

## Scientific Report

<b>Reference</b>	<b>CyberParks ECOST-STSM-TU1306-36837</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Meltem Sentürk Asıldeveci</b>			
<b>Home institution</b>	<b>Bauhaus University Weimar</b>			
<b>STSM Topic</b>	<b>Picturing Meeting Places in the Age of Ubiquitous Mobile Technologies</b>			
<b>Period</b>	<b>from</b>	<b>2017-03-24</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>2017-04-07</b>
<b>Host institution</b>	<b>Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICON), Utrecht (NL)</b>			

### (1) Abstract

Findings in the relevant previous academic works show that the meaning and image of urban space in inhabitants' mind is quite different than previous times by considering the penetration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into city space (Barlas, A., Sentürk, M., 2012, Alessandro, A., Fiorella, D. C. 2008, Glotz, P., Stefan, B., Locke, C. 2005, Castells, M. 1996, Bull, M. 2008). Townsend (2000) have also highlighted how the temporal quality of wireless and mobile networks reconfigure the spatial and visual qualities of a city, therefore, it should cause us to question the way we plan our cities and social space in urban space. Particularly, smart phones being one of the most crucial components of everyday life rituals have changed a lot. People still need urban components while circulating in the city. However, location based information applications and social media used via smart phones have become an essential part of our everyday life. The most crucial issue here is the necessity of understanding the effects of mobile technologies on behaviors in urban space by city builders.

STSM in Utrecht is planned to reveal the most recognized places of the city through meeting activity and meeting places. At this point the critical approach of interpreting effects of mobile communication possibilities in urban space on legibility issue, perception of physical space and behavioral patterns brings the challenge. STSM is conducted in 5 focus areas of urban space which are; 1. Central Station (Utrecht Centraal), 2. Vredenburg Square, 3. Oudegracht Street, 4. Neude (urban square), and 5. Dom Plein (urban square). During the research process Central Library and Korte Minrebroederstraat are included into the focus areas and they are used as additional mediums in the questionnaire component of this research.

With this research, we tried to formulate the answers to the question of "what does the image of the meeting place looks like" in the age of ubiquitous mobile technologies". Through this evaluation, the relation between meeting places and other specific places of the city is attempted to be built and interrelated to what the theory says so far. On the other hand, the results are interpreted comparatively with the results of the previous research conducted in Ankara (2009). According to the research done in Ankara, it is seen that meetings became more like simultaneously scheduled activities, rather than situated/organized activities and related to this

issue; meeting places were scattered along the paths. Streets or the boulevards (linear forms) in the city are preferred as meeting places more often besides landmarks (point wise). STSM in Utrecht shows that depending on the convenience and suitability of the city center for pedestrian circulation, inhabitants still prefer using urban open space as meeting place. However the ease of mobile communication technologies seems to create a considerable change in the process of meeting organizations. Some of the most interesting findings can be summed up as follows: great majority of the participants prefer to meet directly at the activity place regardless of what the type of the activity is; they are the respondents who claim to use their mobile phones for navigating in the city (to find/define their meeting places) (Question Nr.2). Just like in the research done in Ankara, Utrecht STSM also reveals that mobile communication most probably plays a role on 'by passing' the meeting places in urban open space; thus, it enables meeting directly indoors (cafés, restaurants, cinemas, theaters, etc.). Therefore, meeting places in urban spaces (e.g. landmarks in urban square, well known streets, in front of the central train station, etc.) are mostly used when participants are planning to meet with people other than close friends and family (Question Nr.3 and Nr.4).

## (2) Purpose of the STSM

The Short-Term Scientific Mission aims to focus on the image of meeting places in inhabitants' mind. This research is searching for the extensions of the navigation possibilities in urban physical structure via mental maps and tries to define the image of meeting places. It is an effort to understand the process of meeting activities in urban space through the benefits of information and communication technologies.

Additionally, the results and interpretation of the questionnaire research finds that, this project sheds light on urban design theories and the issue of urban identity which is largely fed by visually based explanations according to the acknowledged theoretical works. Hence this research stands beyond architectural determinism. The programme of the STSM is basically designed on the tasks shown below;

ACTION	TIME TABLE															
	MARCH							APRIL								
	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 - 24
(1) LITERATURE REVIEW																
(2) SITE VISIT AND OBSERVATIONS																
(3) QUESTIONNAIRE RESEARCH & INTERVIEWS																
(4) ONLINE NETWORKING & ADVERTISING																
(5) MAPPING & PRODUCTION OF VISUAL MATERIAL																
(6) DEVELOPING / CHECKING THE RESULTS																
(7) COMPARE & CONTRAST																

Figure.1. Action Plan – Time Table

## (3) Description of the work carried out during the STSM

The Short-Term Scientific Mission aims to focus on the image of meeting places in inhabitants' mind. By the application of the proposed methods in Utrecht case, the perception of the inhabitants and the legibility of the urban space is planned to be reinterpreted which is likely to open a way for cross questioning what the theory says so far.

### 3.1. Objectives of the STSM

The main objective of this research is to examine the perception of urban components which built mental maps and help people in orientation and way-finding. The framework of this STSM project is based on a city survey (questionnaire research and interviews) and literature review on the effects of mobile technologies on behavioral patterns and bottom-up planning strategies supported by smart technologies. The focus areas are decided in advance to the arrival in accordance with STSM Advisor's recommendations; these are shown below. Points number 5 and number 6 are added in process depending on the answers of the participants.

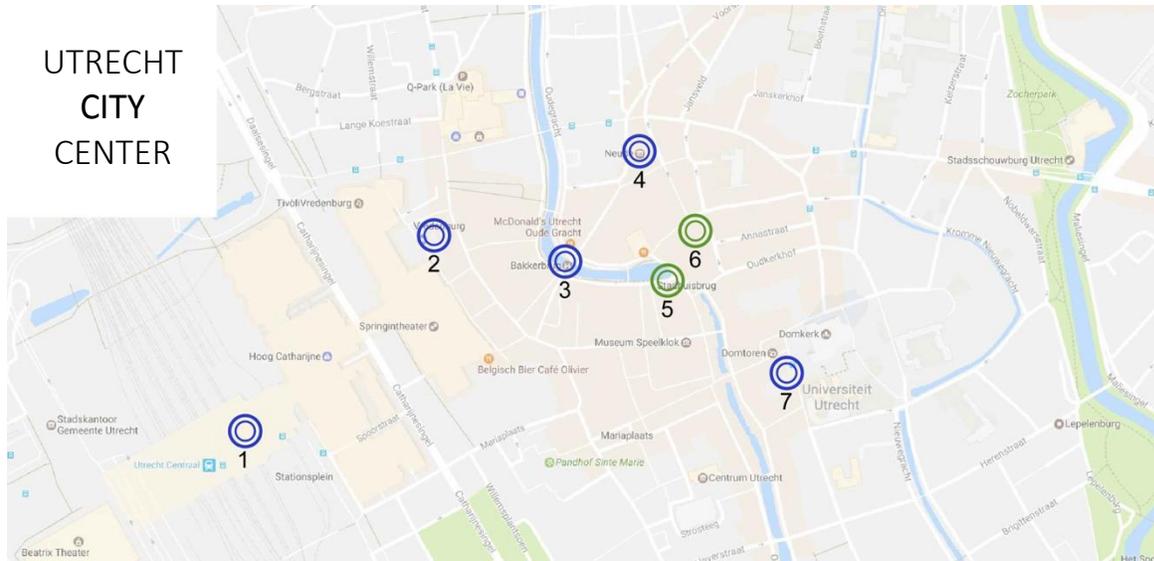


Figure.2. Focus Areas:

(1) Central Station (Utrecht Centraal), (2) Vredenburg Square, (3) Oudegracht Street, (4) Neude (urban square), (5) Central Library, (6) Korte Minrebroederstraat (street and small urban square), (7) Dom Plein (urban square)

The research begins with the design of the digital and visual material which are; a web site (<https://stsmutrecht.wixsite.com/research>), a questionnaire form (printed version and online form created via Google Forms) and flyers. Through the web site, visitors can read more about the aims of STSM project and the about researcher's background. There is a link on the website which directs to the questionnaire form and a request link for the visitors to send pictures of their meeting places. Furthermore, the website is announcing where and on which day the researcher is conducting her questionnaire research, so that the volunteers who are interested in the project can contribute an interview. The process is continued with site visits for observation and to increase the number of interviews. Depending on the results of the questionnaire research;

- Comparison between findings of the previous research (Ankara-2009) and STSM in Utrecht is intended to be made.
- A link between physical characteristics of the most recognizable meeting places of Utrecht and the characteristics of legible urban space described by Lynch (1960) is planned to be provided.

### 3.2. Approach and methodology

The STSM in Utrecht is based on the responses of the inhabitants and visitors of Utrecht to a questionnaire. A questionnaire research is conducted face-to-face in urban space and online in various virtual platforms. All of the participants have at least a little awareness and consciousness about the city sphere. The focus areas of the research are consolidated in research process due to the semi-structured and unstructured interviews with inhabitants of Utrecht. Observations in urban space about the movement patterns of inhabitants, where people wait, where people slow down or move fast are also some of the most significant determinative factors behind the course of the STSM.

Analysis and data collection continually inform one another and initial analysis determines where to go and what to look for next in data collection. Hence, STSM and the comprehensive research are realized within the framework of Grounded Theory methodology. Grounded Theory enables researchers to seek out and conceptualize the latent social patterns and structures of their area of interest through the process of constant comparison. Initially the inductive approach can be used to generate substantive codes from the data; later the developing theory will suggest where to go next to collect data (Glaser B., 1978).

### 3.3. The Questionnaire Research and Interviews

The first weekend in Utrecht was important for the research process to be started because the questionnaire research was needed to be conducted in urban space and reaching a high number of participants was crucial to decide on the content of the following tasks. The time period of STSM in general was very suitable for conducting such research in an urban open space due to very good weather conditions. Urban spaces were very crowded and people were enjoying their time on sunny days.

The questionnaire form used for the city survey is seen below;

- (1)** Do you live/work in Utrecht or are you a visitor?
- (2)** Do you use your mobile phone to navigate in the city (to find/decide on your meeting places)?
- (3)** Which places (streets, squares, interiors, etc.) would you like to choose as a meeting point when you meet with your close friends and family?
- (4)** Which places (streets, squares, interiors, etc.) would you like to choose as a meeting point when you meet with others (other than close friends and family)?
- (5)** Do you usually use the meeting places in the urban space then you go to the activity point or do you meet directly at the destination point/at the location of the planned activity?
- (6)** Which mobile phone application do you use the most to decide on the meeting places and to navigate in the city?
- (7)** Imagine that there are no mobile phones, which place could be your meeting place in Utrecht?
- (8)** Are there any other comments that you would like to add?

The flyers of the research which is seen below are given to the participants of the research and many of them are placed at the information desks of cafés, bars and cultural centers. These kindly ask city users to send the pictures of their meeting places. In the second week, on the 6th day of the questionnaire research of STSM, depending on the answers given to the Question Nr.3

and Nr.4 new focus areas are included to the research. These new areas (the Central Library Building, Mariaplaats and Korte Minrebroederstraat) became additional places for interviews.



Figure.3. Flyer of STSM in Utrecht

The action number 4 (Figure.1) called 'Online Networking & Advertising' means actually the project presentation in various communication platforms. It ensures many participants to contribute to this research through different channels of the Utrecht University and social media. A notice for project participation is placed on the websites of some related departments of the university. In fact, participants replied to the online questionnaire form via these platforms were mostly young students. Therefore, in order to balance the age groups, face to face questionnaire research and interviews were conducted at the Central Library which is used quite often by elderly inhabitants.



Figure.4. Meeting places of inhabitants in Utrecht:

- (1) Beatrix Theater, (2) Central Station (Utrecht Centraal), (3) Hoog Catharijne Shopping Center, (4) Tivoli Vredenburg Contemporary Music Complex, (5) Zara Store at Vredenburg, (6) Vredenburg Square, (7) de Bijenkorf Utrecht Shopping Center, (8) Mariaplaats (urban square), (9) Oudegracht Street, (10)

Neude Square, (11) Central Library, (12) Korte Minrebroederstraat (street and small urban square), (13) Janskerkhof (small urban square), (14) Janskerk (church), (15) Bike parking area at Janskerkhof (Figure.10), (16) Dom Plein (urban square), (17) Drift Street, (18) Park Lepelenburg

#### (4) Description of the main results

##### 4.1. Findings

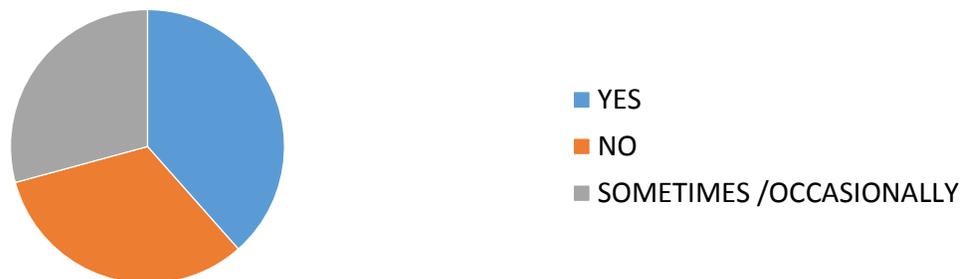
The number of participants of the questionnaire research conducted in urban space and online via Google Forms is 95. All of the participants so far have been living or working in Utrecht and has a general idea about most common pedestrian patterns in urban spaces. Almost all of the participants are using smart phones and 87% of the participants use Google Maps and the Whatsapp application to decide on meeting places and to navigate in the city (according to the answers for the Question Nr.6).

According to the answers of Question Nr.2, we can say that the participants who need navigation programs to find meeting places and the ones who doesn't need any navigation programs in the city are almost the same in quantity. The number of the participants that have replied as 'sometimes' is also quite high in number. The diversity of participants in 3 groups gives a useful data for this research.

**Q.Nr.1:** Do you live/work in Utrecht or are you a visitor?

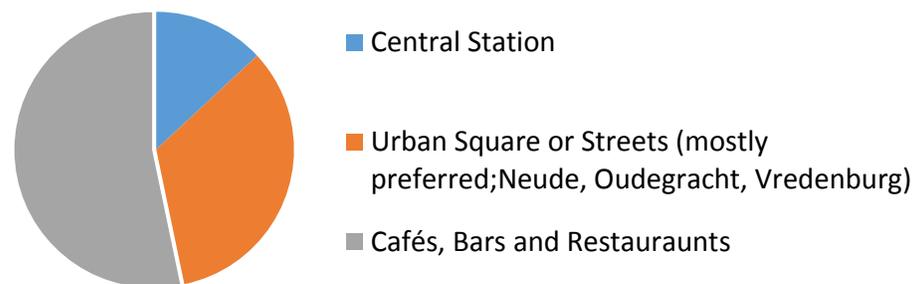


**Q.Nr.2:** Do you use your mobile phone to navigate in the city (to find/decide on your meeting places)?

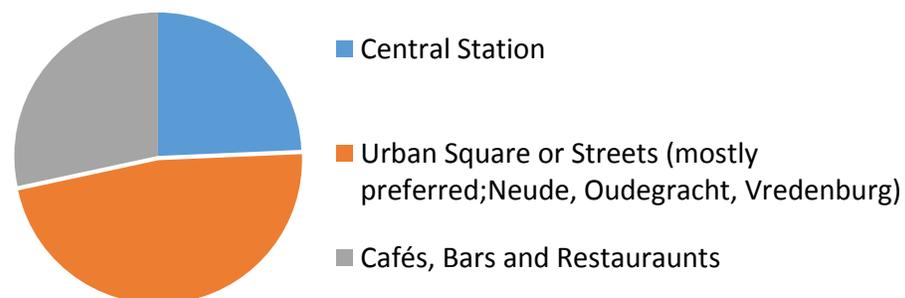


The difference between the answers for the Question Nr.3 and Nr.4 shows that the participants prefer to meet at interior locations (cafés and bars) when they plan a meeting with close friends and family. However, they like choosing urban squares more like Neude and Dom Plein and the Utrecht Centraal when they meet with others. It is one of the very interesting findings of STSM. Meeting with strangers comparing to close friends and family is mostly happening at a landmark or a specific place in urban space. This finding can be interpreted by the fact that people prefer meeting directly at the activity place when they meet with close friends and family but they meet in urban space in order to decide on next activities location when they arrange a meeting with others. Variety in choosing meeting places is an integral part of space quality (Lozano, 1990), its reasonable increase will contribute to the senses of belonging and attachment: two of the basic processes that are essential parts of urban identity.

**Q.Nr.3:** Which places (streets, squares, interiors, etc.) would you like to choose as a meeting point when you meet with your close friends and family?



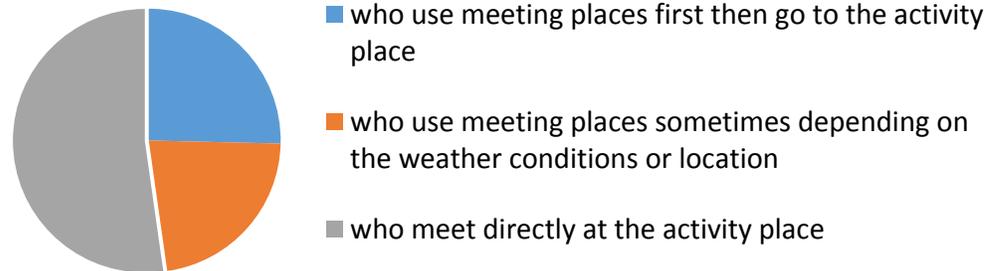
**Q.Nr.4:** Which places (streets, squares, interiors, etc.) would you like to choose as a meeting point when you meet with others (the ones that you are going to meet at that day for instance)?



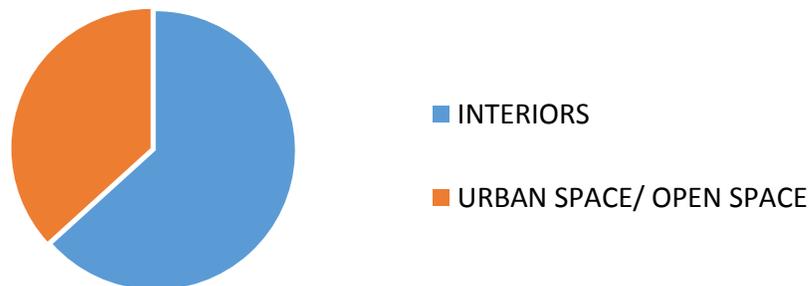
Another interesting finding from the research is that the meeting place has had no characteristic significance before has become a part of this inventory like parks (green areas where meeting without mobile communication is almost impossible) and bike parking areas. However, most of the meeting places located in urban open space is either landmarks (like Dom Tower) or small squares which are well known and easily recognizable places in Utrecht (like Neude).

Question Nr. 7 is asking for the meeting places of the participants in case of not having mobile phones means not having any possibility to call each other in urban space. 26% of the participants has replied that they prefer to choose 'meeting point' at the Central Station. Many of the participants stated that they prefer meeting indoors like cafés and restaurants due to the possibility of having improper weather conditions and difficulty of waiting outside for someone who is running late.

**Q.Nr.5:** Do you usually use the meeting places in the urban space then you go to the activity point or do you meet directly at the destination point/at the location of the planned activity?



**Q.Nr.7:** Imagine that there are no mobile phones, which place could be your meeting place in Utrecht?



Lynch describes observer as a citizen who “has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings”. He divides environmental elements into moving elements (such as people, their activities) and stationary physical parts. Way-finding in his theory is related to two things: physical elements and a map drawn in peoples’ minds, this map is what Lynch named mental map or cognitive map (Lynch, 1960: 1). Yet, his seminal work only revealed the urban components. This is evident when one follows his later studies (Lynch, 1987) where he painstakingly tries to theorize about identity. Lynch says that “the visual environment should be meaningful; that is, its visible character should relate to other aspects of life”. The legibility of the city is described through which its parts can be recognized and organized into a coherent pattern (Lynch, 1960:2). The Image of the City (Lynch 1960) introduces the term “image-ability” to describe the qualities of a city which make it understandable to any citizen, again underlining the effect of the visual form of the city on perception and memory of physical space. In this context, the findings of STMS are directing us to question the significance

or determinative role of urban components which are described by Lynch (1960) to ensure legibility.

Willis gives a relevant example in this respect in her study on wireless sources in urban space. She states that the visuo-spatial properties of public space enable and frame patterns of behavior and activity. For example, we tend to meet people at commonly recognizable landmarks; below a clock or on a street corner, and we relax in spaces which often have a physical openness. But as demonstrated in the study of the perception of the spatial presence of a wireless node, wireless technologies are not visible structures in public space. The presence of networks in public space exists in a manner more similar to our concepts of a social network. However, mobile and wireless technologies reconfigure this concept of access in the sense that access also becomes access to the technology. A person is thus perceived as being separated from another only by switching to a network connection, not a physical distance in space (Aurigi, A. and De Cindio, F., 2008). The reconfiguration of the concepts of access and location directs city makers to reconsider the discourse of cognition mapping. While the most crucial method is perceived unlike the times of Kevin Lynch, the acknowledged theories can possibly be reconsidered. Related to this issue Willis states that the complex and rich nature of social interaction in public space is transformed when these interactions are less defined by physical boundaries and frameworks. Spatial concepts such as separation, bounded-ness, linkage, presence and temporality are reconfigured by mobile and wireless technologies so that although physical setting still influences our actions, many aspects of social connectedness are further elaborated and accentuated (Aurigi, A. and De Cindio, F., 2008).

Recognized places in urban space are consolidated in the age of ubiquitous mobile technologies. Specific places like landmarks are still important but they transformed their function and identity in describing legible cities. Today the real and the virtual environments are intertwined and coefficient structures. Therefore, smart technologies, especially mobile communication possibilities, can be used as a tool to provide actual data about the urban space and to build a strong link between users and planners to make bottom-up participatory planning processes more applicable.

#### 4.2. Comparison of the Findings

My previous research (2010) which is a comprehensive inventory of meeting places of Ankara for different age groups resulted that there was a considerable change. The results showed that comparing to past mobile phone times, after the advent of the mobile phone, meeting places were scattered along the paths. Besides the landmarks, streets or boulevards in the city center were also preferred as meeting places more often. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the meeting places were also perceived in linear forms besides point wise. Unlike the urban theories so far which tell us these components of urban structure are ascendant elements for a city to be legible; the research reveals that may be these points of references are losing efficiency during cognition mapping processes in the era of mobile information and communication technologies (Barlas, A., Sentürk, M., 2012). Mobile phones have increased the ease of meeting close to the transfer points, particularly the arrival or departure points in the city center like a metro station or bus station. Participants mentioned metro/bus stations 906 times which is a great majority among all of the answers.

Utrecht research and the previous research which is conducted in Ankara resulted to conclude on the characteristic change in the perception of the meeting places. The results of the research in Ankara considering the forms of the meeting places are not similar with Utrecht research. Paths

(pedestrian streets and boulevards) are included in the areas of meetings in Ankara's case. In Utrecht, Oudegracht for instance was mentioned only 6 times for questions Nr.3 and Nr.4 of this survey which was one of the most important pedestrian links and one of the most known shopping streets in Utrecht. From an urban designers perspective it can be interpreted that the small squares in cities with suitable and safe pedestrian access are preferred as meeting places as an alternative to pedestrian streets. Ankara is a city where squares have disappeared according to the planning policies since the 1990s. The places called squares in Ankara are actually junctions dominated by traffic roads which are unsuitable for pedestrian use. From this point of view, STSM in Utrecht has a great value to evaluate the use and the perception of urban physical space by mobile phone users.

Two important questions of Ankara research (2009-2010) are;

- Where were your meeting places in the times before you have started to use mobile phones?
- Where are your meeting places now in the times of mobile phones?

Answers for the second question comparing to the first question shows;

- ✓ Dispersal of meeting places
- ✓ Increase in the variety of meeting places
- ✓ Increase in the number of interior meeting places
- ✓ Increase in the number of physically inconspicuous meeting places
- ✓ Emergence of streets as meeting places

Similar comparative questions used for STSM in Utrecht (2017) are;

- Which places (streets, squares, interiors, etc.) would you like to choose as a meeting point?
- Imagine that there are no mobile phones, which place could be your meeting place in Utrecht?

Answers for the second question comparing to the first question shows that;

- ✓ Meeting places are described more likely to be at the landmarks like Central Station, ZARA Store at Vredenburg Square or Old Post Office at Neude Square.
- ✓ Meeting places are described more at the interiors like cafés and restaurants.

##### **(5) Follow-ups - future collaboration with host institution and foreseen publications or papers for conferences**

Regarding the developing area of Utrecht the New Centre will develop into an attractive, lively, safe, climate-neutral and multipurpose area, connecting the historic city center with the areas South-West of the district. It is valuable to analyze the redevelopment of the Utrecht Central Station area in detail because 25% of the participants for Question Nr.3 and 32% of the participants for Question Nr.4 have replied 'Utrecht Centraal (Central Train Station)' as meeting place. In fact Utrecht Centraal is not only the hub and a meeting node of the passengers in transition; it is also a node of the city itself as it is located in the core of Utrecht. Especially, in the

close future plans, the train station building and the open space including the area of the Town Hall (Stadskantoor) is becoming a meeting place for everyone wishing to travel, shop, live, work and relax in the dynamic heart of the Netherlands. This is needed because of overdue maintenance, a growing number of passengers, a growing city and the desire to restore the original canals. With the construction of a new and renewed area all these things are tackled at once. The historic inner city and 'Utrecht the New Centre' are two separated parts of Utrecht; these parts will be connected again to form one coherent center. Utrecht is building the future of the city: a new meeting place [1]. The responses of the participants of this research are supporting the goals of the construction of this development area. This new center will probably be one of the most important meeting places in Utrecht. Therefore after some time from the construction ends when the inhabitants occupy and assimilate the existence of this new area, another site specific research is planned to be conducted in Utrecht in collaboration with the host institute.



Figure.5. Images of the New Center Project [2]

The researcher is a member of International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). She applied for a research grant of IAMCR with a proposal project related to the STSM Utrecht research which advances the understanding of the growing complexity of the urban environment. The Research Grant supports the projects related to communication in the transformation of urban cultures and communities. The proposed project is planned to be the second phase of STSM Project using the results by focusing on one meeting place which is likely to be Central Station (Utrecht Centraal); 'Utrecht the New Centre'. This time, the physical character of the space is planned to be examined by testing Lynch's analysis and experiences in a brand new 'meeting center' of Utrecht. The selected scholar will also attend and present at the IAMCR 2017 Conference which is held in Cartagena, Colombia on 16-20 July 2017 [3].

Additionally an abstract is sent to "Living Cities, Liveable Spaces: Placemaking & Identity" Conference [4] which will be held in Valletta, Malta in 22-24 November 2017. The proposal of STSM may be included into one of the thematic areas of the conference which is; Future Cities. With this focus area, the academic committee is searching for the links between city's liveability, its attractiveness and the capacity it has to embrace new forms of citizen engagement and technology applications. Moreover, the results of the STSM project and may-be one additional extended survey in Utrecht will be evaluated for the researcher's dissertation.

## **(6) Personnel Benefit and mutual benefits for the Home and Host institutions**

STSM has given me the opportunity to enrich my research in a different urban context. Thinking about different aspects and testing the issue of changing behavioral patterns through ICTs in a distinctive urban context within a different socio-cultural structure was very valuable experience for my PhD research.

A very important amount of research is carried out by the host institution regarding the issues of ICTs, Media and their benefits on urban, artistic, cultural and social studies. I had a chance to meet and share our academic experiences with other PhD Researchers at the host institute. We have shared our literature lists with each other to reach more information for our personal research fields which was very fruitful for me. My home institute is also hosting Media City Conferences on related topics. The future collaboration possibilities with ICON Group of Utrecht University can be possible and PhD students of Utrecht University whose works are relevant to the focus areas of Media City Conference can contribute to the upcoming organizations at Bauhaus University Weimar.

I believe that urban design theories shouldn't belong to one particular place or city, such as these theories can't be implemented everywhere in the world. STSM experience is a milestone in my PhD process that helps to understand the importance of the unique character of different cities with their physical, behavioral, socio-cultural components as a whole.

## **(7) Pictures of Meeting Places of Utrecht**

Some of the pictures below are selected as example to give an idea about the visual quality and characteristics of urban space for the places preferred as meeting points by the participants of STSM in Utrecht.



Figure.6.2. Vredenburg Square (Personal archive)



Figure.6.2. Vredenburg Square (Personal archive)



Figure.7. Cafés at Neude (Submitted by a participant)



Figure.8. Griftpark (Submitted by a participant)



Figure.9. Tivoli Vredenburg Music and Cultural Center (Personal archive)



Figure.10. Bike parking area at Janskerkhof (as meeting place of 'mobile society') (Personal achieve)



Figure.11. Mariaplaats (Personal achieve)

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[4]. <http://conference.valletta2018.org/>, Accessed on 22.04.2017

### **Confirmation of the host of the successful execution of the STSM**

We confirm that Meltem Sentürk Asıldeveci from Bauhaus University Weimar worked in our studios at Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICON), Utrecht (NL) from 24.03.2017 to 7.04.2017.

The visit has been successful and the results are described in this report, which I confirm.

[NAME AND SIGNATURE OF THE HOST]

Michiel de Lange

m.l.delange@uu.nl

Media and Culture Studies

Utrecht University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. de Lange', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.