The city in words. Urbanistic notions of the last century

**Keywords:** urbanistic notions, urban design analysis, etymology, cultural history

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**Area of Research:** Urbanism, Design & History

**Research Summary:** During the development process of the built environment there is often unclarity in the use of the main urbanistic notions by the several participants of the process, which can block good communication and smooth development. In this PhD research, notions in three semantic fields (public spaces, building types and parts of the city) will be investigated for four groups of language users: the original designers, fellow designers, policymakers and journalists. Three main hypotheses will be verified: in the first place that urbanistic notions can be dissected in words, concepts, physical abstractions and drawn objects (images) and that their interrelations can clarify the meaning of the notion, secondly that even within a period of a hundred years words can change in meaning in quite an unnoticeable way, which leaves room for misinterpretation, and finally that the different motives of the various participants lead to the use of words to a certain effect, resulting in different words being used for the same objects and in possible unclarity as well.

**Research Methodology:** Four case studies are being executed, all twentieth century extension plans for Amsterdam (Plan South, Buitenveldert, Bijlmermeer and IJburg), in three consecutive steps: firstly the notions of the original designers are investigated (in images and texts), secondly the notions of the contemporaries (synchronic research) and finally the development of these notions until now (diachronic research). For the first step urban design analysis will be combined with linguistic (etymological) analysis. The second and third steps are completed with cultural-historical analysis.


**Main Question:** During the design and development process of the built environment, which words are being used with which meanings by which participants, to designate the designed phenomena, and what is their relationship with (the language of) the drawn objects (images)?

**Deliverables:** Insight in the use of urbanistic notions by different participants of the development process of the built environment and in the relationship between words and images, leading to better communication in both ways.

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**Updated:** September 26, 2013