

Assignment in preparation of Urban Regeneration minor '22

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Question 1a

How does interaction within the group or project team compare with interacting with stakeholders - residents, businesses and government- in a project area?

In my opinion interaction is a transformative experience for participants in a meeting or conversation, which can be in either a formal or informal setting. The core lies in the transaction of thoughts, knowledge, and emotions. Which can be done verbally or non-verbally, the first being the 'what' that someone tries to communicate and the latter focusses more on the 'how' it is communicated towards others. As facial expressions and body posture often can say a thousand words I think it should be taken into account, the same counts for the intonation of the 'what'.

It is common for group projects, or meetings with stakeholders, to place it in a formal setting, where emotions and feelings are taken out of the equation. Which is, according to me at least, a misconception of how people should interact with each other, especially when talking about problem solving.

Residents, for example, can object quite fierce to spatial plans, which municipalities or housing corporations have for a certain neighbourhood. And it's understandable that residents want to be heard, or even participate, because they are the people who eventually have to deal with the outcome of a certain project. As such, listening is more than giving the people the possibility to say something at a general community meeting. Professionals in the field of spatial development should actively seek the interaction with the community if they want to understand the end-users.

Question 1b

Do you agree or disagree with Roger Scruton's view on the importance and effect of beauty?

The beauty in things, how small or big you could imagine, can evoke intense emotions in people. People can be moved by seeing the sunset for example (whilst knowing that it happens each day), especially when it happens in an astonishing environment. It can be an inspiration to life itself, or for a certain lifestyle. People value beauty. Music, literature, fine arts, (both historic and modern) architecture and vast untouched landscapes are just a few examples. But, in my opinion, form should not have the upper hand over function when talking about spatial quality. If we, society, cannot meet the basic needs of people we're clearly not on the right track. The focus on necessities should be key.

The question which came to my mind is whether we, as people and society, can find common ground for what we define as beautiful in the first place? As it is rather subjective and opinions can change over time. And moreover, does beauty still evoke emotions once we are accustomed to it?

Question 2a

Can you prioritize the issues in the urban environment that require urgent change?

- Housing – Currently a high priority of the Dutch government, due to a lack of affordable housing. People have limited options to find suitable housing which accommodates their needs, which stagnates personal development in the long term.
- Energy transition – The process of changing to sustainable and renewable sources of energy to combat climate change. Reduction of greenhouse gases by changing the energy mix is important, but we also need to reduce our energy-usage in general. Meanwhile, energy should be affordable for all people. Connected with this, in a more distant way, is our personal energy intake (as in the food we consume on a daily basis).
- Climate adaptation – The way we adapt to the unavoidable effects of climate change due to our polluting behaviour, which is embedded in our historic capitalistic growth economy. How do we prepare the environment for extreme weather conditions like heavy rainfall, high temperatures and periods of drought. These measures will have effect on the way we shape our surroundings and buildings.
- Mobility – With a growing population and trend of urbanization we need to find a way to get all citizens in a sustainable manner from their houses to work, education, and other amenities. Preferably in a safe, sustainable and affordable way.
- Safety – Different forms are applicable, all with the same goal: protect the life of people. Physical safety in the form of hazards in traffic, but also air- and water pollution which affect our wellbeing. Together with social safety, the way we protect people against the actions of others.
- Social engagement – The way people can make people connect with each other. The trend of ongoing individualisation in society leads to a high degree of loneliness for different groups. Another reason can be addressed regarding social exclusion due to different cultural backgrounds, this also has links to the next point.
- Accessibility – The public space should be available for all people, also for the impaired members of society. Either being visually or physically impaired, or simply unfamiliar with underlying ruleset of the urban environment.
- Biodiversity – Due to urbanization, intensive agriculture and climate change the diversity of animal- and plant life is danger. This should be addressed because the role of other species is vital for a healthy environment.

Question 2b

Who has had the most influence upon the issues like those mentioned above and are these the most important issues to consider? And over which time period has this all occurred?

Governmental bodies, in my opinion, on different levels (international, national and local) have a lot of influence on the above mentioned issues as they are in charge of formulating policies. But in a way the true power lies with the people (at least in a democracy) as they vote on who is representing them. Free will of people should be taken into account, people make decisions on how they behave and what life-choices they make themselves.

The role of bureaucratic system behind politics cannot be overlooked in this regard as well, as these are the professionals who advice policymakers on different matters. As such, educational institutions for all age-groups have influence on how the future will be shaped. The importance of sustainability, in the broadest sense, should be embedded in study programs if we want to succeed as society. Connected to this is the industry, as they make products and services available to the public.

Question 2c

What are your moral, political and philosophical perspectives upon urban problems?

The ethical basis for my perspective on urban problem influenced by the writings of John Stuart Mill¹, and as such can be described as utilitarian. To formulate this very briefly, decisions should be made to maximize the happiness and well-being of the larger part of affected individuals. As such, personal or economic egoism should be avoided since this does not reconcile with the needs of others. Politically, this translates to a rather social-liberal standpoint. Society should lay a foundation for people (on which they can fall back in times of hardship) and provide them with means to develop themselves so they can be (financially) independent. Meanwhile adding value to society with their expertise and skill, so they can provide others when necessary. I truly believe in looking out for one another, in the first place the direct surroundings of people (family, friends and neighbours) and secondly society in general.

Question 2d

How can improvements in the urban environment be most effectively achieved? By which combination of economic, social (including political), environmental or technological changes? What is the evidence for your argument?

The urban environment can be improved most effectively by cooperation. As mentioned before, communication between actor is vital to truly understand motives of different stakeholders. One approach that can be taken is through the triple helix model of innovation proposed by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff². See figure 1. Where academia (i.e. universities), industry and governments actively interact with each other to strengthen the economy and society. Although mainly applicable for developed countries, like the Netherlands, it can function on a broader international scale.

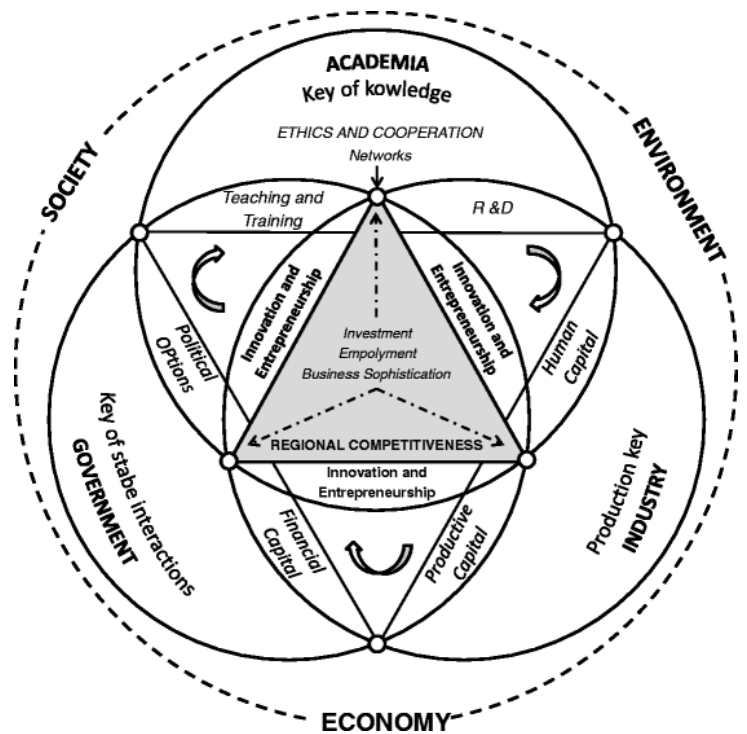


Figure 1 Visual depiction of triple helix model

¹ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Parker, Son and Bourn, 1863)

<https://archive.org/details/utilitarianism03millgoog/page/n4/mode/2up>

² Loet Leydesdorff, *The knowledge-based economy and the triple helix model* (Amsterdam: 2012)

<https://www.leydesdorff.net/arist09/arist09.pdf>

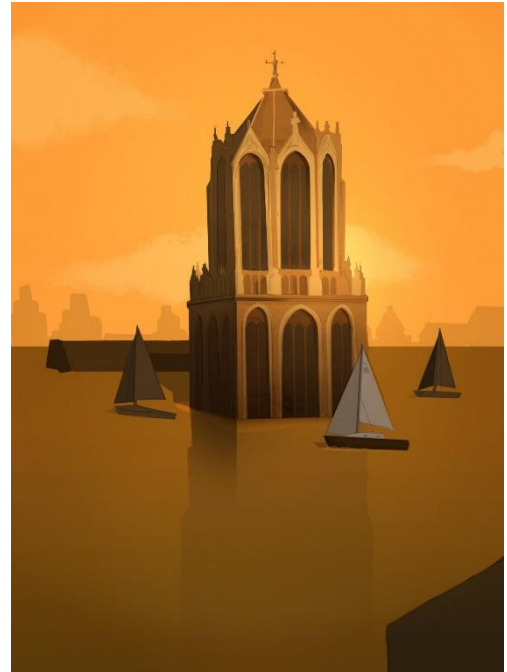
This can even be extended to a quadruple or quintuple helix if the public (i.e. civil society and the media) and the natural environment (i.e. the non-artificial world which surrounds us) are added as components.

Question 2e

Would it be more effective to gradually abandon the old cities and towns and plan new settlements in the northern hemisphere? And would the same strategy work in other parts of the world and if so (or not), why?

In my opinion it won't be effective or desirable to abandon the built environment we currently have. Simply because we attach value to our surroundings (i.e. historic and cultural) and we already have a decent infrastructure in place to provide us in our needs. Besides that, it would be rather difficult in a practical sense due to the limited space which is available within the borders of nation states to apply such a strategy. Revitalisation and actualization of the current environment to accommodate in future needs would be more effective. Thought the effects of climate change can cause the need to abandon certain urbanized areas due to rising sea levels³.

Other reason can be given to abandon or move the current built environment, for example the governments of Indonesia and Egypt struggle with their capital cities. Jakarta has serious issues with subsidence and Cairo's city centre cannot handle the mobility of citizens. As such, both countries are developing new urban areas to solve these problems.



Question 4a

What are your frames of reference? How do you understand what you are hearing or seeing as either evidence of the truth or as a falsehood? What is your model of the world and your expectations of your own life or life in general? How much of these preconceptions do you carry with you into every new situation?

My frame of reference is firstly my empirical experience, what do my senses perceive. What I observe and what others tell me, and moreover how I give meaning to what I perceive. Whilst trying to understand the perspective of others, either by communication or by gaining academic knowledge regarding the subject. My own perspective can be false, or trick me, and others can give insight into reality (as far as one reality exists of course).

³ Rolf Schuttenhelm, "In face of rising sea levels the Netherlands 'must consider controlled withdrawal'" Vrij Nederland, February 7, 2019, <https://www.vn.nl/rising-sea-levels-netherlands/>

Question 4b

What is your starting point in any discussion with new acquaintances or colleagues(?) and what are your presuppositions about the opinions of other people when you discuss society and human development? What do you think the dominant social paradigm (DSP) and its effect upon your personal and professional life might be?

As all people have different perspectives on society, and different paths they walked whilst developing themselves, I see encounters with others as an interaction of thoughts and beliefs. Where I can learn a great deal about worlds which are unknown to me. In a professional context it gives me insights into the workings of institutions and companies, how these are connected to each other and society general.

The dominant social paradigm, that humans are superior, is heavily embedded in the human psyche. Evolution and progress of the self is expected by society, we always need to progress because that leads to a better world. And in my opinion this is an overrated paradigm. Because the need to progress leads to an never-ending need. As such, the appreciation for our current position in life is diminished. It can lead to an unhealthy lifestyle and severe mental health problems, which should be avoided by all means.

Question 4c

What is our natural state, when you feel balanced or centred? Do you understand the different qualities and effects of order versus chaos? What is nature (order or chaos?) and are you part of it? What is the relationship between nature and human development (does this mean evolution, spiritual, technological or intellectual development for you)?

The natural state of mankind is a blank slate, the *tabula rasa*, and how people develop mainly is affected by their environment. Social, ethical and political thoughts from within society affect the way people develop over the course of their lives. In other words, they are born within a social paradigm and internalise this.

As I've been raised in the Netherlands by my parents in a rather safe community near Groningen, I clearly have presuppositions to what society should be. Although I try to stay as close as possible to my own intuitive feelings, I also am aware that I always relate to the beliefs that have been imprinted on me during my life by family, friends, teachers and classmates, colleagues and all sorts of media.

Question 5a

How do you know what it is to call a place home? How do you define place and home? How do you express your love for the qualities of your house, village, city or country? To begin to make it new again without it losing the best or defining characteristics?

When growing up, home always was the house where my parents, sister, brother and myself lived in. For ten years that was Sappemeer, then we moved to Hoogezand where I lived for another 10 years. After which I've decided to move out, to Groningen, I studied there and most of my social life took place in my new hometown. After moving from one room to another for a few years, I finally settled

in a student house which I've called home, my roommates also became a new sort of family. At the moment I live on my own, which I also call home. I definitely call Groningen, as a city, as my home right now, and Hoogezand-Sappemeer as the place I've grown up in. I relate home to the people I love and hold dear, and more over the place where I feel comfortable to develop myself. For me Groningen provides me in all the needs I have from day-to-day life.

In general home can be defined as the place where one feels comfortable. With that I mean safe, in the broadest sense. A place where one can grow to become the ideal self.

Question 5b

What is the relevance of renewal or urban regeneration? Is it the same for you and others in this place you call home?

Urban regeneration is relevant in the sense that it leads to an actualization of the environment to meet the standards of that time, or even be ready for the future. As the home of one stands in relationship to its direct environment, where others might live close by, the process of renewal is a social process where desires of all participants should be taken into account. As these desires can vary strongly between people, communication needs to take a central place within this process in my opinion.

Question 5c

Do you think that there is a case for forgetting the old and starting with new settlements? Is it connected to the "great reset" mentioned in the news or is it a personal opinion based upon the need to start afresh?

I think that we simply cannot forget the old and start anew, simply because our cultural and historical evolution is core to the human being. I do believe that we, as world citizens, can try to change our behaviour in such a way that we establish common grounds upon which we can lay a foundation for future generations. The Sustainable Development Goals, as set up by the United Nations, for example, can be a good instrument to develop the wellbeing of all people if we combine our efforts.

This question relates closely to 2e, my line of thought as described there is applicable to this question as well.

Question 6 (?)

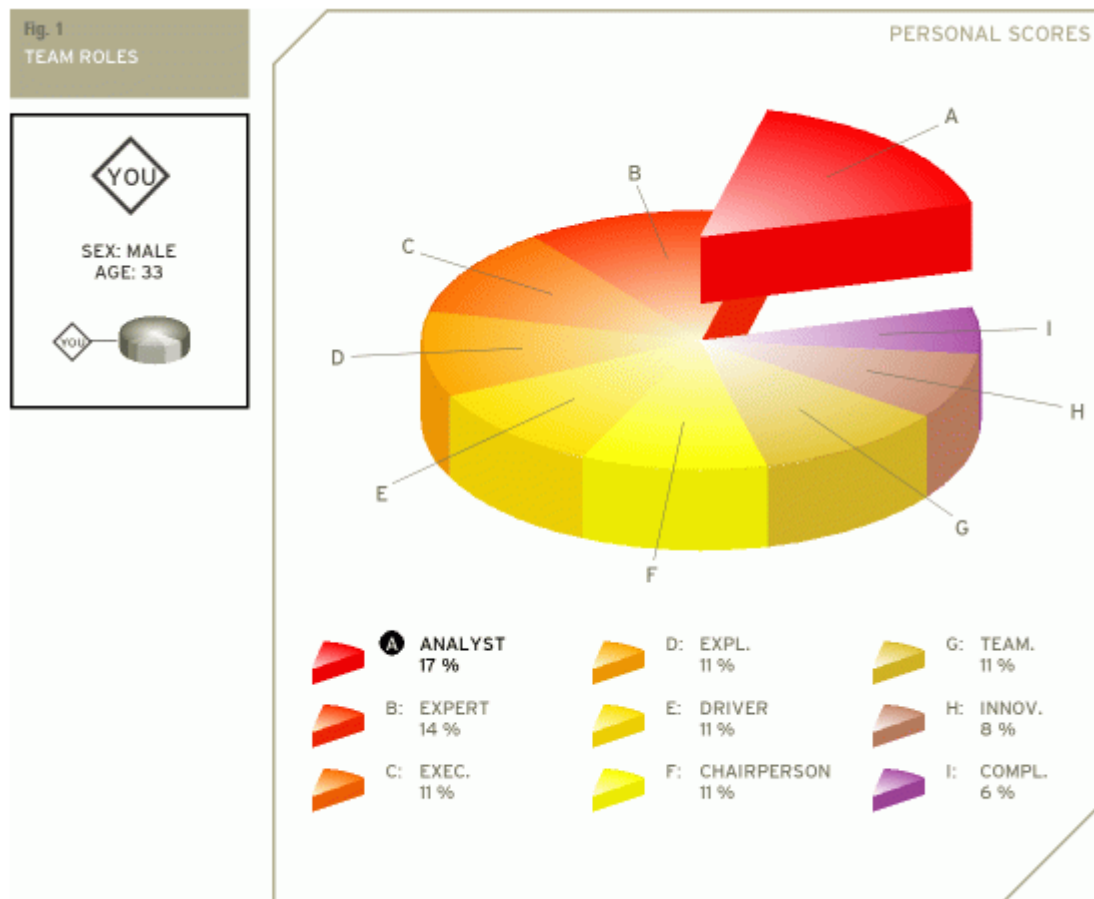
Who do you want to be working with during the main (team) assignment? You could consider character, skills, experience, cultural background, existing knowledge ambitions? Therefore, if you want to be picked for the team that suits you best, you also need to communicate these things!

In short: I believe I'm capable to work with anyone, as long as their motivation is sincere. A group process can add significant value for the personal development of all participants, and I will try to be a part of their personal development by using my knowledge and skills.

My core strength lies in my open attitude towards others. My former studies in the field of religion and spiritual care are useful in communicating with others, I've been trained in conversation techniques to a high degree, listening to and questioning others is familiar to me. My professional experience as customer service agent helped in this as well, as problem solving is key in that line of work.

I would define myself as a "Jack of all trades, master of none", due to my broad interest in the fields of energy transition, climate adaptation, biodiversity and social engagement. My former study in the field of religion, with a specialization in spiritual care, definitely has impact on how I understand the world. Over the course of time I have developed skills in multiple software programs specifically for designing, both 2D and 3D. Which I find a good way to communicate towards others. The results of the team role test was no surprise, I like to analyse a subject matter in detail and then search for solutions whilst keeping others desires in sight.

Teamroles



Analyst

The analyst has a tendency to be reserved and critical. The analyst will also react to plans and ideas in a rational and sensible way. He or she will favor a prudent approach to matters and will evaluate them according to their accuracy before acting.

Expert

The expert has the skills and expertise required for the specific task at hand. He or she has a strong focus on the task and may get defensive when others interfere with his or her work. The expert prefers to work alone and team members often have a great deal of trust and confidence in him or her.