

THE BEAUTY OF TRANSITION: AESTHETICS AND INNOVATION IN STRATEGIC URBAN TRANSITION PROJECTS: EXPERIENCES FROM CLASSROOM (1156)

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Abstract. The challenge of transition to a new more resilient and sustainable urban age is huge. Collectively, in our modern lifestyle as ‘urbanites’ we consume environmental services to an extent which matches several planets in scale. In diverse institutional settings, these challenges are constantly debated and looked at, with a view to possible solutions. Most of this, still, stays on the level of paper. But how do we generate the urgently needed concrete actions and changes? Especially, how do we evoke on the level of the individual energy and commitment as the basis of a potential system change? As difficult as this may be, instead of devising new ‘big plans’ (Burnham) the paper suggests developing ‘beautiful’ plans, projects, ideas to stir the affects of citizens. Within the environment of a MA course in spatial planning at Radboud University (Nijmegen), the beauty of transition was further explored.

Keywords: aesthetics, transition, New European Bauhaus, education, theory and concepts.

1. Introduction

This paper explores some possible dimensions of beauty and aesthetics in spatial planning, the latter is used here in a comprehensive manner, from urban design to town and country planning and beyond. The paper will (1) provide some conceptual reflections on issues, which can be considered relevant when discussing beauty and aesthetics in planning, or rather, which we want to suggest as relevant in the context of planning. The paper will then (2), intermittently, use examples from a master course organised at the Radboud University (Nijmegen). With that, we present some evidence under two perspectives: First, a collection of examples which show how a perspective of beauty and aesthetics could be developed. Secondly, a set of dimensions which young future professionals consider relevant in the context of transition strategies, to which conceptual aspects will be added. The paper will then (3) propose some actions towards ‘beautiful’ plans and planning, certainly aware about a possible critique against ‘beautification’ of cities (Jacobs). The last part will be done in view of the transition challenge that societies are confronted with. It will also be done in view of the New

European Bauhaus launched by the European Commission at the beginning of 2021 stating: “The New European Bauhaus is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative, convening a space of encounter to design future ways of living, situated at the crossroads between art, culture, social inclusion, science and technology. It brings the Green Deal to our living places and calls for a collective effort *to imagine and build a future that is sustainable, inclusive and beautiful for our minds and for our souls.*” (https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en, emphasis added, see also (Ban et al., 2021)). What does this entail in terms of educating coming generations of planning professionals?

2. The beauty of transition – starting observation

During a conference on innovative municipalities (<https://kommunen-innovativ.de/fachkonferenz>), the small city of Krumbach (AT) was presented as outstanding example of innovation in transition strategies. That municipality initiated an international architectural design project called BUS:STOP Krumbach. The project had several ambitions: combining international design thinking with traditional materials, traditional local craftsmanship, landscape design and the grand challenge of a transition to a more sustainable transport system. The example was presented as particularly interesting by Harald Welzer (Welzer, 2019), a renowned sociologist in Germany working on issues on transformation, because of the small scale of the municipality (about 1000 inhabitants), the innovative approach chosen, and the out of the box thinking applied by this village. Here, a particular ‘design element’ and its ‘beauty’, mainly resulting from the combination of local vernacular techniques with international design teams, created ‘innovative and beautiful actions on a small scale’ to stimulate different courses of action in the field of mobility. The resulting bus stops had indeed amazing designs, as can be seen from Figure 1 (see <https://www.bregenzwald.at/aktivitaet/busstop-krumbach/>). The conference and discussion did not enter the field of planning at that time, but gave the stimulus to reflect on these and other approaches focusing on beauty and aesthetics to develop some lessons for the larger transition challenges e.g. at city regional scale and how to achieve this in planning education.



Figure 1. Busstop Krumbach (Sou Fujimoto)

Source: www.krumbach.at

Beauty and transition are not entirely new topics in the field of planning, as is well known. Already the ancient Vitruvius called in his principles of architecture and design for: *Firmitas* (stability), *Utilitas* (functionality) and *Venustas* (beauty). In his view, architecture depends on Order, Arrangement, Eurythmy, Symmetry, Propriety, and Economy. Especially Eurythmy stands for the graceful and the true-to-size appearance in the assembly of the structural elements of building(s) (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ten_Books_on_Architecture/Book_I).

However, the best-known example in planning will be the ‘city beautiful’ movement of the 19th century, which started in many places in Europe and the United States of America. At its origin, the book by Camillo Sitte (Vienna) is often placed (Sitte, 1889). His work *‘Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen’* provided for the first time a compendium of principles for a modern city design and planning¹. The main concerns

¹ The subtitle of the original publication further specified his endeavour: a contribution to the solution of actual challenges in architecture and monumental sculptures with specific concern for Vienna. The section on ‘the limits of art in modern city design’ focuses specifically on aspects of art, beauty and aesthetics. For inspection see <https://archive.org/details/diestadtebaunach00sitt/page/n6/mode/1up>.

of the city beautiful movement were the poor living conditions of citizens in the period of accelerating industrialisation and urbanisation. The movement promoted 'beauty' not for its own sake but as a civic virtue, advocating beautification to increase urban quality of life at large, in addition to modern functional structures. Daniel Burnham's 1909 Plan of Chicago is one such example experimenting with central elements defined by the movement. For the European context, Berlage's extension plan for Amsterdam South in the Netherlands from 1904 (though ultimately not realised) can be named as another example (Cammen et al., 2012). In modern times, scholars like Jane Jacobs criticised the city beautiful movement – and within that everything particularly oriented towards order - as a 'design cult' and stated: "To approach a city, or even a city neighborhood, as if it were a larger architectural problem, capable of being given order by converting it into a disciplined work of art, is to make the mistake of attempting to substitute art for life." (Jacobs, 1961, p. 373)

According to Talen and Ellis (Talen & Ellis, 2004), Jane Jacobs was right claiming that a city cannot be a 'work of art'. However, according to the same authors, Jacobs based here judgment wrongly by mixing her criticism on the dominating modernist planning approaches, which promoted the cult of the individual architect genius, decontextualization, specialization and fragmentation, with her critique regarding the 'design' orientation of the city beautiful movement. Following the suggestions of Talen and Ellis (2004), if the intention is to bring back art and beauty into city planning, ancestors of the city beautiful movement and the particularities of the movement itself should come into focus. Talen and Ellis' (2004, p. 13 f) exploration of aesthetic dimensions in planning amongst others remark, that the original idea of 'beautification' came also with an idea to represent diversity in the melting pots of the new world. Without going further into detail of that discussion, it is worthwhile looking at the element of diversity. The view here is that it is necessary to make a distinction between incremental, collectively oriented notions of aestheticism, and city design that is preoccupied with self-expression, individuality or the dominance of one ruling individual or institution. One is organic, fluid, and derived from a pluralistic view of the city. The other is absolutist and dependent upon centralized authority. Elements that come back in philosophical perspectives on aesthetics and beauty.

To state it clearly, we do not want to suggest a return to a simple 'beautification' for our times and prepare cities for a new 'pomposity'; though some more recent urban design projects could be considered exactly as that, especially the still notorious high-rise buildings (Jencks, 2006). What we want to suggest is to pay attention to beauty and aesthetics as cultural dimensions of local transition strategies. Reformulating the well-known quote from Burnham in the following way: "*Make no standard projects; they have no magic to stir citizen's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make beautiful projects; aim for high aesthetics in hope and work, triggering people's*

affections and stimulating their dreams."

The objective to reflect on the 'beauty of transition' is to elaborate on aspects of beauty and aesthetics as cultural dimensions and as part and parcel of local transition strategies. It further invites - students as future - planners to explore the potential of beauty and aesthetics in such strategies. Important questions emerge, for instance, concerning the role of vernacular, locally authentic practises or how participation as an element of such strategies could inspire the adoption of local forms of knowledge and aesthetic appreciation. Again, quoting Talen and Ellis (2004, p 15) who claim a "need for a participatory, interactive kind of art, the need to avoid separation of art and life, and the need to integrate art and nature. It is precisely these emphases on integration that can be used to support the connection between aesthetics and city planning."

3. Conceptual aspects

Until now, the text introduced a range of terms: aesthetics, beauty, art, planning, urban design and architecture, innovation, and transition. The following section, therefore, tries to develop main conceptual aspects which were used to structure our approach and thinking about beauty and aesthetics. This account is far from complete and marks only a starting point that will be further inquired.

We must start with a number of definitions, first. Following Scruton (2007), aesthetics (also esthetics in American English) is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of beauty and taste, as well as the philosophy of art (its own area of philosophy that comes out of aesthetics). It examines aesthetic values, often expressed through judgments of taste. In our context, aesthetics relates to sensations, perceptions, feelings that grasp 'beauty' and largely depend on the context of use. In the context of poetry for instance Baumgarten (Scruton, 2007, p. 233) defined in the 18th century beauty as 'sensuous knowledge, through which we grasp particulars, as opposed to intellectual or conceptual knowledge'. The philosopher Kant (Scruton, 2007, p. 233, Kant: Critique of Pure Reason) spoke about a sensuous aspect of our appreciation of beauty, in his view mostly an appreciation of natural beauty; not made but 'found'. Scruton (2007, p. 238) further emphasises, that we appreciate mostly through assessment, "... though we may differ in our judgements of taste in landscapes and the like, we all agree in making them." In short, it is difficult to establish up-front an idea of beauty, but human beings are happily engaged in finding specific dimensions of that very same beauty.

A very stimulating source regarding beauty and aesthetics can be found in the work of Mirza Tursić, who wrote a PhD thesis at EPFL on the topic (Tursić, 2017). In reflection on the argumentation provided in his article on the city as aesthetic space (Tursić, 2019), we would like to emphasise the following aspects: The aesthetic space brings together

past and present but might as well stimulate an idea of a future of becoming. Tursić (2019, p. 205) describes the aesthetic space as a particular sort of direct lived experience through which memories of the past, latent reality and the actualized perceived present are conjured together, informing one another. However, this production of aesthetic space might as well be seen critical, at least being on the edge of creating *ideology* (see also above comments by Jacobs).

In his view, aesthetic spaces are created by self-conscious actors, with each individual having an idea of what society should be like and what it should look like (with reference to Norbert Elias). At the same time, aesthetic qualities should be considered as properties that emerge from the interaction between individuals and their environment and society, within a process of constituting themselves as self-reflective subjects (Tursić 2019, p. 208). And last, any aesthetic experience requires an active participation from the observer, because it is the imaginative attention of the individual that enables them to see a certain object in one way or another (Tursić 2019, p. 209).

One aspect in Tursić's argumentation brought particular resonance. Citizens create a network of aesthetic spaces. With reference to de Certeau (1984) and his walking the city project the following aspect stands out: The city is experienced (and therefore produced) in a way that the fragments replace the totality, while conjunctions between the fragments remain totally or partially omitted (Tursić 2019, p. 212). The beauty of a city is a classic example of the emerging property of a city since the aesthetic appreciation of the city as a whole cannot be solely understood as the sum of the aesthetic appreciations of its separate parts. As part of a spatialized practical action, aesthetic phenomena appear as a constant reminder of the power of that which does not appear visibly and the power of the unknown. This is why individuals' aesthetic sensibilities should be a matter of societal debate (Tursić 2019, p. 218). We can only reiterate the final point, that it is equally important to address the role of the unconscious (Soja, 1996) and expose this to societal debate, not least with a view towards lines of conflicting views (Ache, 2017). Leading to an interim summary also relevant for classroom, the relation between beauty, aesthetics and the transformation of spaces should preferably be experienced in a 'corporeal' exposition. Unfortunately, due to the Corona pandemic a corporeal experience and the inter-individual exchange about it was largely impossible.

Besides such basic definitions, we searched for additional tools for a more specific analysis, applied mostly to written documentation of urban transition projects (the major source during the Corona pandemic). First, as we are looking at space, the works by Henry Lefebvre (1991) provide a unique interpretation of its dimensions. With Lefebvre we can assume that societies are not just occupying pre-given static space, but rather produce that very space. In turn, space is an active element in the constitution

and functioning of society. The Lefebvrian space operates with three main dimensions, the lived, perceived and conceived space (see also figure below, from Wiedmann & Salama, 2019). By allocating aspects of beauty and aesthetics, the lived and perceived space might certainly be seen as the most relevant places. The conceived space, as was outlined at the start with the example of the city beautiful movement, is open for professional perspectives on beauty and aesthetics.

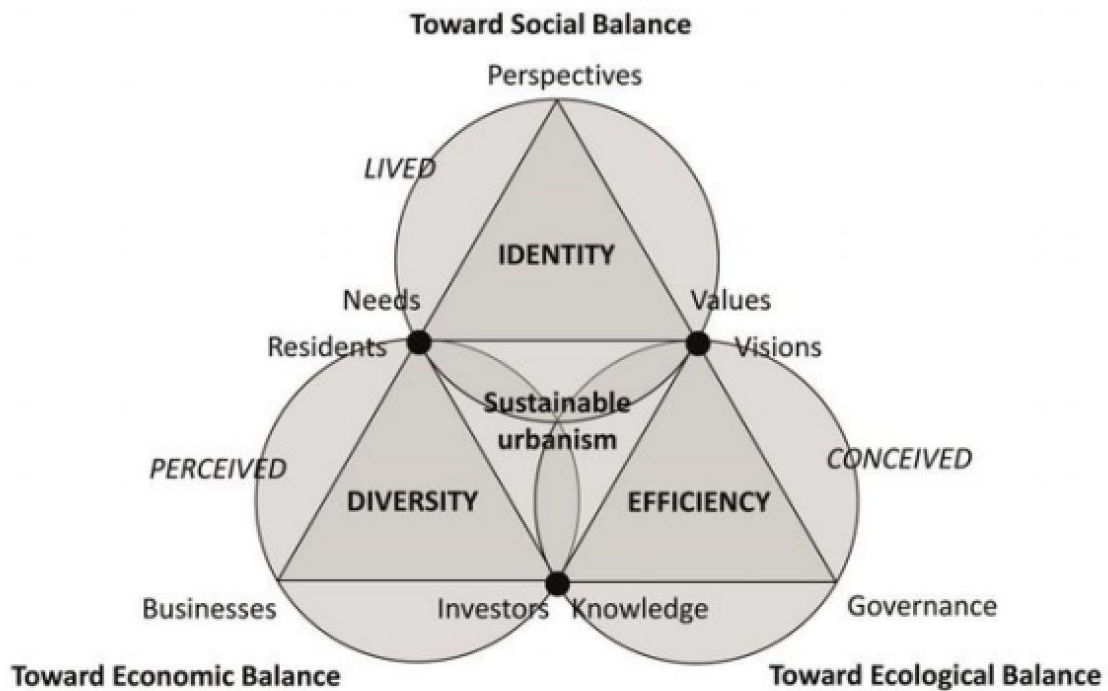


Figure 2. Lefebvre'ian Space (Wiedmann and Salama, 2019)

Other scholars from the field express similar perspectives; we already referred to Soja (1996, p. 57): “Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, *the real and the imagined*, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, *mind and body*, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. Anything which fragments Thirdspace into separate specialized knowledges or exclusive domains - even on the pretext of handling its infinite complexity - destroys its meaning and openness.” Of course, addressing ‘beauty’ in that context with a professional mindset might contribute to destroying *meaning and openness*.

However, to try understanding it, is not forbidden, using again Tursić (2019, p. 205): “I analyze a particular sort of direct lived experience through which memories of the past,

latent reality and the actualized perceived present are conjured together, informing one another. Studying the aesthetic space can help urban researchers better understand how the world becomes internalized or externalized by inhabitants, how they develop a stronger concern for justice, or how novelty is borne from a constant dialogue between the ethical and the aesthetic.” Here, the aspects of ‘novelty’ and ‘justice’ add further dimensions to the discussion: taking a perspective of beauty might allow us to develop alternative and probably more ‘just’ perspectives on future urban transitions.

Following the ideas of Geels and Schot (2007), transitions in socio-technical regimes can happen on three principal layers: niche, regime and landscape level (see Figure 3 below).

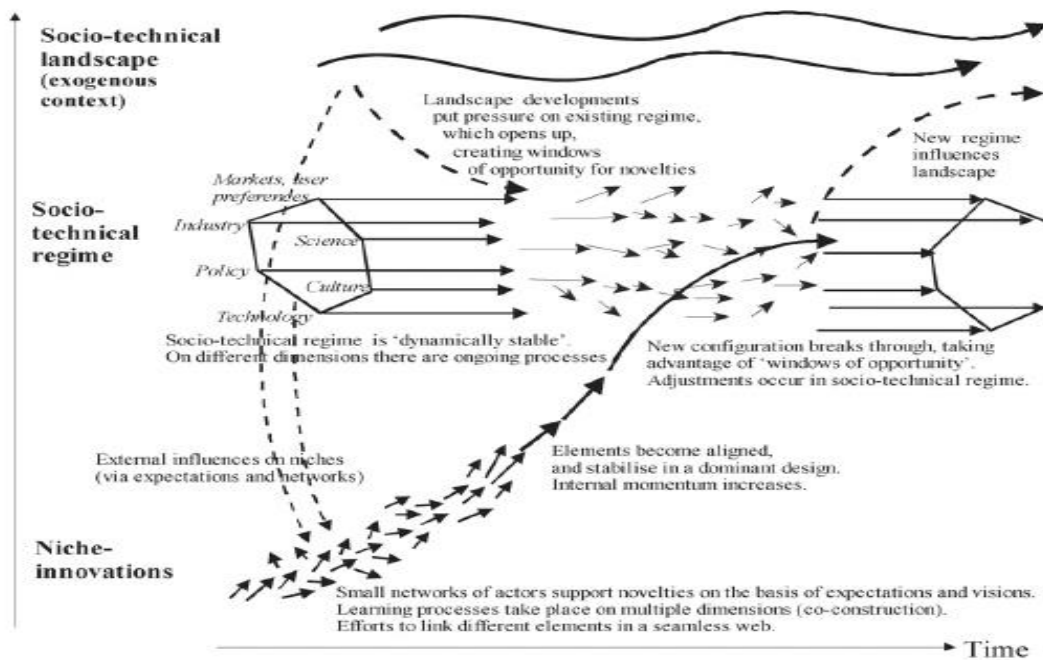


Fig. 1. Multi-level perspective on transitions (adapted from Geels, 2002, p. 1263).

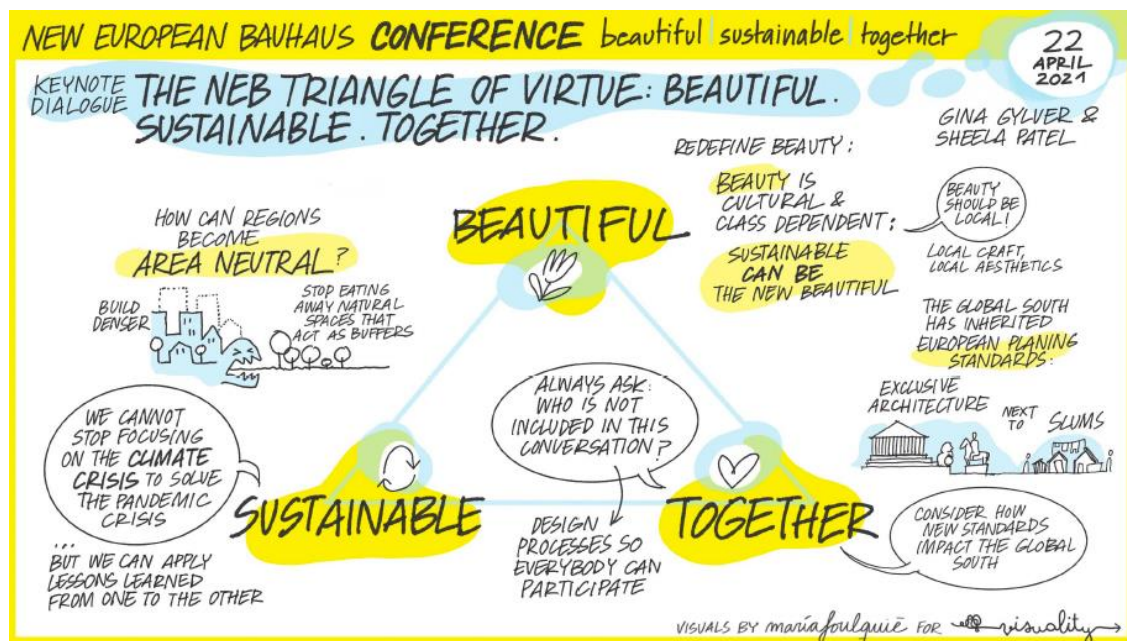
Figure3. Transition - a multi-level perspective

Source: Geels and Schot, 2007.

The ‘avalanche’ settings at the bottom and in the centre of the above figure depict a conceptual aspect that opens for several transition directions creating a window of opportunity for experimentation and novelty. We suggest understanding aspects of beauty and aesthetics as important element in that context, starting with the niche innovations but extending further into the other elements.

Before outlined concept of transition includes at the system level exogenous elements

which could be labelled political or strategic, bringing for instance the European policy and strategy context into the equation. We consider three European policies relevant here: In December 2020, a new Territorial Agenda (2020b) was agreed upon by European ministers. The TA 2030 formulates a central objective: “A sustainable future for all places and people which does not leave anybody behind has been underlined as essential for Europe’s future.” It neatly connects to the Green Deal (2019) of the European Commission, the major strategic development program towards a ‘Just Europe and a Green Europe’. At the same time the New Leipzig Charter (2020a) was released, which like the TA2030 promotes a place-based approach, calls for policy coordination and effective multi-level policy frameworks as common principles. Especially the New Leipzig Charter provides guidance for applying these in cities, urban areas, their functional regions, and peri-urban areas. It supports strengthened cooperation between and across spatial levels, including urban-rural partnerships. The principles of good urban governance and quality design ensure attractive, inclusive, durable, adaptable places which contribute positively to making places more pleasant and attractive for people to work, live and enjoy. It is essential (that) public authorities plan positively for



the achievement of high quality and inclusive design when considering development in our cities, towns and villages.

Figure 4. New European Bauhaus

Source: EC.

Shortly after these two initiatives, the European Commission launched the New European Bauhaus at the beginning of 2021: “The New European Bauhaus is a creative

and interdisciplinary initiative, convening a space of encounter to design future ways of living, situated at the crossroads between art, culture, social inclusion, science and technology. It brings the Green Deal to our living places and calls for a collective effort to imagine and build a future that is sustainable, inclusive *and beautiful for our minds and for our souls.*" (https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en)

Coming back to Lefebvre and his tripartite concept of space, we can combine it with above outlined perspectives in several ways: As lived experience, beauty is produced and reproduced on the individual level and becomes an element of societal engagement, up to the point of being turned into a dominant aesthetic program (at the interface of perceived and conceived space). Planning but also strategy contribute perspectives on beauty and aesthetics, in professional terms but also regarding aspects of power. EU policies and initiatives can be interpreted as part and parcel of the conceived space element; the positive aspect here being that beauty and aesthetic receive more attention, especially in the New European Bauhaus. Now we need the next generation planners to play with these elements and create beautiful spaces.

4. On-Off-Beauty: Approaching Beauty and Aesthetics in Student work

As was emphasised in the conceptual section, beauty and aesthetics are basically constructions, depending on a capacity of the individual to perceive beauty and aesthetics (Kant) but also depending on some societal practices. With 'style', grown out of historic roots and kind of generalised as shared practice, a pattern can become dominant within a specific period of time, in a specific society, in a specific place. How do those aspects return in our exercise?

But before talking about findings from the course, a brief outline of the program as such shall provide an overview. The course was an invitation to elaborate on aspects of beauty and aesthetics as cultural dimensions and as part and parcel of local transition strategies. It further invited students to explore the potential of beauty and aesthetics in such strategies. The main step to elaborate on those aspects are case studies of self-selected projects, in a Dutch, European, or global context. The main approach for doing so is a 'transition theatre'². In his work on theatrical performance, Peter Brook contends that "[t]ruth in theatre is always on the move" (Brook, 1996, p. 140). Akin to Brook's argument, the 'transition theatre' will act as a heuristic device to reflect on the interplay of planning theory and practice, and, as such, to uncover the diverse articulations of beauty and aesthetics in ongoing transitions. In terms of learning aims and objectives,

² Special thanks to the co-teacher I Barba-Lata who generously provided for the course his knowledge and previous teaching experiences with this theatrical approach.

the course connects to the following competence and learning outcomes of the SP MA program: critically assessing and adequately applying theories and concepts; compare existing strategies and projects and develop creative new approaches; autonomously design and perform a case study; learn to apply new methods; critically reflect on normative assumptions involved in planning; alternative ways of communication and engagement; develop a European comparative perspective. The course consisted of two main elements: First, in several lectures, main conceptual elements were presented and discussed with students. Topics included are: European Context; Beauty and aesthetics in urban planning; transition theory. Second, students had to work in groups on self-selected case studies, exploring the various dimensions of beauty and aesthetics and developing a 'transition theatre' approach. The overall runtime was four weeks, so the course resembled more a kind of intensive workshop and project. The course had about eighty participants. In the next couple of paragraphs, we will look at some of the outcomes of this working process.

The first task to address aspects of beauty and aesthetics was openly defined at the very start of the course: participants were invited to take pictures from any kind of street scene which they considered 'beautiful' or 'aesthetically' appealing. They had no previous knowledge of the topic, except the course syllabus, but some might have done a bit of background research before starting. They were asked to document a certain/specific scene of their "liking" or choice and remove the central aspect of beauty or aesthetic, which contributed mostly to their judgment. The results do not stand hard statistical test but provide some interesting dimensions, which can be traced back to Lefebvre.

The collection of scenes and, within that, objects that trigger the individual to consider aspects as beautiful or aesthetically appealing range from the natural environment to the urban fabric, include greenery and especially trees (as landmarks) or water (which is not that surprising in the Netherlands, of course), include churches, windmills, and bridges (the important landmarks in the flat lands). Also squares, public parks and gardens as well as streets alongside canals or 'grachten' are considered appealing. Typically, these are symbolic structures charged with historic meaning, which belong to the perceived space of societal practices. For some observers, the street corner with cafes or graffiti and murals on buildings attracted their attention as appealing, an aspect of the lived space. (See Figures 5 & 6)



Figure 546.

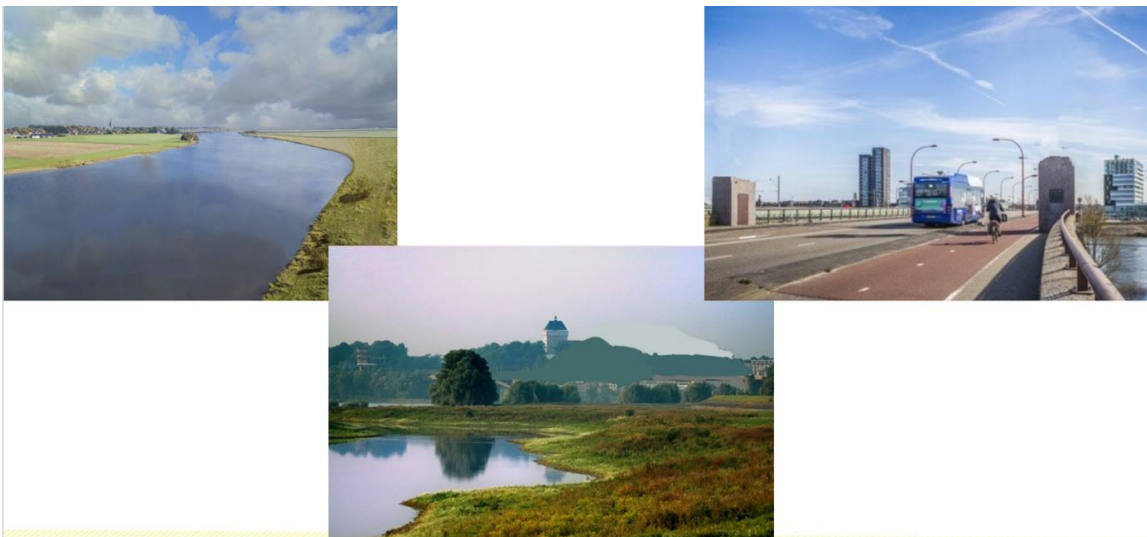


Figure 647.

When looking at the qualifiers to answer the why question, the term 'beautiful' was used frequently in combination with feelings, memories, history of the place but also stories told (on both, experienced and abstract level). Observations perceived the beauty and aesthetics of spaces and places mostly from a visual perspective. Potentially, one could think in extension of sound, smell, haptics as elements of beauty and aesthetics. Interestingly, in only a few cases that came to the front (like mentioning bird

song). Observations are frequently connected to personal feelings, activities and social interaction; walking the dog or walking with friends during a certain daytime and in an intimate conversation give a certain feel and touch to a place; the beauty or aesthetic value of a certain condition is perceived not just through a pair of eyes, but many - and in cases more than human. (See Figures 7&8)



Figure 48.



Figure 8.

Interesting outliers were a few (see Figure 6 top left picture Maas trees; Figure 8 top left - transition to mystical realm): What we consider a natural scene receives additional value through the intentionally grown trees as way signs (river basin marker); a certain landmark defines a transition zone to mentally step over into a new realm, an experience of intricate beauty.

We also invited at the very start of the first lecturing session in classroom students to share some thoughts on beauty and aesthetics “as such” using ‘mentimeter’ as a tool. From that, some further aspects can be highlighted (reservation: for most students, EN is a second or third language partly restricting the wording).

Students make judgments about “beauty” - basically from “inside” (gut feeling, nature of human). Other comments link to that by alluding to feelings, emotions, expressions which come “automatically”. The latter can of course be something trained for, indicative for such dimensions are upbringing, forming character, conditioning, or connected with others. This aspect of a nature of the human is reflected in the academic literature and especially in the philosophy on aesthetics by Kant, who claims that as rational beings we cannot escape making aesthetic judgments, as was briefly outlined before. (See Figure 9)

Why are YOU making judgements about beauty?



Figure 9.

When thinking about aesthetic aspects in planning, first ideas expressed by students were (full list): urban design in most instances followed by a collection of other aspects, like greenery, multifunctional development, reconnecting with nature, diversity but also uniformity. Listening to locals and the act of “designing beautiful spaces” were also mentioned, as making places from spaces, so transforming the abstract to a (not literally)

concrete setting. (See Figure 10)

When thinking about aesthetic aspects in spatial planning my first idea is ...

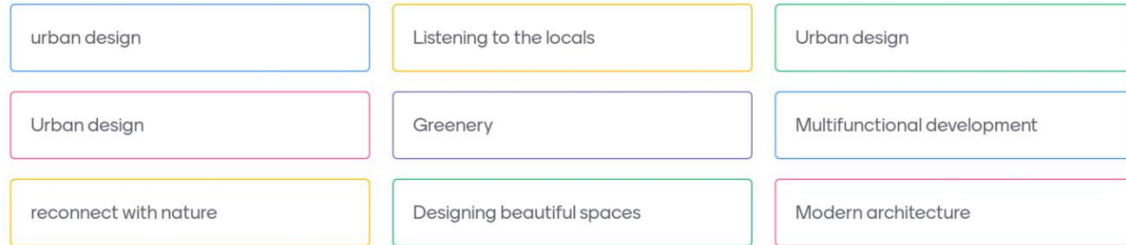


Figure 10.

As said, these are a collection of utterances at the start of the program. What can be seen is the broad range of dimensions listed which also mirror the scientific and academic discussion. A last point in that was the question, where students would see aesthetics placed, as given or created. Students voted with a clear majority for 'created'; the aspect stands somewhat opposite to the idea that especially beauty is conceived but might as well be seen as a kind of professional deformation; planners are making plans for places, that includes design and aesthetics - which is why such a course is needed!?

When reflecting on the entirety of examples and notions regarding beauty and aesthetics, and when using as a structuring device the Lefebvre'ian trinity of spaces, one can order the observations as depicted in figure x. Mind the reader, that the Lefebvre'ian spaces show overlap and are not mutually exclusive.

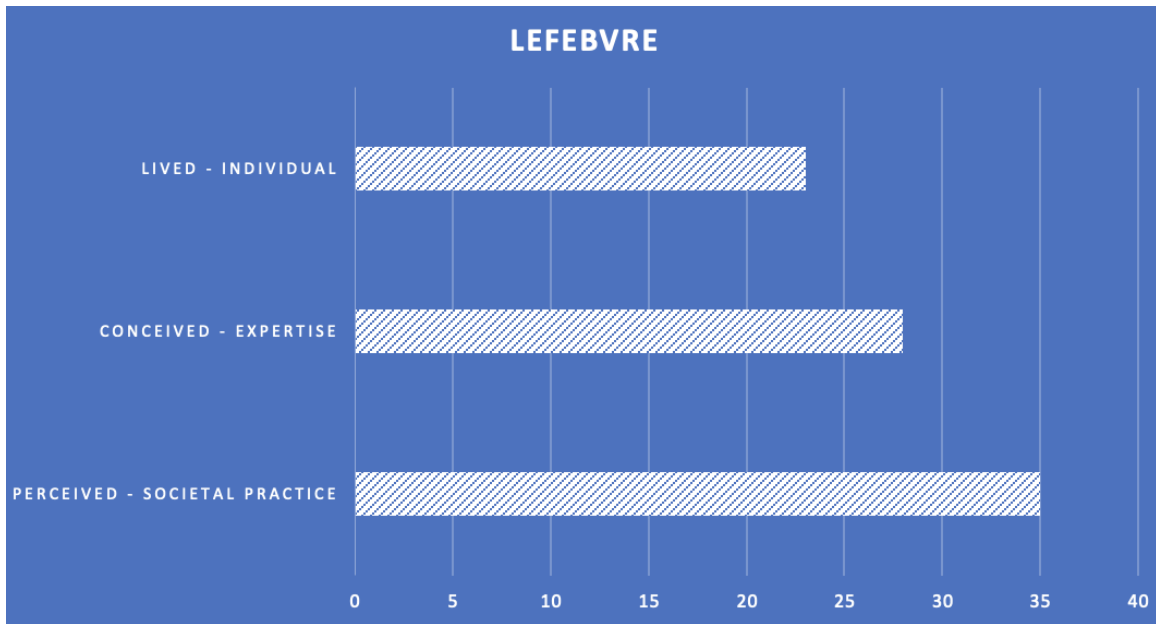


Figure 11. (multiple mentions possible)

What the group of students and their observations show, resonates with Tursić (2019, p. 205) “... Studying the aesthetic space can help urban researchers better understand how the world becomes internalized or externalized by inhabitants, how they develop a stronger concern for justice, or how novelty is borne from a constant dialogue between the ethical and the aesthetic.” What needs to be seen is the second aspect, a concern for justice, novelty, and the dialogue between ethical and aesthetic; we will return to this in the group and individual projects.

5. Beauty of transition: case studies

In a second task, students had to study cases for a review of “planned” beauty and aesthetic in concrete projects (though, mostly visited in the digital world as outcome of the CoV restrictions). Tabel 1 presents the choices of projects; student groups collected two examples for their analysis.

Table 1. Overview of Transition Projects

City	Project	Material Dimension	Transition Perspective
New York	<i>Highline</i>	Public Space	Social Justice
Seoul	<i>Seoullu Skygarden</i>	Public Space	Climate mitigation
Rotterdam	<i>Dakpark</i>	Public Space	Climate mitigation
Singapore	<i>Solar Supertrees Bay South Garden</i>	Public Space	Climate mitigation
Copenhagen	<i>Superkilen Urban Park</i>	Public Space	Social Justice
Seville	<i>Metropol Parasol</i>	Public Space	Climate mitigation
Copenhagen	<i>Hyyge Harbour Bath</i>	Public Space	Climate mitigation
Arnhem	<i>Central Station</i>	Mobility	Public transport
Kyoto	<i>Kyoto Station</i>	Mobility	Public transport
New York	<i>Oculus Transport Hub</i>	Mobility	Public transport
Naples	<i>Metro dell'arte</i>	Mobility	Public transport
London	<i>Canary Wharf</i>	Urban renewal	Economic
Amsterdam	<i>NDSM Wharf</i>	Urban renewal	Economic
Milan	<i>Bosco Verticale</i>	Green building	Housing, Climate mitigation
Amsterdam	<i>Valley</i>	Green building	Housing, Climate mitigation
Nijmegen	<i>Waalfront</i>	Urban renewal	Housing
Antwerp	<i>Park Spoor Noord</i>	Urban renewal	Housing
Bristol	<i>Citizenspace</i>	Urban renewal	Housing
Tilburg	<i>Spoorzone</i>	Urban renewal	Housing
Jinhua	<i>Yanweizhou Wetland Park</i>	Flood protection	Climate mitigation
Nijmegen	<i>Room for the River (Nevengeul)</i>	Flood protection	Climate mitigation
Dhaka	<i>Flood protection</i>	Flood protection	Climate mitigation

Source: author (groups times cases?).

In terms of the material dimension addressed, public spaces are clearly in the lead, followed by urban renewal projects. Others address mobility, greening or flood protection as material dimension. In terms of the transition aspect, several dimensions can be identified, with housing and climate mitigation as the more frequent topics. Of course, individual projects reach out to more dimensions and are following current requirements to integrate various dimensions - the Table provides the main foci of those. The transition aspects addressed by projects were climate mitigation, housing, public

transport, economic development and in two cases 'social justice'. We were interested in the line of argumentation and interpretation which students developed in their group but also individual papers (the latter inviting for a conceptual reflection).

Group Paper

Students were comparing two cases from the list above, starting from an interesting transition perspective (see Table 1) and looking besides others into dimensions of beauty and aesthetics, which will be briefly presented in this section.

Within the collection of examples, obvious candidates to discuss aspects of beauty and aesthetics have been the architectural and urban design projects like the Highline (NY), Parasol (Seville), Solar Supertrees (Singapore), or the Skygarden (Seoullu 7017). Besides the obvious design element, these projects were discussed as well at the intersection with aspects of justice (Highline), participation (Superkilen) or environmental dimensions (Supertrees). More specifically, students were developing arguments regarding how those urban designs helped positively influence the other dimensions. To be more specific, how can a project revitalising public space by reusing outdated infrastructures (Highline, Skygarden) provide access for all citizens to green infrastructures and public spaces? On the one hand, one receives some innovative public space with 'pleasant' architectural features and 'attractive' forms; formulating also 'accessibility' as part of beauty or aesthetics. On the other, not just doing that but obviously also initiating processes of gentrification and, in the preparation and implementation of the projects, being partially void of participative processes or a fuller recognition of citizens interests (all these perspectives were established using publicly available sources).

The set contained several examples working on mobility issues (railway station projects in Arnhem, Kyoto, or projects on metro stations in New York and Naples). Students were interested in 'attractive' stations with 'beautiful' designs, combining aesthetic quality with smart features, ultimately asking questions regarding the shift in transport modes towards public transport. Can an aesthetically appealing design attract more people to public transport, which is the intention of both projects (with the answer being open, as no real tests on site were possible).

Other examples addressed questions of 'natural' beauty, from architectural projects (Bosco Verticale, Milan) to water management projects (Wetland Park, Jinhua or Room for the River, Nijmegen). Aspects of beauty and aesthetics in the first set were connected to environmental sustainability, human wellbeing, but as well the optimal use of the territory; sustainable features, smart technology and healthy living trends; and in general appearance and accessibility. Aspects of beauty in the second set were seen in connection with influences of local materials and symbolism; specific lighting; or the integration of cultural infrastructures via the design of adjacent public spaces. Beauty in

the second case was defined in connection with the infusion of local cultural and historical elements directing perspectives/views; nature preservation; or, indeed, public participation in the development of the project.

Overall, the features outlined before are not that surprising, with maybe the definition of 'accessibility' as aspect of beauty as exception. However, what was interesting to see was that the appeal to identify dimensions of beauty and aesthetics and embed these in broader aspects of transition, worked out in that widening the perspective and also preparing some critical inquiry into plain design dimensions led to different discussions. Questioning together with students whether a project like Metro dell'arte really multiplies the number of public transport users and what else would be needed (like ticket pricing) to do so, helped putting things into perspective. It also helped, from a comparative perspective, discussing projects in view of different local contexts and assess their functionality.

Performances

The performances by the same student groups elaborated on before mentioned aspects further. Juxtaposing cases and elaborating the findings with a view towards engaging people or proposing different strategies. As a case in point the performance by the group working on the Parasol (Seville) and the Harbour Bath (Copenhagen) shall be mentioned here, called 'uninspired': The movie starts with the feelings of an individual student, running through the obviously uninspiring local environment, who accidentally bumps into two foreign students (from Copenhagen and Seville, respectively) who 'sing' to him how beautiful the two public spaces are which are open to all with the refrain 'public spaces give people happy faces' focusing on public needs obviously cheering the student up (one of the students composed and sang a song for that purpose). One might consider this a broad brush picture with standard appeals and narratives (public needs), but engaging for that movie by explicitly starting from individual feelings and being cheered up by two foreign students (which were not foreign but acted as those), shows how complex the engagement on the side of students became.

An interesting and relevant dimension here is, that in all cases were students were engaging in the matter by acting and performing (bringing in their personality and body) one immediately saw more stimulating results and a clearer reflection on relevant items. In terms of the teaching program, these performances were supported by several rounds of feedback before the final performance. All of the performances were delivered as video recordings (with a maximum length of six minutes) for which students used standard editing software and, mostly, their mobile phones to record the performances. Certainly, this group of students in their early twenties had many skills in that respect; social media and video platforms seem to have trained them well.

Individual Paper

The individual papers were supposed to elaborate further on conceptual aspects of beauty and transition. What we present here, are extracts from some of the papers and especially the final sections reflecting on the beauty of transition.

Students were particularly stimulated by the dimensions of the lived and perceived space. Experiences and interactions of the newly created public spaces were considered very relevant; a reflection obviously also of the literature consulted for interpretation. However, students applied their reading of the academic literature to the respective cases coming to interesting insights: „Through reviewing the case of the Metro dell’Arte, one can remark the successful application of both physical and symbolic elements of beauty and aesthetics to induce the transition in mobility (Darley, 2019). Not only were physical artworks, architectural elements, and archaeological remains applied to the stations to create an attractive perceived and conceived space, symbolic elements of beauty like inclusivity, meaning-making, and collaboration also were included by planning authorities to create the conceived space. In the Metro dell’Arte, this has led to a diverse lived space (De Risi, 2018; Corbi, n.d.). Subsequently, this has led to the increased attractiveness and use of public transportation, leading to more sustainability in the city.“ None of the local actors were of course using any of these conceptual elements, explicitly. The interpretation is that of the student.

Other comments echoed such aspects and dimensions, emphasising local cultures, heritage, but also interaction and embeddedness due to participation and co-creation: „The ‘beauty of transition’ recognizes the need to let shared values and civic identity lead the way to create a place that is locally embedded among residents and is sustainable for years to come. Accordingly, the strategic transformation will have a positive impact on society, the environment, and the economy.“

In terms of the broader idea of transition strategies, the following statement brings another nice view to the table: “The argument that has emerged, and that can also be drawn over a broader perspective on sustainability transitions, is that the instances of beauty experienced by city inhabitants can in different ways shape and thus change the practices they are engaged in. This follows from the fact that beauty can lift people’s bodily experienced spaces. A resulting change in user practices can be translated to a change in regime rules which then reconfigures the deep structure of the larger system. A sustainability transition could thus be promoted, as just one of the many different ways, by the very individual and cognitive experiences of delight and a sense of place.“ The connection between bodily experiences and change of practice that opens up new innovative niches which can penetrate the regime level to push for innovations and create opportunities for sustainable change sounds at least worth considering.

Students are aware of critical perspectives, too, like in the case of iconic architectures

and global players in the field: “The role of beauty in this (illusion of a) transition is taking place at the landscape and the regime level. As described by Edwards (2021), a new generation of train station design is emerging. Prof. ... coined the term ‘Calatrava’ising’, indicating the hope of city councils to hire a famous architect who is supposed to create a change for better in their region. The window of opportunity in this case is filled with a globalized design.”

„In this way, it can be said that both within the beauty and aesthetics of temporary use ..., friction arises between the user and the planner. On the one hand this creates possibilities to develop beauty and aesthetics in the lived and perceived space but on the other hand these possibilities and the results remains limited by the pressing power of the conceived space." But, frictions respectively conflict over the built environment can be used in creative ways, creating solutions outside beloved boxes.

6. Create beauty in/with planning - Reflection and discussion

As was demonstrated, in the setting of a MA course and based on the works of students, the interpretation and application of beauty and aesthetics in transition developments at an urban scale provide rather diverse perspectives. They are clearly a first approximation but nevertheless also very informative regarding our intention to outline a more systematic approach towards these dimensions in planning and its education.

A central aspect relates to the following: Aesthetic values are not simply inherent to an object, a building, or a place, but are continuously shaped by cultural conditions and dynamic social processes. Aspects of beauty and aesthetics are continuously shaped by, and in turn shape our deep cultural conditions, our shared identities and ideas. These expanded networks of meaning (Tursić) , through which our notions of beauty and aesthetic quality arise, also shape fundamental feelings of interconnectedness and togetherness. With the aspect of affect and social connection beauty and aesthetics can be mobilised to nurture transition processes. We find this back in the New European Bauhaus’ notion of aesthetics, considered not dependent on individual judgement but emanating from a sense of community and place, of diversity and distinction. To make this even more effective, we must dare to imagine the as-yet-unknown instead of relying on well-known typologies (so against unreflective traditionalism or inherited notions of beauty and aesthetics).

We should try to embed these aspects into our teaching, no matter whether in specific or general courses. With the suggested approach combining conceptual dimensions with personal experiences and reflection through, in the end, analysing concrete projects (even if only virtually visited) and acting out transition (inviting for creative techniques involving bodily experience in group settings), many dimensions of beauty and

aesthetics can be addressed. Better of course in a life world setting with more actors around; but that was impossible given the Corona pandemic situation. Suffice to say, that some students had difficulties with the topic as such. It was considered lying too far outside their expectations based on specialisations (water management, mobility, real estate); the novelty was too challenging. Likewise, asking them to produce a kind of theatrical performance to present conceptual and concrete aspects created similar reservations. A majority of students just engaged in standard ways, navigating their way through the separate tasks. However, several performances (all of them were video recordings) were outstanding, including a James Bond re-make to explain the necessity for transformation strategies; stirred not shaken with beauty! What can be seen from the reactions of the group of more eager students is how the engagement with beauty and aesthetics stimulated their degree of reflection, creativity and energy, invested in conceiving and further developing transition ideas and projects. Which is promising, not least for the transition challenges ahead. We need to start dreaming of beautiful projects - and learn in classroom how to do so.

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