be defined as a place where a group of people, often with diverse backgrounds, have come together to solve a contemporary urban issue. Our world is changing at a faster rate than it ever has before, thanks to the exponential advance in technology. This in turn creates new patterns of behaviour and a rapidly changing urban environment which needs to accommodate our new lives as well as additional pressures such as climate change. The evolution of urban spaces inevitably leads to issues. The best examples of ‘collective landscape’ that I witnessed on my trip turned these issues into opportunities.

For the field of Landscape Architecture, it is vital to respond to these changing values and we are in the unique position to facilitate and organise the new foundations that our cities and towns are in need of. As this portfolio aims to demonstrate, creativity, collaboration and bravery in design will be rewarded with dynamic and vibrant urban environments that will enrich experience.

**Ownership**

The term ‘collective’ looks to the future, and ‘community’ is intrinsically linked to our evolutionary needs, and that which links the two is a sense of ‘ownership’. This word continually came up in conversation during the meetings I had with professional and local people I met across Europe. It is also a term which has a multifaceted meaning with both literal and symbolic connotations.

Literal ownership of a space allows a community to transform an area of a city into something that reflects their values and interests, but beyond this ownership of a space also represents a symbolic sense of belonging.

I will be looking at the role of ‘ownership’ as it interacts with community and collective spaces in the exploration of the projects I encountered along my travels. In doing so, I hope to be able to demonstrate the importance of citizen ownership and how it creates a sense of collective empowerment.
The challenge in researching social spaces is that they are each unique to the context of the place in which they are located, having been woven from many different strands of their distinct geographical and human histories. Whilst there are certain difficulties in creating a precise model with which to replicate a specific space in a new location, patterns and themes began to emerge through my research which linked many of the spaces that I encountered.

Drawing on the patterns that I observed, I have broken down the processes involved in making successful and resilient community spaces into three key phases. Each has been embedded into a timeline where they interact and may overlap. It is my hope that this framework will be able to be applied in Scotland to support the transformation of vacant areas into vibrant social hubs that enhance a sense of the collective, community and ownership of a space.

Phase 1: Participation and Engagement
– the conception and implementation of a social space through the engagement of the community

Phase 2: Empowerment and Placemaking
– the way in which spaces establish themselves within the middle-term, changing social patterns of use

Phase 3: Resilience
– considering the longevity of a social space and its potential to shape an urban fabric.

As shown in the diagram above, each of these phases contain several ‘actions’. These actions are ideas and strategies that I learnt about through the spaces I visited and people I spoke to during my trip. Each ‘action’ has been employed by either a municipality, Landscape Architect or local group as a means by which to create vibrant social spaces.

The framework is not necessarily intended to be implemented in its entirety, rather it has been designed to allow relevant ‘actions’ from each phase to be applied to a project accordingly. In a sense each ‘action’ can be seen as an ingredient which should complement the existing ‘flavour’ of a place.

The next three chapters of this correspond with the three phases as outlined within the diagram. I will explore each ‘phase’ in detail and delve into the projects that best reflected the potential and value in each ‘action’, and how this might allow for more diverse and vibrant community spaces within Scotland.
As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an abundance of potential spaces for community and collective-focused landscapes, they litter the urban environment. For most urban environments in Scotland, the question is not where can we find the space but how can we create relevant community centred spaces in pre-existing sites? In there current state it is sometimes difficult for the local population to imagine these spaces as valuable or as potential asset to the community.

In principle it is a simple concept, it brings people and their ideas into the spaces they have often avoided. With events and through the construction of basic infrastructure and installations people are able to use and therefore, imagine these landscapes in a new way. These moments can act as a catalyst, and with guidance a community can take a ownership of a new space, shaped by their collective ambitions and interests.

Landscape Architects are uniquely placed to implement this task as we are taught and trained to see to potential and value of a place. The following case studies examine how different practices have tackled this challenge within a range of settings and at different scales.
Bruit du Frigo are a intriguing practice who I met with in Bordeaux, and who feature in several other chapters of this portfolio. Founded in 1977 they define themselves as an ‘Urban Creative Collective’ who ‘propose alternative ways of imagining, building and living environments.’ They are a practice who actively engages with local communities and specialise in innovative consultation techniques.

In 2003, this project originated when a group of volunteers working in collaboration with the Bordeaux-Nord Social and Cultural Centre built a temporary garden within an abandoned plot of land in a neighbourhood near the Basin à Flots district. The initial stages of the project were based on learning and engagement with local young people, who helped build furniture for the space, allowing for new social activity to take place. One of the prototype pieces of furniture was a paddling pool which brought many children to the space!

This event proved to be a catalyst for wider community engagement. Alongside several local associations, a group of local residents began to campaign to make the space a permanent park, which was supported by Bruit du Frigo. In collaboration with the residents, Bruit du Frigo were able to facilitate connections with the local government and organise administrations to bring people together. As Yvan Detraz, Initial Phase – community collaboration  

Jardin de la Soeur  

LOCATION: Bordeaux  
DESIGNER: Bruit du Frigo  

Director of Bruit du Frigo, told me, co-production of common space requires the invention of innovative forms of coordination.

Interestingly, one of the principles of the community space was to create unique pieces of furniture for the park, with the initial intent of creating a temporary garden. Bruit du Frigo developed a design for the park and commissioned a number of different artists and collaborators to create these pieces.

One of the most striking elements of the park was designed by a Chilean mosaic group called Punto Funga who were partaking in a residency in Bordeaux. Even the construction was a communal effort with approximately 130 residents, including local schools, assisting in the construction process. Since then, numerous other pieces of furniture have been added to the garden including a piece of bespoke play equipment created from left-over industrial material, a pergola and sculptural art pieces.

Jardin de la Soeur is a fascinating example of how an initial intervention can mobilise a community, helping them appreciate the value of their open green space. Today it has developed into more than a community park – it has been shaped by collective interventions which have brought different minds and art forms together to create a hybrid space. Throughout, the space has been dictated by local people who have helped to design, built and create the park in the form it is in today. I believe this is an excellent model for developing relevant social spaces, through an empowered community group which could be used with Scotland to take control of vacant spaces.
In contrast to this project, Bruit du Frigo's involvement with 'La Confluence' is an interesting example of how these techniques of engagement can be scaled to larger projects. La Confluence, in Lyon, is a post-industrial landscape positioned on a peninsular directly north of where the two main city rivers meet. A city initiative plans to turn this area of the city into an urban forest, the masterplan of which is being developed by BASE Landscape Architects. Bruit du Frigo's role lies within the engagement process of the project.

The inventive approach which they developed for this project reflects the challenges of the existing site which is largely devoid of people. It is an underused space as it is a largely derelict area with abandoned factories scattered throughout. Filling the gaps are car parks and nondescript wastelands. Bringing people to the area and sparking their imagination as to what an urban forest could look like within such a desolate area was a key part of the project. Bruit du Frigo knew that they would have to challenge people's existing perceptions and impart upon them a sense of curiosity and possibility.

In order to facilitate this, Bruit du Frigo designed a temporary 'experimental station' called 'La Station Mue'. It was conceived as a 'pioneering basecamp within a changing territory.' It is a playful, artistic and relaxing space which has become the backdrop of the public consultation scheme and has shaped and evolved the existing masterplan design.

Alongside the installation a festival was set up between September 29 to October 6, 2018 which brought more activity and diversity to the space, generating community involvement. It also opened the doors to different minds and industries who all had an opportunity to help create a variety of experiences. These included an introvert party, workshops, concerts and food events.

During my visit the site was unfortunately no longer open to the public but it still stood as a reminder and memory to the process that had taken place. Even as a closed space it stood as a beacon of potential amongst the factories and open spaces. The idea that had been planted for the event was slowly maturing and the forest was beginning to take shape in its small way.

These two examples use many of the same principles. Firstly, a basic level of infrastructure is designed and implemented to allow for new possibilities and behaviours within underused spaces by the community. Then, as the community begin to occupy and shape the space, other parties, professions and collective groups are brought into the space to help widen its diversity and shape its image. I believe it is a intriguing approach that should be more widely utilised within the underused spaces of our cities and could be applied to underutilised urban areas in Scotland.

Station Mue - La Confluence

LOCATION: Lyon
DESIGNER: Bruit du Frigo

Station Mue - a temporary activation space

Events and happenings
Bruit du Frigo photography
During my time in Amsterdam I was fortunate enough to have an opportunity to speak with Gert-Jan Wisse from Bureau B+B. One of the projects we discussed, KuBAal, is situated in the city of BachOLT in south-west Holland. An old textile centre, BachOLT has a 200 year history of producing the world famous blue and red checked tea towel. Today that industrial landscape lies forgotten behind brick walls on the banks of the Aa river. When the city began the project of reactivating this area, Bureau B+B and SeARCH Architects began the process by re-introducing the local people to the industrial heritage within the town.

To reanimate the collective memory, the existing factory buildings were re-purposed into temporary venues and event spaces. The activities included a secret garden, skate park, market space, concert venue and cinema. As people used and became familiar with the space, the public realm began to materialise as businesses and people began using the open spaces as hubs for activity. Through this natural process, squares and plazas emerged. These patterns of behaviour, created through new opportunities of use shaped the final design of the space. New connections were established to improve the accessibility, ecological and environmental landscapes along the river were created and a phased residential process began. As there was a re-found appreciation for the industrial landscape, house design was inspired by the unique roof shapes of the existing factories.

In this example it is possible to see how an ambitious initial approach to activation has shaped the imagination of the project, reconnecting to existing heritage and creating a stronger sense of identity for the city. There are many previously industrial landscapes across Scotland which, through the right design process, have the potential to become new dynamic and historic districts to our urban and peri-urban environments.
Natuurspeeltuin Speeldernis was the first Natural Playground to be implemented in Rotterdam and designed by Landscape Architect Sigrun Lobst, whom I had the privilege of meeting during my trip. Sigrun took on the challenge of designing a new type of playground when the existing play facility fell into disrepair and was underused by the community. Through an expansive consultation period Sigrun engaged with many children, but experienced a major limitation during the process. As this would be a completely new type of playground in Rotterdam, the children could not fully understand or imagine the experience of play that was being proposed. Their requests and ambitions for the space were based purely on their previous experiences of playgrounds which did not involve natural play elements.

For Sigrun, the most important question within a consultation is ‘How do you want to play?’ She is interested in learning what the children would like to experience within her design. These are ideas such as jumping, playing with water and spinning rather than which pieces of play equipment they would like. It was therefore essential for her that the children had an opportunity to experience a natural playground so that their imagination could be expanded.

Through several events, children from the local area were taken to a range of venues including nature reserves and rural activity centres. The new possibilities for play that they experienced in these non-urban environments helped Sigrun extract more from the consultation process and ultimately deliver a popular and successful space that is unique and cherished in the city.

In this example, the ignition of the imagination was achieved through new possibilities of activity. It highlights how creative thinking within the engagement process can shape the design process as well imagination of the space-user. The Speeldernis project also highlights the importance of a relevant engagement process, one that captures the imagination of those involved, especially when working with children.
While Igniting Imagination is an ‘action’ that uses events to spark a new sense of curiosity and potential within a space, Prototyping Designs uses designed interventions to encourage and alter new patterns of behaviour to emerge. The difference might seem subtle, but whilst there is a some overlap between all the phases, there are also distinct differences.

Within Prototyping Designs, a built form is the catalyst for change in use of a space. The examples within the ‘action’ show how a tiered process of prototyping within a space can help create a design that evolves to the changing relationship a space-user has with a landscape. This section will explore three examples at three different scales starting with the smallest.
In this project, Sigrun Lobst was tasked with the objective of transforming a paved backyard of a community centre into a garden. While the project had a timeline of six months, from consultation through to construction, Sigrun wanted to make an immediate impact upon the space as it was being used on a daily basis.

As the first task, and with the help of the local community, several slabs were removed to expose the soil beneath. Here trees and shrubs were planted, creating a new feel to the space and helping the children to imagine its potential.

As a simple initial technique, it has the ability to make an immediate impact upon a space and to change how it is perceived and used by the community. This phased form of design helps create something which is shaped by the evolution of the use of the space.
Mariahilfer Strasse is Europe’s longest shared space and the iconic street of Vienna, but its journey to become this was fraught and turbulent. I learnt about this project during my meeting with Bureau B+B and it impressed upon me the significance that a prototyping phased design can have upon a space.

While this has always been an important street in Vienna, the past 40 years have seen a dramatic increase of car traffic, turning it into a mono-functional and congested road. Despite these limitations, the initial idea of creating a shared space was met with resistance.

Through a consultation program it was agreed that the street would be closed to cars for a year as a trial period which would be followed by a public referendum to see if the people of Vienna were in favour.

During this time Bureau B+B helped design a number of prototyped ‘city lounges’ which became a central theme to the final design. These areas were designed as quieter spaces, protected from the swell of people by planters and benches, allowing for social interaction and points of meeting. The people immediately took ownership of the space and new patterns of behaviour could be observed.

At the end of trial period, the city of Vienna voted for a shared space but it was a closely contested battle. Without the trial period and the opportunity for the residents to experience prototyped ‘city lounges’ it is highly probable that the result would have been reversed.

There have been significant long-term improvements to the street since its completion in 2015. The dramatic decrease in traffic has led to reduced pollution and there are higher numbers of walkers and cyclists on the street, enhancing public health. Spending on the street also increased as people spent more time within the area. None of these things would have been realised however, if people were not given the opportunity to experience the street in a new way. Through Bureau B+B’s prototyping approach, people were given the opportunity to re-occupy a lost space.
Parc aux Angéliques

I feel privileged to have visited Parc aux Angéliques and to have had the opportunity to discuss it with Martin Basdevant, Director at Michel Desvigne Paysagiste in Paris. It is a project that has shaped the contemporary history of Bordeaux and it was achieved through a phased prototype design.

To understand the significance of their scheme it is important to briefly look into the layout of Bordeaux. The UNESCO heritage city is located with the Garonne river to its west. To the east lies the historically industrial and working-class half of the city. It is a stark difference which has been exacerbated since World War II and the decline of industry in the area after which relics of factories lined the eastern bank. This decline and inequality led to MDP’s involvement in the area through the Bordeaux 2030 scheme.

MDP have worked on this project over a 14-year period, with the designed landscape emerging over several phases of development. The initial scheme was to bring people from the western side of the Garonne back into this forgotten landscape, this was achieved through a new access network and green infrastructure. As people reanimated the space, the successive design evolved. As a visitor it is possible to see this – the first beginning of the park is linear, dominated by paths lined with trees. As you move through the park however, new green ‘rooms’ emerge delineated by younger clumps of trees. These spaces are also programmed with activities such as outdoor gyms and generous seating and sunbathing spaces.

Through this framework, new possibilities outside of MDP’s scope have emerged. Included within this is a fantastic botanical garden designed by Mosbach Paysagiste, residential developments which extent from the green fingers the park and cultural centres located within old factory buildings.

Through this measured, considered and prototyped approach a new vibrant quarter to the city has emerged; one which is rooted in contemporary culture, creating a healthy contrast to the ornate and historic western half of the city. This example highlights how important the process of time is when assimilating a forgotten area into the city. A complete masterplan is unlikely to capture the future behaviour and use within a space which is why I would advocate a phased approach. The Parc aux Angéliques project could be highly relevant to large scale developments in Scotland.

Bordeaux – economically divided

Parc aux Angéliques
This ‘action’ was inspired by a conversation I had with Philip Kuypers, a community founder of the Spooruit Park, part of the Groene Connectie, in Rotterdam. One quote from our discussion resonated with me; “space facilitates community. Space inspires a network around it.”

This ‘action’ explores the benefits of allowing communities into the nooks and crannies of the urban realm, enabling them to transform these corners. This works on two levels; firstly, there are physical improvements that are made to the landscape, and secondly the resultant social benefits.

From my experience travelling and researching these projects across Europe, I would advocate that communities should be allowed to claim ownership of underused spaces if they express an interest in them. These projects, like all others, are not always successful, but brave and forward-thinking municipalities and local authorities have the opportunity to expand their welfare and community programs with little expenditure and risk.
I begin my exploration into occupying gaps at the location where the conversation I had with Philip Kuypers took place. Spoortuin is situated within a sliver of land between a railway and canal which is owned by the transport network. The community space is part of the wider de Groene Connectie, which is examined in the fourth chapter. Before it became a community-focused space, it was under the jurisdiction of the regional train company where it was an unsuccessful space on many levels. To begin with, it was the scene of antisocial behaviour with the trains being targeted as canvases for graffiti artists who gained access under the cover of the dense foliage. As a consequence, the train company began cutting down the trees to install CCTV and lighting as a deterrent, compromising the biodiversity of the area.

In response to these actions, the community began to lobby against the train company’s actions and fought to take control of the area. Today, the community leases the space from the municipality and it has become an asset for the local people. Growing spaces have been established on the grounds, allowing local people without access to a private green space the opportunity to grow food and plant flowers. The biodiversity of the area has improved significantly through local initiative and is now surveyed each year by the city’s ecological district. Lastly, the park is also maintained by a group of volunteers and is used regularly by schools for outdoor learning opportunities.

Having had the opportunity to explore the space myself, I enjoyed following the trail along the canal and climbing up into the elevated viewpoint to watch the water birds. It created a welcome contrast to the hyper-modern city of Rotterdam. It was a unique space which catered for new experiences. This space might be modest, but under the control of the community it has become vibrant and buzzing with activity and opportunity, rather than the burden it once was to a private company. I believe this could be a highly effective model for developing community and collective spaces in Scotland. Even on my walks around Glasgow I often see parcels of land, protected by security fencing, that serve purely as a barrier to antisocial behaviour. Spoortuin shows how these mono-fictional landscapes can become dynamic community spaces.
Greening Permit

Paris is the most densely populated European city with one of the lowest percentages of landmass dedicated to public parks: only 9.5%. To combat this issue, the city of Paris has enlisted its citizens with the aim to ‘green’ the city, distributing permits to residents for personal planters within the urban realm. It is an intriguing project which I had the opportunity to discuss with Arnaud Le Bel Hermile from the Paris Municipality, DEVE.

Like many European cities, Paris is experiencing longer, hotter and drier summers through climate change. This issue is exacerbated through the lack of green space. While the city is working to increase the area of park space within the city, they realised that it was the citizens of Paris that were best placed to ‘green’ the streets. Through enlisting residents within this vital task, new social opportunities have been realised.

Walking the residential streets of Paris, one is immediately aware of the personal planters that have been installed. Through this process, the people of Paris have been able to take a new form of ownership over the public realm which is normally a regimented, municipality-controlled space. It creates new potential relationship between residents and their neighbourhoods and has the ability of forging new social connections.

From my experience, I believe there are some areas of the scheme that could be improved. There could be a greater sense of aesthetic continuity within neighbourhoods. This could be rectified with the municipality providing a set range of planters for each district. That being said, it is a fascinating projects that could easily be implemented in Scotland to improve our urban environments, building resilience to climate change and generating a greater sense of ownership and community spirit of our streets.
Potgieterstraat

This undulating playground has been designed on a street in inner Amsterdam. Before Carve’s intervention it was a suburban street, primarily used by cars for parking. This design has allowed for a new form of activation and activity, with people taking ownership of the space. Within a densely populated areas of the city, the play facilities are an important asset to the neighbourhood.

Klunkerkranich

I was unfortunately unable to enter this space due to Coronavirus restrictions while I was in Berlin. It is however, a fantastic example of ‘occupying gaps’ as it is located on top of a shopping centre’s car park. It has since become an institution of the city. This example highlights how creative cities can be in finding new social spaces.
La Recyclerie & Jardin du Ruisseau,

The community-led gardens of La Recyclerie and Jardin du Ruisseau in Paris are the epitome of "occupying a gap". Squeezed onto the banked slopes on either side of a disused railway line are two community spaces. Each might be steep and narrow but they have been gladly taken on by the local people and turned into vibrant spaces of activity.

They have both been established through the Paris ‘greening’ project which is also discussed in the Biodiversity ‘action’ in Chapter 3.

La Recyclerie has expanded into a communal hub based around a café space which uses the generated income to fund other projects. This includes the urban farm, a repair workshop and a host of public information events.
Culture is perhaps too often confined to artistic institutions. Within these settings, highly curated expressions and images are shared with an audience who have chosen to attend and engage with a particular event. What is often harder to measure, interpret and recreate is the contemporary lived culture of a city or place. This is also the seed of placemaking and community empowerment.

From my experiences across Europe, some of the rawest forms of culture I experienced were found within community and collective-focused spaces. These are spaces that often bloom on the fringes of an urban fabric, but if they are appreciated and nurtured they have an ability to shape local ideologies and enrich the daily experiences of the people they serve.

Through these examples, I hope to be able to express the cultural importance of these spaces and how they have evolved to become community and commercial institutions for a city, shaping its local and global identity. By embracing these sub-cultural spaces, Scotland has the opportunity to broaden the artistic spectrum of its urban spaces.
Amsterdam is a city that has learnt to embrace its sub-cultural and collective spaces which is now undoubtedly part of the city’s creative identity. The NDSM wharf is described as “a permanently temporary location for creative experimentation: an indispensable cultural free space serving and belonging to the city.” It, too, was born from the sub-culture of the squatters movement. In fact, it was only their occupation that stopped the city from demolishing the port and warehouses at the wharf during the boom years of the 1990s. From that moment the port was suddenly seen as ‘iconic’ and part of Amsterdam’s historic heritage.

This prompted the publication of a new manifesto which was signed by thousands of residents. It argued to the municipality that ‘Amsterdam is losing its DNA as a city of experimentation, subcultures and free spaces; already, many people are moving to other cities, and Amsterdam is at risk of losing its international appeal.’

The municipality decided that Amsterdam’s success should not become its downfall. From this moment, the city changed its policy of eviction to that of ‘incubation’. This meant that as well as several squats being legalised, new areas of the city were turned into low rent spaces that were dedicated to new cultural movements made up of independent collectives. In essence, the core principle of the squatters culture was embraced and encouraged as the government recognised its placemaking and empowering potential. The mayor’s slogan for the incubator project became, ‘No culture without subculture.’

This space is still evolving. It is now at the heart of a new development with BMB Ontwikkeling the delegated developer with 2,100 new residencies planned for the area. Many would argue that this is a form of gentrification, but it can also be seen as a natural lifecycle of successful cultural spaces. As long as Amsterdam remains open minded to new forms of subculture, the seedlings of new spaces will emerge and areas like NDSM mature into alternative spaces.

Whilst squatting is not a solution to creating more vibrant, community-focused space, these are interesting examples of the resultant positive impact embracing a city’s subculture can have. The key principle in this example is embracing these marginal spaces. As the NDSM example highlights, these spaces can be assimilated into the urban fabric and enrich a city’s experience. Scotland has a fantastic artistic scene that can develop further through creative approaches to these sub-cultural spaces.
Darwin Eco-système

The Darwin Eco-système has a similar story to that of NDSM, having also been born from the squatters movement.

Today, it is a fascinating space frequented by both locals and tourists alike. It is a multifaceted space which has empowered the community through opportunity. Within an old hanger there is a skatepark created from recycled materials. Growing space has been created including permaculture areas as well as hydroponics and an expansive chicken coop. It has also embraced commercial opportunities, with local makers and designers opening offices and shops. There is a bar, restaurant and shop selling local organic produce and scattered in-between everything else is art. Large murals cover almost every wall as well as numerous sculptural pieces, all created by local and residential artists. Finally, the whole space is governed by environmental principles that challenge the status quo of consumption. Through solar panels and other green solutions, Darwin produces six times less CO2 than a regular building equivalent in size.

It is another example of how sub-cultural spaces can become important landscapes to a city, both as a resource but also by shaping the identity of a neighbourhood.
The environmental benefits of biodiversity are undeniable and well documented. What makes these projects special is that they turn biodiversity into a palpable and sensory part of social space.

Vacant spaces that have been left unmanaged for several years often develop interesting ecologies which should be preserved in the first instance, and then enriched through intervention. Community and collective spaces are fantastic options to take over these spaces as they are often intrinsically with ecological diversity.

Through empowerment, local people feel they have the ability to affect the areas they live in which in turn enhances a sense of place, through nature.
One of the highlights of my trip to Amsterdam was my meeting with Maike van Stiphout, Director of DS Landschaparchitecten, a practice which specialises in nature-inclusive design.

The Hofplienlijn design is a proposed linear park that is to run along an elevated former rail line in Rotterdam. In this design, biodiversity has been used as the theatre of the space and the local people have been enlisted as enablers within the scheme. I found it to be a fascinating approach which empowered residents to become active members of their biodiversity network.

DS Landschaparchitecten saw the linear site as an opportunity to establish a new biodiverse corridor, permeated within smaller specialised ecosystems. An example of this is the small wetland areas which eased drainage burdens of the densely populated neighbourhood. Interestingly, Maike referred to creatures such as hedgehogs, butterflies and toads as her ‘other clients.’ Each of them have clear requirements and they made sure that their needs were catered for within this inclusive design. They typically targeted species common to the area above exotic creatures as this creates a more immediate and obvious impact. By setting a solid base and platform for biodiversity, a by-product of this is that other less common species will often be attracted to the area as well.

The space was also activated for people, with a new walkway planned on the elevated rail line and shops proposed within the arches below. Through retail opportunities, attractive seating areas and interesting walking routes the conditions for a strong human biodiversity were also key to the design.

This design understands the potential of bringing people and nature together. By consulting with the local community and bringing them into the project early on, DS Landschaparchitecten hoped to recruit the residents within their scheme. This might be through encouraging them to install bird boxes or leaving food out for hedgehogs. This is a holistic approach as the residential buildings are not technically within the site boundary.

From their experience, people want to become more active in their local nature network and simply need to be empowered through knowledge and community. This in turn affects the spirit and energy of the neighbourhood, forging a new place-making identity.
Maxima Park

LOCATION: Utrecht
DESIGNER: West 8

In this project a huge concrete wall is used to create a living monument for nature and biodiversity. It’s a spectacularly strange sentence but it does achieve this on an impressive scale.

What I enjoyed most about this design was the way in which it is designed to be reclaimed by nature with ivy and other climbing plants beginning to encase it. Although it was only built in 2013 it feels like you are stepping into a relic, or a space that has been lost to humans for an age. It created a powerful feeling within me but this design is not just about creating theatre.

Set within the honeycomb perforated wall are numerous tools for biodiversity, with bird’s nests and insect hotels nestled in the gaps. Within the park itself there are also a range of landscapes which have been created to support a wider network of nature.

Although this is not explicitly a community or collective-focused space this project highlighted to me how awe-inspiring ecologically rich landscapes can be and how human-made forms can complement natural environments. This is a method that could be widely applied throughout Scotland were pre-existing industrial relics could be transformed into havens for wildlife and biodiiversity, blending historic, humans landscape with nature.

An exhilarating landscape of nature and built forms
Innovation is not always found in the research and development labs or the Silicon Valley. From my travels around Europe, I encountered some truly exceptional spaces that attempt to solve pressing issues we face in our urban environments.

The example below reframes environmental and social issues and turns them into opportunities for the area. Community and collective-focused spaces can be very dynamic and use an inclusive approach, engaging local people as their source of energy.
De Ceuvel

LOCATION: Amsterdam

This collective-focused landscape has been conceived through the outputs of a range of professions and thinkers. From this collaboration, De Ceuvel has emerged as an award winning, sustainably planned workshop for social and creative enterprises. Yet it came from humble origins, located on a highly contaminated and polluted site of an old ship yard in the Buiksloterham district of Amsterdam. This project demonstrates how we should invite creatively-minded landscapes into our cities as they are fantastic test beds for urban development.

The idea for De Ceuvel was created by a group of Architects, who in 2012 secured a ten year lease from the municipality of the Johan van Hasselt shipyard. A framework for the site was established by transforming old house boats into office spaces and placing them on the land. These offices are accessed by a winding boardwalk which has allowed for phyto-remediating planting to be seeded across the site. It is a intriguing piece of design; the elevated, twisting boardwalk adds character and excitement to the space beyond its functional use.

This resourceful and inventive approach laid the groundworks for further experimentation. De Ceuvel considers itself to be a 'playground for sustainable technologies.' Due to the polluted ground, piping for toilets was not possible so they researched new technologies for compostable toilets. Through their experimentation with new fertilizers, metals and pathogens and medicine residue, they have been able to advance the treatment, production and harvesting methods of compostable toilets. This solution of course also helps with water management as well.

The phyto-remediating planting, developed by Delva Landscape Architects, has also been an area of experimentation. Although large areas of the old port are affected by centuries of pollution, only two areas have used phyto-remediating as a potential solution. De Ceuvel have carefully surveyed any self-seeding planting within the polluted areas to see if they can also be utilised for remediation.

There are many initiatives that have contributed to the Circular Buiksloterham Manifesto which many developers have become involved in. Meaning that successful experimentations within the De Ceuvel can be initiated in other local developments. As a result, Buiksloterham is on its way to becoming one of Europe’s most sustainable neighbourhoods.

It seems incredible that this level of influence and creative thinking has come from the ownership of such a constrained site. I believe it demonstrates why we should consider surrendering areas of land to ambitious collective groups who want to challenge and test our current practices, a method applicable to Scotland and its disused landscapes.
There is also the opportunity to develop innovation in how landscape architects design for communities, as the project Park of the Docks developed by Agency Ter highlights.

This project is a major piece of public infrastructure, covering a 100-hectare area, located in a neighbourhood of Saint Ouen in northern Paris. This is a historically working-class area of the city which has become culturally diverse in recent years with the addition of new housing developments. Agence Ter wanted to design a new landscape that would help bring people of over 140 different nationalities together.

A key part of the existing site was the Jardin du Partage (community garden) which they decided to open up to the community. Instead of an exclusive fenced space, the garden has been relocated to the centre of the design next to the core community building. A range of private and collective-focused little gardens sit side by side, some to grow vegetables and others more ornamental. To complement the social character of the space, the building acts as a green house, cooking facility and meeting space creating a central hub of activity and a common resource. It is an enabling space that allows for a wide variety of plants to be grown and cooking skills to be learnt.

Parts of the design allow for the community to take ownership of the space. The prairie area is set on a bank and dedicated to perennial planting which can be picked and re-sown with the following season by the local community. Encapsulating this social landscape are wetland corridors which act as natural gateways to the space and allow for additional water retention.

From my own personal perspective, during my visit I was struck by the immediate and palpable sense of community I experienced, even on a rainy day. I feel that this is somewhat of a rarity within blocks of modern apartments. Innovative social landscapes are one of the great challenges facing the practice of Landscape Architecture and I believe it is important to draw inspiration from those that have been successful and apply similar strategies to challenges facing Scotland’s landscapes and communities.
There are many interesting Landscape Architects already imagining what the communities of tomorrow might look and feel like. One of them is Felixx, a Landscape and Planning practice based in Rotterdam, who I had the opportunity to meet with. During my meeting with Partner Deborah Lambert, we discussed the ambitious Brainport project.

At its core, Brainport is a residential and industrial project which aims to develop 1,500 new houses and 12 hectares of business premises over the next ten years. What makes this scheme different is that it is led and based on latest insight and techniques in developing a community-based environment. Conceived as a ‘living lab’, Brainport aims to be a sustainably circular and socially cohesive neighbourhood which blends often separated elements together.

As a point of inspiration, Felixx has looked back to how landscapes have historically been formulated, through a mosaic of forests, moors, habitations and wetlands. Brainport looks to connect these individually rich landscapes through a new collective model. In doing so, a hybrid landscape of the urban, natural and agricultural is created, with production at the heart of this design. Plots have been assigned throughout the different landscape typologies and each plot contributes to food and energy production, water management, waste processing and biodiversity generation.

What struck me about this project was the complexity and range of processes within the scheme, all of which overlap to create a dynamic whole. For me it captures the essence of the vibrant community and collective spaces that have been described throughout the portfolio. Looking to the future in community-centred projects, I believe it will be vital to extract opportunities from each corner of a site and to entrust its production to the local people. This is a strategy that can be applied to many vacant sites in Scotland, particularly those that bridge gaps between neighbourhoods where a functional and vibrant new resource can be

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Thus far, this portfolio has considered individual, community and collective-focused projects. From my travels, conservations and exploration across Europe, I began to understand the importance of how these landscapes are perceived as a collective whole for their long-term success. These physical and/or emotive ties help a re-imagining of a terrain and unify disparate elements into a perceived whole, worth more than the sum of their individual parts.

Part of my project is about understanding how community and collective-focused landscapes can shape development strategies for Scotland which I would argue is intrinsically linked to the longevity of a social space. By adopting some of the strategies on the following examples, community and collective spaces have the possibility of creating long-term benefits to the neighbourhoods they reside in.
Yvan Delmae, Director of Bruit du Frigo, has had a personal interest in the peripheries of Bordeaux since he was a student. During my travels, I had the opportunity to discuss his long-term, constantly evolving, Suburban Shelters project with him.

The core principle of the project is to improve and redefine people’s understanding of their city’s edges. This has been achieved by eleven artistic shelters which have been inspired by their local environment and distributed around the peripheries. These spaces are landmarks but can also be stayed in for the night, helping people to rediscover and experience these undervalued spaces.

Although they are eleven individual structures, they have been conceived as a whole and connected through planned walking routes. It is possible too circumnavigate Bordeaux’s peripheries visiting each shelter (and staying the night in a few) over a period of several days. During my time in Bordeaux I visited Shelters 1 and 10 which took me from the new eco-district Ginko on the banks of the city’s largest lake to an abandoned quarry, turned into a steep sided forest park.

From my experience I was struck by the importance of these connections. The accompanying photographs track my journey cross the varied peripheral landscape that would not have experienced otherwise. The connection created a unified experience in my mind, bookended by the two shelters.

Bruit du Frigo often lead groups of people on walks across the peripheries. They are compelled to share its experience and have chosen walking as their medium for exploration. This physical form of connection has added additional value and potential to the eleven sites and opened my eyes to the importance of developing links between community spaces so they can be valued as a collective whole.
As I have described, one of the greatest strengths of community and collective spaces is the breadth of the spectrum that they inhabit. All strengths have associated weaknesses, in this case the diversity of social spaces dilutes their clarity. This is why it is crucial that our community spaces are unified through a single body, such as the Dutch company De Meent who I encountered during my travels. De Meent acts as a platform that represents the community and collective spaces of Amsterdam. By coming together as one organisation they are more easily understood by municipalities, politicians and local people and can channel their positive influence into a clear narrative so as to protect and share their influence.

De Groene Connectie is a similar organisation representing all the community green spaces within the Delfshaven area of Rotterdam. The group sought to preserve and further expand the physical connection between green spaces in the area. By linking the individual community spaces, a nearly continuous green loop was established around the neighbourhood which was a cherished asset by the community. This physical link gave the area a sense of identity and increased the community’s political presence within the city.

Social spaces should have a palpable presence within the framework of power and influence within a city. As individual pockets and initiatives they can unfortunately be overlooked, so for the long-term health and vitality of an area, community and collective spaces should have organisations that represent them. In this way their accumulative benefits to a community can be fully appreciated and protected.

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Maintenance is an Asset

Maintenance is a key issue within Scottish Landscape Architecture and the long-term life cycle of a space. For a local authority, it generally results in additional responsibility and financial burdens. Yet I believe it does not have to be framed in such a way. From my travel and research across Europe, I experienced how maintenance is a source of opportunity for community groups. The responsibility of upkeep of a space can be shared around a neighbourhood, bringing in and engaging new groups and institutions into the space. It is also a source of knowledge as new skills are passed on to members.

These examples show how this form of engagement is the long-term glue of social spaces, whilst freeing up resources for local authorities, a principle that may be applicable to the long-term management of socially focused landscape projects in Scotland.
Essenburg Park

LOCATION: Rotterdam

Essenburg Park is part of the Groene Connectie, a local organisation that represents a chain of green spaces in the north-western area of the city. I had the opportunity to discuss this dynamic site with Philip Kuypers who is part of the group.

In this project, a new water park with a retention capacity of 5000m³ was established through the activism of local residents in Rotterdam. The land was originally owned by the rail company, who in 2008 wanted to turn the land into a new housing development. This was met with criticism by the community who wanted to preserve the polder landscape, a rare ecological landscape within the expanding city.

Without the community’s pledge to take on the maintenance and responsibility of the space alongside the water authority, the ambitious water park would probably have never come to fruition. As the municipality did not have to take on the long-term financial responsibility, it was able to raise the funds to purchase the land of the rail network company who owned it.

Today, community groups and schools are involved in the daily running of the space alongside water authority professionals. There are many different roles that local people can become involved in from core responsibilities such as litter picking and planting to roles such as storytelling, organising coffee events and language learning. When a community takes on responsibility for a space, a variety of water roles seem to appear which are tailored to local interest.

For these types of initiatives to take off, local authorities need to show trust and belief in local communities. Those that are empowered and well-organised are often able to turn the burden of maintenance into a long-term opportunity for the space.
Looking forward, the Urban Food Forest in Utrecht is an exciting example of how the asset of maintenance can evolve in the future. I had the opportunity to learn more about this project during my meeting with Felixx, a Landscape and Planning practice based in Rotterdam.

This scheme plans to develop 1000 new dwellings in the area of Rijnvliet. Felixx was responsible for the design of the public space which was developed around the principles of edible and educational landscape.

By blending a productive and natural landscape, Felixx came up with the idea of an ‘Edible Forest’ dictated by a layered planting scheme in which to create a variety of habitats. The maintenance of the space is carried out by the residents, and supervised by a forester.

A large process of the scheme is the sharing of skills and learning. With guidance and access to resources, residents will be taught how to seasonally forage and care for the landscape. This design puts social involvement and occupation into the heart of the project, turning the required maintenance of a local authority into an opportunity for local people. This is a concept that can be applied in Scotland within large-scale developments, where community learning and skill development can become a valuable means by which to maintain the communal landscapes.
Successful, long-term social spaces are often built around a shared resource that a local community manages together. The process of designing a communal resource is a challenging one that requires the designer to acquire an intimate understanding of the community they are designing for. The following projects are exemplary examples of this process that I encountered on my travels across Europe.
During my time in Paris I was fortunate enough to attend a shared lunch with the local mayor at the Agrocité, a space designed and developed by Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée. It was a fascinating event which allowed me to gain an insight into how resource spaces provide long-term opportunity for a community.

AAA is a practice that describes itself as ‘a studio for self-managed architecture’ and has also guided my other principles such as participation and micro-political activation. During the event, I had the opportunity to speak with several members of the team and learn more about the influence of the AgroCité space had on the local community.

AgroCité is primarily a site of urban agriculture but it also supports a range of cultural and educational activities. Within the gardens, there are plots of community gardens but it is also a space of research, looking into new intensive organic agricultural production. Food grown in the gardens is either prepared in the collective kitchen or sold at a market held on site. Members of the community can get involved in any area of interest and benefit from other resources such as the seed library. This scheme enables local people to transfer learnt skills at the AgroCité into new areas of the city.

I was intrigued by the political landscape that surrounded the space. Within a large meeting space, there was firstly a talk delivered by a member of a local authority on a climate change initiative taking place in the area followed by a lunch prepared in the community kitchen. I was struck by how accessible this political forum was. During the meal, local people were able to talk with their mayor and other members of the local authority and there seemed to be a good understanding between the groups.

To me this seemed like a new form of urban democracy which is transparent and accessible. It facilitates grass root politics and supports local agendas, bringing the community inside the process.

On many levels the AgroCité is a resource to the community. However, what seems to give it a sense of longevity is its relationship with the political world. This allows the space to become a hub of contemporary issues at the forefront of change.
Wir in Winzerla

**LOCATION:** Winzerla  
**DESIGNER:** Gruppe F

Gruppe F specialise in creating socially inspired landscape designs in the community. During my time in Berlin I had the opportunity to speak with Bettina Walther, a Sociologist, at her office. After our conversation I was convinced that the two fields of sociology and landscape architecture should be more collaborative within the process of designing for the community.

In this project, Gruppe F conducted an expansive engagement programme which helped them to engage and understand the neighbourhood they were designing for. Through this process, the community was equipped with long-term tools which has helped transform the neighbourhood.

Winzerla is an area located to the East of Leipzig. It is a historically deprived area which over the years has developed a troubled reputation. Gruppe F’s primary aim was to reverse this damaging trend by upgrading the open spaces to strengthen local identity and to create new opportunities. In essence, the project looked to equip the area with new communal resources, enabling the social rebuilding of the neighbourhood.

The design was underpinned by a rigorous consultation process. Over seven events, the team set up a temporary office in tents on site for up to a week at a time. Here they could actively engage with all members of the community through scheduled events but also through chance meetings. Walking was a key tool they used for understanding the site, being led by different members of the community.

This immersion within the community and neighbourhood allowed Gruppe F to create a proposal which was relevant to the needs of the residents. To challenge the identity crisis an art initiative was developed. By bringing in local artists, new murals were created throughout the space. The green spaces were also reconfigured, creating a new axis of movement, meeting points, play areas and community gardens. Where possible, the local people constructed the infrastructure and furniture that populated the new landscape. This process stimulated a sense of ownership over the neighbourhood and brought new people together.

This project highlights a new way of thinking about designing community spaces rich in local resources. By bringing the community into the construction process, a greater amount of time could be spent on the consultation process which in turn improved the output of the project. This is a process that could be much more widely used within Scottish Landscape Architecture to help transform neighbourhoods.
Occupation of space creates culture

Social spaces are unique to a city because they are shaped by the interests and values of a neighbourhood. Usually we only have the ability to affect our private spheres, but by allowing a community to occupy small areas of land, this field of influence is extended to the urban realm. I noticed that community spaces often became the canvas for local people and that areas with a rich network of social spaces oozed with a distinctive culture that reflected the multifaceted values of a neighbourhood.

This sense of opportunity and expression of local culture creates widespread communal benefits. The best example which highlights this is Groene Connectie in Rotterdam, made up of the community gardens Spoortuin, Essenburg Park and Spleedernis as outlined in the previous chapters. These social spaces have empowered the people of the Delfshaven neighbourhood and created a range of engaged and ambitious community groups that are interested in every aspect of change within the area. At every opportunity, they seek to create new social and ecological possibilities within their neighbourhoods, often taking on roles usually carried out by the municipality.

I would argue that by letting a community take ownership of disused gaps within a city’s fabric, the positive field of influence becomes much greater than the physical perimeter of the land occupied. As a network of social spaces grows, the field of influence and interest in local issues seems to increase.

The diversity of a social spaces need to be cherished and appreciated

As this portfolio sets out to illustrate, the types of social spaces can be highly varied, and there is also a huge amount of diversity within each individual space. For example, a community garden can be a growing space, an area of education and outdoor learning, an ecological hub supported by volunteers, an area of commerce, an events and meetings space and a charitable resource.

In our contemporary urban areas where land is an ever-more precious resource, we need our spaces to fulfil as many roles and functions as possible. This is one of the most important characteristics of a social space, yet this is not always recognised. From the conversations I had with different community groups, it was the structure of local governments that hindered support and growth of social spaces. Municipalities are often divided and subdivided into departmental silos which are not designed to deal with diversity.

If we want our social spaces to thrive then it is important to re-imagine how to interact with them in order to appreciate and utilise their unique and varied qualities. Cities that are brave and inhabit communities with spaces and opportunities can be rewarded with neighbourhoods that strive for new responsibility and independence.

Empowered communities give designers more tools

Finally, it is important to understand how community-led space can have the ability to influence the scope of the design. I experienced the evolution of Landscape Architecture within cities that were enriched with a plethora of social spaces which supported empowered communities. In these cities, designers had the possibility of creating areas that nurtured the new and exciting patterns of behaviour stimulated from these community and collective spaces.

Paris is a city that has ventured into new social territories in order to engage with and empower its residents through projects such as the Green Permit and Community Gardens scheme which assists residents within the ‘greening’ of the Parisian streets. These new relationships and behaviours can be captured and utilised within design.

The best example of this is the Park on Docks project by Agence Ter. In this scheme, spaces designed as areas to be occupied by the residents of the new and existing communities aids the integration of the two groups. This was realised through the prairie which was harvested and reseeded by residents and the community gardens made up of shared, communal plots adjacent to a new community space which acted as both an educational and meeting points. These areas were more readily and eagerly occupied by residents who began to form a new cohesive neighbourhood.

This experience highlighted to me how vibrant social landscapes can shape development strategies for cities. An empowered community creates greater opportunity for more socially minded design.

In Conclusion

In conclusion, occupation of space creates culture and the diversity of a social spaces need to be cherished and appreciated. Empowered communities give designers more tools.
Social Spaces Framework
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