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Greening the City Place-making, liveability and feelings of belonging among residents in De Wallen, Amsterdam

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Greening the City

Place-making, liveability and feelings of belonging among residents in *De Wallen*, Amsterdam.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Acknowledgement 3

Abstract 5

Entering the 'theme park' 6

Local Notions of Liveability and Feelings of Belonging 9

Social Construction of Liveability 9

Methodological Reflection: a Constructed Reality 10

Loss of Feelings of Belonging 12

Methodological Reflection: an Immersive Experience 15

Staying in 'The Village' 15

The Right to the City 17

Methodological Reflection: Turning Looking into Seeing 18

Green Appropriation 19

Development of Greening Initiatives 19

Methodological Reflection: an Observational Approach 21

Creating Lived Spaces 22

Social Relations through Plants 24

The Right to Participate 26

Supporting Greening Initiatives 26

Negotiating the Right to Participate 28

Upturn the City 30

The Right to Greening 32

Bibliography 34

ABSTRACT

The amount of tourists visiting Amsterdam is expanding with a million a year (CBS 2020). Especially *De Wallen*, internationally known as the 'Red Light District', attracts many tourists with its image of 'anything goes'. At the same time, this neighbourhood is the home of many residents struggling with the effects of neighbourhood change, influenced by the process of globalization and shaped by urban tourism. This study is based on three moths of fieldwork and uses visual ethnographic methods and analysis to examine how the desires for a stronger sense of belonging and a more liveable neighbourhood have led to greening initiatives by residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood. Results are presented in a text, film and an art installation with corresponding website. The film focuses on local greening initiatives as a performative mode of place-making and the art installation uses a multimodal approach to make this topic more visible in the neighbourhood itself. In this text, I argue, that greening initiatives are effective place-making strategies to reclaim the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1991) in *De Wallen* neighbourhood. According to 'the right to appropriate' and 'the right to participate' notions of liveability and feelings of belonging are increased.

Key words: liveability, feelings of belonging, right to the city, urban green spaces, tourism, Red Light District, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ENTERING THE 'THEME PARK'

I am trying to find my way through the small alleys full of tourists. I have visited Amsterdam multiple times before, but never actually visited De Wallen. I didn't feel any need to walk through one of the most crowded areas in Amsterdam, among all those drunk tourists and prostitution windows. But in the next three months, I will spend a lot of time in this neighbourhood. This is the first time I am visiting this neighbourhood at night and I have no idea where to look or how to behave. I am overwhelmed by the number of people filling the small streets of this oldest neighbourhood of Amsterdam. The smell of weed is taking over the area. I am absorbed in the crowd and just follow the stream of people. The tourists, mostly men, are just walking through the neighbourhood and stop sometimes to look at a lady. Just on some occasions, people start talking to a lady. "Hundred euro, she is just a hundred euro" a man starts shouting to his friends. "Yeah, you can do it man" they are yelling back. But the friends walk further and the woman closes the window again. I am so confused by this situation, all these people seem to look at the ladies like it's an outdoor museum. I feel very uncomfortable walking between all the windows with the ladies almost naked and all those drunk men looking at them. I want to avoid the streets with all the windows, but I have no idea where to go, it seems as if they are everywhere.

The next morning I return to the neighbourhood and I am so surprised to see the same neighbourhood in a totally different manifestation. Just a few tourists are walking through the neighbourhood and I am looking at a lot of empty prostitution windows. The unpleasant atmosphere of last night disappeared and it feels like a totally different area I am walking through.

The amount of tourists visiting Amsterdam is expanding with a million a year (CBS 2020). Especially *De Wallen*, internationally known as the 'Red Light District', attracts many tourists with its image of 'anything goes'. Abroad, the neighbourhood is associated with 'liberal attitudes toward sex and drugs, and this has become its niche in the competitive world of tourism' (Nijman 1999: 156). At the same time, this neighbourhood is the home of many residents struggling with the effects of neighbourhood change (Pinkster and Boterman 2017). Especially, the branding campaign 'I amsterdam' had a significant influence on the neighbourhood. In 2004, the municipality and city marketing started to actively promote Amsterdam as a tolerant city related to drugs, prostitution and gay rights (Aalbers 2010). The 'I amsterdam' branding campaign had the ambition to develop the economic industry of *De Wallen* and Amsterdam as a whole (City of Amsterdam 2004). As Aalbers and Sabat (2012: 120) argue, *De Wallen* gained considerable economic status through its touristic value. In relation, processes of homogenization occurred whereby many facilities focused on 'regular' uses of residents became sex and tourism-related facilities (Ibid.). In previous research on *De Wallen* (Nijman 1999; Aalbers and Sabat 2012; Neuts et al. 2014; Pinkster and Boterman 2017), the metaphor of a 'theme park' is often used to refer to the loss of authenticity and tourists behaving like everything is possible in this neighbourhood. It is not a planned theme park focussed on movies, rollercoasters or Disney, but an adult 'theme park' focussed on sex and drug entertainment. Research findings will show that the process of neighbourhood change, influenced by the process of globalization and

shaped by urban tourism, threatens the notions of liveability and feelings of belonging of the residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood.

This research aims to learn and better understand how greening initiatives function as performative way of reclaiming the 'right to the city' in *De Wallen* neighbourhood and improve notions of liveability and feelings of belonging. Since four years, greening initiatives of residents, like façade gardens and flower boxes located in the public space, are a growing phenomenon. Besides its strong social relevance of creating a green counterbalance to the tourism industry in the 'Red Light District', there is also a great academic relevance of researching this performative way of claims-making. First of all, this research bridges the literature on place-making and greening initiatives, which is a rare combination. On one hand, research on place-making focuses on performative ways of using and creating a place by for example everyday practices as walking or shopping, community activities or political campaigns related to the future of a place (Fenster 2005; Pink 2008; Blokland 2009; Sorensen 2009; Benson and Jackson 2013; Lew 2016). But greening activities aren't often addressed. On the other hand, studies on greening initiatives like community gardens and allotment gardens are focussed on the social, physical and economic effects of these collective greening activities which aren't related to processes of place-making. Thereby, the greening initiatives of *De Wallen* neighbourhood differ from community gardens and allotment gardens, which have been frequently researched in the past (Alaimo et al. 2010; Okvat and Zautra 2011; Guitart et al. 2012; Poulsen et al. 2014; da Silva et al. 2016; Djokic et al. 2018; He and Zhu 2018). Okvat and Zautra (2011: 374) define community gardens as 'bottom-up, community-based, collaborative efforts to grow food'. Allotment gardens are 'divided into individual plots, but the gardeners are under no obligation to pay an affiliation fee and/or rent' (Djokic et al. 2018: 248). Although, these gardens have some commonalities with the greening initiatives of *De Wallen* neighbourhood, they aren't the same since these initiatives include smaller areas of greenery like façade gardens or flower boxes in the public space. Besides, these greening initiatives aren't always community-driven and not focused on the production of food. This makes the greening initiatives in *De Wallen* differ from other urban gardens.

This research is based on three months of visual ethnographic fieldwork in *De Wallen* neighbourhood among residents who are involved in greening initiatives in the public space. According to snowball sampling, I was able to talk to fifteen residents who are taking part in greening activities and seventeen others who are part in alternative grassroots organisations to improve the liveability in the neighbourhood. Examples of such organisations are 'We Live Here' or *'Stop de Gekte'* (Stop the Madness). Except from two interlocutors, all residents who took part in this research are living more than ten years in this neighbourhood, and therefore experienced how the neighbourhood changed over time. In line with Hastrup (2004: 464), I suggest that there is no single objective truth, but different subjective perceptions of reality creating an event. Since this research focusses on the perspectives and experiences of the residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood, it will

be important to emphasize that the findings of this research are just a representation of one of the multiple realities about this neighbourhood.

Research findings are presented in a text, film and an art installation with corresponding website.[1] The film focuses on local greening initiatives as a performative mode of place-making and the art installation uses a multimodal approach to make this topic more visible in the neighbourhood itself. In this text, I argue, that greening initiatives are effective place-making strategies to reclaim the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1991) in *De Wallen* neighbourhood. According to 'the right to appropriate' and 'the right to participate' notions of liveability and feelings of belonging are increased. This multimodal approach is important to emphasize anthropological complexity. As Nichols (2001: xii) suggests, no matter how hard the ethnographer tries to accurately represent the field, the correspondence to reality will never be perfect. Multimodality will be effective to 'recognize the 'messiness' of the anthropological encounter by showing the ubiquity of media practices' (Collins, Durington and Gill 2017: 143).

In this text, I will start elaborating on local notions of liveability and feelings of belonging in *De Wallen* neighbourhood. This will be followed by a discussion on Lefebvrians' notion of the 'right to the city'. Additionally, I will analyse how local greening initiatives function as a mode to reclaim the city according to the 'right to appropriate' and the 'right to participate', which are the building blocks of the 'right to the city'. The text will be concluded with some findings on the influence of Covid-19 on notions of liveability and feelings of belonging in the neighbourhood.

[1] In an external document I will further elaborate on my intentions for the art installation and website. Because of Covid-19 and the compressed time for this master thesis, the art installation and website will take place in the near future. The website (https://evakrol.wixsite.com/onsdorp) is still under construction, but can be viewed to get an impression.

LOCAL NOTIONS OF LIVEABILITY AND FEELINGS OF BELONGING

Liveability is an overarching concept referring to the quality of life and is recognised as being 'not only difficult to measure but also difficult to define' (De Haan et al. 2014: 123). It's a subjective concept, which is measured by the individual perception of a specific place and 'encompasses the characteristics of urban environments that make them attractive places to live' (Leby and Hasim 2010: 71). Vuchic (1999 in De Haan et al. 2014: 123) describes liveability as 'a series of elements that make a city liveable and is generally understood to encompass those elements of home, neighbourhood, and metropolitan area that contribute to safety, economic opportunities and welfare, health, convenience, mobility and recreation.' This definition is highly related to a safe and functional perception of liveability. In addition, Leby and Hashim (2010) argue that also social and physical elements of liveability are relevant. Social liveability is among others operationalized by community life and social cohesion in a neighbourhood. Physical liveability includes how people use and interact with a space and how they perceive it.

Social construction of liveability

Based on the subjective nature of liveability it is crucial to situate this concept according to local perceptions and social construction of the residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood. Participatory mapping seemed to be a sufficient method to get an overview of how residents determine and experience liveability in the neighbourhood.

> *"Bikes are a problem here in the Koestraat, Bethaniënstraat and Bethaniëndwarsstraat" Regina explains while pointing out the streets on the map. "Trash is a problem here on the corner of my street. And it is too crowded here, it is dirty and there is an unpleasant atmosphere because of the people [referring to groups of tourists] walking there. It is partially caused by Google Maps[2], since everyone is walking the same routes. This street is nice, but might go wrong. There is a beautiful pavement and pedestrian zone. I was used to going there if I didn't know what I wanted to have for dinner. There was so much diversity there. But it is disappearing and becoming more of the same touristic oriented restaurants. However, the atmosphere is not too bad. There is a*

[2] Google Maps is always trying to provide its customers the shortest path to their destination (Byrne 2015). Since most tourists are entering the neighbourhood by general access points like public transport facilities (all located outside the neighbourhood), tourists are often entering the area by the same routes. In general tourists enter the northern part of the neighbourhood, where the main attractions of the 'theme park' are located, by four main access points; the central station of Amsterdam, metro station Nieuwmarkt and Rokin, and the Damstraat. The latter is the connection between the famous 'Dam' and the 'Red Light District'.

nice flower shop and supermarket located which makes it possible to continue ordinary life. The cafés on De Nieuwmarkt are nice, but ruined by the coffee shops and nauseous smell." – Regina

Participatory mapping made it possible to concretise aspects of liveability and it functioned as a reflexive method for my interlocutors to think about their personal perception of the neighbourhood. The invisible common knowledge became visible on the maps.

Methodological reflection: a constructed reality

Collaborative methods were important to establish an equal and dynamic relationship with my interlocutors, instead of presenting the intellectual authority of the anthropologist. As Mosse (2006: 951) suggests, objections of interlocutors may challenge anthropological authority by disallowing analytical closure. As anthropologists, we should be aware of our own frame of interpretation and objectification that transforms facts into 'evidence'. Therefore, collaborative processes are important to get an understanding of the emic perspective and local notions of liveability.

Clifford (1988: 41) argues that 'it becomes necessary to conceive ethnography not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed 'other' reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects.' Therefore, multiple residents from *De Wallen* neighbourhood who are performing greening activities are included in the text and film of this thesis. I let different voices speak to each other which establishes a sense of dialogue across time, without claiming synthesis. Especially, because this research is focused on one specific neighbourhood, it is important to follow different residents to show diversity but also their commonalities.

Functional, physical and social elements occurred to be the most relevant aspects to measure the quality of life. Functional and physical liveability were mostly referred to in a problematic manner. Residents experience the threat of liveability based on the growing amount of tourists visiting the area and the corresponding tourist industry which results in crowded streets, lots of trash, noise disturbance, a rough atmosphere, drug dealing and the disappearance of local shops. These findings are in line with previous research of Pinkster and Boterman (2017: 465), which showed residents of the Canal Belt experienced 'tourists leaving trash behind, engaging in tasteless activities, wearing inappropriate outfits, and ensuring noise pollution.' In addition, they showed that residents perceived 'a more permanent loss of place through erosion of the everyday, ordinary function of the area by the disappearance of ordinary shops' (Ibid.). Besides, the neighbourhood survey of the municipality of Amsterdam, shows that the tourists and their nuisance are most problematic liveability issues of the city centre (OIS 2019). Other issues like the

crowdedness, keeping the public space clean, collecting waste and the lack of greenery seemed to be major problematic issues of the neighbourhood. Pinkster and Boterman (2017) and Nijman (1999) prove that many of these problems are caused by the underlying infrastructure of neighbourhood change shaped by urban tourism. In line, one of my interlocutors explains:

> *"We have lived here since 1995, but back then there was almost no nuisance of the people visiting this area. The average visitor, often the typical man with a raincoat, was just going to visit the ladies. […] But now it is so much focused on tourism, it is actually claimed by the tourists. Tourism has grown, which started with the municipality of Amsterdam and city marketing." – Yet*

New understandings about *De Wallen* neighbourhood were created and performed, whereby local notions of the neighbourhood became subject of change (Nijman 1999). Bernadette, lived for fifteen years in the neighbourhood, explains:

> *"The window prostitution, in combination with cheap fast food and 'obesity counters'[3], coffee shops and sex theatres, all low-quality tourist economy, is displacing the ordinary economy. This type of tourism acts as a magnet for immature behaviour. People think: 'Now I'm in the Red Light District and everything here is allowed. I'm just getting drunk and puke and piss and make noise, because that's allowed.' But they would never do that in their father's and mother's street. And it's difficult for me that they behave like this in the medieval city centre of Amsterdam. This is all UNESCO world heritage."*

So, underlying infrastructure promote certain activities and behaviour according to the liberal image. However, these activities are experienced as problematic and 'inappropriate' by residents, since tourists aren't showing any respect for the historical neighbourhood.

> *"All I would like is that the tourists who come here have more respect for this neighbourhood. And that they realize where they are: the historic centre of Amsterdam. Just more respect. " – Rosaria*

But a striking distinction is made by many residents between two kind of tourists. On one hand, residents identify tourists who just consume the entertainment of the sex and drug industry and enjoy the image of 'anything goes'. On the other hand, residents define tourists who come to appreciate the charm of the Canal Belt and the old characteristics of the neighbourhood. This distinction between different kinds of tourists visiting Amsterdam is also present in the research of Pinkster and Boterman (2017) and Neuts et al. (2014), whereby only the first category is perceived as problematic.

[3] Refers to shops selling sweets like pancakes and waffles, and are totally focussed on tourism.

Loss of feelings of belonging

Although not all interlocutors refer to the same altitude of nuisance, many talk about the neighbourhood being 'claimed' or 'taken over' by tourists. Pinkster and Boterman (2017: 460) show 'changes in the everyday rhythm of the neighbourhood may trigger experiences of estrangement and disconnection.' In addition, Benson (2014: 3109) argues that 'long-term residents may find themselves displaced from their previous position of privilege[4], caused by a changing neighbourhood.' Residents from *De Wallen* are also referring to this feeling of displacement and a decrease of feelings of belonging, according to the changing neighbourhood and the 'inappropriate' behaviour of some tourists. Benson (2014: 3102) suggests that feelings of belonging result from 'the dynamic interaction between the neighbourhood and habitus (de)generated as the individual moves through time and space.' Besides, belonging is often used to refer to people's connection to their place of residence. It is a constructed relationship between 'the self and the other, and self and society' (Vasta 2013: 198). May (2011: 369) concludes that feelings of belonging are constantly reconstructed according to the development of 'claims-making for space and recognition.' This process of claims-making is highly under pressure with the expansion of the tourism industry and the related pressure on the public space. Based on the research findings, I argue that feelings of belonging are jeopardized by the changing neighbourhood and tourists who are taking over the area.

Residents devised several strategies to cope with the disruption of their sense of place. In line with Pinkster and Boterman (2017), research findings showed that the most prevalent coping strategy is to leave the neighbourhood or at least to avoid the 'theme park' area. Some residents have a second home or vacation accommodation to escape the city on busy days[5]. However, a paradox appears since residents experience the 'take over' of the tourists as problematic, but at the same time they are leaving the area which provides space for the tourists to claim.

[4] Most residents express feelings of privilege because they are able to live in the oldest part of Amsterdam and consume this historical landscape on a daily basis. However this privileged position is threatened since they became a minority using the public space. Residents experience 'their neighbourhood' taken over by the tourists and their 'inappropriate' behaviour. Besides, residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood might be privileged to live in this neighbourhood since it is one of the most expensive areas of Amsterdam. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean that all the residents are upper-class citizens with high access to financial resources. Jan explains that the houses were very cheap when he moved to this neighbourhood twenty five years ago.

[5] This also refers to the privileged position of some residents in *De Wallen* neighbourhood, since they have the financial means to escape the city.

"I just deny that I am living here. I deny this part of the neighbourhood [referring to the theme park]. It is also very ridiculous. But I prefer not to walk down that street [the Damstraat] and I also pretend it isn't there."

"If you don't see it, it's not there?"

"Yes, that's why it's a bit threatening too because it feels like this part [referring to the southern part where she lives] is under pressure now too. But previously, it was the warm and the cold side. The warm side was the ladies' side and the cold side is this residential area. […] The men used to go to the ladies and that had a function. It was very clear, people had that goal. People always acted a bit mysterious about that, but now it has become an entertainment area and people go here for fun and make a lot of noise. That are completely different people." – Elke

This process of drawing boundaries around a neighbourhood 'in order to disaffiliate from less desirable areas close by', can be defined as selective belonging (Benson and Jackson 2013: 797). Residents of *De Wallen* draw boundaries, not around, but within the neighbourhood. As mentioned by Elke, there is a natural boundary between the northern and southern part of *De Wallen* by the Damstraat. Because of the promotion of the 'Red Light District' and the changes of commercialisation and homogenization which occurred in the neighbourhood, residents stopped using the northern part of the neighbourhood, and selective belonging became a common phenomenon. In line, Blokland (2009: 1597) argues that neighbourhood borders are defined by the practical or symbolic use of the public space, whereby feelings of belonging are created.

However, residents also experience pressure on the southern part of the neighbourhood since last five or six years. Although policy forbids the opening of restaurants, cafés, coffee shops and prostitution windows on the southern part of the neighbourhood, many tourists pass this area since the opening of a new metro station.[6] Besides, stronger regulations on guided tours in the northern part of the area are implemented since April 2020.[7] Already before the new rules were implemented, more guided tours were walking through the southern part of the neighbourhood. In addition, tourists are using this more quiet part of the

[6] Metro station 'Rokin' opened 22 juli 2018 and is part of the North-South line. Because of the growing amount of inhabitants, commuters and visitors of the city, the construction of the North-South line started in 2003 (Vaillant 2014). With this new public transport facility, a fast and reliable connection between the northern and southern part of the city is realized and also the 'heart' of the city centre can be reached more easily.

[7] From April 2020 stronger regulations about guided tours in the city centre of Amsterdam are implemented. This includes that the maximum amount of people is narrowed down from thirty to fifteen people. Besides, there are no guided tours allowed anymore along sex workers' windows. In *De Wallen* neighbourhood, the municipality excluded tours from almost the whole northern part of the neighbourhood, although the prostitution windows aren't located in this whole area (Amsterdam 2020). A civil servant explained to me that these new regulations are implemented to avoid congestion of large groups in the most crowded area of Amsterdam. It is important to keep this crowded area safe and make sure the prostitutes can do their work without being bothered by large groups of tourists.

neighbourhood to sit along the canal side. Residents are complaining that tourists are sitting for hours along the canal side to eat their take-away and get drunk. This phenomena started one year ago and is defined as '*kadehangers*' or quay sitters by the residents.[8] According to these changing infrastructures feelings of belonging and liveability are also threatened in the southern part of *De Wallen* neighbourhood.

Figure 1: *De Wallen* neighbourhood with the 'theme park' and division of the 'warm' and 'cold' side by the *Damstraat.*

[8] Since the strict regulations on monumental buildings, most buildings in *De Wallen* neighbourhood are equipped with single glass windows. Therefore, noise disturbance is a common problem in this neighbourhood. Some residents explain that it is almost like the tourists are in their house, since they can hear the conversations of the 'kadehangers'.

Methodological reflection: an immersive experience

> *After a few weeks, my view from an outsider, researcher, but also a kind of tourist, changed slowly to a more local perspective. I got used to the crowdedness and started to know the beautiful and pleasant parts of the neighbourhood. For example, the local café 'De Koffie Schenkerij' and the community centre of 'We Live Here' became my regular places to hang out and meet some residents. However, walking with a camera, especially at night among all those drunk tourists and some drug dealers, was an unpleasant experience since some people started to yell at me. Sometimes I asked residents to join me on the streets, because of the threatening feeling I experienced during filming at night. Residents explained they were happy to show also this side of the neighbourhood in front of the camera.*

Filming in the neighbourhood became an active participatory 'process of inquiry' through which new knowledge was collected. As Grimshaw (2013: 227) explains, this process is rooted in 'an intense engagement with the concrete particulars of lived experience.' Because of the film, I forced myself to visit the neighbourhood multiple times at night, despite the unpleasant and threatening atmosphere. By recording this perspective of the neighbourhood, the contrast between day and night became visible, not only for me as a researcher, but also for my audience. Besides, it made me better understand the threatening notions of liveability and feelings of belonging which residents were referring to.

Staying in 'The Village'

While residents experience oppression by the changing neighbourhood and specific kinds of tourists take over the area, they still don't want to leave the neighbourhood. Important physical and functional liveability aspects to stay are the central location, old characteristics of the neighbourhood, many possibilities regarding leisure activities such as theatres and cafés (located in the southern part of the area) and good public transport facilities. In line with Pinkster and Boterman (2017), residents refer to strong feelings of belonging regarding the atmosphere of this historical place.

> *"I stay here despite everything. Sometimes I'm happy, sometimes I'm pissed, but you wouldn't know what it's like in another neighbourhood. This is still a lively neighbourhood. The historic centre of Amsterdam, with nice neighbours... Why should I leave? I live centrally and I am proud of this neighbourhood, even though it is tough." – Rosaria*

Another crucial element for residents to stay in this neighbourhood is the social cohesion. Residents acknowledge that the strong social cohesion between the residents is really unique and uncommon for an

urban neighbourhood.[9] Residents know their neighbours, help each other and also try to claim back their neighbourhood together. This strong social liveability is an important counterbalance to the threatening notions of physical and functional liveability. Besides, social cohesion is crucial for the residents to maintain a sense of belonging to the area. The strong ties between residents create a sense of acceptance and recognition within the group of people living in *De Wallen* neighbourhood. The combination of the aesthetic and sensory experience of the historical place and the strong social cohesion in the neighbourhood results in the experience of a 'village feeling'. Many residents pointed out they experience the neighbourhood in this way during the morning when the area is not claimed by the tourists.

> *Regina is gardening in front of her house in the Bethaniënstraat. She moved to this neighbourhood four years ago after living in foreign countries for a while. "I didn't know that the neighbourhood became such a tourist attraction, but I am surprised that it is often so quiet in this street," she explains. I look around and see some neighbours having breakfast in front of their house. Another neighbour is passing by. "Doing your daily morning stroll?" Regina asks and the neighbour nods friendly. "It is a bit like a village this street," she clarifies.*

Thus, although physical and functional liveability are highly threatened by the changes in the neighbourhood, caused by globalization and shaped by tourism, social liveability is an important counterbalance. Social cohesion is an important aspect to maintain a sense of belonging, whereas tourists who are claiming the area are a critical threat for this feeling. While residents are temporarily leaving the neighbourhood or avoiding the northern part of the area, there are also some initiatives to reclaim the environment. Especially greening initiatives are popular among residents of *De Wallen* to reclaim the public space. Before elaborating on these initiatives and their social function in the neighbourhood, I will explain Lefebrians' notion of the 'right to the city' and how residents can reclaim the city according to the 'right to appropriate' and the 'right to participate'.

[9] This strong social cohesion is partly caused by grassroots initiatives as 'Stop de Gekte', 'We Live Here' and greening initiatives in the public space. In these different initiatives residents collaborate to create a more liveable neighbourhood and social connections occur.

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Henri Lefebvre is one of the most influential thinkers in the field of urban space and his theory about the 'right to the city' is still valid for analysing social relations in urban areas (Fawaz 2009; Erdi-Lelandais 2014). I use Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city as a guide and inspiration to declare how concrete actions of greening can change and reclaim *De Wallen* neighbourhood. As Purcell (2014: 141) argues, 'the right to the city is a radical vision in which citizens manage urban space for themselves, beyond the control of the state and capitalism.' Lefebvre understands rights as the result of collective claims made by societies under oppression. His theory is heavily based on Marxist ideology and focusses on the closing of the gap between state and citizens by civil society claiming power (in Purcell 2014: 146). This theory is often used to study marginalized groups, but this research will show how residents of *De Wallen* are trying to reclaim their privileged position within the neighbourhood.[10] Lefebvre (1991) makes a distinction between 'the city', which refers to the dominant mechanisms of urbanization, industrialization and capitalism, and 'the urban', indicating society beyond capitalism. He envisions an ideal of society changing from the city to the urban. In this case, residents have to claim the right to the city and make it their own. Lefebvre (1996) argues that the right to the city can be claimed in two different ways.

Firstly, the city can be claimed according to the appropriation of the urban space. This includes the possibility to 'fully live, play and work in the city and occupy the place' (Purcell 2003: 578). As Benson and Jackson (2013: 794) show, places are created by daily activities. Therefore, place-making is perceived as a performative process shaped by practices in the urban space. Lefebvre (1996 in Purcell 2003: 578) states that we should think about the city as a work of art which is created by the shared daily activities of its residents. The city is thus created by embodied spatial practices which produce an urban space (Low 2016: 19). In line, also Pink (2008) and Moretti (2015) argues that public spaces are made by the negotiation of embodied individuals. Moretti (2015: 8-9) suggests that public spaces are made through social processes of seeing these embodied individuals. The way we see social bodies moving through space, the ways they interact with each other and their surroundings create a sense of a space.

[10] As shown in the previous sections, underlying infrastructures of globalization and neighbourhood change have a big influence on *De Wallen* neighbourhood. Residents became a minority in the public space and their privileged position of living in this oldest area of Amsterdam is threatened by the changing image of the neighbourhood as a place where 'anything goes'.

Methodological reflection: turning looking into seeing

I tried to turn my looking into seeing by doing walking interviews. Botticello (2016) argues, it is hard to know where and how to look without asking your interlocutors where they pay attention. Grasseni (2007) suggests that we need to train our vision to learn what to see. She argues that visual competence is embodied, sensorial and a result of training and acculturation. While walking through the neighbourhood with my interlocutors I asked them where to look and to which aspects they pay attention to. Besides, I could participate and experience the daily struggles of residents by moving together through the crowded neighbourhood. Lee and Ingold (2006: 83) argue that 'we can adjust one's body and one's speech to the rhythms of others and of sharing (or at least coming to see) a point of view.' They explain it as a learning process of being together and get to know what to see through shared walking.

Through embodied activities, like gardening, a certain connection and feelings of belonging to a place are developed (Blokland 2009). Fenster (2005: 222) argues that the right to use and the right to belong are 'mixed up since feelings of belonging are built-up and grow according to possibilities of daily use of urban space.' The use of the public space can thus create informal claims of ownership and feelings of belonging. The right to appropriate is an ongoing process of place-making and place-claiming by embodied spatial practices which produce an urban space, which is an ever-changing, shifting construction.

Secondly, Lefebvre (1996) argues that the right to the city can be understood through the right to participate. This can be operationalized by the role of inhabitants with respect to the creation of the urban space. Purcell (2014: 150) argues that active participation can create awareness of inhabitants collective power and they can start recognizing themselves as capable 'stewards of the urban and its collective life'. When civil societies get more agency, Lefebvres' ideal can become reality; the state becomes irrelevant and turns into obsolescence. Although the right to the city is by much urban politics perceived as too radical and too utopian to be used, Purcell (2014) argues that little eruptions of the urban are already present in nowadays societies. He argues that 'we have to seek and learn to recognize the urban that is all around us but hidden, and then nurture it in whatever way we can' (Purcell 2014: 151). I argue that the right to the city is crucial to understand how the residents of *De Wallen* are trying to reclaim the environment. In the following sections, I elaborate on why the right to appropriate and the right to participate are effective place-making strategies for residents to belong to the neighbourhood and improve its liveability.

GREEN APPROPRIATION

Some residents are trying to reclaim the city by appropriating the urban space with greening initiatives as façade gardens or flower boxes. These greening initiatives are a performative mode of place-making, whereby residents themselves become co-producers of the city. Based on Djokic et al. (2018: 248), I will refer to greening initiatives 'not only as a location but primarily the occupation of the location as a lived space.' This lived space, or 'third space' according to Lefebvre (1991), 'embodies both 'first space' (the physical/perceived space) and 'second space' (the mental/conceived space)' (Djokic et al. 2018: 248). Lefebvre (1991) and Little (2014 in Djokic et al. 2018) argue that lived spaces are developed by societies under coercion, willing to reclaim the space and create new meaning. In this section, I elaborate on the right to appropriate through greening initiatives of residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood. I will show how greening initiatives create informal claims of ownership and feelings of belonging.

Development of greening initiatives

The first greening initiatives in *De Wallen* neighbourhood started in 2000 as a grassroots initiative by residents of the Vendelstraat.

> *"It may have been a bit of self-interest at first. We have the space down here too. And we have three children and they were once a bit smaller, of course, so it is in your interest that the outside is in any case clean. I started cleaning very soon and one thing leads to another. […] Somewhere you start and then it expands. And then you see that people appreciate it and that's how it actually grew. – Sunke*

 [11]

1981

 [12]

2020

[11] Archival footage of Sunke
[12] Photo made by the author

As shown by this quotation, safe, functional and physical liveability aspects were key motivations for Sunke to start with the greening. The second greening initiative in the neighbourhood occurred 12 years later as a reaction to waste nuisance. Since the renovation of the Warmoesstraat in the year 2000, bulk waste is dumped in the Oudezijds Armsteeg and the Heintje Hoeksteeg, two adjacent alleys.

2007

2018

[13]

> *"These gardens are actually the first structural thing that has contributed to the improvement. As you can see it does not always work. We have not yet found a solution for that, which is a pity, but we keep on trying." explains Herman, who is living since 1991 in de Oudezijds Armsteeg.*

In line with He and Zhu (2018), greening initiatives can thus function as an effective way to appropriate the city and avoid trash. Since four years, more greening initiatives of residents occurred as a reaction to the increasing amount of tourists visiting the area and their 'inappropriate' behaviour.

To understand the greening initiatives and how they changed over time, it is crucial to see how they are constantly influenced by shifting materials, meanings and competences of people (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012). Greening activities cannot be abstracted 'from the material and infrastructural systems on which these complexes depend' (Shove, Watson and Spurling 2015: 284). Shove, Watson and Spurling (Ibid.) suggest that lives and geographies are reshaped because of the changing infrastructure. The greening initiatives are thus temporary, flexible, and adaptable to the changing neighbourhood (Djokic et al. 2018). When new issues occur, residents are looking for new adaptations in the gardens to solve the problem. The greening initiatives are thus lived spaces, developed by societies under coercion willing to reclaim the space and produce new meaning.

[13] Photo's made by Erwin Slaats, resident of the Oudezijds Armsteeg

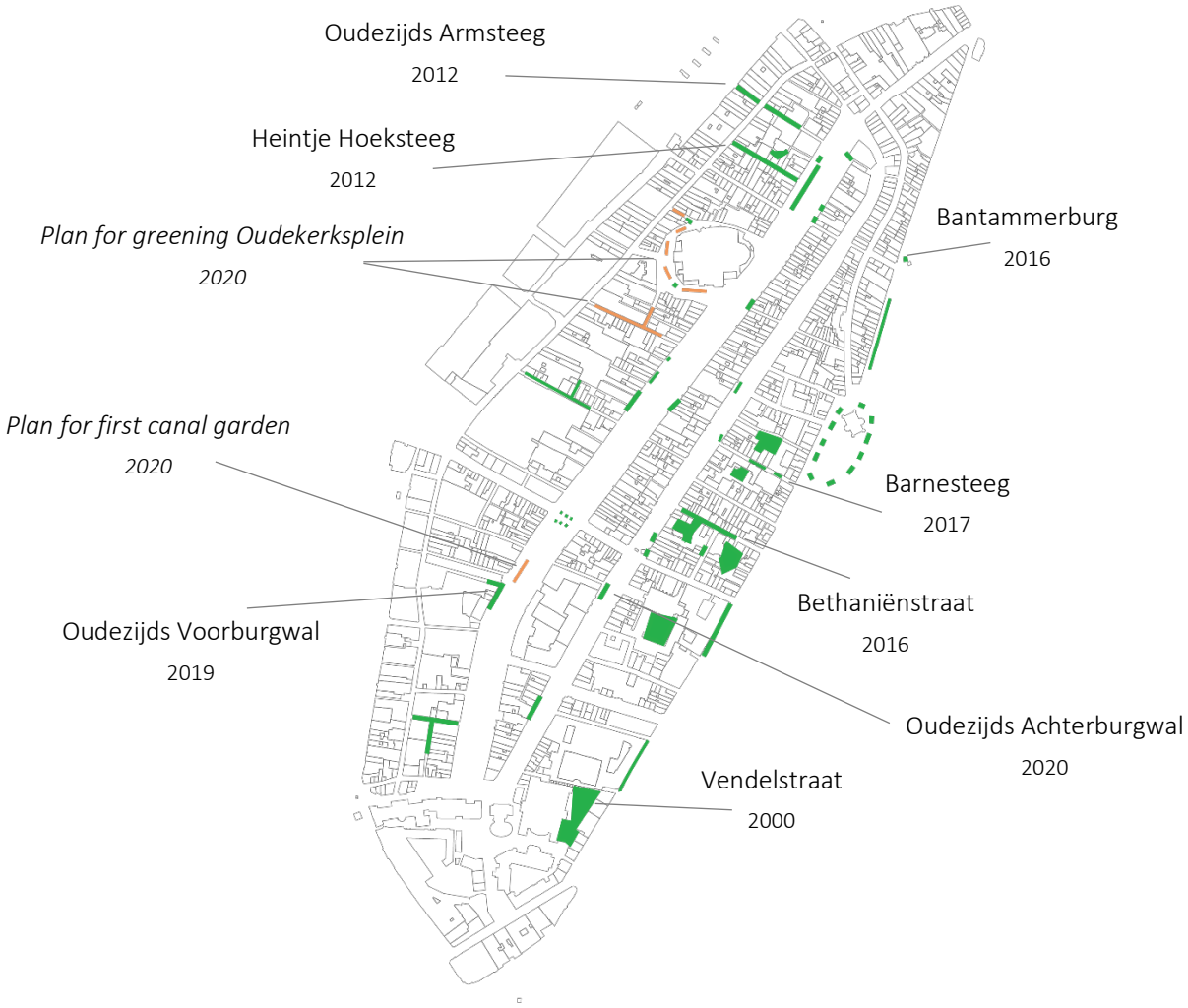

Figure 2: Green areas of the neighbourhood, with the residential initiatives defined.

Methodological reflection: an observational approach

In this research observation took a central role, as well as research method and a cinematic approach, to get a deeper understanding of the social construction of the greening initiatives. As a research method, it was effective to see how the embodied spatial practice of greening produces the urban space, and gain knowledge of this lived spaces. As a cinematic approach, observation took a central role to show the daily activities of place-making of the inhabitants. Suhr and Willerslev (2012: 283) state that observational cinema aims to 'inquire the role played by ordinary lived time and space in the constitution of social life.' By focussing on the daily maintenance of the public green spaces in the neighbourhood the invisible became visible, especially for people who are not living in this neighbourhood. For example, tourists

didn't seem to mind people living in *De Wallen* neighbourhood or didn't mention me filming on the streets. By standing next to the inhabitants, joining them in their activities and filming daily life, I could capture this hidden dimension of the neighbourhood.

Creating lived spaces

Residents point out that greening initiatives are helpful in different ways to reclaim the neighbourhood. By using the neighbourhood and performing (daily) practices of gardening, residents make informal claims of ownership. If we think of the city as an artwork, greening can be perceived as an art to create a liveable city and reinforce feelings of belonging. Greening is a way of de-alienating the neighbourhood and thus creates new meaning. Residents explain that this performative mode of place-making is important to show tourists that there are also people living in this neighbourhood and that it is not a real 'theme park' they are visiting.

> *"At least 24 children and many families and students live here. It is the home to a lot of people and there are also a lot of tourists. We think if we create more greenery, tourists become more aware of their environment. I experienced people behaving differently since I placed planters on the staircase in front of my house. They see that people live here. […] It is a literal way of reclaiming space." – Esmeralde*

Many residents refer to the *broken window theory*. This theory implies that visible marks of crime and incivilities serve as an invitation for more crimes and disorder (Wilson and Kelling 1982). On the other hand, Wilson and Kelling (1982) show that the creation of a more peaceful and safe environment could be effective to counter crimes and incivilities. Research of Poulsen et al. (2014) prove that green areas in an urban setting are related to fewer incidents of graffiti, other incivilities, and the reduction of violence and crime. In the case of *De Wallen* neighbourhood, safety issues aren't experienced as problematic by its residents, whereas the nuisance of the tourists is a challenging element. Residents are strongly convinced that trash attracts trash. They see greening as a medium to create a more pleasant and clean environment, which functions as a catalyst for a cleaner environment and a more liveable city.

> *"It sparks something positive. People are positive about the garden and I am convinced that this also means that I have less mess in front of my house. People treat it a bit better when something looks neat. […] I think it does a lot to improve the quality of life in the city." – Regina*

> *"And that has to do with the fact that people see something is managed and that it is lived in. That it has not been abandoned. For that, it doesn't have to be fancy or polished, but people notice pretty quickly whether something is neglected or not. And somehow you ask for a bit of respect by the way it looks. And nine out of ten people respect that too." – Sunke*

Residents try to redefine the neighbourhood by creating green infrastructures in the city. However, residents explain they have to take a lot of different aspects in mind while greening the neighbourhood. If the greenery is too low, people will walk through it, but if it's too tall, people will hide behind the plants which creates an opportunity for 'inappropriate' behaviour. Residents are dealing a lot with the nuisance of people urinating, defecating and puking between the plants. Drunk tourist often falls in the garden and homeless people are sometimes found sleeping between the plants. Drug dealers throw the greenery out to hide their stuff under the plants. Furthermore, bikes are also often parked in the gardens.




[14]

De Wallen is thus a very challenging area to appropriate the urban space, especially through greening. If trash attracts trash, effective self-management is crucial to let the broken window theory occur.

> *"I walk through the alley a few times a day, as soon as I see something, I immediately clean it. If I see something, like this morning I saw some bottles again, then I take it out right away. Our starting point is that dirt attracts dirt, so that's why it should be removed as soon as possible." - Lennard*

While it is a challenging way of place-making and appropriating the urban space, residents acknowledge that they experience it as an effective way of creating more physical liveability. Gardening is helpful to create a clean environment. Besides, residents argue that greenery has a positive influence on the way they experience the neighbourhood. They explain it is pleasant to watch and you become happier when greenery is present in your surroundings. Different studies prove this positive effect of green spaces on the experience of an environment (Poulsen et al. 2014; Okvat and Zautra 2011; Lebby and Hashim 2010). Besides, the physical improvement of liveability, there is also a strong social aspect connected to this green appropriation.

[14] Photo's made by author

Social relations through plants

Greening initiatives are also a way of reintegrating into a web of social connections. Greening in the public space creates opportunities for residents to engage with each other in meaningful interactions. Purcell (2014) argues that interactions which occur during the appropriation of the urban space can be effective to overcome the separation between the residents. They learn about each other and 'deliberate together about the meaning and future of the city' (Purcell 2014: 149). Djokic et al. (2018) shows that social connections appear particular when greening is a collaborative process. Half of the greening initiatives in the neighbourhood are on a collaborative basis. Residents are gardening together, organize meetings with each other and maintain contact through WhatsApp groups. Residents who are involved in collaborative greening initiatives argue that it is important to work together because they are facing so many challenges.

> *"It is a kind of survival of the fittest. We are not giving up. It is important as you see now, that it's not just one or two people maintaining it. We are with about five people who are actively involved in this [greening initiative]. If it really comes down to one person, you might just give up. […] But you have to keep investing together."*
> *– Lennard*

Also, previous research (Poulsen et al. 2014; Okvat and Zautra 2011; Alaimo, Reischl and Allen 2010) shows that the collective process of gardening is helpful to extend the social capital between neighbours. Guitart et al. (2012) illustrate in their literature review that the development of social cohesion is one of the most common benefits of community gardening. These gardens bring 'residents together into a denser network than urban roles normally allow' (Glover 2003 in Okvat and Zautra 2011: 378). However, the greening initiatives in *De Wallen* differ from community gardens, the same social processes occur with collaborative gardening.

In contrast, other residents explain that they prefer to garden individually to have more flexibility in their activities and they experience gardening as a leisure activity. However, even if residents aren't always collaborating in the greening initiatives, it still provides opportunities for residents to engage with each other in meaningful interactions.

> *"There is a lack of social cohesion in the city. We are all busy, we all have our work, our family, our mobile phone and so on. So you hardly see each other except for a greeting at the door if you live in the same building. [...] But as soon as you have a garden, and you are working in the garden, then you see that the social structures are still there but the social meeting points have disappeared. And such a garden, as annoying as it may be, is a meeting point. So people also like to stop for a chat. It is a kind of primal instinct in some way. [...] So, it has an important social function." - Herman*

> *"It is the same as walking with little children or dogs. It gives a reason to start a chat and it is easy for people to say something. With plants, it is actually the same." – Regina*

Not only social interactions with neighbours appear during the greening of the public space, but also interactions with tourists occur. Many residents explain there are sometimes tourists asking about the garden, they have a casual chat or they express their appreciation. In this way, residents receive confirmation about the positive effects of greening on the physical liveability, but also have positive interaction with the tourists.

> *"It happens to me sometimes that I see people here on the street who are clearly not from here. The kind of people you see at night. And then it sometimes happens that I take them inside and show them my backyard. I am proud of that, I am proud of Amsterdam. This is the most beautiful part of Amsterdam here. That church is so beautiful. I always tell people, whether asked or unasked, that they should go to the Old Church and that they should not look at the ladies, but at the facing bricks or something. Look up." – Margaret*

So, the social interactions with tourists aren't only a positive experience which functions as a counterbalance to the nuisance, it is also a direct way for the residents to influence the meaning-making of the neighbourhood. They try to point out the historical characteristics of the neighbourhood which they want to share with visitors.

To conclude, greening as a performative way of place-making is perceived a successful medium to increase not only the physical but also social liveability. Greening initiatives are lived spaces where social interactions can occur. The social relations between residents create a sense of acceptance and recognition within the group of people living in *De Wallen*, which strengthen feelings of belonging to the neighbourhood. The right to use and feelings of belong are thus mixed up since feelings of belonging increase based on opportunities to participate in the urban space (Fenster 2005: 222). Urban green spaces thus construct new infrastructures to create a more liveable urban environment (Guitart et al. 2012; Djokic et al. 2018) and function as an important factor to establish social cohesion and reinforce a feelings of belonging (Okvat and Zautra 2011; Poulsen et al. 2014; Djokic et al. 2018). While greening is perceived as a challenging way of place-making and appropriating the urban space, residents acknowledge that they experience it as an effective way of reclaiming the right to the city. Djokic et al. (2018) support these findings by showing that urban gardens are a successful way of raising awareness about the concept of the city.

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

As Lefebvre (1991) argues, the right to participate is, together with the right to appropriate, crucial to create a sense of belonging to a city. The right to participate involves the role of residents in decision making and producing the urban space. Purcell (2014: 150) argues that active participation can create awareness of inhabitants collective power and they can start recognizing themselves as capable 'stewards of the urban and its collective life'. In addition, Fenster (2005: 227) illustrates that the more possibilities people have, the greater their sense of belonging becomes. In this section, I will show that the municipality of Amsterdam is willing to give the residents the right to participate in some extend, but at the same time, they keep control over the neighbourhood. Berry et al. (2013) show that collaboration between policymakers, government organizations, and individuals can be productive to make a change in a neighbourhood. But on the other hand, many studies show that policies are often insufficient because these regularly don't take the belongings of the local inhabitants into account (Checker 2011; Isenhour 2011; Lee 2007; Mosse 2006). In the following section, I will show how the municipality of Amsterdam tries to support greening initiatives in *De Wallen* neighbourhood and how the right to participate is negotiated. Residents are trying in different ways to claim their right to participate, while some bureaucratic mechanisms pose an obstacle. In line with Purcell (2014), I argue that the right to participate is an ideal of which little manifestations occur and is helpful to increase liveability and feelings of belonging in *De Wallen* neighbourhood.

Supporting greening initiatives

The municipality of Amsterdam is trying in different ways to support greening initiatives. For example, residents can pitch their idea on '*centrum begroot*'[15]. Or residents can submit requests for greenery in the public space, like a façade garden. If the request meets the requirements[16], the municipality will place the garden in a few days (Amsterdam 2020).[17] There are also possibilities to get financial support for greening initiatives which don't fit in these formats, although general guidelines aren't available. There is some general haziness among residents and civil servants about the amount of money available for greening initiatives and

[15] https://centrumbegroot.amsterdam.nl/plannen. Centrum Begroot is an online platform whereby most popular grassroots initiatives are subsidized by the municipality.
[16] The requirements of a façade garden are; approval of the building owner, approval of the residents living on the ground floor, and 1,5 meter of sidewalk has to be remained.
[17] The municipality only provides a space for gardening, the rest is up to the residents. This occurred to be a helpful strategy to give the residents the right to appropriate.

in which ways the municipality can or can't support the initiatives[18]. However, the 'neighbourhood broker'[19] is often the solution to this problem. She is in dialogue with the residents about their wishes and suggestions to improve the quality of life in the neighbourhood. Many residents acknowledge that the neighbourhood brokers are crucial to participate within the bureaucratic mechanism of the municipality.

> *Elke who is responsible for the most recent greening initiative in De Wallen, came in touch with the neighbourhood broker of the southern Wallen[20] in December. After some technical issues about the weight of the planters that could be located close to the canal, the flower boxes which Elke requested were facilitated half April. While I couldn't visit the neighbourhood anymore because of Covid-19, Elke texted me: "The planters arrived 1,5 weeks ago and are really an asset to the neighbourhood! The neighbours react very positively (some neighbours want the same!). In short, a small success."*

Policy on urban planning may cause residents to continue urban gardening and likewise secure the status of greening initiatives in the public space (Djokic et al. 2018: 249). But not all the residents are aware of what the neighbourhood broker can do for them and they get lost in the bureaucratic web of the municipality. So, there is a problem of communication towards the residents about how they can participate in the city. Many interlocutors want to participate, take part in the creation of the urban space, but the complex structure of the municipality makes it hard.

An important issue is that the municipality is the official owner of the public space in which the greening initiatives take place. So, officially collaboration with the municipality is necessary and participating in the capitalist and bureaucratic system seems crucial.[21] Based on Shove, Watson and Spurling (2015), I argue that it is crucial to be aware of the underlying infrastructures and policies to understand how people act in the public space. Greening initiatives in the public space can (officially) only exist when the municipality approves these activities. However, Lefebvre's (1996) vision about the urban, suggests a controversial way of thinking about the public space, whereby the city belongs to those who inhabit it and thus not the official owner. While most residents accept the formal ownership of the municipality and try to participate within its system, some residents claim the right to the city by themself. As Lefebvre (1991) argues, we shouldn't let these systems determine our society, but claim the right to the city ourselves and become co-producer of our

[18] For example, residents at the Oudezijds Armsteeg and Heintje Hoeksteeg receive financial support on yearly basis and some greenery and gardening tools are provided. On the other hand, residents of the Vendelstraat would love to receive this kind of support and did multiple requests, but these didn't seem to be feasible. Other residents don't even know about the possibilities to receive support from the municipality.

[19] In Dutch called '*buurtmakelaars'.* The function of the neighbourhood broker is to represent the residents towards the other civil servants, are in touch with residents on a daily basis and organize different meeting to provide an open dialogue between residents and the municipality.

[20] There is one neighbourhood broker for each part of *De Wallen;* Willemijn Oosterhof is operating in the northern part and Olivia Somson is the neighbourhood broker of the southern Wallen

[21] Underlying capitalist and bureaucratic infrastructures shape our society. For example, as shown in previous sections are processes of globalization, commercialisation and urban tourism of large influence on *De Wallen* and changed the neighbourhood over time.

collective social reality. I suggest that these ways of place-making beyond the system of the municipality are little manifestations of 'the urban'. Some residents are literally claiming their right to the city by putting planters on the street.

> *Regina is gardening between many colourful planters. Over the last four years, she put planters on the street. The greenery slowly extended and at this moment at least thirty different plants are standing in front of her house in the Bethaniënstraat.*
>
> *"Is it allowed to just put some plants on the street?" I ask.*
>
> *"I don't dare to make any statements about that. You must, of course, ensure that a street is accessible, an ambulance or fire brigade must always be able to pass by. […] I haven't heard anything from the municipality yet. Everything in this street is more than the standard façade garden, but that is actually the fact in whole Amsterdam. I think this is the maximum, otherwise, you will not be able to get through the street and that is not the intention." Regina explains.*

In line with the allotment gardens in Belgrade (Djokic et al. 2018), some greening initiatives are the result of citizens' informal practices which did not fit any institutional frames or at least an institutional frame the residents are familiar with.[22] As Douglas (2014 in Djokic et al. 2018: 249) shows, 'informal urban practices may improve the environment where civil society perceives the government and other development actors to be failing.' Thus, some small eruptions of 'the urban' are occurring in the *De Wallen* neighbourhood through informal greening initiatives. These manifestations beyond the system of the municipality are a way of claiming the right to the city by residents.

Negotiating the right to participate

While not all the residents dare to participate beyond the authority of the municipality, most residents try to participate by collaborating with the municipality. They aren't only taking part in greening initiatives but they also try to claim the right to participate in other ways. Many residents are involved in neighbourhood panels and/or monitoring initiatives to keep track of the development of the liveability in the neighbourhood. In these initiatives, the municipality asks the residents to participate in the city. But at the same time, these initiatives often seemed to be insufficient.

[22] Chris Seinen, the civil servant responsible for the operational work in the city centre, explains: "Residents often put planters outside of their own accord. That is allowed. Officially, the policy is no more than two per address. […] But there are addresses with 30-40 planters. And if possible, if you have a bit of spare room, it's fine. We are not going to ask if they want to remove 38 planters. Residents often like it very much. Sometimes it is a bit neglected, but in general it is well maintained. And the board of the municipality also likes it. We do our work for the resident."

> *"I think it's already 3 years ago that I pitched some ideas to the municipality. But in the meantime, I heard nothing about it. When you do that [trying to participate] for the first time as a citizen, you actually think that the government is waiting for you. You come up with ideas and you think that the government will directly implement the good ideas. But it was a learning process to get to know it isn't like that. You may be involved in a meeting, but in fact, nothing is done with your ideas. […] At some point I was thinking of leaving the neighbourhood because it is so busy. But then I thought, well, I'm not leaving without a fight. So, I don't want to leave before I know that I tried at least. That was the moment I joined 'Stop de Gekte'." – Elke*[23]

The technical top-down approach of policymakers is often condemned by civil society actors, who experienced not being appropriately treated by professional planners (Mosse 2006; Lee 2007; Checker 2011; Isenhour 2011; Djokic et al. 2018). There are many residents in *De Wallen* neighbourhood that participate in grassroots initiatives like '*Stop de Gekte*' (Stop the Madness) and 'We Live Here', as a reaction to the insufficient way of the municipality cooperate with the residents. In these grassroots initiatives, residents come together to create more awareness about the processes of neighbourhood change and the threatening notions of liveability they are experiencing (Stop the Madness). Or residents try to meet their neighbours, create more social interaction and point out that there are people living in the neighbourhood (We Live Here). Besides, residents are working together on a neighbourhood newspaper to raise more awareness about local issues. The residents who are participating in these initiatives, feel the need to take action caused by the insufficient functionality of the municipality. Sorensen (2009: 223) shows that 'the claiming of ownership and authorship of the meaning of public spaces are often successful ways of political strategies of self-empowerment by community groups to create shared values and meanings to a space.'

Thus, the municipality seems to be willing to cooperate with the residents, whereby neighbourhood brokers fulfil an important function. But at the same time, they often don't meet the local needs. It is an organization which is working top-down, and although it is willing to take the local perspective into account, it is often perceived as insufficient by the resident of *De Wallen* neighbourhood. In reaction, residents try to participate in the city by taking part in the creation of the urban space in different ways. By collaborating with the municipality and starting grassroots initiatives beyond this bureaucratic system, small eruptions of 'the urban' arise. Residents take their responsibilities for the creation of the city, which acknowledge their collective power and sense of belonging. In addition, the right to participate is helpful to deal with liveability issues. By taking part in the development of the urban space, residents also have the possibility to tackle some liveability issues and improve the quality of life.

[23] Joining *Stop de Gekte,* was the first stap for Elke to take action. This year she also started with a greening initiative trying to claim back the public space.

UPTURN THE CITY

An interesting development in the context of this research is the situation which occurred according to COVID-19. From one day to another the whole neighbourhood and all the touristic facilities were shut down and a transformation occurred.

> *When I enter Amsterdam via the central train station it feels like I am in a completely different city. There are no crowds of tourists blocking my way. No smell of weed welcoming me in Amsterdam. It feels like I am in a desolated city. Some empty trams are driving, a few people on their bike passing by and a lot of construction work is going on. With the sun reflecting on the quiet canal, I look at the beautiful old buildings around me. There is so much to see which was covered by all the craziness of tourists and tourist entertainment before. Just some local residents are walking through the neighbourhood, cyclists can pass the streets again and some motorbikes find their way through the narrow alleys which were used to be covered by tourists.*

Covid-19 and the related measures seem to have a big influence on the daily lives of the residents in *De Wallen* neighbourhood and their notions of liveability and belonging. Suddenly, the influence of the tourist industry became visible and invisible underlying patterns, like social relations, became more present in this new reality. The 'village feeling' where lots of residents were referring to, became visible when walking on the streets. The strong social ties between residents become much more present since the streets aren't flooded by tourists anymore. So, Covid-19 made 'present by a certain absence the invisible ground of the visible world' (Suhr and Willerslev 2013: 4).

Besides, this time of crisis is by residents perceived as chance to claim back the neighbourhood and appropriate the public space. Where many residents weren't entering the northern part of *De Wallen* before Covid-19, they started to walk through this area again. Fenster (2005), Low (2016) and Ference (2019) acknowledge that daily routines like walking in a city are an effective way of marking territorialisation, appropriation, and create informal claims of ownership.

> *When walking on 1,5-meter distance through the neighbourhood with Regina, she starts explaining: "I don't usually walk that way [pointing towards the theme park], I usually just walk this way to do some shopping and then with a wide arc to go further into town. […] I never actually enter the 'Red Light District'."*
>
> *"Not even now?" I ask.*
>
> *"Yes, now I do. Since it's quiet and you do not get all the aprons with dicks against your face. Yes, now I go there. Now you can finally see how beautiful those façades are."*

Based on this development of appropriation of the theme park by residents, I argue that selective feelings of belonging could wither away if this development started to expand over time. However, it is a very precarious

situation and it is likely that it will not remain like this. In additional research, this process of claims-making and assert to the right to the city could be researched in the context of Covid-19 and its aftermath. It is plausible, that residents experience a stronger sense of belonging after this period, because of the increased notion of the right to appropriate. As Low and Smart (2020: 1) argue, 'our world and our cities will be fundamentally transformed by the virus.'

In addition, residents are perceiving this period as a possibility for the municipality to take action and create a change in the neighbourhood. Bernadette explains:

> *"At this moment, we are all dedicated to Corona, of course. But in our neighbourhood, we are also very busy with communicating to the municipality what measures are necessary to prevent the area from eruption again, in the future. To prevent that all those crowds of tourist, who perceive this area as a theme park, will go through the neighbourhood. This is the moment for the municipality to take action and make sure it doesn't happen again."*

This shows that, while residents try to participate, the municipality keeps control over the area and is perceived as responsible. Also, the municipality itself is aware of the possibility for change according to this situation. Parool (2020) mentions that the municipality is working together with city marketing and the tourist industry to realize a new start for the city centre of Amsterdam after the crisis.[24] As Low and Smart (2020: 4) argue, 'we need to seriously think about the kind of economy and society that we will have when we have recovered from this pandemic.' Possibilities that seemed to be unlikely a year ago, are now being seriously considered and underlying infrastructures can be changed. Geerte Udo, director of city marketing, explains that they want to give the city centre back to its residents and facilitate sustainable tourism (Parool 2020). However, it is striking that they are not working together with the residents to work from bottom-up towards a city that belongs to the residents themselves. This confirms that the right to the city, and especially the right to participate, is an ideal of which little manifestations occur, but which isn't the reality on a larger scale.

[24] This proves that the municipality, city marketing and the tourist industry are facilitating infrastructures that are highly influencing and shaping the neighbourhood.

THE RIGHT TO GREENING

This visual ethnographic research on greening initiatives of residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood shows that greening initiatives are effective place-making strategies to reclaiming 'the right to the city'. A growing amount of tourists went to visit *De Wallen* to enjoy the enjoy the progressive altitude of the city where 'anything goes'. But at the same time, this neighbourhood is the home of many residents struggling with these effects of neighbourhood change, influenced by the process of globalization and shaped by urban tourism. Residents experience threatening notions of physical and functional liveability cause by tourists who consume the entertainment of the 'theme park'. Residents have to deal with lots of trash, noise disturbance, a rough atmosphere, drug dealing and the disappearance of local shops. In relation, residents are referring to a feeling of displacement and a decrease of feelings of belonging.

On the other hand, social liveability is a crucial element for residents to stay in this neighbourhood. Residents acknowledge that the strong cohesion between the residents is really unique for an urban neighbourhood. They know their neighbours, help each other and also try to claim back their neighbourhood together. Greening initiatives are a common way of appropriating the urban space and reclaiming the right to the city. Since four years, more greening initiatives of residents occurred as a reaction to the increasing amount of tourists visiting the area and their 'inappropriate' behaviour. The greening initiatives are thus created by a society under coercion that wants to reclaim the space and wants to produce new meaning. Through greening, residents try to show that there are people living in the area and they expect from tourists to respect the historical city centre. line with the broken window theory (Wilson and Kelling 1982), residents perceive greening as a catalyst for a cleaner environment. Moreover, greening initiatives create opportunities for residents to engage with each other in meaningful interactions. Greening initiatives bring 'residents together into a denser network than urban roles normally allow' (Glover 2003 in Okvat and Zautra 2011: 378), which improve the social liveability and feelings of belonging. Using the public space by greening thus creates informal claims of ownership and is perceived as an effective way to improve the physical and social liveability and increase feelings of belonging.

As Lefebvre (1991) argues, the right to participate as well as the right to appropriate are crucial to claim the right to the city and create a sense of belonging to a certain place. The right to participate involves the role of residents in decision making and producing the urban space. The municipality of Amsterdam seemed to be willing to cooperate with the residents and give them some right to participate, whereby neighbourhood brokers fulfil an important function. But at the same time, the municipality keeps control over the neighbourhood. Residents are trying in different ways to claim their right to participate while some bureaucratic mechanisms pose an obstacle. In relation, some small eruptions of 'the urban' occur by residents who are literally claiming their right to the city by putting planters on the street. Residents experience the top-down approach of the municipality often as insufficient. In reaction, residents are

participating in grassroots initiatives as '*Stop de Gekte*' (Stop the Madness) and 'We Live Here'. When residents take their responsibilities for the creation of the city, their collective power and sense of belonging will be reinforced. By taking part in the creation of the urban space, residents also have the possibility to tackle some liveability issues and improve the quality of life.

However, Covid-19 has a big influence on the neighbourhood. Suddenly, the influence of the tourist industry became visible and invisible underlying patterns, like social relations, became more present. Covid-19 made 'present by a certain absence the invisible ground of the visible world' (Suhr and Willerslev 2013: 4). Residents started appropriating the northern part of the neighbourhood through walking, which can cause a decline of selective feelings of belonging. In addition, the municipality is working together with city marketing and the tourist industry to realize a new start for the city centre of Amsterdam after the crisis and give the city centre back to its residents. It is striking that they are not working together with the residents to work from bottom-up towards a liveable city that belongs to the residents themselves. This confirms that the right to the city, and especially the right to participate, is an ideal of which little manifestations occur, but which isn't the reality on a larger scale.

Further research could investigate the process of place-making and claims-making in the context of Covid-19 and its aftermath. It will be interesting to see how the process of the right to the city will develop in this neighbourhood, highly influenced by process of globalization and shaped by urban tourism. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that the findings of this research are just a representation of one of the multiple realities about this neighbourhood, since this research is focussed on the perspectives and experiences of the residents of *De Wallen* neighbourhood. As Neuts et al. (2014: 38) suggest, 'every city image is constructed form a certain vantage point, which might lead to an exclusivist consensus about spatial claims.' Therefore, I want to recommend further research on neighbourhood change, liveability and belonging among other groups of people operating in *De Wallen* neighbourhood.

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