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Imagining inclusive urban public spaces through multiple ethnographic methods

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Imagining inclusive urban public spaces through multiple ethnographic methods

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Abstract

This article explores, from a justice perspective, the power dynamics in public spaces and the resulting spacing practices and feelings of (dis)belonging. The aim of this article is to investigate how ethnographic methods can contribute to inclusive urban planning processes. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork guided by the research questions: How can an ethnographic approach capture residents' spacing practices, their feelings of (dis)belonging, and issues of fear and othering? And how can it contribute to more inclusive public space designing processes that support diverse feelings of belonging? The analysis is based on a small pilot study on the Emilius Seghersplein (Ghent, Belgium) using an ethnographic methodology, consisting of several (sensory) methods organized like a toolbox. The various ethnographic methods captured spacing practices and feelings of (dis)belonging, as well as imaginings about public places, and helped to grasp the complexity of urban public space and its processes of othering.

Introduction

Despite the extensive recommendations from scholars and international organizations to create inclusive public spaces for the sake of a livable and more equitable society (Beebeejaun, 2017; Fenster, 2005; Garcia-Ramon et al., 2004; Kern, 2020; Ortiz Escalante & Gutiérrez Valdivia, 2015; Un-Habitat, 2020), policy actors seem to be failing to create truly inclusive public spaces. The way the municipality of Ghent dealt with the central square Emilius Seghersplein in the multicultural and disadvantaged neighborhood Brugse Poort is a good example. When they presented their strategies and solutions for public space in the Brugse Poort in 2020, including the participatory project called *Wijkbudget* (Citizen's Budget) and *Stadsvernieuwingsproject* (Urban Renewal Program) (Dupont, 2020; Stad Gent, 2020), I had the impression that it was blind to the power dynamics and took a rather simplistic view of public space. While it is commendable that the city has turned its attention to the square and planned temporary changes after years of actions and reports from citizens and social organizations raising concerns about the livability in the square, the strategies and solutions for the square seem to overlook the complexity of ongoing intra-actions and negotiations or spacing practices (Davet, 2021) in public space about who/what does (not) belong. Spacing practices, shaped by the dynamics of oppression, dominance, and hegemony in urban public space, create "various forms of marginalization, exclusion and segregation, with enduring effects on the opportunities and wellbeing of urban dwellers" (Knierbeen et al., 2022, p. 4). Leveratto et al. (2022) assert that a space is inclusive when it offers diverse people the opportunity to feel a part of that space and develop a sense of belonging. By not considering spacing practices and feelings of belonging, urban renewal plans ignore an important aspect of creating inclusive public spaces.

The academic debate on community involvement in urban planning is twofold and revolves around who should be included and how they can be involved. Un-Habitat (2020), the United Nations agency that promotes inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities, advocates putting the needs of the most disadvantaged at the forefront of urban development and involving them in the decision-making process about public spaces to make these spaces more inclusive. Ortiz Escalante & Gutiérrez Valdivia

(2015, p. 115) advocate for the inclusion of a gender perspective in urban planning, because it tends to bring in the needs of groups such as children, the elderly, youth, and people with disabilities, for women are still the main care-givers of these groups today. By engaging the community in urban renewal initiatives and starting from the lived experiences of disadvantaged groups, the multiple challenges and power dynamics in public space become visible (Beebeejaun, 2017). Fenster (2005) argues that existing power relations in society are reproduced rather than challenged when planners (often white, middle-class men) adhere to existing forms of participation and notions of citizenship. According to Hunt (2014) and Darder (2019), this is due to unspoken rules, customs, and prejudices that go unnoticed but exclude people and devalue their contributions or other types of ontologies.

Other scholars such as Agyeman (2022) and Ortiz Escalante & Gutiérrez Valdivia (2015) argue that existing urban planning is not inclusive because it is shaped by the experiences of a small segment of society and thrives on preconceived notions or ideas of what is desirable for urban spaces. Not only urban planners or city officials, but also community-based organizations sometimes contribute (knowingly or unknowingly) to neighborhood changes that lead to exclusion of certain groups from public spaces or even gentrification and displacement (Agyeman, 2022). Both Van Wymeersch, Oosterlynck, and Vanoutrive (2019) and Goossens, Oosterlynck, and Bradt (2020) have shown in their research on *Leefstraten* (living streets or the temporary closure of the street to motorized traffic to make room for green spaces and street encounters) that "ideological notions of urban livability (can) serve as a vehicle for place-making and/or displacement" (Goossens, Oosterlynck & Bradt, 2020, p. 551). Research (Knierbeen, 2022; Oosterlynck and Debruyne, 2013) shows that spacing practices, feelings of (dis)belonging, and issues of fear and othering in public space are rarely considered in urban planning, and that separating the materiality of urban places from the practice of urban life creates a disconnect between the social, cultural, and political domains of urban life. According to Aalbers and Van Beckhoven (2010), despite claims to the contrary, urban planners often lack an integrated perspective and tend to work in a single domain such as mobility or greening, often prioritizing policies that focus on physical interventions over social interventions.

Therefore, Leveratto et al. (2022) suggest a different way to engage the community in urban planning and design processes by advocating for greater involvement of planners and decision makers into the neighborhood. Sweet and Ortiz Escalante (2017) contend that urban planners would be better informed about the complexities of living together in public spaces if they included and connected both bodies and land as personal and collective experiences with urban spaces. Ortiz Escalante and Gutiérrez Valdivia (2015) assert that urban planners must acknowledge that residents are the true experts of their communities. According to Leveratto et al. (2022), reversing the idea of inclusion offers an alternative to participatory processes in which residents must conform to structures created by urban planners. Mattila et al. (2022) recently suggested "new ways of applying different forms of knowledge in planning processes" (p. 21) through ethnographic approaches. Ethnographic approaches, according to Mattila et al. (2022), can bridge participatory and knowledge-based planning and provide "more inclusive knowledge on the everyday lives of city inhabitants" because they include "the daily lives of groups not participating in planning processes" and thus contribute to "more cohesive, sustainable forms of urban development" (p. 21). However, the ways in which ethnographic research can be used to support more inclusive urban renewal projects requires further research. Moreover, to my knowledge, this approach has not yet been tested in a Belgian context.

In this MA dissertation, I present the small pilot study I conducted on the Emilius Seghersplein (Brugse Poort, Ghent). This study was guided by the research question: How can an ethnographic approach capture residents' space-making practices, their feelings of (dis)belonging, and issues of fear and othering. How can it contribute to a more inclusive way of designing public spaces that support multiple feelings of belonging? My ethnographic methodology included several (sensory) methods organized like a toolbox. Through the use of multiple ethnographic methods, I was able to gain different insights and a deeper understanding of residents' perceptions of public space, spacing practices, and feelings towards public space in relation to the image and norms, materialities and others in public space. This study aims to contribute to the field of research that examines urban planning from a justice perspective by considering power dynamics and processes of othering in public space. My study can also serve as

an example of how inclusive design processes of public space can look like in urban renewal initiatives by considering feelings of belonging and spacing practices through the use of different ethnographic sensorial methods.

Theoretical and conceptual approach

In this article, I have chosen to condense the theoretical discussion into three key concepts: spacing, belonging and spatial justice.

Spacing

Space can be approached in very problematic ways: as an independent, static, and bounded entity or as a relational and dependent entity but lacking power (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). New materialist perspectives can help view spaces in a different way (Barad, 2007; Fox & Alldred, 2015; Massey, 2005), as 'matter' like spaces, along with human and other more-than-human entities, have effect and are affected in a continuous process. Focusing on the agentic potential of all matter reveals the entangled complexity and materiality of bodies, entities, and places (Malone & Nxumalo, 2022). In this paper, therefore, I build on Haraway's (in Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) notions of space as dynamic, powerful, and interactive. Massey (2005) uses the concept of 'spacing' or the making of space to acknowledge that places are transformative, embedded in power relations, and constantly renegotiated. For Hubbard and Kitchin (2011), places are "multiple, contested, fluid and uncertain" (p. 7) because places are relational and depend on people's different experiences and conceptions of a space. In other words, space is constituted by a multiplicity of interactions, while at the same time space enables this multiplicity (Massey, 2005). This socio-spatial dialectic underscores the "mutually influential and formative relation between the social and the spatial dimensions of human life, each shaping the other in similar ways" (Soja, 2010, p. 4). Massey (2005) argues that spaces become significant through the ideas and activities that people bring to them. According to McIntyre (2003, p. 47), meanings about space are "shaped by the person's past as well as by the person's attitudes, beliefs, and actions in the present." Consequently, space's inclusivity and (feelings of) belonging in public space are dynamically created through space and time and negotiated with other (non) humans in public space. Knierbeen et al. (2022) perceive urban spaces as (un) settling or determined by unsettled moments and practices that assert invisible and internal tensions. Space therefore has "a strong transformative potential of exposing the invisible injustices and struggles, delivering emancipatory change and producing alter politics" (Knierbeen et al., 2022, p. 7). In her study, McIntyre found that places that mattered to and provided shelter for women were also contested places and sites of struggle and survival. Some places have a strong unsettling potential because of the presence of different and sometimes conflicting logics and the lack of a common image of place.

Belonging

According to Leveratto et al. (2022), creating opportunities for belonging is an important aspect of creating inclusive public spaces. Eckersley and Vos (2022) distinguish three interrelated, overlapping dimensions of belonging: socially situated belonging, which focuses on people or communities; spatially situated belonging, which focuses on place; and finally, temporally situated belonging, which focuses on time and memory. Feelings of belonging can be absent, and according to Burgers and Zuijderwijk (2016), it is impossible for everyone to always feel at home in every public space. Stokkom and Toenders (2010) find that in a heterogeneous neighborhood, there is less public familiarity and public spaces are more often experienced as inhospitable. According to McDowell and Harris (2019), co-presence or sharing of public spaces becomes particularly difficult when fear is involved. For example, when "several groups identify with and feel they belong to the same place differently" places can become contested locations and sites of difficult encounters (Eckersley and Vos, 2022, p. 5). According to Wilk (2016), struggles over public space are most prevalent in dense neighborhoods and when users have different ideas about how public spaces should be. Wilk (2016) found that cultural differences play an important role in public space conflicts because they inform what people perceive as desirable or undesirable uses of a place. In particular, children, young girls, marginalized adults, and older people (belong) "in different ways in relation to public spaces" due to "relational, material, normative, and other aspects (...) involved in the

achievements of belonging" (Davet, 2021, p. 11). Norms related to gender, age, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality can reinforce feelings of (dis)belonging (Davet, 2021; Fenster, 2005; Garcia-Ramon et al., 2004; Kneeshaw & Norman, 2019). Davet (2021) perceives the negotiations that determine "what sort of activities individuals incorporate into that place" (p. 3) as active relational processes. However, when conflicts arise in public space, city governments tend to opt for "heavy-handed practices of reclaiming the streets for the 'acceptable' majority" (McDowell & Harris, 2019 p. 431). This can contribute to further exclusion and a growing feeling of disbelonging of certain groups. Another element that undermines feelings of belonging in public spaces is the reputation of a neighborhood. According to Stokkom and Toenders (2010), a negative image of a neighborhood negatively affects the well-being of citizens through stigma and shame and is difficult to change. There are some elements that can contribute to feelings of belonging, such as familiarity in public spaces or a common language. According to Snippe et al. (2013), meeting familiar faces in public spaces makes people feel like they can balance undesirable situations in their neighborhood. Being able to communicate in the same language and understand and speak Dutch, according to Burgers and Zijderwijk (2016), "plays an important role in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and thus is critical to the sense of belonging at the square (...) [and] an instrument for bridging among ethnic groups" (p. 117). Blommaert et al. (2005) and Knierbeen et al. (2022) link agency in public spaces not only to social networks, but also to social skills. According to Blommaert et al. (2005), people have more power to claim and use public space if they are skilled in dealing with the multifunctionality of public space or the interactions that take place there. Both Blommaert et al. (2005) and Knierbeen et al. (2022) find that people with higher economic resources exercise more power in public space.

Spatial justice and right to the city

Space is "actively involved in generating and sustaining inequality, injustice, economic exploitation, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression and discrimination" (Soja, 2010, p. 4). By using the concept of *spatial justice*, Soja (2009) emphasizes the spatial or geographic aspects of (in)justice, asserting that inequalities and injustices are inherent in any geography in which we live. This, he argues, does not mean that we must resign ourselves to this injustice, but rather that we must think critically about where we intervene and how we can work toward a "fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them" (Soja, 2009, p. 2). The pursuit of spatial justice and the right to control the social production of urban spaces -often referred to as the "right to the city"- are closely linked (Soja, 2010). The right to the city, a concept developed by Henri Lefebvre, emphasizes the importance of human rights in the urban context (Soja, 2010). This right highlights the lack of opportunities for those most affected in urban spaces to help shape those spaces. According to Knierbeen et al. (2022), the right to the city is about "more equitable and politically inclusive forms of city-making" (p.7) and claiming the right to difference. Castro Seixas (2021) highlights the importance of the collectivity of the right to the city. For her, the right to the city is more than "a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies." According to Castro Seixas (2021), this right involves "social struggles for appropriating and reclaiming urban spaces" that are "creative, unpredictable, and open-ended" (pp. 2-3). In other words, the right to the city goes beyond providing the resources that city dwellers need to live well and demands the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes such as urban planning (Castro Seixas, 2021). According to Castro Seixas (2021), in order to fight for social justice in the city, it is important to develop a "critical awareness of urban structural inequalities" (p. 2) and a "critical analysis of the inhabitants' everyday life experiences and informal practices of appropriation in the urban spaces" (p. 3). Feminist scholarship has also given increasing attention to "loitering" in public spaces (Phadke, 2020) or "staying behavior" (Zapata & Honey-roses, 2020) as important forms of embodied resistance to non-inclusive public spaces.

By viewing space as dynamic, powerful, and interactive, considering the meaning and dynamics of belonging, and committing to the concepts of 'spatial justice' and the 'right to the city,' I aimed to counter the depoliticized research gaze of certain strands of empirical socio-material research (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). By using these concepts, I aimed to think critically about "the complexities, contradictions, and social struggles inherent to the process of urbanization" (Castro Seixas, 2021, p. 3) and to contribute to a more just and inclusive way of urban place making.

Methodology and ethical considerations

For this study, I developed a critical feminist methodology that understands knowledge as a collective process, which Lather (2016) refers to as *being, acting, and feeling together*. Therefore, I turned to the relationships, mediations, and (dis)connections between human and nonhuman beings, not separate things or persons (ibid., p. 103), and followed Fenwick et al. (2011, p. 6 in Tuck and McKenzie, 2015, p. 103), who understand human knowledge as "embedded in material action and interaction." Furthermore, this research project was action-oriented in that it aimed to listen, learn, imagine, and collaborate with others for social and spatial justice (Askins, 2018; Brinton Lykes & Crosby, 2014). To this end, the research was organized around a specific square, the Emilius Seghersplein (Ghent, Belgium), and conducted as a case study for evaluating different ethnographic methods in the context of an urban renewal program and an upcoming reconstruction of the square. Both the materiality of the Emilius Seghersplein and the people who participated in this research can be perceived as (non-)human actors who are actively involved in (re)creating spaces, but who are usually left out of urban planning and related participation initiatives. Different ethnographic methods, including several sensory methods based on feminist anthropology and geography, helped me to capture the spacing practices and the sense of (dis)belonging, as well as imaginings about place. This set of methods served as a toolbox to flexibly select the method that best facilitated the 'being, acting, and feeling together' during the fieldwork. The way the toolbox was used was informed by *Dérive*, a concept by Débord (1958 in Tuck and McKenzie, 2015, p. 97) that refers to "an experience of 'letting go' and becoming 'drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters.'" By adopting an experimental stance to the research methods, I created space for an eventful way of doing research (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015).

An important principle during the research was my own embodied engagement. According to Lather (2016, p. 126), embodied engagement, or reading "with" the data, can help to think differently, to intervene, and to be responsible and ethical. In this way, I wanted to resist a research tradition that extracts data from the field as "raw material" for the production of knowledge elsewhere. This embodied engagement is based on new-materialist notions of intra-action and entanglement. To facilitate this embodied engagement, I employed several sensory methods. These sensory methods provided greater insight into concrete understandings and actions in the square, while the oral methods focused on thoughts, memories, and feelings related to the square. However, the two understandings were not strictly separated and occurred simultaneously (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015). The following methods were used during fieldwork from March 2021 to May 2023.

Semi-structured interviews.

The interviews were structured around the topics 'use (of their target group)', 'feelings', 'recommendations' and 'possible collaboration' in relation to the square and were designed as conversations. Both residents and neighborhood professionals were interviewed. I interviewed 15 neighbors at their front door and 3 female residents while walking through the main road of the neighborhood and the Emilius Seghersplein. The walking interviews were supplemented with the topics 'feelings of belonging' and 'expression of agency' in public space. Interviews with 8 professionals took place on the square or at another location in the neighborhood. The interviews were converted into field notes. The walking interviews were recorded, transcribed, and supplemented with field notes.

Participant observations

I conducted 22 sessions of one to three hours of participant observation in the Emilius Seghersplein, embedded in *Seghersplein Leeft*, an initiative of *Buurtwerk* (Community Work) and the neighborhood's Community Health Center. I focused on both people's interactions and the "place itself in its social and material manifestations" (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015, pp. 100-101). I took fieldnotes during and after the sessions.

Photovoice

Both a group of teenage girls and adult residents participating in a neighborhood walking group were asked to take photos of places/things/people that evoked emotions and feelings of (dis)belonging in the square. According to Nichols and Dobson (2018), these photos capture both what people do and what they say, often revealing the tensions between these two aspects. We then discussed the photos

in a group conversation, with the citizens in the square itself and with the girls in a room overlooking the square. The photos were collected, and the observations and discussions were turned into field notes.

Mapping

Two mapping techniques were used throughout the study. Mappings were conducted at the end of two walking interviews and at the beginning and end of a photovoice activity with girls. The first two mappings used a pre-printed neighborhood map based on the relief maps of Rodó-de-Zárate (2014). During the mappings, participants were asked to name the place (the geographic) in the neighborhood where they felt (un)welcome (the psychological). In addition, the possible connections between these feelings and their intersections (power relations), such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, health status, and age, were discussed. Another mapping method conducted with a group of teenage girls following the photovoice, was based on the work of Smith and Aranha (2022). The girls were asked to create their own mental map of Emilius Seghersplein and to imagine Seghersplein as a welcoming place. According to Tuck and McKenzie (2015), mental maps offer insights into "how space and place are internalized, interpreted, embodied, and revised within individual-level experiences" (p. 106). Mappings were digitized and discussions and observations were transformed into field notes.

Imagining

Pink (2015) understands imagination as an "emplaced everyday practice carried out in relation to the multisensoriality of our actual social and material relations" (p. 56). For Pink (2015), a "future-oriented sensory ethnography approach has a key role to play in change processes (...) because it promises to bring to the fore the tacit, normally unspoken (about) ways of knowing and doing that are part of everyday life" (p. 193). According to Hayes et al. (2015), imagination is a radical "creative energy that has the potential to transform (...) consciousness [and link] it to its concrete manifestation in the world" (p. 39). Through imagination, we enter a space where the site of inquiry can be imagined as "a place not-yet, a place of possibility, or a place in emergence" (Hayes et al., 2015, p. 14). I considered 'imagining' as a collective process in which imaginaries emerge from intra-action with others, both human and non-human. I embedded the act of imagining in each of the preceding methods. Mapping in particular, according to Wood et al. (2010 in Genz & Lucas Drogan, n.d.), and experimenting – as small and temporary activations of ideas (Leveratto et al., 2022) – can be tools for imagining. Experimentation was enabled by the Seghersplein Leeft project, as it elaborated various imaginings of residents and professionals about infrastructure, activities and people and aimed to explore how the square could become a vibrant meeting place. Various organizations and residents of the neighborhood participated in the project, which started as a two-month initiative and was extended for another two months.

The research process was "based on exchange, aimed at creating equality between different parties and diminishing the distance between academic and community members" (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2018, p. 8). I carefully selected methods, such as photovoice and (mental) mapping to support participants' agency and to facilitate collaborative research (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2018; Smith and Aranha, 2022; The College of Kansas, n.d.). Given the vulnerability of the people who participated and the unpredictable nature of the research, thorough ethical reflexivity was applied throughout the research process (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2018), guided by the principles of inclusivity, justice, and reciprocity. Following other research with vulnerable groups (Akram, 2021; Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2018), I worked with an oral consent procedure as this better suited the nature of the research and addressed the difficulties associated with being asked to sign a document, which socially excluded or vulnerable participants often find threatening. Participants were informed of the purpose, scope, and limitations of the research project, their role and position, and the procedures for using and handling the data participants provided. All participants provided informed consent to participate and confirmed their agreement throughout the research process. In a few cases, consent was recorded. Each participant received an information letter. When children were involved, consent was obtained from both parents and children. During participant observations, the individuals I spoke with were always informed of the reason for my presence.

However, the research was not without power inequalities, therefore I actively reflected on these inequalities and my positionality at various stages of the research (Stephens et al., 2018), recognizing the performativity of both the meanings created by the research project around the Emilius Seghersplein and my presence and the activities I conducted (Emerson et al., 2011). As a person who does not live in the neighborhood and has a middle-class, cisgender, female, mid-thirties, and nonimmigrant background, I was aware that certain perspectives and experiences might be invisible to me. However, my gender and longstanding involvement in the neighborhood since 2011 fostered the building of trust and recognition of certain experiences of the (female) participants. Taking time to get to know the participants and gain insight into community needs and issues (Akram, 2021) enhanced ethical decision-making and confidentiality between the participants and the researcher. After completing the research project, I remained connected to the research site through my professional involvement in the neighborhood. This provided me with the opportunity to follow up on the dynamics that emerged from the research project and contributed to a responsive relationship with the participants. As part of this responsiveness, I sought to bridge the gap between participants and other stakeholders (ICPHR, 2013), such as municipal services involved in the design of public space in Brugse Poort.

To contextualize the data, some demographic data such as age or gender were collected. Information that could lead to participant identification was not retained or omitted from the transcripts of the recorded interviews. Data was stored in accordance with the guidelines of the Ethics Committee of Ghent University. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts, and Philosophy of Ghent University. I analyzed the collected data in a cyclical and iterative process (ICPHR, 2013), using different phases as described by Braun et al. (2016). First, I read and reread the data to familiarize and immerse myself in the data. Second, I coded the data using the following topics that emerged from the data: *use and experiences*, *feelings of belonging*, *agency*, and *imaginings* in relation to public places in the neighborhood. From this, I developed initial themes to group the data. After reading through the data along with these themes, I revised, defined, and named main themes and linked the data to existing literature on urban renewal, spatial justice, and urban ethnography. In what follows, I discuss the main results of the fieldwork, structured by three main themes: *(un)settling ideas*; *(un)settling materialities*; and *the (un)settling other*. I conclude with findings regarding the potential of an ethnographical toolbox for inclusive square-making.

(Un)settling ideas

The first aspect that emerged from my analysis is the role of ideas in the way people perceive public space. People's ideas about the neighborhood are not only shaped by their own experiences, but also by what they read in the press or what they hear of others. In this section I discuss how ideas can have an (un)settling potential as they assert invisible and internal tensions in the public spaces and influence people's spacing practices, some were quite positive, like Carine* (60+), who said she loved the diversity of the neighborhood and that people are very friendly. Angela* and other residents such as Amal* (45+) or Tom* (30+) and Nur* (35+) stated that although they do not feel uncomfortable crossing Seghersplein, they do not use the space to linger or meet people. Rather, these residents say they used the square as an in-between place: a place they cross when going to other places in the neighborhood. The interviews show that a positive discourse about the neighborhood or the square does not necessarily mean that the neighborhood's public spaces are seen as places to linger or relax. Other residents expressed a more negative perception of the neighborhood. They referred to problems with drug use, drug dealing, and violence. Hatice* (25+), for example, expressed doubts about living in this neighborhood because she had heard stories about drugs. Peter* (40+), with whom I spoke outside his front door in a *cité* (a gated area of old workers' houses) just beyond the square, said he did not feel safe in the neighborhood, especially at night. He recounted several unpleasant situations, including witnessing drug dealers who became aggressive when they saw him watching them. With Ingrid* (45+) I walked through the main street of the neighborhood, the Bevrijdingslaan, and across the Seghersplein (square). As we walked, she told me that when she told her neighbors she was moving to the Brugse

Poort, everyone thought she was crazy - except for one who had already lived in the neighborhood. Ingrid* also said:

In the beginning, I really didn't feel comfortable here. The second day I lived here, there was a fight in the street, (...) there was someone with a knife in the street. That's when I thought, 'Why did I come to live here?'

Ingrid* admits that Facebook is a source of information for her and has influenced her perception of the neighborhood:

I've to say that everything that was in the press last year, with the drug dealers and stuff, didn't help me feel safe either, because it kind of confirmed the impression I already had. (...) If it hadn't been on Facebook, I wouldn't have known.

For Imane* (25+), her parents' warnings made a big impression on her and triggered feelings of fear, as she repeats her parents' words, "We live in a neighborhood where many different things happen and where there are different problems, but we shouldn't interfere in anything." She also expressed her reluctance to go to Luizengevecht park next to the square because her mother had warned her about needles in the park, and she recalled situations in her childhood where she actually found needles. She admitted that this image changed since she heard that her niece's children played there, she became more positive about the park.

Ideas about who belongs and who does not, affect people's feelings of belonging in public spaces. Nur*, who organizes activities for children and their parents from diverse ethnic backgrounds, told me that women tend to seek out places where they do not feel "naked" and that the square makes women feel like their "in the middle of the road." Imane*, who grew up in the neighborhood, felt controlled by notions of how women should behave in public spaces. She believes that as a woman, being in the wrong place, doing the wrong things, or being dressed the wrong way can lead to shame in her family. Although she is happy with the extensive network she has in the neighborhood, she admits that it makes her feel very visible and monitored. She claimed, as did Nur* and Moussa*, that this was something cultural. Moussa* (40+), who grew up and works in the neighborhood, believes that men in certain cultures are more easily satisfied with simple outdoor spaces without many amenities such as benches or playgrounds. Both Nur* and Moussa* claim that women prefer to meet in other places, such as at home. Another group that does not want to be seen are teenagers, according to Moussa*. They are looking for a place where they can be left alone and do things they can not do at home, such as blowing, or where they will not disturb the neighbors. In hindsight, I realized that Moussa was talking about male teens because several youth workers who work with girls did not really know where female teens would hang out and assumed they were with friends or downtown.

My research shows that people's discourses and their use of public space are not always clear, stable, or coherent, and may involve contradictions. I noticed that their experience of the neighborhood was shaped by the image of the neighborhood and by ideas (of others) about who does or does not belong. However, it was also shaped by material aspects, such as the presence of cars or garbage in the square, and by relational aspects, such as knowing people or feeling (un)comfortable with certain groups of people. In what follows I will show how the combination of oral and sensory methods made people's different spatial practices visible and revealed how differently people understand public space in both a material and relational sense.

(Un)settling materialities

Participant observations

The square, together with the main street Bevrijdingslaan, divides the neighborhood into two parts. The square is elongated, and in addition to an empty church opposite to the square, there is a community health center, a crèche, a laundromat, two cafes, a few small stores selling alcohol, tobacco, and snacks, a barber store, a snack bar, the post office, the Mobile Service Center on Wednesdays (which was discontinued in December 2022), and the milk truck on Thursdays. All of these establishments are interspersed with residential buildings. Behind the Seghersplein is the recently renovated but hardly used Luizengevecht park with play facilities. Observing the square, I noticed that Seghersplein is literally

and figuratively a hub in the neighborhood, mainly because of the various services and stores on the square and the stops of two popular bus lines. The square is a place of passage: many people pass by without stopping. Two cafes in the square, the *Come Back* and *Saray*, have a regular clientele that sits on the terrace when the weather is nice. The square is greener than the neighborhood's main streets with planted areas and even large linden trees. There are fifteen permanent parking spaces, but also many unofficial parking spaces that are unabashedly used by many, which makes the square feel like a large parking lot. Cars and mopeds go up and down frequently. As I sat in the square, I often saw trash, such as cans or food scraps, sunflower seed shells, and cigarette butts, especially around the benches, even though the trash collector services cleaned the square daily.

Conversations

In conversations with residents and neighborhood workers, two topics came up frequently: 'trash' and 'traffic' together with the differing views on these issues. When I was in the square with Ingrid*, who lives on a replacement income due to a chronic illness, she said the square was a parking lot. She said, "I would leave it as it is because there are other good alternatives, like the park adjacent to the square." According to several residents and a neighborhood worker, the unpredictability of traffic in the square creates feelings of unease. Hatice*, however, thinks the square is a good place to park her car. Bram* and Moussa*, who both work in the neighborhood and are often on the square, acknowledge the inconvenience caused by cars in the square. When I asked them if making the square 'car-free' would help, they claimed that removing the parking area would lead to protests from residents, recalling to the protest in 2017 after the city's mobility measure closed part of the main street to through traffic. According to Malik* (40+), trash is the biggest problem on the neighborhood streets. Ingrid* thinks that if the square was turned into something else, like a park, it would just be full of dirt and therefore not enjoyable. A teacher who comes to the park every Wednesday with her class often finds trash and broken glass in the Luizegevecht park and on the playground. Jens* (75+) thinks there should be more trash cans because they are always full. Amal* and Imane*, who participated in a walking interview, did not mention the garbage or the cars. For Amal*, the cars are part of the liveliness of the neighborhood. When I asked what other kind of materialities could help people feel more comfortable in the square, several residents, such as Marie* (70+) and Hatice*, mentioned more flowers and plants and less concrete. While some residents said that more benches or other seating and trash cans in the square would make the square more attractive, others believed that it would lead to more (noise) nuisance. More stores would lead to more frequent use of the square or the main street, according to some participants, but several residents, such as Marie*, Ingrid*, and Amal, claimed that the stores were too similar and that they missed the Flemish supermarket that had been taken over by Turkish owners. I noticed that most of the residents and neighborhood workers simply did not use the square and did not reflect much on that.

Experimenting

Experimenting with the infrastructure on the square gave me the opportunity to see how adding or taking away certain materials on the square affected people's spacing practices. During the Seghersplein Lefte initiative, a part of the square was made free of traffic, broken items were removed and extra trash cans put up, as well as benches and other items such as chairs, hammocks, ping pong tables, trampolines, tables and umbrellas. A wooden chalet in the center of the square served as storage and activity center. When I or one of the neighborhood workers was running a permanence on the square, we would open one of the sides of the chalet to hand out coffee and materials such as toys or ashtrays. The free space on the outside of the chalet was used to promote activities and to attach photos taken during the Seghersplein Lefte activities. The chalet also made people curious: they came and asked what was going on in the square. Despite warnings of vandalism or theft, everything remained intact during the four-month experiment and almost nothing was lost. We used rolling flower beds to temporarily close off the square to motorized vehicles during thirty-five permanences. I noticed that the closure did not evoke any incomprehension from drivers. However, the moment we removed the barriers, the cars were back. The same thing happened with the benches: more benches in the square caused people other than the daily users of the square to stay and sit in the square. Older men who met daily in the square appreciated

the benches with backs. Because the picnic benches were not permanently attached to the square, the benches were sometimes moved to sit in the sun or not. The additional benches did not add to the nuisance in the square. However, when no activities were taking place, the benches remained empty or only occupied by regular users of the square. The additional efforts to make the square litter-free, such as additional trash cans or cleaning measures, did not bring much success. Often, before starting a permanence on the square, I had to sweep and pick up the trash lying around. During the Seghersplein Leeft, I worked with children from the physical activity program and a local artist to design and paint three floor paintings on the square. As soon as the paintings were finished, the (younger) children started bouncing around the paintings. However, when the paint was faded or there were no activities going on, I did not see children playing around the paintings. The small trampolines that were set up each time we had a permanence, were especially popular with the younger children. I noticed that the presence of benches or chairs near the trampolines made parents stay a while. The kids often used the hammocks between the trees to chill and play wild swing games. I noticed that after a while children came and asked for the hammocks and helped us hang them on the trees. Most of these materials could not be left unattended and had to be put away at the end of each permanence. Imaginings became salient through my conversations with people during and after the experiments. People asked when there would be another activity, like Havva* (75+), whom I met at a neighborhood house and who really liked the farmers' market during Seghersplein Leeft. Also the owners of the café, the employees of the community health center or social professionals, who often come to the square, asked when there would be a new edition of Seghersplein Leeft. Els* (40+), general practitioner at the community health center, said that Seghersplein Leeft made the square less gloomy.

Photovoice / Mapping

Another technique I used during my fieldwork was photovoice. During the first photovoice activity, Amalia* (40+), who struggled with depression, took pictures of the flowers on the trees because they made her happy. Two participants who are also patients at the Community Health Center took a picture of the Community Health Center's building. Both said the building represented the welcoming feeling they have when visiting the center. Nicole* shared her dislike of the trash in the square and park because it shows that people do not care about the square. The other participants also took pictures of trash and echoed her frustration. However, Nicole* (80+), pointing to another picture, also said that trash cans are often too full, and she understands that people put their bags next to the trash can. For Nicole*, an empty can on a bench makes her hesitate to sit because the bench might have spilled beer on it. When I asked Robert* (65+) why he did not like the square, he shrugged his shoulders. When he participated in the photovoice, he took me to different parts of the square without much prompting. He took photos of the concrete blocks and said they were too low to sit on and looked more to prevent cars from using the square. Robert* used a photo to point out a wooden platform he liked to sit on, but was removed some time ago. Nicole* used a photo of trees where hammocks hung during the Seghersplein Leeft project, to refer to the playing kids she missed since Seghersplein Leeft had stopped. In another photovoice session, Kenza* (12 years old) and Ayşe* (11 years old) took a picture of a door in the corner of the Luizengevecht park somewhat hidden behind a hill, where Kenza* felt particularly uncomfortable and she referred to as the "witches' place". Both girls were hesitant to cross the square and only took a picture of the snack bar, where they liked to go with their parents. The youth workers who also participated in the activity, said they missed color and art on the square. During two photovoice activities I could observe the participants' spacing practices and how their movements were limited by barriers such as cars and a busy road. In addition, photovoice helped to articulate (dis)likes and connect feelings of (dis)belonging to concrete material elements such as trash, dark corners, unusable benches, flowers, and colorful floor paintings. After the photovoice, Ayşe* and the youth workers drew their personal maps of the square. Mapping created space to imagine places differently in very concrete ways as participants drew their preferences. I noticed that Ayşe* preferred to imagine ideas for the park, such as an adventurous climbing structure, while the youth workers envisioned a more colorful and festival-like square where they could linger, eat some food, and meet friends. Cars were absent in the drawings, only Rosa* drew three parking spaces. I noticed that their ideas were rooted in the current situation, as their drawings all included existing elements in the square such as the trees and the café light bulbs but were

modified by adding more of what they liked, such as play options, food options, or colors, and eliminating things they did not like, such as the cars.

I found that perceptions of the materialities and associated feelings of belonging were closely tied to both the image someone had of the square and the people who used or accompanied the materialities. In the following section, I will discuss the latter, or the potential of the 'other' in creating feelings of (dis)belonging.

The (un)settling 'other'

Participant observations

When I was in the field, I found that objectifying behavior performed by men of different ethnicities and ages was often very subtle and confusing to experience and observe. On several occasions during my fieldwork, (racialized) men I did not know, commented on my clothes or said I looked good. This, but also incidents with other women, made me feel uncomfortable. During Seghersplein Leeft, for example, three students, who were doing a school assignment in the neighborhood, were playing with juggling balls. Suddenly, a middle-aged white man sitting in the Come Back approached the girls and made comments about the balls in which he referred to his genitals. I was surprised and after exchanging concerned looks with the girls, they left. The few benches in the square were used daily by a group of people, most of whom are homeless or live in precarious conditions. On several occasions during Seghersplein Leeft, people told me about their problems with mental illness and homelessness, such as Claudine* (50+), who had difficulty getting proper mental health care and was afraid of becoming homeless again. I had to intervene several times when people seemed agitated, confused, unwell or passed out, by calming them, asking for help from a social professional who often knew the person, or calling the ambulance after consulting with the Community Health Center's doctor. I noticed how both the objectifying behavior and incidents with confused or agitated people had an unsettling effect on me and other visitors to the square. During my fieldwork, I occasionally saw men exchanging small packets, probably drugs. Once, while participating in an activity with children in the park, I felt disturbed after one of the men saw me watching. In retrospect, I remembered the story of a friend who lived in the neighborhood who told me that she never dared to look or object when such events occurred because she was afraid of becoming a target of harassment. Through this experience, my conception of the problem of drug dealing in the neighborhood took on a new sensory and physical understanding made me aware of the disruptive potential of witnessing these brief, barely visible actions.

Conversations

Imane* and Amira*(40+) both said that the square is a place for men and according to Imane*: "with all the men sitting there, there's just no room for women anymore." Especially at night, men had a disturbing potential for Ingrid*, Imane* and Sander*. Sander* (40+), who lives close to the square, told that his wife sometimes hears sexist remarks when she crosses the square at night. Alesia*, a teenage girl who lived on the square, said she was fed up with the catcalls and the feeling of being watched in the square. These objectifying acts are often perceived as harmless or insignificant events. However, literature has shown that this can contribute to the restriction of women's movement in public spaces (Fenster, 2005; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). According to Sander* (40+), the atmosphere on the square can be grim, with young men loitering, dealing drugs and cars parked everywhere. Bram*, who works in the neighborhood, said he had received complaints about the pushy behavior of some young men in the square towards women, such as hitting on them and taking the sidewalks. In his opinion, they cast a negative image on the square. Ingrid* and Imane* said they would feel more comfortable if there were more women around. Imane* lamented that nothing changes over time for women and that "the number of men is increasing, and the stores aimed at men are also increasing." The walking interviews with Ingrid*, Amal*, and Imane* also revealed their spacing practices and agency in public spaces as various forms of small and embodied protest (Phadke, 2020), such as keeping a distance from or walking quickly past men, taking a different route or limiting ones movements at night or (discussing) strategies like staring back and saying 'good evening' (with other women).

Amal* and Aisha* (25+) said they felt comfortable in the Bevrijdingslaan because of the liveliness. They said it brought back positive memories for them of visiting family in Algeria or living in Soudan. Imane* (25+) and Hatice* (25+) told me that having a network in the neighborhood and knowing people on the street helped to feel welcome and comfortable in public spaces. Imane*, who was born and raised in this neighborhood, told me that she did not feel welcome in some places, especially places inhabited by a non-Muslim majority, because of racist remarks on her headscarf in the past. Women of color are more inclined to fear harassment in public spaces because they fear not only sexual harassment, but also racism (Kneeshaw & Norman, 2019). Amal*, who was incredibly positive about the neighborhood and public space, expressed no feelings of discomfort during the walking interview until we passed the bus stop in the square, and she recalled an incident with a confused-looking man early in the morning while waiting for her bus. She said she felt particularly uncomfortable because there were few people around and it was still dark. Ahmed* (50+), who I spoke to on his doorstep, does not like the square because the alcohol-drinking people scare his children. The children from the Community Health Center's physical activity program said that more color, such as colored flags, might drive away the "mean" or "dirty" men in the square. The confused and rude-looking people seemed disruptive to many I spoke with, such as Liesbeth* (35+) and Aisha* (25+), who said they felt uncomfortable because of their shouting or unpredictable behavior.

According to Ursin (2012), people whose behavior and lifestyle do not conform to hegemonic values of public space use, risk to be othered and pushed to the socio-spatial periphery. Behavior, ethnicity and age were important markers in the act of othering, as I noted, for example, that a Moroccan woman pointed to young illegal Tunisians, while a Turkish woman pointed to Moroccan men for objectifying behavior. Furthermore, non-racialized men-who were also involved in these acts-were never mentioned in the interviews. This demonstrates how othering-the ability of those in power to portray the other as undesirable or a threat to public order-can marginalize certain groups, such as ethnic minority men, in society's public space (McDowell & Harris, 2019; Flood, 2019; Ursin, 2012). However, during my fieldwork, I found that some (young) racialized men were able to claim public space for themselves, both physically and in the way they brought their demands to the table, as their proposal for a work-out zone was included in urban renewal experts' plan for the square, despite objections from some neighborhood workers and residents.

Experimenting

Seghersplein Leeft enabled me to observe how the additional activities, infrastructural measures, and the presence of social professionals attracted people to the square who are not usually seen there and how they impacted groups who regularly sit in the square. During Seghersplein Leeft, a wide variety of residents - in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity - came to the square. However, I noticed that these people did not come to the square when there were no activities nor extra materials, such as hammocks or chairs. Children almost always came accompanied by their parents, only a few women of color stayed in the square, and teenage girls and young women remained absent during Seghersplein Leeft. Tine (35+), who often came to Seghersplein Leeft with her children, told me that she felt discouraged to organize something with other neighbors in the square because of the "rude" men. Amin*, who overheard our conversation, tried to reassure her by saying that "they do not really do anything." However, he understood that she felt that way. One of the regular visitors to the square who was often othered in conversations with the residents was Matej*. In the past, I observed him using and selling drugs. During Seghersplein Leeft, however, he was (visibly) no longer involved in dealing and often admonished his seatmates to clean up their trash or spontaneously approached us and asked for a broom to help clean up. Matej* and his friend seemed less drunk and often came to ask for a coffee or water. They continued to use the space and also the extra benches. As time went on, I noticed that they felt more comfortable as they tried to communicate with me and even asked me to take pictures of them to hang on the chalet. However, when they drank a lot, they became louder, paid less attention to the trash they were creating, and peed in their pants or against trash cans or trees in the middle of the square. Sometimes members of this group acted agitated, like Monica*, who sometimes approached people aggressively, but on other days was funny and stole the show from the square visitors by performing a little theater. I noticed that other visitors to the square often kept their distance from

people who were acting confused or aggressive. I found that it was sometimes difficult to address residents' discomfort caused by these groups while ensuring that (non)residents, who are often marginalized, are not excluded through processes of othering and cared for in emergency situations. The ability to draw on other actors in the neighborhood, such as outreach workers, doctors at the Community Health Center, and Buurtwerk was critical to ensure this precarious balance.

Photovoice / Mapping

Robert*, who lived in the neighborhood in public housing for 16 years, was the only participant in the first photovoice activity to comment on the people in the square. As we walked across the square to take photos, Robert* spontaneously led me to the corner of the square where he felt uncomfortable facing the young, racialized men standing together at Café *Saray* or around the parked cars. "They are not really doing anything wrong", he said, claiming it was much better now than during Covid. When Kenza* and Ayşe* were asked to mark their favorite places on a map, they did not mark any of the parks or squares in the neighborhood. The youth workers who also participated in the mapping only marked parks outside the neighborhood. Kenza* and Ayşe*, on the other hand, marked the street where they lived and told me they actually met while playing in front of their houses. However, one of the girls, Kenza*, shared that sometimes she goes with her nephew to a square in the neighborhood where she drinks lemonade and pretends to be "drunk". During the photovoice activity with the girls and their youth workers, one of the youth workers, Rosa* (20+), dark-skinned and young, pointed to Café Come Back and said she did not feel like going there for a drink because she only saw white and old people. When I asked her about the other café in the square, she said she sometimes goes there because she knows the owner's brother. It does not bother her that the café is mainly frequented by men. Kenza* said at the end of the photovoice activity: "The neighborhood is weird because there are a lot of weird people there." When I asked her why she thought that, she said, "They are foreigners, not from Belgium or the Netherlands, and they fight sometimes." I noticed that during the photovoice and mapping activities, participants focused mainly on the material aspect of places. However, during the photovoice activity, Robert*, as well as Rosa* and Kenza*, pointed out the gendered, aged, and/or racialized others and how they evoke feelings of (dis)belonging.

Potential of a toolbox for inclusive square-making

Using a variety of methods during my fieldwork allowed me to engage with public space and capture spacing practices and feelings of (dis)belonging in relation to other people, materialities and ideas. The toolbox provided flexibility throughout the fieldwork and made visible how some methods were better suited to actively engage people who were less comfortable with participating in the research. The different methods also allowed different kinds of knowledge to emerge, and some helped more than others to imagine places differently. However, using different methods was also challenging because I had to become familiar with a variety of methods and adapt the methods to the needs of the participants and the situation during the research.

Conversations over public spaces

Conducting interviews and conversations provided information about people's perceptions of public space. These conceptions are based on people's own experiences with material and relational aspects of public space, supplemented by experiences they, or people in their network, have had in (other) places or at other times. The image of the neighborhood in terms of normative ideas about what and who belongs in public space also shaped their perceptions. Residents' accounts of public space were expressions of power, making things/people/situations in public space (in)visible and creating (new) realities through discourses. Moreover, people's accounts of public space in the neighborhood were not always clear, stable, or coherent, and their discourse was sometimes at odds with their use of public space. According to Blommaert and Dong (2010, p. 4):

People are not cultural or linguistic catalogues, and most of what we see as their cultural and social behavior is performed without reflection on it and without an active awareness (...). Consequently, it is not a thing they have an opinion about, nor is it an issue that can be comfortably put in words when you ask about it.

I found that some people were less comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences in an interview or conversation, and that it was especially difficult to use oral methods when there was no common language. In the conversations, I noticed that imagining was rather limited. People mentioned improvements to the square such as more greenery, benches, or trash cans without really thinking about whether this would be enough to create a more welcoming atmosphere for themselves or others. People with a low sense of belonging to the public space often did not see this feeling as a problem or made suggestions for change. Oral methods led to vague, limited, and one-sided solutions for spaces that did not address the root causes of feelings of disbelonging and discomfort. Therefore, planning public space improvements using only oral methods will most likely reinforce existing power dynamics in public space by reinforcing certain discourses and experiences and sidelining others.

Sensorially and bodily engaging with the public spaces

In contrast to the verbal methods, the sensory methods enabled me and the participants to connect with public space in a different and more embodied way. Spending a certain amount of time in the square encouraged relationship building with regular visitors to the square and also engaging with both the concrete aspects of who/what is (not) present in the square. The participants and the researcher encountered things/people/situations through sensory methods during the fieldwork that evoked more abstract understanding and emotion. The methods provided a context and practice which allowed for sharing feelings of (dis)belonging among participants and the researcher and reflecting together on spatial practices and contradictions between ideas, the use and the actual conditions of a place in an embodied and sensory way. Researcher observations also made visible the discrepancies between what people said during the conversations about the public space and what was happening there, but also how some things/people/situations were given a lot of weight while other things/people/situations were ignored or left out. In addition, talking with participants while sensorially engaging with public space through walking, playing, using photovoice, and (mental) mapping created a space to share their understandings in a way that was comfortable for participants, even for those who were initially hesitant to respond to questions about public space. The use of multiple sensory methods allowed for different forms of participation and facilitated the participation of individuals who had less advanced language skills, were inexperienced in participating in research, or were unable to express themselves in an interview. I found that walking, playing, and taking photos were activities that participants were familiar with. More so than with the (mental) mappings, photovoice made participants less inhibited about showing what they had selected and allowed participants to express their feelings about the place and what they missed. Both photovoice and (mental) mapping are methods that put participants at the forefront of research as they decide what to photograph or draw (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2018; Smith and Aranha, 2022; The University of Kansas, n.d.). Mapping, however, was less accessible than photovoice and required more support. When using mapping techniques, I found that it was not easy to point out places and connect them to feelings, and that participants were hesitant to do so in the presence of others. In addition, participants were often unfamiliar with drawing or using maps and expressed doubts about their own abilities, which made using mapping techniques challenging.

Participants had little awareness of how public spaces simultaneously shape them and how they themselves are active agents in the production of space (Imilan & Marquez, 2019). Agency or acts of resistance were articulated at the individual level, and the influence of identity characteristics on experiences in public space was rarely mentioned. As a result, limited use of public space and feelings of not being welcome there were often not seen as problematic or as violations of the right to use public space. However, limited awareness of the various contestations in public space and the gendered/aged/racialized mediation of everyday experiences is detrimental to creating more inclusive urban spaces (Beebeejaun, 2017). I found that sensory methods could sometimes make participants more aware of their own interactions with and in public space and helped make the unnoticed visible and the unthinkable thinkable. Confronting people with inconsistencies in their expressions and behaviors that I observed heightened participants' awareness of their own spacing practices and invisible dynamics in public space. For example, the women I invited to be interviewed for a walking interview did not feel entitled to talk about public spaces and did not understand why their experiences and

feelings might matter at all. According to Blommaert and Dong (2010, pp. 4-5), "ethnographic fieldwork aims to find out things that are often not considered important but are part of the implicit structures of people's lives." One of the women, Imane*, who participated in a walking interview, however, stated that the interview provided her with new insights. In addition to increased awareness, this may also increase participants' agency in addressing issues in public spaces.

Imaginative potential of sensorial methods

The shared bodily experiences evoked by the sensory methods provided a starting point for imagining the square differently. Sensory engagement with place fostered imagination by allowing the more abstract feelings of (dis)belonging to be connected to spatial practices and the concrete presence of things, people, and situations. However, imaginings were not only connected to participants' experiences during the research, but spanned across different times and spaces. I found that some methods stimulated the imagination more, such as (mental) mapping and experimentation, and helped participants express their ideas about the square, but also the conditions necessary to be able to use and feel comfortable in the square. Above all, the experiments in the square made the unimaginable imaginable and created new imaginaries. At the same time, the experimentation allowed me to explore the spacing practices and the feelings of belonging that resulted from activating certain imaginings. However, it is important to consider whose ideas are brought to bear in experimental projects, as they can reinforce the exclusion of certain groups who, for example, were not included in the preparation phase, which was the case for young girls during Seghersplein Leeft. Other demands were explicitly not activated by the Seghersplein Leeft project group because they were not in line with the goals and values of the project, such as the demand for more parking spaces or the establishment of an exercise zone. Both demands threatened to further exclude groups that were not represented in the square and would further limit the inclusivity of the public space. However, it is important to make these decisions reflexively and transparently, as they involve power and could lead to the exclusion of certain groups. I found that feelings of fear and disbelonging limited the act of imagining among participants as they expressed feelings of powerlessness or indifference. The emergence of imaginaries requires a context in which imagining is possible by paying attention to important thresholds, such as feelings of fear and discomfort due to the other, situations, and deplorable state of place, and by using facilitative methods. Emphasizing the usefulness or implications of the act of imagining can create a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Oral methods such as interviews and conversations provided insight into people's ideas about public space. People's narratives about public space in the neighborhood were based on norms and ideas about who belongs and who does not, as well as their experiences with the place. I also noticed that their discourse was at odds with their use of public space and that their expressions were powerful, as they made things/people/situations (in)visible and created (new) realities. Verbal methods led to vague, limited, and one-sided solutions for the square that did not address the root causes of feelings of disbelonging and discomfort. Oral methods, second, were less appropriate for some people to share their opinions and experiences, especially for people who are not used to participating in research. Thus, if only verbal methods are used in participatory urban planning processes, planning for public space improvements will most likely reinforce existing power dynamics in public space by amplifying certain discourses and experiences and obscuring others (Mattila et al., 2022). In contrast to the verbal methods, the sensory methods allowed both myself and the participants to connect with public space in a different way: we became part of the public space and its interactions in an embodied way. The methods created a space for sharing embodied knowledge and insights about public space. The sensory methods also allowed us to engage with the elements of the square in a more concrete way. During the fieldwork, the participants and the researcher were able to relate to specific things/people/situations they encountered. Therefore, the use of various ethnographic methods allowed participants to engage in ways they were comfortable with and provided space for different perspectives and knowledge, especially for groups not used to or considered inappropriate to speak out on urban renewal issues. Sensory engagement also made visible the discrepancies between what people were saying, how they

were behaving, and what was happening in the square, as well as the ways in which discourses and processes of othering played out. In addition, the sensory methods had a sensitizing effect, making participants aware of their own interactions with and in public space and helping to make visible what was unnoticed. The shared embodied experiences evoked by the sensory methods therefore provided a starting point for imagining a different future for the square. I found that some methods and environments tended to stimulate imagination, such as mapping and experimenting in the square. The research has shown that feelings of otherness, fear, and disbelonging can limit participants' imaginations as they expressed feelings of powerlessness or indifference related to gendered, classed, racialized, and sexualized urban power relations and politics (Kern, 2020). The emergence of imaginaries required a context in which imagining is possible, by listening and responding to important thresholds and highlighting the benefits or impacts of the imaginative process. However, ethnographic methods can promote imaginings of a better world based on values such as social justice, activism, equality, and solidarity by providing "fragments of possibilities that encourage dialog and action" (Hayes et al., 2015, p. 47) in relation to shared perspectives at the research site. Thus, research, like the pilot study, does not end with a clear picture of what the public site should/could/would be like, "because imagination thrives on multiplicity and diversity and the opening of possibilities" (ibid., p. 47) and rather provide an amalgamation of plural considerations and imaginings.

The research has shown that ethnographic approaches can help to grasp the complexity of urban public spaces by capturing both people's opinions, spatial practices, and feelings about public spaces. According to Beebeejaun (2017), it is important to recognize the multiple challenges in public space that coexist in today's city and to mediate everyday experiences across gender, race, and age in order to make urban spaces more inclusive. This study, therefore, challenges the ways in which urban planners often portray inclusion as simply about celebrating differences, trivializing the efforts that inclusion requires (Allan, 2007). Capturing the complexity of urban public spaces through multiple ethnographic sensory methods also tends to prevent the reinforcement of processes of othering and the (re)stigmatization of the most vulnerable urban residents (McDowell & Harris, 2019). However, when applying an ethnographic approach in urban renewal processes that aim to contribute to a more inclusive public space, urban planners need to critically examine who/what and how people and things are included in the process and whose ideas are brought in, as they may reinforce the exclusion of certain groups that have not been involved. This requires reflection on what values guide urban planning (processes), as well as transparent communication and public deliberation in the community (Mattila et al., 2022).

These insights are not new to ethnography, but are often underutilized in urban renewal processes (Mattila et al., 2022). However, the challenges for ethnographic approaches in urban renewal are many, such as the need for time to engage sensorially with public space and its interactions, and for expertise and experience to adapt methods to the opportunities in the field. In addition, there may be several thresholds for urban renewal actors related to the way urban services are typically organized. Political constraints and demarcations between different urban services and sectors can hinder a comprehensive approach to urban renewal. In addition, urban renewal is often organized as a time-limited and tightly controlled process, which is at odds with the way spaces are constantly reshaped through interactions, as well as the unpredictability of ethnographic research findings. However, this research has shown that ethnographic methods are particularly useful for urban planners when approaching complex places where different power dynamics come into play and groups are at risk of becoming 'othered'. Finally, these methods promote the inclusion of diverse perspectives and the empowerment of vulnerable groups' awareness and agency.

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Appendices

1. Abstract Nederlands
2. Infobrief Participanten
3. Toolbox Interview
4. Toolbox Logboek Participant Observatie
5. Toolbox Mapping
6. Toolbox Mapping Photovoice Meiden
7. Toolbox Photovoice Wandelgroep
8. Toolbox Wandelinterview

Abstract Nederlandse Versie

Dit artikel verkent, vanuit een rechtvaardigheidsperspectief, de machtsdynamieken in de openbare ruimte en de daaruit voortvloeiende ruimtelijke praktijken en gevoelens er (niet) bij te horen. Het doel van dit artikel is te onderzoeken hoe etnografische methoden kunnen bijdragen aan inclusieve stedelijke planningsprocessen. Dit artikel is gebaseerd op etnografisch veldwerk waarin de volgende onderzoeksvragen centraal stonden: Hoe kan een etnografische benadering de ruimtelijke praktijken van bewoners, hun gevoelens van er (niet) bij te horen en kwesties rond angst en othering in kaart brengen? En hoe kan dit bijdragen aan een meer inclusieve ontwerpprocessen voor de openbare ruimte die ruimte bieden aan de diverse gevoelens van erbij horen? De analyse is gebaseerd op een kleine pilootstudie op het Emilius Seghersplein (Gent, België) met behulp van een etnografische methodologie, bestaande uit verschillende (zintuiglijke) methoden samengebracht in een toolbox. De verschillende etnografische methoden legden ruimtelijke praktijken en gevoelens van er (niet) bij te horen vast, evenals verbeeldingen over publieke plaatsen, en hielpen de complexiteit van de stedelijke openbare ruimte en de processen van othering die er plaatsvonden te bevatten.

Hallo! Ik ben Anna.

Ik werk in het Wijkgezondheidscentrum van de Brugse Poort als gezondheidspromotor. Ik studeer ook aan de Universiteit van Gent en voor mijn masterproef doe ik onderzoek rond de publieke ruimte in de Brugse Poort, zoals pleinen, parken, straten en stoepen. Dit zijn allemaal plaatsen waar we elke dag passeren. Op sommige plaatsen voelen we ons welkom op andere minder. **Waar in de wijk voel jij je welkom of thuis? En waar helemaal niet?**

Het Seghersplein is het hart van de Brugse Poort waar heel wat mensen passeren. **Kom jij soms op het plein? Voel jij je welkom? Voel je je thuis op het Seghersplein? Of kom jij nooit op het Seghersplein? En wil jij graag met mij uitwisselen over het plein?** Hopelijk kunnen we zo samen ontdekken wat nodig is om zodat jij je thuis kan voelen op het plein. En kunnen we met de resultaten van dit onderzoek de stad informeren.

Hieronder staan **enkele afspraken** voor we in gesprek gaan:

- De dingen die je deelt met mij tijdens het gesprek worden vertrouwelijk behandeld. Deze studie kreeg positief advies van de Ethische Commissie van de faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte van de Universiteit Gent.
- Het is belangrijk dat je uit vrije wil met mij in gesprek gaat. Je kan het gesprek op elk moment stopzetten.
- Ben je onzeker over iets dat je met me deelde, laat het me gerust weten! Tot 2 weken na je deelname kan je vragen om (een deel van) het gesprek weg te laten uit het onderzoek. Je hoeft hier geen reden voor te geven.
- Je krijgt geen vergoeding voor je gesprek en er worden geen extra inspanning van je verwacht.
- Indien er een opname wordt gemaakt, wordt de opname enkel door mij en mijn promotor beluisterd, worden persoonlijke gegevens geanonimiseerd en wordt de opname veilig bewaard. 5 jaar na het onderzoek wordt de opname vernietigd.

Heb je nog vragen of twijfels? Je kan me bellen, een bericht sturen of mailen.

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.....

Meer vragen over het onderzoek? Dan kan je ook terecht bij

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Meer vragen over bescherming van jouw persoonlijke gegevens? Dan kan je terecht bij

Hanne Elsen, Data Protection Officer, Universiteit Gent:

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Gesprek bewoners/wijkwerkers

Leidraad vragen:

Gebruik

- Maak jij zelf gebruik van het plein
- Waarom wel/niet
- Wat doe je er: passeren, verblijven,...

Gevoel

- Wat vind je leuk aan het plein
- Wat vind je niet leuk aan het plein
- Wanneer zou je er naartoe komen
- Wanneer zou je je er op je gemak voelen

Wensen

- Wat is er nu dat mag versterkt worden?
- Wat ontbreekt er?
- Wat zouden we kunnen doen aan de inrichting tijdens de tijdelijke inrichting
- Welke activiteiten zouden er moeten gebeuren, zodat jij er ook naartoe komt

Actie

- Op welke manier wil jij verder betrokken worden?
- Op welke manier wil je op de hoogte blijven?
- Zou je zelf iets willen uitproberen?

Voor wijkwerkers

- Hoe kunnen we jullie achterban/doelgroep best bereiken om hen te betrekken op het participatietraject: wat zijn de voorwaarden, waarmee moeten we rekening houden?...
- Zie jij of je organisatie het zitten om hier een activiteit te doen (eenmalig of op regelmatige basis), wat is hier dan voor nodig?
- Met wie moeten we zeker ook nog een gesprek voeren?

Wnr/Waar/...	Participanten	Inhoud	Reflectie methodiek

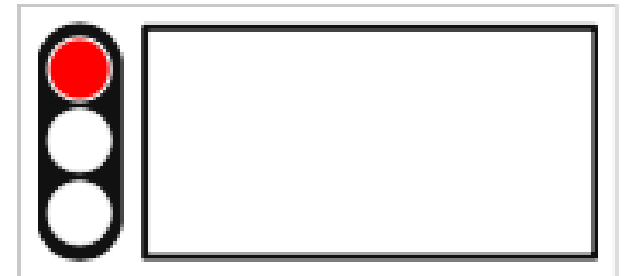
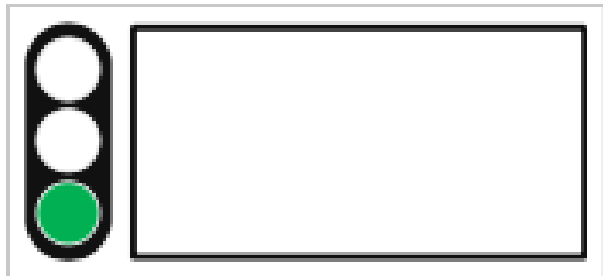
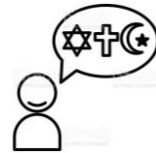
Mapping-methodiek

- **Geografische factor:** Bevrijdingslaan/Seghersplein – zie kaart
 - NODIG: kaart
 - Begeleidende vraag: **Je gaf tijdens het gesprek al een aantal plaatsen aan waar je je op je gemak voelt & waar niet, laten we deze aanduiden.**
 - Actie: We duiden deze plaatsen samen aan op de kaart.

- **Psychologische factoren** (effecten van de publieke ruimte op emoties).
 - NODIG: Verkeerslichten met witruimte
 - Begeleidende vraag: **Welke emoties voel je bij deze plaatsen?**
 - Actie: invullen van emoties in de witruimte naast het verkeerslicht
 - Blij? Gemak? Geluk? Comfort?: GROEN
 - Waar heb je een eerder oncomfortabel gevoel? ORANJE
 - Boos? Verdriet? Angst? ROOD

- **Sociale factoren** (posities en identiteiten met betrekking tot onder andere gender, sociale klasse, etniciteit en leeftijd)
 - NODIG: Pictogrammen
 - Begeleidende vraag: **Kunnen deze emoties te maken hebben met ... leeftijd, geslacht, herkomst, religieuze overtuiging, sociale klasse, geaardheid, anderstaligheid, gezondheidsstatus?**
 - Actie: We leggen samen deze identiteitskenmerken op de kaart

- **Oplossingen**
 - NODIG: hart met witruimte
 - Begeleidende vraag: **Wat kan je meer comfort/geluk/gemak/welkom gevoel/eigenaarschap bezorgen?** En op welke plaats? (“Als je de burgemeester was ...”)
 - Actie: we leggen samen de harten op de plaatsen waar verandering nodig is schrijven de voorstellen in de witruimte van het hart.



tekening, een soort plattegrond; maar je mag er ook dingen bij schrijven als dat nodig is."

Meiden mogen hun woonplaats aanduiden met sticker op wijkkaart - Visueel maken (eventueel al bij het binnenkomen)

Inleiding ('10)

- Mezelf voorstellen
- Waarom ik hier ben (onderzoeksdoel)?
- Informed consent nagaan
 - o Geen verplichting/ maar waarom net hun stem zo belangrijk?
 - o Vertrouwelijkheid / anonimiteit, wat we delen blijft onder ons

Kennismakingsrondje ('20)

- Participant zichzelf laten voorstellen: **Hoe heet je, waar woon je en wat is je lievelingsplek in de wijk?**
 - Duid **nog 2 plaatsen aan in de wijk** waar je je welkom voelt. Zelf met stickers plakken (Visueel maken): groeps gesprek: waarom heb je deze plek aangeduid?

Activiteit: met de smartphone naar het Seghersplein ('30): wordt onderzoeker

- Afspraken: vertrouwelijkheid/ anonimiteit
- Opdracht: loop rond op het plein ('15) in duo.
- Gebruik je gsm om elk 2 tot 3 foto's te maken die laten zien hoe je je voelt op het Seghersplein. Dat kunnen foto's zijn van de plekken/dingen/mensen die waar jij graag zit, die je goed doen voelen/ of net niet.

Groepsbespreking ('30)

- Stuur de foto's naar de onderzoeker via Whatsapp (infobrief)
- **Opdracht1 ('10): Teken elk het plein (eventueel in duo):** wat is voor jou belangrijk op het plein (**Mind-mapping**) (**blad1**)
 - o Benadrukken dat iedereen zijn eigen tekening maakt en dat het niet erg is als je niet zo goed kan tekenen. " *Je maakt een*

- Opdracht2 ('20): fotobespreking (photovoice) - vragen of ik opname mag aanzetten

- o **Beamen / Waarom deze foto?**
- o **Welk gevoel kreeg je op het Seghersplein?**
 - Waarom is dat?
 - Is dat altijd zo? Wanneer wel, wanneer niet?
- o **Voelde je je er welkom? Voel je je er thuis?** Heb je het gevoel dat deze ruimte van jou is?
 - Waarom wel/niet -- Wanneer wel/niet? -- Hoe komt dat volgens jou?

Als je kon dromen ... - imagining - mindmap ('20)

- o Sluit je ogen, beeld je in, jij bent een tovenaar/burgemeester, ga terug naar het plein hoe zou jouw plein er nu uit zien?
- o Wat wenste je dan op het plein: Maak een nieuwe tekening naast je eerste tekening (blad2) of pas je huidige tekening aan met een ander kleur (blad1)
- o **vragen of ik opname mag aanzetten**
- o Bespreking – Wat heb je getekend. Wat is verschillend? Op welke manier zou je dit plein willen gebruiken? Wat maakt dat je dat nu nog niet doet?

Afronden: ('10)

- o Zijn er dingen die je graag nog wilt delen?
- o Doel van onderzoek herhalen, afspraken rond vertrouwelijkheid herhalen. Informatiebrief uitdelen
- o Bedanken.
- o Wil je verder op de hoogte blijven? Mag ik je nog contacteren? Op welke manier?

Inleiding ('10)

- Mezelf voorstellen
- Waarom ik hier ben (onderzoeksdoel)?
- Informed consent nagaan

Kennismakingsrondje (tijdens het wandelen ervoor – 60')

Photovoice (15')

- Afspraken: vertrouwelijkheid/anonimiteit
- Opdracht: loop rond op het plein ('15) in duo.
- Gebruik je gsm om elk 2 tot 3 foto's te maken die laten zien hoe je je voelt op het Seghersplein. Dat kunnen foto's zijn van de plekken/dingen/mensen die waar jij graag zit, die je goed doen voelen/ of net niet.

Groepsbespreking ('15)

- Stuur de foto's naar de onderzoeker via Whatsapp (infobrief)
- Vragen of ik opname mag aanzetten
- **Overlopen van de foto's - bespreking:**
 - **Waarom deze foto?**
 - **Welk gevoel kreeg je?**
 - Waarom is dat?
 - Is dat altijd zo? Wanneer wel, wanneer niet?
 - Herkennen de anderen zich hierin of niet?

Afronden: ('10)

- Zijn er dingen die je graag nog wilt delen?
- Doel van onderzoek herhalen, afspraken rond vertrouwelijkheid herhalen /meegeven infobrief
- Bedanken.
- Wil je verder op de hoogte blijven? Mag ik je nog contacteren? Op welke manier?

Inleiding

- Bedanken deelname
- Mezelf voorstellen
- Waarom dit interview?
- Informed consent & opname aanzetten
- Participant zichzelf laten voorstellen: **Hoe ben je in de wijk terecht gekomen? Hoe lang woon je al in de wijk?**

Welke plaatsen bezoek je in de bevrijdingslaan/ Wanneer of waarom kom je op het Seghersplein?

(hoe gebruiken vrouwen in de Brugse Poort de bevrijdingslaan/ Seghersplein)

- o Waarom kom je daar
- o Hoe frequent kom je daar
- o Kom je in gezelschap/alleen
- o Wanneer kom je er?

Met welk gevoel kom je daar

(Hoe ervaren vrouwen in de Brugse Poort de Bevrijdingslaan/ Seghersplein)

- o Hoe voel je je
- o Kom je er graag
- o Waarom kom je er niet graag
- o Wat maakt dat je dit gevoel hebt

Heb je het gevoel hier te mogen komen? Heb je het gevoel dat deze ruimte van jou is?

(In welke mate hebben de vrouwen een gevoel van *belonging* in de Bevrijdingslaan/ Seghersplein en wat betekent dit voor het gebruik van deze publieke ruimtes)

- o Waarom wel/niet
- o Wanneer wel/niet: verschilt dit gevoel naar plaats/omstaanders/moment
- o Pas je je gebruik hierdoor aan?

Wanneer zou jij het gevoel hebben ...

(Wat is nodig om het gevoel deel te kunnen en mogen uitmaken van de publieke ruimte te verhogen bij vrouwen?)

- o Op je gemak te zijn/ Dat je er welkom bent
- o Dat deze ruimte jou toebehoort
- o Dat je er kan doen wat je wilt
- o "Als je de burgemeester was van ..."

Afronden:

- o Zijn er dingen die je graag nog wilt delen?
- o Doel van onderzoek, wat met de info uit het interview?
- o Nog enkele gegevens checken indien niet genoemd tijdens het gesprek: Leeftijd, Etniciteit, Kinderen, Relatie/ Geaardheid
- o Wil je verder op de hoogte blijven? Mag ik je nog contacteren?