Course Reflection
DCM100 - Constructive Design Research

During the CDR course I have been part of the field approach design research team. This method interested me, because I used it before for my Final Bachelor Project but did not realize this was the field method. In this course I wanted to learn how to better apply the field method. In my previous project I struggled with making the 'right' design things, so I wanted to create a strategy for myself to make artifacts that fit the field approach.

For this short research I introduced the idea of focusing on anti-social behavior of participants towards design probes in open spaces. On the one hand because I read that this was a problem with a lot of the Data-Enabled-Design (DED) probes and talking to our project coach, it became clear demolishing of design probes is a reoccurring problem. This was a topic that allowed us to construct a study that had a field approach by taking the context of use of a design as a starting point. Trying a few different intervention methods to record and try to influence participants behavior, gathering quantitative and qualitative data, made it in my opinion the right opportunity for a field research.

On the other hand, because my interest lies with designs that alter or change behaviors of people interacting with designs. I felt that the lab approach would not work for this kind of challenge, as it focuses more on the theory and the application comes in the end. I think it is more interesting to have a more open mind and reiterate while using your design probe and find unexpected twists and turns. While the showroom approach could have been an option, I felt like that method would have centered too much around art and the designer's perspective, while this topic asks for a neutral stance of the designer him or herself. The studio approach was no option at all, as this asks for no participants and in my opinion design for behavioral change is always done within the society. With the field approach, this felt right and as a practice round for my research project next semester.

In this study we gathered qualitative data through interviews. Our group decided to not record people but to write down some keywords during these interviews. A method I would not reapply because I feel it compromised the findings in the end, making it harder to interpret the data. However, I feel like I am often so strict that I only start a study when everything is absolutely perfectly measured and measurable, while the field approach is meant to fill and create gaps you had not prepared for. This fits my curious mind-set and helped me in this case to focus on the theory and the discussion, by researching and comparing our results to find where an attitude of a participant could come from.

It was also good for me to write a complete research paper again, as I am also completing another bachelor's degree – in law – in which I write a lot, but all in Dutch and in the form of essays. I noticed I am sufficient in understanding the build up of a research, but I did struggle with the difference between the findings and discussion in the written paper. Especially using qualitative data, in our case as interview results as quotes. One of our team members is completing another master's degree focusing on research, so I could have some conversations with him to better see the difference between dry findings and interpretation.

Lastly, I did not create a proper strategy for making the right design things in this course, as I no longer feel like that should be the goal. Especially with a field approach, as a designer you should be open to the unforeseen and let that be an inspiration. For my research project I therefore want to take my time creating design probes, but I feel like this should be an iterative process in which I can build on designs rather than completely dismissing them when the outcome is not as I hoped for.