

In undertaking an assignment about designing the ideal city, I found myself turning to ChatGPT—a powerful tool that could provide insights, stimulate ideas, and offer suggestions based on a vast corpus of data. On the surface, the prospect of collaborating with an AI seemed like an exciting opportunity. After all, the complexity of urban planning requires considering a multitude of factors: from infrastructure and sustainability to social dynamics and cultural diversity. But as I continued to interact with ChatGPT, I found that the experience elicited both wonder and caution, particularly as I began reflecting on the strengths and limitations of such a tool in this context.

Strengths: Inspiration and Efficiency

One of the most immediate benefits of using ChatGPT was its ability to process and generate ideas quickly. In an assignment like this, where I was tasked with designing a city from the ground up, having a brainstorming partner who could suggest ideas in real time was invaluable. Whether I was pondering the optimal layout of residential areas or trying to balance green spaces with urban density, ChatGPT could present a range of perspectives drawn from various urban planning models and historical precedents.

The AI also helped me streamline my thought process. For instance, I could ask it to break down complex concepts like "mixed-use development" or "transit-oriented design" into easily digestible explanations. This ability to clarify and expand on technical language made my approach to the assignment more informed, and ultimately, more creative.

Moreover, ChatGPT's adaptability—shifting between formal technical language and more casual conversational tones—allowed me to explore different avenues of the city design without feeling confined to a rigid structure. It felt like an intellectual collaborator, offering ideas that I might not have considered on my own.

Weaknesses: Hallucinations and Reliability

However, as I continued to rely on ChatGPT for more specific details, I encountered the first cracks in its utility. One of the biggest challenges I faced was the phenomenon of hallucinations—when the AI provides inaccurate or fabricated information. In urban planning, where precision is essential, these errors posed a real problem. For example, when I asked about the historical effectiveness of certain public transport systems, ChatGPT would occasionally cite specific studies or data points that I later discovered were either outdated or, in some cases, entirely made up.

This experience highlighted a fundamental flaw in the way large language models (LLMs) function: they are trained to predict patterns in language based on past data, but they lack the ability to verify the truthfulness of the content they generate. The risk of accepting these fabricated details as factual is high, especially when the output sounds authoritative or cites sources that appear legitimate. In a high-stakes field like urban planning, where decisions can affect millions of people, reliance on such hallucinations could be detrimental.

Biases and Assumptions

Another significant challenge I encountered was the subtle but pervasive presence of biases in the model's responses. ChatGPT, like any AI trained on data from the internet, inherits the biases embedded in that data. I began to notice this when I asked about how different urban layouts might cater to diverse socioeconomic groups. The AI often framed its answers around Western-centric urban planning paradigms, neglecting considerations unique to other cultural or geographic contexts. For instance, suggestions about housing affordability often ignored local variables like land ownership traditions or informal economies that might be critical in non-Western cities.

Moreover, ChatGPT sometimes reinforced stereotypes when discussing demographic groups. For example, when prompted to design a city that was "ideal for all," the responses tended to prioritize efficiency and productivity over inclusivity or accessibility. The model's notion of the "ideal" seemed grounded in a one-size-fits-all framework, which was both limiting and problematic.

This brought me to an important realization: AI is only as good as the data it learns from, and data itself is always filtered through the lens of societal norms, historical contexts, and, more insidiously, the biases of those who generate and curate the information. As an urban planner, I felt a deep responsibility to not let these biases shape my work. I had to actively question and contextualize the suggestions ChatGPT provided, reminding myself that the "ideal city" isn't universal—it's a complex, evolving vision that must account for diverse needs, histories, and lived experiences.

A Tool, Not a Substitute

Ultimately, working with ChatGPT reinforced my awareness of the importance of critical thinking in the planning process. The AI was undoubtedly a helpful tool, but it was only that: a tool. It could generate ideas and make connections I might not have seen on my own, but it was up to me to filter, contextualize, and evaluate its suggestions. This partnership highlighted the broader conversation around AI and its place in human creativity and decision-making. The more I relied on the model, the more I realized the importance of not surrendering my judgment or creativity to it. Rather, I needed to use the AI's output as a springboard—an initial idea to be tested, refined, and adapted, not as the final answer.

A Mindful Approach to AI in Urban Planning

Using ChatGPT in my urban planning assignment was an enlightening experience. It pushed me to think more expansively about what an "ideal" city could be, but it also reminded me of the limitations of relying on artificial intelligence without mindfulness. The tool can be a valuable assistant, but it must be wielded with care, particularly in fields like urban planning where human lives and communities are directly impacted. The hallucinations and biases that

permeate the model's output serve as a reminder that, despite the sophistication of AI, human intuition, critical thinking, and empathy remain irreplaceable components of responsible decision-making.

In the end, I think the future of urban planning will not be defined by AI replacing human expertise, but by humans using AI to enhance their creative and intellectual capabilities. It's about knowing when to trust the machine and when to challenge it, ensuring that technology serves humanity's best interests, rather than the other way around.