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Everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas

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Lives on Edge

Everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas

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There are places I'll remember
All my life though some have changed
Some forever, not for better
Some have gone and some remain

All these places have their moments
With lovers and friends I still can recall
Some are dead and some are living
In my life I've loved them all

John Lennon, The Beatles – In my life

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Introduction

Growing social and spatial divides

1.1 Global currents, local impacts

Socio-spatial inequalities are harmful for social, economic, and health prospects and opportunities, especially of people living in disadvantaged areas (van Ham et al., 2021; Small and Feldman, 2012; Peck, 2012). In the current global economic system, agglomeration economies of so-called global cities are the main generators of economic growth (Glaeser, 2012; Sassen, 2001). This widens socio-spatial dichotomies because, almost by default, less successful areas simply matter less in social and economic terms (see Rodriguez-Pose, 2018). However, socio-spatial inequalities are not only increasing between regions and cities but also within. On many scales and in many contexts, wealthy areas are getting richer, while poorer areas are becoming poorer. Consequently, spaces are increasingly geographically divided and polarized along social and economic lines. This trend increases tensions between spaces and between people, which ultimately has profound consequences for the ways people live together in countries, cities and towns, and streets.

Although causes for growing socio-spatial inequalities are often related to global economic currents, the consequences in terms of e.g. poverty, housing, service provision, are experienced locally and in the context of the everyday. A surge in austerity and neoliberal governance after the 2008 financial crisis saw national governments in Western countries cut back on public spending and decentralize responsibilities to regional and local scales, often down to the community level (Peck, 2012; Van Lanen, 2017). In this dynamic, citizens, volunteer organizations, and non-profit organizations are increasingly relied upon and expected to participate in the design and implementation of policy and decision-making (Suzuki, 2020; Bailey, 2016). Similarly, local governments increasingly call on residents to participate and contribute to the socio-spatial development of their

neighborhoods (Pierce et al., 2014; Lees, 2014; Peck, 2012). Research on socio-spatial development demonstrates that socio-spatial interventions such as neighborhood restructuring, regeneration, and social mixing, often struggle to benefit low-income groups (Small and Feldman, 2012; Peck, 2012; Musterd and Murie, 2006). A challenge for socio-spatial development is to meaningfully connect to the lived realities of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas. This is illustrated by the recognition that poor and minority groups are often poorly included in community participation processes regarding socio-spatial development (Lees, 2014; Mahjabeen et al., 2009). Altogether, the changing dynamics of governance and socio-spatial development underscore that the linkages between the everyday lives of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas and socio-spatial inequalities require a deeper comprehension.

In this chapters that follow, I aim to advance the understanding of the relations between experiences of poverty and socio-spatial inequalities by zooming in on everyday life in places and of people on the edges of society. Using three different ethnographic studies, I present in-depth and detailed insights into everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas and the ways in which they shape and are shaped by socio-spatial inequalities. All studies were conducted in socially, economically, and spatially marginalized areas relative to their socio-spatial context. Additionally, this thesis also reflects on the value of ethnography as a scientific approach to study subjective and contextualized experiences of phenomena such as increasing socio-spatial inequalities. Before presenting the study design and outline of this thesis, the introduction will provide a background on increasing socio-spatial inequalities and on the experience of poverty and exclusion in disadvantaged areas.

1.2 Contexts and consequences of socio-spatial inequalities

Socio-spatial inequalities have always existed in human settlement in some shape or form and have historically been a prolific subject of social research (see Davis, 1965; Marcuse, 1993; Madanipour, 1998; Park and Burgess, 2019). Technological advances during industrialization increased the carrying capacity of cities (meaning they could feed, house, and employ more people), which ignited a trend of rapid urbanization. Whilst an increasing number of people lived in cities, the living conditions of the working class were particularly poor (see Engels, 1993)[1]. In the shift from Fordist (i.e., industrial) economies to increasingly service-based and global economies, cities have become centers of capital flows and investment (Glaeser, 2012; Florida, 2004; Sassen, 2001). Despite a plethora of interventions and policies aimed to decrease socio-spatial inequalities in many Western societies, socio-spatial disparities have continued to exist and appear increasingly more persistent. Compared to industrial times, living standards have generally improved, although a lack of affordable housing and precarious housing conditions are current and urgent issues as well as an important catalyst for socio-spatial inequalities in Western countries and cities (Hochstenbach and Arundel, 2019; Huisman, 2016; Townshend et al, 2018).

[1] In 1845 Friedrich Engels published his book *The condition of the working class in England*. Based on observations he made while walking through the emerging industrial city of Manchester, he conveyed a detailed portrait of the everyday struggles and grievances as well as the living conditions of the working class during the timeframe in which the industrial city started to take shape.

In the current paradigm, fueled by works by prominent authors such as Ed Glaeser's *Triumph of the City* (2012), cities are widely regarded as the catalysts for regional and national growth. This notion, however, is challenged, with critics questioning the presupposed 'trickle down' mechanisms which enable marginal areas to benefit through redistribution of the wealth generated by successful cities. In fact, an increasing body of research demonstrates that successful cities are increasingly found to be a site for rising inequalities and segregation (Van Ham et al., 2021).

Socio-spatial inequalities are also apparent between rural and urban areas. The countryside and the city are often contrasted in terms of community structure and ways of life (see Tönnies 1887). Because the city is a space of density and diversity, cities have historically been regarded as the spatial context in which socio-spatial inequalities are particularly visible (see Madanipour, 1998; Wirth, 1938; Simmel, 1903). Rural towns and communities have often been viewed as more homogenous and arguably less problematic than cities in terms of internal socio-spatial inequalities. Due to lower population densities, poverty and other inequalities are indeed less concentrated and therefore less obvious than in urban areas. Furthermore, romanticized narratives projecting the rural idyll and close-knit and caring community structures, still often prevail over narratives of rural poverty and social exclusion (MacKrell & Pemberton, 2018; Lee et al., 2005; Commins, 2004, Edensor, 2002). Consequently, however, pressing issues such as poverty and social exclusion are in rural contexts, receive just a fraction of the academic attention compared to the same issues in urban contexts (Bock, 2016; Tickamyer, 2010). This highlights yet another form of socio-spatial inequality between rural and urban areas, as well as the need for more research on poverty and social exclusion in rural contexts.

While the above illustrates how socio-spatial inequalities occur on many different scales and in many different contexts, the fundamental trend which causes much concern is that advantaged regions prosper, and disadvantaged regions lag behind. Rodriguez-Pose (2018) wrote an intriguing piece on the strong promotion by many Western governments of (global) cities over other places, which he aptly labelled the 'places that don't matter'. In recent years, the discontent of people in these marginalized places has been clearly reflected in election results in many countries, displaying a surge in right-wing populism. The rise in political populism reflects the strong spatial character of the growing social tensions and discontent experienced in disadvantaged areas. Adding to the grim outlook of disadvantaged areas is the notion that these spaces, on a regional as well as a local scale, have been found to be afflicted more from government retrenchment and economic decline and tend to benefit less from economic upturn than thriving areas (see Peck 2012; Tickamyer et al., 2017; Storper, 2008). The trends together create polarizing social and spatial trajectories in society in which people and places that prosper have favorable prospects, while people and places that struggle have less favorable prospects.

In addition to creating social tensions and unrest, increasing socio-spatial inequality has profound consequences for the behavior and prospects of individuals. Research on neighborhood effects study the direct and indirect effects neighborhood characteristics have on individual opportunities and behavior (see Galster, 2012; Sampson, 2002). Besides quantifiable and aggregated neighborhood attributes such as poverty rates or housing composition, more elusive and qualitative attributes such as neighborhood reputation and stigmatization also play an important role in the effect neighborhood characteristics have on the lives and opportunities of residents (Arthurson, 2012). Moreover, research into neighborhood effects underlines that neighborhood attributes alone are not able to explain

the experienced impact of these socio-spatial issues (Hedman et al., 2015; Arthurson, 2012). The experience of the consequences of socio-spatial inequalities therefore depends greatly on personal and local circumstances (Small and Feldman, 2012). This connection underscores the need for in-depth qualitative research across different socio-spatial contexts into how people experience and perceive the effects of their daily socio-spatial environment on their lives and opportunities.

1.3 Everyday practices and social exclusion

Ali Madanipour (1998; Madanipour et al., 2015) draws attention to the role of social exclusion in socio-spatial inequality by arguing that groups living in disadvantaged areas are excluded from the opportunities and benefits that other spaces have to offer. In other words, where one lives says a great deal about one's social, economic, cultural, and political position. More importantly, it says something about one's prospects. Madanipour (1998) identifies three societal dimensions in which social exclusion can occur: political, economic, and cultural. Political exclusion happens when groups and individuals become marginalized in their spatial and social environment because they are unable or denied the right to participate in important decision making. A similar marginalization occurs when individuals or groups are excluded from common methods and channels of communication and integration. Economic exclusion in the form of unemployment has well-known impacts on the ability of people to participate in social processes. In terms of the spatial character of social exclusion, there are two main elements which are important to consider: the structure of space (i.e., the physical layout) and the

social practices that construct and control space. These practices unfold in the context of everyday life and are rooted in informal codes and signs as well as formal rules and regulations (Madanipour, 1998). The study of everyday practices in disadvantaged areas can therefore deepen the understanding of the subjective and contextual experience of exclusion associated with socio-spatial inequalities.

Henri Lefebvre was an influential scholar who wrote about the social production of space. Repeated routines of social practices, which follow distinct temporal and spatial orderings, form rhythms which in turn construct a social space imbued with rules, roles, and inequalities (Edensor, 2010; Lefebvre, 2004; Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre (1991) and David Harvey (2008) put forward the notion of 'the right to the city'. Considering the overpowering effect of capitalism and neoliberalism on everyday life and urban space (see Harvey, 2008; Peck, 2012), the right to the city promotes the right of ordinary citizens to influence the processes that shape their city in such a way that it aligns with their views and everyday practices (see Meij et al., 2020b). In this sense, the right to the city symbolized through everyday practices connects to Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, which looks at the reciprocal effects of structure and human agency (Giddens, 1991).

In terms of structuration theory, the right to the city promotes the agency of groups and individuals to influence the urban structures in which they live. Similar to Lefebvre, Giddens (1991) also emphasizes the symbolic importance of social practices in the dynamics between structure and agency, placing them at the intersection of structures and agents. This means that Giddens views social practices as an expression of the reciprocal effects of structure and agency. In this light, protests by discontented and marginalized groups should be regarded as an attempt to exert agency over structures that are perceived as oppressive and undemocratic. In the

context of the everyday, practices that go against rules and expectations which are considered 'normal' reflect acts of protest and resistance against social and spatial structures. The right to the city debate underlines that everyday life should be the subject of serious academic and political attention. En route to more inclusive societies, questions about who benefits from urban and rural developments and who does not, should be asked and interpreted within the context of the everyday practices of people experiencing poverty and marginalization.

1.4 Study design and methodology

The overall aim of this thesis is to present an in-depth understanding of the ways in which everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas shape and are shaped by socio-spatial inequalities. Research questions that will be addressed in the empirical chapters of this thesis are: what are everyday practices of poor and marginalized people in disadvantaged areas?; how do everyday practices of poor and marginalized people in disadvantaged areas shape, and how are they shaped by socio-spatial inequalities?; and, to what extent does socio-spatial development in disadvantaged areas connect to the everyday practices of poor and marginalized people?

As was explained before, one of the greatest challenges for socio-spatial development is to comprehend, incorporate, and connect to everyday realities of people experiencing poverty in relation to socio-spatial inequalities and development. Therefore, it is important to study the effects of socio-spatial inequalities from an insider perspective. Ethnography is an approach to social science which is particularly able to do that. Chapters two, three, and four

present the findings from three ethnographic case studies, located in the city of Groningen, the city of Calgary and the rural region Groninger Veenkoloniën, based on a cumulative total of approximately two years of fieldwork. Over the course of the fieldwork, 159 people participated actively[2] in participant observations and a focus group discussion, and 54 people participated in in-depth interviews. All case studies show comprehensive and detailed images of the everyday practices of poor and marginalized groups in disadvantaged areas against a backdrop of socio-spatial inequalities.

The principal aim of ethnography is to convey insider perspectives on the studied subject. Consequently, it is important to maintain an open process of data collection to ensure the insider perspective is not compromised e.g. by a specific theoretical framework or very narrow research questions. In terms of the research questions above, this meant that I would generally look for and document practices which told me something about these questions, but deliberately without a theoretical framework in mind. The theoretical contour for each study was constructed later in the data collection process to ensure the data would reflect the subjective perspective of participants rather than a theoretical framework. Each of the case studies therefore has a different theoretical perspective on everyday practices: chapter two focuses on everyday rhythms, whereas chapter three zooms in on spatial practices and chapter four analyzes class practices.

In each of the case studies ample time was dedicated to immersing myself in and to some degree become part of the social worlds in the areas under study. In the early stages of fieldwork

[2] 'Participated actively' refers to persons who belong to the subject group (i.e., people experiencing some form of poverty and/or marginalization) and verbally consented to being part of the study.

various forms of participant observation were performed. Usually, I started fieldwork by doing covert observations in public spaces. This gave me a sense of everyday life in the studied areas, from which I could identify places and people relevant to my research aims. The next step would be to connect to participants, thereby moving onto overt observations. After introducing myself and the aims of my research, I always tried to connect to participants in the context of their everyday lives. Rather than approaching them for a formal interview immediately, I would ask if I could join them on a daily task, such as doing grocery shopping or meeting them at home or at a place they frequented. From these observations of daily activities, I started to identify socio-spatial patterns and processes that would serve as input for in-depth interviews.

By engaging with participants in their everyday activities I was able to develop trusted relationships with many participants. At the time when I felt a sufficient level of trust had developed, I would enquire if participants would like to tell me about their life stories and everyday life in the area in a formal (and recorded) interview. By asking about their life story I obtained a comprehensive image of their personal history which helped to interpret findings on their everyday practices. The patterns and hypotheses derived from observations also became topics discussed during the interviews. Because the interviews covered extensive subjects, such as a person's life history, interviews typically lasted anywhere from one to four hours. Therefore, in many cases, interviews were done over multiple sit-downs. Although this was a time-consuming process, it did provide me with the deep and personal stories I was looking for to achieve my research aims.

Due to the fluid nature of ethnographic fieldwork, obtaining informed consent was not a straightforward task. In all case studies the aims and scope of the research would change slightly throughout

the fieldwork period. Consequently, written consent obtained in early stages of fieldwork, would most of the time be outdated near the end of the study, which would be unethical. Furthermore, social workers working with the target group explained that the need to fill out forms could potentially deter a lot of potential participants from participating. Therefore, after approval of my university's ethical committee, I proceeded to obtain verbal consent from participants at multiple times during the case studies. Each time I would inform them how their data would be used in my studies and I would remind them of the opportunity to opt-out of participating at any time. To enable participants to fully understand the way their participation informed the research, (preliminary) findings were shared and discussed in an informal setting with participants who expressed an interest to do so. In other fields of research, this way of obtaining consent is referred to as 'rolling consent' (see Novitzky et al., 2014).

Because patterns and hypotheses derived from initial observations serve as input for further observations as well as interviews, data collection and analysis and interpretation coincided in each case study. To ensure and increase the validity of the data, analysis was done in collaboration with participants. Incorporating this participatory approach to data analysis helped to firmly embed the findings from each case study in the lived reality of the people under study. In chapter five I reflect more extensively on the ethnographic approach I used and developed.

1.5 Thesis outline

In chapter two I examine the effects of a social-mixing intervention, which was aimed at improving the area's livability, on the everyday practices and rhythms of residents in a disadvantaged neighborhood in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands. The municipality of Groningen has a population of around 230,000, with a little over 200,000 living in the central urban core, i.e., the city of Groningen (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). I describe how the livability of the area might improve through replacing so-called bad apples with new residents who do not cause trouble, but the social mixing intervention hardly mitigates the everyday struggles of a group of long-term residents living in poverty. This way, already disadvantaged and marginalized long-term residents are even more marginalized within their own neighborhood.

Chapter three analyses how local interventions and development fail to connect to the everyday practices of poor and marginalized residents in Calgary East (Alberta, Canada). With a population of over 1.2 million (Statistics Canada, 2016), Calgary – the location for the study presented in this chapter– is the largest city in the province of Alberta and a global center of the oil and gas industries. In a report on the spatial distribution of income inequality, Townshend et al. (2018) demonstrate that much of the wealth of Calgary is concentrated in the inner city, while low-income and very low-income groups are increasingly concentrated in the Eastern and Northeastern parts of the city. I provide a detailed description of the ways in which poor groups and individuals in the Greater Forest Lawn area try to cope with experiencing poverty and how this relates to their views on local attempts at economic development of the area.

Chapter four ventures to a rural context, describing the everyday lives and views of people experiencing long-term and

intergenerational poverty in the rural region of the Groninger Veenkoloniën. In a Dutch context this region is considered 'as remote as the Netherlands gets', in the words of *Financial Times* journalist Simon Kuper (2018). The Groninger Veenkoloniën are located only forty kilometers from the city of Groningen. To illustrate the Dutch notion of 'remote', this is a slightly shorter distance than it would take to travel from the southernmost part of the city of Calgary to the north of the city. This chapter identifies and describes structural and social factors that explain the struggle of a group of people experiencing long-term and intergenerational poverty to break the cycle of deprivation.

Chapter five provides extensive reflections on the ethnographic approach I used and developed during the three case studies. This chapter takes a closer look at the suitability of ethnography as an approach to generate comprehensive knowledge of the interactions between everyday practices of poor and marginalized groups and socio-spatial inequality. Incorporating a participatory approach to ethnography helped me to firmly ground the findings and conclusions on socio-spatial inequality presented in this thesis in the lived realities of people experiencing poverty. This way this thesis adds insider perspectives based on lived experiences to academic debates on socio-spatial inequality and socio-spatial development.

Chapter six is the final chapter, which compares and contrasts the findings from the three ethnographic case studies in the city of Groningen, the city of Calgary, and the rural region Groninger Veenkoloniën. Based on ethnographic evidence from the case studies, the overarching proposition of this thesis states that attempts to improve the disadvantaged areas through design, policies, and interventions fail to align with the everyday practices of poor and marginalized groups. What ensues is that already poor and marginalized groups are pushed further towards the spatial and social edges of society,

thereby perpetuating and exacerbating a trend of growing socio-spatial disparities. From this rather grim overarching conclusion, I present thoughts and insights on how to achieve more inclusive socio-spatial development.

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2

The time and place of social mixing

Everyday rhythms of long-term residents and newcomers in a Dutch neighborhood

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Abstract

Despite research questioning the beneficial effects of social mixing interventions, urban governments continue to strive for a social mix. In this chapter we examine the effects of social mixing through the concept of rhythm. We paint an ethnographic portrait of a disadvantaged area in the city of Groningen, The Netherlands, which was subject to a social mixing intervention. We analyze everyday rhythms of newcomers and long-term low-income residents in order to shed light on the effects of the mixing intervention on perceptions of social division and disadvantage. By introducing 'exemplary' newcomers, the social mixing intervention improves the area in terms of e.g. livability scores and socio-economic indicators. However, looking through the lens of rhythm, we found how social divisions between advantaged and disadvantaged groups become exacerbated as a result of 'arrhythmias' occurring. We argue that institutional actors fail to align the social mixing intervention with long-term residents' daily rhythms, which impinges upon that group's right to the social production of their neighborhood. On a wider scale, we assert the social mixing intervention renders the problem of socio-economic disadvantage spatially insignificant under the guise of improved livability. Therefore, we implore future urban policy to explicitly imagine the ways in which socio-spatial interventions might affect daily rhythms of inequality within neighborhoods.

2.1 Introduction

The Netherlands has a longstanding history of urban policies that aim to decrease neighborhood inequality and promote inclusive cities. Among the most prominent of planning tools to achieve more inclusive cities are social mixing interventions (Musterd et al., 2017; Uitermark et al., 2007; Van Gent et al., 2018; 2009). Such interventions aim to improve social indicators of spatially defined areas, e.g. neighborhoods, to increase livability and to mitigate inequality (Boterman and Van Gent, 2014; Galster, 2007; Musterd & Andersson, 2005; Nast & Blokland, 2014; Uitermark, 2003; Van Gent et al., 2018, 2009). Despite the widespread employment of social mixing interventions, the ways in which they address neighborhood inequality have been subject to serious academic scrutiny (Chaskin and Joseph, 2015; Lees, 2008; Smets and Sneep, 2017; Walks and Maaranen, 2008).

Scholars have argued that social mixing erroneously operationalizes indicators of inequality at the aggregate level of the neighborhood, while the social production of inequality in fact unfolds within neighborhoods (Mayer et al., 2016). Some extend the critique by stating that social mixing creates new processes of inequality within the neighborhood whereby particularly disadvantaged socio-economic groups and individuals are excluded from the promised opportunities and benefits (Smets and Sneep, 2017; Van Gent et al., 2018). However, how such new processes of inequality exactly unfold on an everyday basis has been less researched.

To address how processes of inequality unfold, we use the concept of rhythm, which according to LeFebvre (2004) originates at the intersection of time, space, and the expenditure of energy. Following these lines, we consider rhythm as a collective of repeated practices in particular places at particular times. In geography, the

temporal-spatial concept of rhythm is viewed as a shaping factor in the social construction of spaces (see Edensor, 2010; Lefebvre, 2004). It stands to reason that social mixing, through actively altering the social composition of places, affects the everyday rhythms of these places. Although previous research has connected rhythm to socio-spatial processes such as gentrification (Kern, 2016) and ageing (Lager et al., 2016), there is a lack of in-depth qualitative investigations that approach social mix through the concept of rhythm.

In this chapter we aim to gain insight into the ways in which social mixing affects everyday neighborhood rhythms. To achieve this aim, we paint a detailed ethnographic portrait of everyday life in a disadvantaged area in the city of Groningen, The Netherlands, which was subject to a social mixing intervention. Grounded in four months of close observations and complemented by in-depth qualitative interviews, we describe everyday experiences of newcomers and long-term low-income residents. These experiences are analyzed through the lens of rhythm in order to shed light on the effects of the mixing intervention on experiences of social division and disadvantage.

2.2 Social mix

The principal idea of social mixing is to change an area's social composition in order to create more opportunities and benefits for all its inhabitants, in particular for the more vulnerable community members. Its fundamental aim is to achieve more equal and inclusive cities (Blokland, 2002; Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Galster, 2007; Musterd and Andersson, 2005; Nast and Blokland, 2014). The assumption underlying social mixing is that by disassembling spatial concentrations of disadvantage and by creating mixed neighborhoods, vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups will be more easily

connected to social resources that could improve their situation (Galster, 2007; Hoogerbrugge and Burger, 2018; Nast and Blokland, 2014). Another common motivation to employ social mixing interventions is as a type of emergency measure to pacify tensions that threaten the social order, i.e. criminal activity, drug and alcohol abuse, and disturbances (see Van Gent et al., 2018). There is a longstanding academic debate on whether social mixing indeed creates individual opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

Many scholars contend that there is enough evidence of beneficial effects of social mixing to perhaps justify its continuation in urban policy. Similar to the critique on social mixing, scholars that stress positive effects of social mixing also refute the notion that mixed social networks and reciprocal exchange yield the promised benefits of social mix. Instead, they argue that in the long-term, disadvantaged households benefit from the presence of more advantaged groups in their neighborhood through role model example, increased neighborhood control over social disorder, gradual decline of neighborhood stigma, and ultimately increased livability (see Galster, 2012; 2007; Fraser et al., 2013; Galster and Friedrichs, 2015; Miltenburg, 2015; Permentier et al., 2009).

Critics of social mixing put forward a variety of critiques, most commonly calling into question the assumed mechanisms of social capital building through the development of mixed networks and reciprocal exchange. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that social mixing interventions often do not align with the interests of community members and consequently may harm the area's social cohesion (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014; Uitermark et al., 2007; Van Kempen and Bolt 2009). Furthermore, some scholars assert that social mixing is a form of state-led gentrification, not aimed to increase land rents or revenues per se, but often to pacify tensions regarding the social order and an area's livability (see Kipfer and

Petrunia, 2009; Rosol, 2015; Uitermark et al., 2007; Van Kempen and Bolt, 2009; Van Gent et al., 2018).

Despite the mounting warnings against the negative effects of social mixing policies, municipal governments in The Netherlands and in most other Western countries continue to vigorously employ social mixing (Van Kempen and Bolt, 2009). Most research and theories on social mixing focus on the spatiality of neighborhood changes, or so-called 'neighborhood effects' (Galster, 2012; Sampson et al., 2002). However, although social mixing interventions also have temporal implications, these have received far less attention (see Schwanen and Kwan, 2012). Viewing neighborhoods as social spaces, social mixing interventions have far-reaching consequences for the dynamics of social space. Social space is understood to encompass material aspects of place such as the composition of housing, services and facilities, as well as social, symbolic, and affective features e.g. social cohesion, inclusion, exclusion and neighborhood identity (Kern, 2016; Mazer and Rankin, 2011).

A prominent debate has emerged identifying the process of social mixing as 'gentrification by stealth' (see Bridge and Butler, 2011; Chaskin and Joseph, 2015, 2013; Lees, 2012). Similar to state-led gentrification, the gentrification by stealth states that disguised forms of gentrification are nurtured in cities in the Western world. This type of gentrification is often justified by policies that, at first glance, proclaim to promote social, spatial, and economic development – such as social mixing, creative cities, and livability policies. Even though mixing interventions can also benefit more vulnerable socio-economic groups, e.g. through improved housing conditions and service provision, Davidson and Iveson (2015) argue mixing remains very much a class-based policy vested in politics and power relations. The capacity of newcomers in mixed neighborhoods to define neighborhood identity and control local politics, inevitably leads

to forms of displacement of particularly lower income residents who generally do not possess the political, social or economic capital to influence neighborhood changes (see Marcuse, 1986). Elliott-Cooper et al. (2020) advance the notion that displacement constitutes a process of un-homing in which the connections between people and place become challenged at different speeds and scales. Following this notion, one does not have to be physically displaced to be un-homed (see also Davidson, 2009). Therefore, in the case of social mixing, adding new social groups to an area might cause a process un-homing for groups that do not possess the power to influence changes to their neighborhood. Looking at the impacts of social mixing on everyday practices within disadvantaged neighborhoods therefore entails looking at changing relations between residents and their neighborhood as well as the local power geometry.

2.3 Rhythm, power geometry and social mix

Many geographers have emphasized the importance of rhythm in the production of social space (see Edensor, 2010; May and Thrift, 2003; Thrift, 2003). Everyday neighborhood rhythms consist of the everyday spatial and temporal dynamics that construct social space (Edensor, 2010; Lefebvre, 2004). Everyday rhythms are constructed from repeated temporal orderings and spatial arrangements of human activity (Jarvis et al., 2016). In Rhythmanalysis (2004) Lefebvre explains how daily routines of human activities at particular times in particular places, and the interaction between these routines, construct a rhythm of everyday life. An example of rhythm is how parents go to the playground with their children on Saturday afternoons. In a neighborhood context, multiple local rhythms unfold

simultaneously and interact with each other, thus giving shape to a 'neighborhood rhythm'. For instance, the playground which parents and children visit during the day, can be a place for young people to hang out a night. Simpson (2008: 812) elaborates on how different rhythms within a neighborhood merge into one to produce a 'social whole':

> *(...) multiple habitual routines accrete into a social-habitual formation in the city streets, buildings, or other social spaces—a fusing together of rhythms of various individuals' pre-discursive habitual movements and time-space routines into a general social order.*

Lefebvre (2004: 90) writes about cyclical and linear repetitions that form rhythms. These two types of rhythm are inextricable but according to Lefebvre should nonetheless be distinguished and separated by rhythm analysts. Cyclical rhythms are easily understood through examples of day blending into night, the changing of the seasons, or the shifting of the tides. Linear rhythms are the product of social and human activities and are defined 'through the consecution and reproduction of the same phenomenon', (Lefebvre, 2004: 90). Whereas cyclical rhythms always contain a new beginning, e.g. a new sunrise, linear rhythms are best viewed as a point of departure within a schema or trajectory, each reproduction adding to the previous. The inextricability of both forms of rhythm might be understood through an example of a metro line. Each journey, the metro line travels back and forth between two end destinations. This is a cyclical rhythm. Within the cyclical journeys between the two end stations, many linear rhythms exist, because each journey – from station to station – represents a linear rhythm.

Expanding his theory, Lefebvre (2004) puts forward various states in which rhythms interact with each other and the degree to

which they 'fuse together'. A state of polyrhythmia develops when multiple rhythms co-exist and are tolerated by each other. When multiple rhythms are in harmony with each other, when they positively connect or complement each other, a state of eurhythmia is achieved. However, in the case of negative interaction between multiple rhythms, such as a disruption or disturbance of any particular rhythm, arrhythmia occurs, which might cause tensions and conflicts. Returning to the playground example: as long as both parents, children and young people do not alter the spatial configuration of the playground, both their rhythms may co-exist. However, when young people leave waste or make excessive noise, which would impinge upon the way parents and children would use the playground, this may result in arrhythmia.

In a previous section we underlined that to understand the effects of social mixing on everyday rhythms, one must look at local power geometries. Lefebvre's writing on 'right to the city' deals explicitly with the political dimensions of everyday life that constitute the extent to which city dwellers have the right to shape their cities (Lefebvre, 1996). Drawing on Lefebvre's framework, Chaskin and Joseph (2013) have closely examined how, synchronous to positive effects of mixing, new tensions occur regarding norms and expectations around the daily use of neighborhood space because of social mixing. Considering these findings, it seems that various neighborhood rhythms become at odds with each other as a result of introducing new residents through mixing. Particularly low-income residents feel their ways of life become pressured (Chaskin and Joseph, 2013). In terms of the right to the city debate, it is important to ask the question as to how democratic the mixing process is as well as how daily neighborhood rhythms and perceptions of neighborhood space are affected.

We view rhythm as a process adding to the social production of space rooted in processes such as exclusion, otherness, and power relations (Lefebvre, 1991; Reid-Musson, 2018; Simpson, 2008). In a study focusing on experiences of ageing in place, Lager et al. (2016) found how diverging temporal and spatial rhythms of older and younger neighborhood residents inform their experiences of place and evoke senses of division and otherness. Examining gentrification from a rhythm perspective, Kern (2016) found that through the reorganization of neighborhood social life, new rhythms are introduced which become dominant and thereby exclude and marginalize more vulnerable community members and their claims to the neighborhood. These studies show how neighborhood rhythms interact with social experiences. However, it is unknown how social mixing intersects with neighborhood rhythms and how it relates to the development of polyrhythmia, eurhythmia, or arrhythmia.

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Study setting

The housing corporations have a mandate from the municipal government to improve livability. Livability is defined in terms of objective and subjective indicators in the following dimensions: the physical environment (e.g. types of dwellings, public and green spaces), the social environment (e.g. population composition, social interactions and cohesion) and safety (e.g. criminal activity, disturbances) (Leefbaarometer, 2018). The area in which we conducted the study has long been characterized by low levels of livability. Over the years, multiple policies and interventions have been implemented in the area to improve livability, particularly aimed at the safety dimension.

When looking at the 2002 to 2016 period livability scores of the neighborhood in which our study area is located (see Figure 1), we see that these interventions seem to have been effective. However, we also see an area, which – despite the surrounding neighborhood remaining stable – continues to score poor in terms of livability. It was in this area that in 2013 the mayor of Groningen issued a ban on meetings in the public spaces due to increasing reports of neighborhood disturbances pertaining to e.g. drug use, drug dealing, noise, intimidation, alcohol use, loitering and littering (Municipality of Groningen, 2013). This is also the specific area in which this study took place. In terms of spatial structure, the area breaks with the typical design of the wider neighborhood, which is characterized by cul-de-sacs with mostly terraced or semi-detached single-family dwellings, typically lining a public green space. In contrast, the studied block of streets consists of a large five-story gate-building containing studio apartment, a wide street with a long monotonous line of three-story tenement buildings, two back streets with terraced houses, and four semi-detached dwellings.

Over a period of two years, since 2015, the two housing companies, which own all dwellings on the block except for the owner-occupied semi-detached homes, deviated from the conventional appropriation of dwellings by applying a 'labeling' intervention aimed to achieve a balanced local social mix. The intervention is regarded as an emergency measure, only warranted in special circumstances such as (extreme) social disorder. As opposed to the conventional appropriation of available units according to a waiting list or special urgency, the social mixing intervention allows housing corporations to handpick new tenants according to criteria determined by the housing corporations. Over the last two years, so-called 'strong tenants' have been moving into available apartments. The two criteria for 'strong tenants' are: first, proof of steady income or enrolment in an educational program; and second, a certificate of conduct,

attesting to a clean criminal record. It is important to recognize these criteria for new renters are determined solely by the housing corporations. Judging by the criteria, the mixing intervention aims to achieve a socio-economically mixed neighborhood and focuses explicitly on the safety dimension of livability.

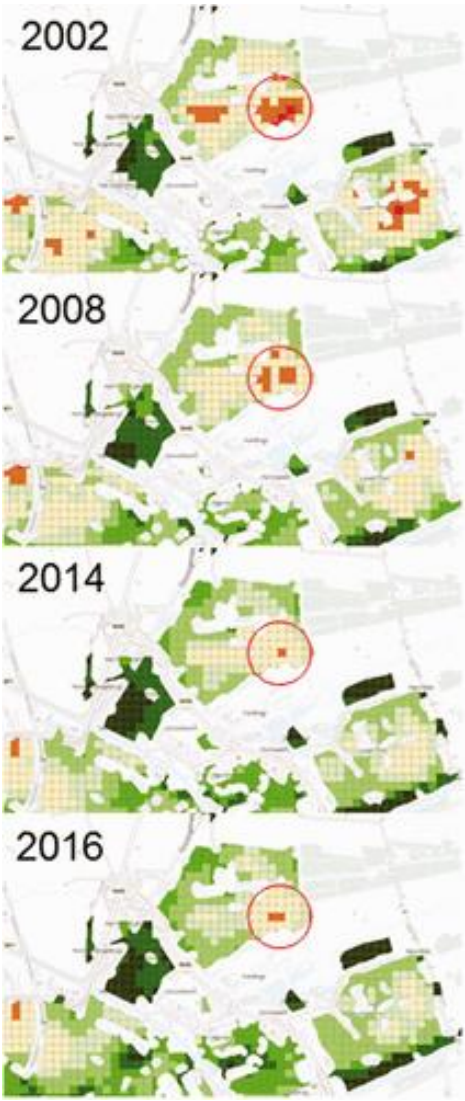

Figure 1 Livability scores for the study area from 2002 to 2016. Red indicates low livability, green indicates high livability (Leefbaarometer.nl, 2018).

2.4.2 Research methods

The data collection for this study is based on four months of field research undertaken from April to July 2017 during which the field researcher resided in the studied area. The core methods consist of participant observations involving 30 study participants, complemented within-depth interviews with residents (10) and professional stakeholders (6); two municipal government officials; an employee of the local housing corporation; a local journalist; and the two founders of a local faith-based organization (FBO) which organizes social events for neighborhood residents. The interviews were conducted in Dutch and the quotes in this chapter were translated by the field researcher, who is fluent in both languages.

To get a comprehensive image of the rhythms unfolding in the area, the initial two weeks of data collection consisted of systematic observations of street activities conducted during daily walks twice a day, which lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. The first week the walks took place in the early mornings and early afternoons, the second week the walks were done late in the morning and late in the afternoon/early evening. During these walks, street activity was counted, mapped and their nature was described. For instance, the field researcher would count the number of people that were interacting in the area, where the interaction took place and what type of interaction it was e.g. greeting, conversation or other.

The systematic observations were followed by more engaged participant observations, during which the field researcher participated in daily activities such as dog walking or an Easter brunch organized by the local FBO. Repeated informal unstructured interviews with area residents were conducted, as a part of these participant observations. The participants were recruited mainly through encounters in the streets during systematic and participant

observations. By becoming more engaged in local social life and by tagging along with initial participants and meeting new residents, the group of participants grew rather organically.

The informal interviews conducted as part of the participant observations were characterized by their spontaneity in the sense that they resembled everyday conversations, with the important distinction that the researcher attempts to direct the conversations to themes related to the study. The field researcher consistently documented observations and discussions from informal unstructured interviews in field notes, the writing of which simultaneously acted as data collection and preliminary data analysis. This dual function of documenting observations is rooted in the observer's role as the primary cognitive instrument of data collection, thus directing and shaping fieldwork and data and requiring constant analysis and assessment (Goodwin et al., 2003; Schensul et al., 1999).

Observations, field notes and transcripts of the in-depth interviews were categorized taking a grounded theory approach. From this first categorization rhythm emerged as a relevant conceptual frame for analysis, after which a focused coding scheme regarding rhythm was used to give analytical meaning to our findings.

2.5 Newcomers and long-term residents

As a result of the social mixing intervention that had been carried out in the study area, two distinct groups of residents live in the study area: newcomers and long-term residents. These groups shaped the selection of resident interviewees.

The long-term residents interviewed are Olivia, Hannah, Lucy, Claire, Harry, and Lydia. Olivia and Lucy were between 30 and 50 years old, Hannah, Claire, Harry, and Lydia older than 50. All long-term residents, except for Harry and Lydia who are retired, were on income support at the time of the study. Also worth noting is that Olivia, Hannah, and Claire were recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction. By no means should this characteristic be regarded as representative of the group of long-term renters, although the incidence of similar or related personal issues does seem to be higher in this group.

The newcomers are a group of residents that has been introduced to the neighborhood through the social mixing intervention. George, Katy, Amy, and Joan make up the group of newcomers. All of them had been living in the studied area for less than 3 years and were all under the age of 30. George and Katy are a cohabiting couple and were interviewed together. Amy also lived together with her partner but was interviewed alone. Joan, too, was in a relationship but did not cohabit. All newcomers were employed or enrolled in a degree program at the time of the study, except for Katy, who had recently graduated and was looking for employment. George was working besides his studies.

The distinction between newcomers and long-term renters will be upheld throughout the presentation of the findings in this chapter. Although the internal characteristics of these two groups vary – e.g. in terms of ethnicity, personal interests, and histories – contrasting them was found to be illuminating when considering the impact of the social mixing intervention on neighborhood rhythm.

2.6 Producing a social space through neighborhood rhythms

From the systematic observations of street activities, it became clear that most everyday street activities serve a clear and sole, often functional, purpose – predominantly transportation (by foot, bike, scooter, or car) through the area. Peak moments of street activities were expectedly observed during mornings and late afternoons when employed neighborhood residents would leave for and return from work. Encounters as a result of these functional street activities, which might result in social interaction, were seldom observed. The participants ascribed the lack of encounters and social interactions in public spaces to the area's poor quality of space – in particular around the line of tenement buildings. Participants discuss a lack of places to sit or dwell, which makes it almost impossible to pleasantly pass time in the street.

Besides the uninviting nature of public space, many participants pointed out how a large share of the apartments have bedrooms (and bedroom windows) at the street side and have the living rooms, kitchens, and balconies – where people spend most of their time at home – facing private gardens at the back of the buildings. Some bedroom windows, particularly those on street level, are blacked out, to ensure a degree of privacy. Lucy explained why she has her bedroom curtains permanently closed: *"That's where I undress and try to sleep. I don't want any people looking in."* Although understandable from the perspective of a resident, when experienced from the street, the blacked-out windows contribute to a perception of an impermeable boundary between the public street and the residential units and thus evoke a sense of abandonment – a 'not very social' environment, as Harry put it.

Joan addresses another obstacle for pleasant neighborly interactions that has its origin in the public space of the area. Nightly social activities in the street undertaken by certain groups hamper her good night's sleep. She recalls that during some nights scooters drive by and people have (loud) conversations, which, to her, often sound like arguments. This adds to a perceived awareness that there are activities occurring in the street that Joan does not want to take part in, thus posing a barrier for Joan to engage in local social life altogether:

> *I don't exactly know what people are doing driving around on their scooters and speaking loudly with each other in the middle of the night. (...) I suppose they live in the street too. (...) I never talk to them. That's not exactly a group I am interested in getting to know better – ha ha.*
>
> *–Joan*

Joan describes how the activities heard overnight carry into the daytime where fellow residents encountered on the street are, identified as belonging to a group of 'disturbers', predominantly based on appearance and projection. Many participants underline this process by indicating how they are less inclined to interact with a projected 'other' in the street. The different rhythms of people who go to bed before midnight (e.g. because they have to work in the morning) and those who stay out on the street until after midnight become problematic through the spatial design of the street due to the bedrooms located on the street side. To a group of residents, the bedrooms represent a space of quiet, peace, and rest, while to another group the street bordering those bedrooms acts a space for nightly encounters. As such a conflict of rhythms, i.e. arrhythmia, between the two groups emerges, even in the absence of direct social interaction.

Hannah provides further illustration of this process while telling about how nightly activities on the street increase during spring and summertime:

> *The last one and a half months, as it's getting warmer, it's becoming noisier on the street... Well ...I don't spend a lot of time in my bedroom. Usually I sleep when I'm in there. (...) Anyway, I hear people at night. Yelling at each other or something. Having a quarrel. (...) I don't know these people; maybe it's just one wrong character that lives here. But I hear them.*
>
> *–Hannah*

Hannah adds an important seasonal dimension to the temporality of neighborhood rhythm. Also, she describes how the different rhythms of local groups are further exacerbated by the spatial design of the area with the bedrooms facing the public space. Hannah and Joan both provide examples of disruptions of their daily rhythms that negatively affect local socialization processes due to evocations of division and otherness – understandings of 'us' and 'them'.

Providing strength to the suggestion that a spatial and temporal mismatch can exacerbate perceived social divisions are observations that exhibit the opposite – how an alignment of spatial arrangement and temporal orderings in fact are able to promote local interactions. The adjacent line of tenement buildings, which are designed with the living rooms, kitchens, and balconies facing the street provide an example. Participants on this side of the street exhibit more awareness about what happens in the street. Not only do they see more of what happens, they tend to interact more with people in the street as well. Social interactions do not necessarily take place in the shared space of the street but can also occur on the public-private

interface. For example, many greetings were exchanged between people out on their balconies (smoking or enjoying the weather) and people walking or biking through the area. Such brief exchanges hardly seem meaningful – seeing how they do not usually develop into conversations or deeper, more meaningful interactions – nonetheless; they provide an important base of mutual familiarity with residents in addition to direct interaction opportunities.

Because the balconies serve as spaces used for leisure and relaxation, residents typically spend prolonged periods of time on them. Furthermore, they are in direct contact with and sight of public space. Therefore, the probability of interactions occurring – both intragroup and intergroup – is much higher. This illustrates how brief, but nonetheless repeated periods of overlap in spatial and temporal dimensions of daily rhythms – i.e. polyrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004) – create an integral prerequisite for local intergroup socialization in the shape of a base of mutual familiarity and tolerance.

2.7 Eurythmia: Trust, support, and reciprocity among local dog owners

While conducting the fieldwork, the social interactions of a network of local dog owners were witnessed. To better observe the nature of these interactions the field researchers 'borrowed' his in-laws' dog called 'Max'. While walking Max, he managed to connect to the group of local dog owners and observe the exchanges between them firsthand. Striking was the level of acquaintance local dog owners have with each other. Most dog owners greet each other while

passing, usually exchanging quick phatic interactions, such as: "Hey, how are you?" or "Lovely weather today, isn't it?"

Better-acquainted dog owners exhibit the habit of engaging in longer conversations on their walks, while the dogs get a chance to engage in playful interaction. The nature of some of these conversations reveals supportive elements associated with neighborhood social capital and social cohesion. For example, when one of Lucy's dogs passed away after a period of illness, several local dog owners expressed their solidarity and sympathy toward her. Not only did they provide emotional support during difficult times, they also kept regularly checking in with Lucy to see how she was coping. Lucy has a reputation for going on alcoholic episodes in times of emotional turmoil. After the passing of her dog, she also had a string of drinking days, which was noticed by an observant dog owner and neighbor. He told her he had not seen her walking the dog for a couple of days, which made him wonder how she was getting by. Lucy responded that she was still very sad, "But not to worry" she added: "I am so shaken up that I can't eat. I can't even drink [alcohol]!" – specifically communicating the inability to drink to be a positive thing. The man and Lucy had a big laugh about the remark after which Lucy mentioned it also was a good thing she could not eat, because that way she could save money for the dead dog's urn. In an earlier conversation, Lucy had disclosed that the combined sum of euthanasia and the urn for her dog would amount to around 200 euros – quite a hefty sum for a woman living off a debt-related allowance of 60 euros per week. Then, in a more serious tone, the man told her that if at any time he could help by taking her remaining dog out on a walk, she should not hesitate to ask him. Although Lucy did not seem intent on taking him up on his offer any time soon, she expressed her gratitude for the gesture. The conversation concluded with Lucy remarking that by the time she would get the urn with her dog's

cremated ashes, she would return to her normal self. "All right, take care," the man said as he continued his walk.

Dog owners are able to overcome the spatial impediment for frequent contact posed by the poor meeting qualities of the area's public space through the perceived moral obligation to take care of their pets – to go out and walk their dogs. As long-term resident Claire expressed:

> *If you want to get to know people around here, you need to get a dog. (...) People meet each other on the street walking dogs, and the next day they are drinking coffee together. (...) Like my neighbors here [points to an adjacent balcony]. They are also very social with other dog owners around here and have people over all the time.*
>
> *–Claire*

Claire's quote illustrates how characteristics in individual context, i.e. keeping a dog, create a different interaction with the local context in terms of temporal orderings and spatial arrangements. Indeed, the local environment is where the dogs need to be walked (regularly) and where dog owners consequently encounter each other. Given sufficient repetition over time, these encounters during dog walks amount to a social stability from which meaningful social relationships can be built. On an individual scale, there are signs that keeping pets can add to an individual's capacity to engage in local social life through increased self-esteem and self-worth. For the most vulnerable groups such as those with debts, very little financial means, or recovering addicts, keeping pets – through aligning them with existing local rhythms – can serve as a vehicle for social rehabilitation. Like in Olivia's case, who owns many pets:

Interviewer: "Why do you keep so many animals if I may ask?

Olivia: [long pause] "That's a very good question ... That's a very good question ...I don't know...It feels like family. Something I can look after – take care of. So ...They need you. (...) That's nice for a change."

–Olivia

For the most vulnerable participants, taking on the responsibility to take care of animals can be a type of crutch – a coping strategy to avoid the breaking point of falling back into blurry and chaotic daily rhythms associated with drug and/or alcohol abuse. The group of dog owners shed light on how an alignment of temporal orderings, e.g. structuring the day around dog walks, and spatial arrangements, e.g. which spaces are used for dog walks, promotes local social interactions and social stability. Given time, through stability and repeated interactions, this alignment may result in more meaningful social exchanges and add to exchanges of instrumental or emotional support – i.e. dog owners stick together and keep an eye out for each other.

2.8 From rhythms to networks

All participating newcomers indicate that they had no trouble easing into a routine in their new neighborhood. Some of the newcomers told us that they had several good friends already living in the area who also opted to move to the area as part of the social mixing Meij et al. 11 intervention. This resulted in daily rhythms that were partly intertwined, through social activities, as well as more practical support, as Katy explained:

We have so many friends living here now ...I will ask for a casserole or a pan for soup from our friends down the street. Because ... Well, I can just enter their apartment, I don't even have to ring the bell and ask if they maybe have what I need. I already know they have it, so I can just come in and take it.

–Katy

Katy's example illustrates how her 'happy local network' of previously acquainted newcomers removed the need to establish new local contacts. In this sense, instrumental support within the group of newcomers results in barriers for local socialization between newcomers and long-term residents. When further looking into barriers for social interaction between newcomers and long-term residents, it is relevant to note that most newcomers feel hesitation to personally address long-term residents on – to them – abnormal or disturbing behavior. There is also no real need to do this, as disturbances are easily reported online with the relevant authorities, such as municipality and housing company: "I frequently report if there's litter on the street by sending a message on WhatsApp to someone working for the City. The last couple of months I made a report every week," George remarked.

In this system, residents are encouraged to keep reporting, because only in the case of enough reports the problem becomes viable to address However, anonymous reporting removes the incentive to engage in efforts to collectively negotiate and uphold local social norms of, in this example, a clean street. In contrast with newcomers who embrace anonymous reporting, long-term residents share an understanding about not reporting neighbors to institutions without first talking to the person(s) causing the disturbance in person. During fieldwork an incident occurred where Lucy, who had

been drinking, made a bonfire on the patch of grass behind her (ground-level) apartment. It had rained in days before, causing a lot of smoke to emanate from the wet kindling she used. At least one disgruntled neighbor reported the fire to the police and after a while the police turned up, requesting Lucy to put out the fire. She complied with that request, but later explained how she felt resentment toward her neighbors since they had not asked her in person to put out the fire – something she claims she would have happily done.

The same mechanism of anonymous reporting that equips George and the woman who reported the bonfire with the opportunity to exert indirect social control hampers opportunities for collective problem solving and the developing of mixed local networks. Consequently, we argue, social boundaries between the two groups are reinforced.

2.9 Diverging prospects: Rhythms from a life course perspective

The diverging rhythms in the studied area are strongly represented in diverging prospects and plans between long-term residents and newcomers. Unlike the group of newcomers, long-term residents typically do not feel they have a realistic option of moving to a new house. Olivia, for instance, explained how she always thought her place in the area would be a stepping-stone – a transition home, much like how newcomers describe their residency in the area – to move up the housing ladder. In this sense, Olivia views her residence in the area as part of a linear rhythm, i.e. trajectory, which would lead her to a place in a better neighborhood. That transition never happened due to substance abuse-related problems and connected

financial issues. Being presently unemployed and a recovering alcoholic, she perceives no viable opportunities to move out:

> *My mother would like to see me live elsewhere. She still thinks this is a 'transition apartment'. She often asks me when I will move. (...) Do you have any idea how much that will cost me!? First of all, I would pay around 100 euros more in rent [per month]. Also, I'll start with a bare house; I would have to put in floors – ha ha! – and probably a lick of paint. Minimum. That's just not realistic. So that's that.*
>
> *–Olivia*

Olivia laughed ironically while listing all the financial impossibilities of moving to a new house. When she mentions putting in new floors, it is important to see this in the context that her current apartment does not have flooring everywhere. Whereas long-term resident Olivia has no realistic choice other than to stay put, newcomers like Joan, George, and Katy perceive a wider variety of options as they are typically in the process of obtaining a degree or in their first job. This causes the group of newcomers to feel confident in their capacity to be able to move to a new house when necessary or desired.

With a little imagination, the diverging prospects of groups of newcomers and long-term residents reflect the different rhythms of the respective groups seen from a life course perspective. Newcomers' relation to the neighborhood tends to reflect the unpredictable nature of the life stage they are in, in which many perspectives open up in terms of employment, relationships and family planning. Therefore, this group tends to invest little in becoming part of the neighborhood in social respects. The rhythms of long-term residents are typically more stable in a negative sense, in terms of financial

and/or social problems. This means they have less perspective on moving out and therefore invest more in the social life of their neighborhood.

In addition to the perceived assurance of housing mobility prospects, there is also an institutional foothold that favors newcomers to deal with potentially undesirable neighborhood situations. Joan, George, and Katy point to an example where one of their friends, who was only recently appointed an apartment in the street, has been guaranteed another house outside the study area if she experiences disturbance from a neighbor. In effect, prospective new residents are offered a free pass to try out living in a disadvantaged area without any danger of getting 'stuck' there. Meanwhile, residents who have lived in the area for longer often have no realistic opportunity to move away in case of serious neighborhood disturbances. As such, an already more advantaged group is further empowered, thus deeper carving out the social divisions between advantaged and disadvantaged residents.

2.10 Discussion

This chapter set out to gain insight into the ways in which social mixing affects everyday neighborhood rhythms in a neighborhood in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. We conclude that in our study area, daily rhythms of long-term residents and newcomers at best coexist alongside each other. More often, however, these rhythms are in tension with each other. The daily rhythms of long-term residents are subject to pressure through the introduction of newcomers' rhythms. They feel their ways of living are not accepted by the newcomers. The newcomers are empowered to challenge the ways of life of long-term residents through online reporting methods. In addition, they receive preferential treatment. As a result, the power

geometries are strongly tilting towards the housing corporation/ Meij et al. 13 municipality and newcomers, and the long-term residents are further disadvantaged. Overall, our findings underline that mixing social groups in a neighborhood does not result in mixed social networks, confirming earlier research on the effects of social mixing (Chaskin and Joseph, 2015, 2013; Hoogerbrugge and Burger, 2018; Lees, 2008; Smets and Sneep, 2017; Van Gent et al., 2018; Walks and Maaranen, 2008).

Systematic observations of street activities exhibited how incompatible everyday rhythms are in friction with each other and create arrhythmias. We found that, for instance, a group of residents prefers to sleep during the night, as they want to go to work or study well rested. This contrasts with the rhythm of another group of residents, who like to hang out on the streets at night. Such diverging rhythms pose major barriers for intergroup socialization. Through arrhythmias, strong senses of social division and generalized projections of 'us' and 'them' develop. Furthermore, we found how anonymous methods of reporting transgressions in the neighborhood through institutional channels have an extra inflammatory effect on the senses of division and marginalization for the group of long-term residents. By encouraging newcomers to report disturbing behavior the housing corporation to achieve its aim of quieting down the neighborhood to improve livability. However, because the reporting is often aimed at behavior that is considered normal by long-term residents, this group feels seriously marginalized in the neighborhood they have often lived in for many years. We argue that due to the repeated choices by housing corporations to benefit newcomers over long-term residents for the sake of livability, the latter group is confronted with a process of un-homing (see Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020).

In contrast to the arrhythmias observed between newcomers and long-term residents, we found that coinciding everyday rhythms within the two groups of participants contributed to a sense of harmony within social networks. For long-term residents, an example of such a rhythm was found in walking the dog a couple of times per day. These findings confirm that spontaneous, yet repeated interactions establish complementary rhythms that harness social networks of trust, emotional support, and stability (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Galster, 2012; Lefebvre, 2004). For newcomers, this was found in borrowing cooking utensils and other items from each other, as well as in informal gatherings.

An important contribution of this chapter is the identification of a particular manifestation of rhythm represented in the group of newcomers that has a significant effect on the social dynamics of social mix. Viewing rhythms from a life course perspective, the sense of division between long-term residents and newcomers, becomes even more prominent. The newcomers are typically in a life stage where they are looking ahead, for instance to their first job, to buy a house, to establish a family. Their rhythms are characterized by a plethora of opportunities and an upward trajectory in terms of socio-economic status. To cap it all, newcomers are even given guarantees by the housing companies to move out in case the neighborhood is not to their liking. This is in sharp contrast with the rhythms of the long-term residents, that spiral around unemployment, financial difficulties and (recovering from) substance abuse. Their rhythms are characterized by a lack of opportunities, and often a sense of being 'stuck' in the neighborhood. We argue that the advantaged mobility prospects of newcomers contribute to the neighborhood's transitory character. This is important, as research has shown that a transitory character of a neighborhood is disadvantageous for local social stability (Bergstrom€ et al., 2010; Bolt et al., 2008). Furthermore, we assert that through the social mixing intervention, newcomers are

systemically advantaged over the group of long-term residents, whose mobility prospects are very limited.

Our findings show various scales at which neighborhood rhythms are affected through the social mixing intervention. In turn, changing neighborhood rhythms were found to highlight senses of social division between groups of newcomers and long-term residents through various forms of arrhythmia. Zooming out, by introducing 'exemplary' newcomers, the neighborhood as a spatial unit might improve in terms of the livability indicators used by housing corporations and the municipal government. Even inequality between neighborhoods might seem adequately addressed at an aggregated scale. However, looking through the lens of rhythm, we found how perceptions of social division between advantaged and disadvantaged groups are in fact exacerbated because of the social mixing intervention. In this sense, the social mixing intervention renders the problem of socio-economic disadvantage less significant in a spatial sense under the guise of improved livability. We argue this is problematic because we found the struggles and hardships of the group of long-term residents remain unaddressed.

Among the housing corporations and municipal government, a widespread assumption exists that by increasing safety a more livable neighborhood is achieved. Ultimately a more livable neighborhood is regarded as better for all. However, in this case the social mixing intervention is completely imposed on long-term residents, which entails they are sidelined by more powerful institutional actors in finding an answer to the question what would improve their neighborhood for the more disadvantaged groups, i.e. long-term residents. We argue that institutional actors failed to make an effort to align the social mixing intervention with long-term residents' daily rhythms thereby impinging upon that group's right to socially produce their neighborhood. Even though, as a consequence of social mixing, the

neighborhood is perceived as quieter and perhaps safer, through the concept of rhythm we found clear signs that long-term residents feel more alone in and alienated from their neighborhood. Therefore, we implore future urban policy to explicitly investigate the ways in which socio-spatial interventions will affect every day rhythms of inequality within neighborhoods, and make serious efforts to restore the right of disadvantaged groups' (i.e. long-term residents) to socially produce their neighborhood.

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3

‘Everywhere they are trying to hide poverty’

Spatial practices of the urban poor in Calgary, Canada

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Abstract

Globalizing cities such as Calgary, Canada's center of the oil and gas industry, are confronted with increasing socio-spatial inequalities and uneven development. The aim of chapter three is to comprehend poverty in the disadvantaged area of Greater Forest Lawn (GFL) in Calgary through everyday spatial practices of the urban poor and to examine how these practices are affected by urban developments in the area. We provide an in-depth ethnographic account of everyday routines and social conventions of people experiencing poverty in GFL. Our findings reveal how spatial practices that enable poor residents in GFL to meet basic needs are precariously balanced with many intersecting social, spatial, economic, and political structures. They also portray how many residents feel new developments in the area attempt to hide the presence of poverty by oppressing the undesirable aspects associated with it. Consequently, GFL as a social space is increasingly torn between the spatial practices of those trying to cope with poverty and the urban development which imposes a spatial code of desirability and consumption. Consequently, we see urban development in the case of GFL as oppressive and recommend a shift from thinking about urban development in terms of desirability and profitability to becoming more aware of and involved in local practices. Overall, we argue that the right to the city includes the right to urban development in harmony with one's own everyday spatial practices.

3.1 Introduction

Globalizing cities are confronted with increasing socio-spatial inequalities and uneven development (Townshend et al., 2018; Peck, 2014; 2012). In times of austerity, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged neighborhoods are hit hardest by neoliberal urban development and funding cuts. Peck (2012) states that austerity measures offload social and environmental consequences to local communities resulting in an increasing ineptitude of government to control growing socio-spatial disparities. The city of Calgary, situated in the historically conservative and oil-rich province of Alberta, Canada, is faced with similar challenges. Since the 2019 provincial elections, after four years of center-left provincial government and increased investments in social services, Alberta is once again governed by a conservative government preparing to drastically cut back on spending, particularly in the public sector (Bellefontaine, 2019). Furthermore, due to a crisis of affordable housing (see Domaradzka, 2019; Townshend et al., 2018; Okkola & Brunelle, 2018), socio-spatial disparities in Calgary continue to increase. In the southeastern quadrant of the city lies the Greater Forest Lawn area (henceforth GFL), historically one of Calgary's most disadvantaged areas. GFL is the focus area for this ethnographic study.

Against the backdrop of austerity and growing socio-spatial disparities, academic interest in the concept 'right to the city' has grown. The right to the city is commonly understood as the right of urban inhabitants to be involved in the democratic production of urban space (Shillington, 2013). In recent years, the right to the city – a term coined by Henri Lefebvre (1991) and embraced by David Harvey (2008) – as a political and social ideal has been adopted on a global scale by governments, NGOs, and, most passionately, by grassroots social movements in their endeavors for social justice and

combatting socio-spatial inequality (see Mayer, 2012; Attoh, 2011; UN-HABITAT, 2010; UNESCO, 2006). The idea of the right to the city has influenced debates concerning unequal socio-spatial transformations within cities driven by capitalist and neoliberal forces and raises the fundamental question to what extent the poor possess a right to their city.

Academic writings on uneven urban development commonly focus on understanding the characteristics and unequal outcomes of socio-spatial transformations for different groups (see Townshend et al., 2018; Sampson et al., 2002). Even though Lefebvre draws explicit attention to everyday social interactions as the main component in the production of urban space, everyday practices in poor urban neighborhoods remain less often studied than e.g. urban policy and urban development (see Duff, 2017; Martin, 2003). The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to comprehend poverty in the GFL area through everyday spatial practices of the urban poor and then to examine how these practices are affected by urban developments in the area. We provide an in-depth ethnographic account of everyday routines and social conventions of people experiencing poverty in GFL. In the findings section we first paint a detailed picture of the spatial practices of our participants in order to contextualize and understand the impacts of urban development on those practices in GFL. Our findings portray how spatial practices of poor are disrupted and oppressed by urban development in GFL. We argue the right to the city entails the right to urban development in harmony with one's own spatial practices.

3.2 Right to the city and urban space

In their critique on the effects of capitalism on urban spaces, both Harvey (2008) and Lefebvre (1991) advance the concept of the right to the city. Most writings represent the right to the city as referring to a freedom for urban dwellers that extends beyond a right to merely access urban resources to the collective right of citizens to exert influence over the urban processes that shape their city. Having the right to the city therefore entails the opposite of urban transformations, whether they be social, physical, or political, that are imposed upon citizens while the latter are denied the possibility to influence these transformations (Huisman, 2014). Furthermore, the right to the city does not exist in ephemeral moments of public engagement. Instead, the right to the city is negotiated in the everyday and originates from lasting and trusting relationships between multiple actors (Pierce et al., 2016).

The idea of the right to the city should be understood vis-à-vis the changing nature of the economies of cities, widely researched in urban studies (see Peck, 2014; 2012; Florida, 2014; Zukin, 2012). From the mid-twentieth century onward, industrial economies made way for an economy built on cultural production and consumption, revolving around producing and consuming services and experiences. In contemporary capitalist societies, urban spaces are designed to promote the consumption of these services and experiences, ultimately to make a profit. As David Harvey (2008, p.1) states: "we live in a world, after all, where the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights one can think of", and the quest for profit is widely regarded as the primary catalyst

for increasing urban inequality (see also Peck, 2012; 2014; Kohn, 2004).

According to Lefebvre (1991), urban spaces often produce services and experiences that are not affordable for or accessible to everyone, thereby denying certain groups their right to the city. Indeed, according to Lefebvre (1991), the right to the city fundamentally concerns the redistribution of products of an inherently unequal capitalist system and a reclaiming of the city by the oppressed classes. Consequently, urban space should be seen as a relational concept involved in the production and reproduction of social structures, social action, and relations of power and resistance (Kudva, 2009; Gotham, 2003; Giddens, 1991). Since urban development plays a key role in the shaping of urban space, it is also crucial to consider the ways in which urban development respects people's right to the city. Where powerful actors in urban development - such as planners, developers, and corporations - ultimately control new developments in cities, they cannot, Sharon Zukin (2012) argues, control how diverse groups experience and make sense of their city. Thus, the extent to which urban development upholds residents' right to the city depends largely on the ways in which people perceive and experience urban development and urban spaces.

There is a wide range of work that criticizes the revanchist nature of urban development because it commonly attempts to background homelessness and poverty due to their undesirability for economic development (see Dozier, 2019; Goldfischer, 2018; Speer, 2019; Collins & Blomley, 2003). Duff (2017) calls for a more explicit focus on affective dimensions of the right to the city – how the right to the city is embodied and performed in the context of everyday life. Home and housing are considered a base from which everyday life is structured and crucial in achieving privacy, social justice and the right to the city (see Munoz, 2018; Langegger & Koester, 2016;

Sparks, 2010; Klodawsky, 2009; 2006; Mifflin and Wilton, 2005). Munoz (2018) states that housing and home are currently not central in discussions on right to the city, while home is where urban dwellers are able to create stability, access urban resources, and take part in the social life and development of cities. Consequently, home and housing are fundamentally important for everyday spatial practices. Research by Klodawsky (2006; see also Hwang et al., 2011) demonstrates that particularly vulnerable groups struggling with mental health and/or substance abuse find it difficult to find housing stability in Canadian cities. In an ethnographic study among homeless in Denver, Colorado, Langegger and Koester (2016) stress the importance of having access to public urban space for marginalized groups such as the homeless. They found a ban on camping in open spaces in Denver resulted in a deprivation of the right to the city of homeless because it exposed them even more as visibly homeless due to a lack of a stable space to create a home. Research in Fresno, California (Speer 2019), finds that promoting urban aesthetics and economic development benefits middleclass consumption practices, while displacing vulnerable population such as the homeless. Simultaneously, Speer (2019) argues that the focus on urban aesthetics induces practices of resistance, which promote collective use and reuse of urban space that is more conducive to all urban residents instead of just the middle and upper classes. Similarly, Deverteuil (2014) calls for research on urban injustices to not only focus on the punitive consequences of urban development, but to also conceive of the complex and ambiguous ways marginalized groups are supported in small scale projects and social structures that co-exist with capitalist urban restructuring.

3.3 Spatial practices

Since urban space is to be regarded as a social relation in larger social, economic, and political structures, it is important to consider and reflect on its meaning to different actors. Lefebvre (1991) argues that urban spaces imply a diversity of social knowledge and that they contain acts of production able to illuminate systems of oppression. A fundamental component to the production of space are spatial practices, which unfold in everyday routines, social interactions, and social conventions (Watkins, 2005; Lefebvre, 1991). Spatial practices encompass the ways in which people use and perceive space, thereby infusing space with social meaning and producing a social space (Stewart, 1995). Evidently, they do not produce a singular space but rather simultaneously produce different or even conflicting renditions of 'social space'.

Social space corresponds to 'everyday discourses' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.16) which differentiate certain spaces and the spatial practices that constitute and express them. In everyday discourse, social spaces may have a straightforward description and corresponding set of spatial practices. Through language, spaces such as 'parking lots', 'bedrooms', and 'grocery stores' generate what Lefebvre calls spatial codes. Even so, there is no point in emphasizing spatial codes to dissect social space, simply because there is no singular spatial code for any one space. Rather, Lefebvre (1991) once more stresses the dialectical nature of spatial codification. Nevertheless, spatial codes can be deconstructed. Deconstructing spatial codes entails looking at the spatial practices that produce space as a process in which opposing forces compete to impose a spatial code. In certain spaces one might find signs or practices aiming to enforce a spatial code, which automatically indicates the existence of oppression of spatial practices conflicting with that spatial code. Arguably, well-designed, and

inclusive urban spaces do not require spatial codes to be forcefully imposed as they will allow for a multiplicity of spatial practices.

Similar to spatial codes, it is important to recognize that social space cannot be reduced to a singular abstract and objective form, nor should it be seen as a fixed and concrete concept. Rather, social space is the outcome of a multiplicity of production processes, i.e. spatial practices, rooted in meanings, values, and ideas. Lefebvre (1991, p.106–107) writes that a reduction of social space results in oppression of the capacities, ideas, and values of certain groups. Therefore, spatial practices, in all their potential harmonies and contradictions, produce a social space which reflects the power dynamics and injustices embedded within social structures. Indeed, other scholars concur that space is a crucial point of reference in the production and reproduction of inequalities (Gotham, 2003; Giddens, 1991).

In times of increasing neoliberal urbanism and eroding social welfare systems (see Peck, 2012; 2014), the ways in which urban development results in forms of oppression are often reflected in consumption practices, e.g. 'the enjoyment of the fruits of production' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.73). Studies by Shaker and Rath (2019; 2017) on the consumption of specialty coffee show that consumption related to lifestyle as well as urban spaces can reveal ways in which people demarcate class lines. Other research suggests that urban neighborhoods with a poor or rough image are increasingly becoming sites for gentrification, tourism, and consumption (see Füller & Michel, 2014). These processes are not necessarily accompanied by a displacement of vulnerable groups but can nevertheless cause a sense of oppression and 'loss of place' (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015), or indeed, a deprivation of peoples' right to the city.

3.4 The case of Greater Forest Lawn

Calgary – Canada's fourth largest city – is situated in the province of Alberta on the brink of where the prairies on the East transition into the Rocky Mountains on the West. For the past century, Calgary's economic development has been characterized by a transformation from a regional center for beef and agriculture to a global center for the fossil fuel industry. Although the fossil fuel industry has enabled the city to grow and brought it much wealth, economic growth in Calgary has certainly not been linear. Dependent on global oil prices, Calgary's economy follows turbulent boom bust cycles. In times of booming oil prices, the city experiences tremendous increases of capital investment, construction, wages, and immigration. However, boom cycles typically also lead to rising housing, living costs, and growing social, economic, and spatial inequalities (Townshend et al., 2018).

Various reports on inequality and poverty in Calgary stress that one of the most conspicuous social challenges facing the city is the growing socio-spatial polarization, which is firmly rooted in a lack of affordable nonmarket rental housing (Townshend et al., 2018; Okkola and Brunelle, 2018; Miller & Smart, 2011). In a report on socio-spatial polarization in Calgary, Townshend et al (2018) signal a strong decline in the share of middle-income census tracts accompanied by a rising share of low- and very-low-income tracts, increasing from 11%in 1970 to 33% in 2010. In terms of the spatial distribution of declining income, Townshend et al. (2018) identify a growing concentration of low- and very-low-income people in suburban neighborhoods, particularly in the East and Northeast of the city.

This study is set in Greater Forest Lawn in East Calgary (see Fig. 1). Approximately fifteen percent of the GFL population relies on some sort of social assistance (i.e. receives their income from government benefits), which is much higher than the rest of Calgary and the province of Alberta as a whole (Wilkins, 2019; Peterson, 2013). 'Enough for all' is Calgary's poverty reduction policy, which advocates strong, supportive, and inclusive communities, sufficient income, and resources for all Calgarians, and the inclusion of Indigenous in Calgary's future (Vibrant Communities Calgary, 2019). 'Enough for all' aligns with Canada's first nationwide poverty reduction policy named 'Opportunity for all' (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). Effective from 2018, the policy focuses on three pillars: dignity, opportunity and inclusion, and resilience and security. 'Opportunity for all' also sets an official measure of poverty called the Poverty Line, based on the minimum income individuals and families require to meet their basic needs and achieve an acceptable standard of living in their communities.

Historically, the GFL area suffers from low investment by local government (Peterson, 2013), although since 1993 investments have been made in the designated 'International Avenue Business Revitalization Zone' (BRZ) along 17th Avenue Southeast. To combat the reputation of East Calgary as a haven for drugs, crime, and alcohol, the BRZ focuses on celebrating the area's rich ethno-cultural diversity. On their website (intlave.ca), 'International Avenue' (17th Avenue) is promoted as the cultural and culinary capital of Calgary. The overarching aim of the BRZ is "to promote, improve and create a more pleasant community in which to shop and live" (International Avenue BRZ, 2020). Over the years, the BRZ has transformed the avenue in significant ways, i.e. the implementation of a crime prevention and safety plan (increased policing and community crime watch), the demolition of a trailer park to create space for retail, land-use changes that promote retail, and a major restructuring of the

avenue as part of a comprehensive transportation policy. While at first glance these changes seem to promote a safer, cleaner, and more attractive environment, our findings will show that many of these changes solely benefit economic development while oppressing our participants' everyday practices. In many ways, 17th Avenue Southeast can be regarded as the commercial center and main street of the area. Always busy with cars, 17th Ave Southeast stretches from the Eastern city limits through the central part of the study area to the major roadway Deerfoot Trail in the West. A central lane is dedicated to a bus rapid transit line called MAXPurple which takes riders to the downtown area. These elements make 17th Avenue Southeast an important traffic artery. Furthermore, along the avenue many social service agencies, shops, businesses, and restaurants are located, making it an important social and economic hub.

3.5 Methodology

This chapter is based on an ethnographic study, the core method for which was participant observation. Over a period of six months low-income residents of GFL, many of whom on social assistance, were observed in their daily lives. Considering the fluidity of participant observation, it is difficult to determine a precise sample size. However, to illustrate: encounters with 69 individuals were recorded in the field diary, approximately 30 of whom had been spoken with on a regular (weekly) basis. Observations were recorded in a handwritten field diary and subsequently logged into a digital field diary to make computer-assisted qualitative analysis possible. In addition to the participant observations, seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted with GFL community members consisting of seven men and ten women, ranging in age from twenty-six to seventy-five. While the participant sample contains individuals from a diversity of ethno-

cultural backgrounds including Canadian, Indigenous, Chinese, Filipino, French-Canadian, and African, our findings focus on the similarities in spatial practices, rather than the differences. Furthermore, one focus group discussion was organized in which seventeen community members participated. The group discussion was titled 'Claim Your Space in Forest Lawn' and preliminary results of the study were used to set up a discussion about how participants view new developments in GFL. As agreed in the informed consent forms signed by all interview participants, pseudonyms were used for all participants quoted in this chapter. Analysis of spatial practices followed an open coding scheme, which were later categorized into the practices described in the next section. The spatial practices were subsequently analyzed against the right to the city literature.

Deliberate efforts were made to recruit participants in an organic way. These entailed the field researcher dedicating much time to becoming a familiar face in GFL to win trust and build rapport. Volunteering at various initiatives that supported residents in meeting basic needs was an important part of the strategy. For most of the six months of fieldwork, the field researcher volunteered at: a cooking program set up to share indigenous knowledge, feed community members, and build community; a community-driven network of free food pantries to support residents struggling to meet food needs; a free shower program serving community members without ready access to sanitation; and an activist group consisting of members with lived experience of poverty. Traversing the boundaries of GFL, the latter group advocates the views and needs of people facing poverty citywide. Considering the principal aim of ethnography to give voice to excluded and marginalized groups (Ellis et al., 2011), we decided to foreground the spatial practices (everyday routines, social interactions, and social conventions) of a group of individuals struggling to meet their basic needs, specifically food security, shelter, and hygiene. Considering these factors, individuals who were homeless or

became homeless over the course of the study were also included, although most participants were housed. We refer to this group of people living below the poverty line and struggling to meet basic needs as 'the urban poor' (see Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018).

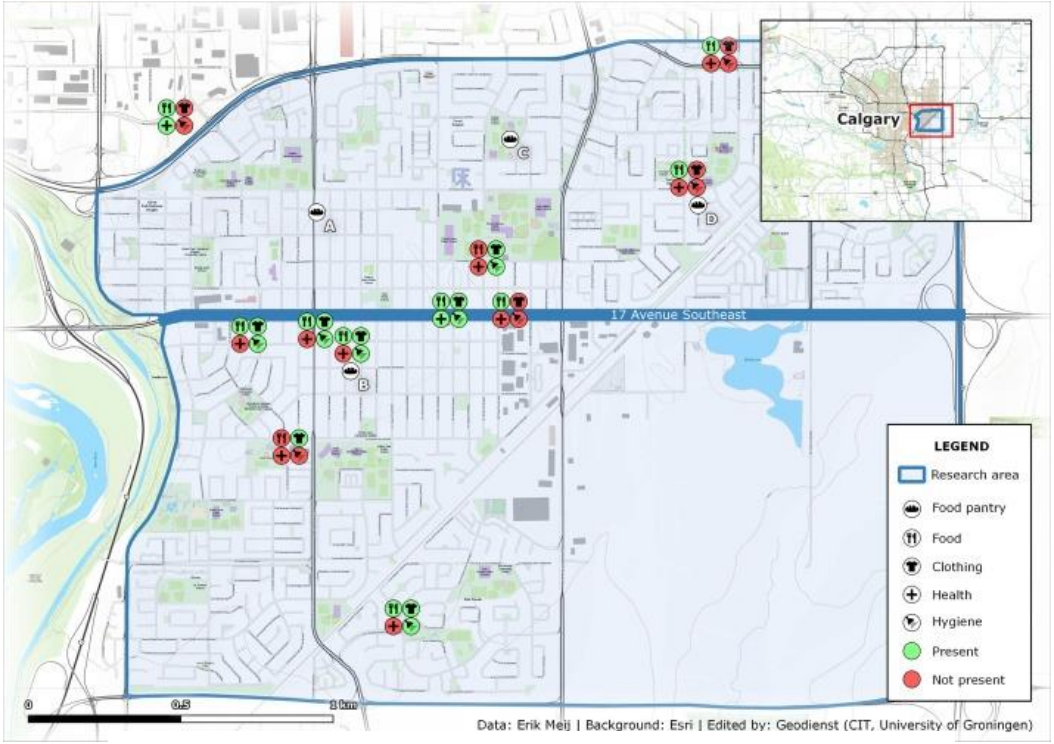

Figure 3.1 The area comprising Greater Forest Lawn with the service providers and food pantries our participants frequently visit. Map design by Geodienst (CIT, University of Groningen).

3.6 Spatial practices in GFL: The struggle to meet basic needs

In the following section we describe the spatial practices of participants, comprising participants' daily routines, social interactions, and social conventions. The daily routines of all participants revolve around getting by, i.e. meeting basic needs. For most participants who receive social assistance (income support) we found that almost their entire income is put toward rent. Subtract the rent from the total income and for most, there is little money, if any, left to be able to afford anything else – including groceries. As a consequence, many participants are so absorbed by attempting to meet the most basic of needs, such as food, hygiene, and housing, that there is simply not enough time or energy in a day to start to pursue a better future, i.e. employment or educational opportunities. For readability, the section is divided into four subsections discussing practices which emerge from the analysis as the most defining for the daily lives of our participants: food practices, housing practices, mobility practices, and the social dynamics that revolve around coping, exclusion, and competition.

3.6.1 Food practices

Janis and David shared their weekly schedule with us, which is predominantly determined by visiting places in the GFL area that offer food and other basic needs.

> David: "Our weekly schedule is dictated by finding places to take a shower and places to eat. (…) We often walk four or five hours a day to visit all

> the places where they offer food or showers. (…) Most days we manage. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday we come to the food center, Fridays we go to the arena for showers… Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays they have meals at the church."
>
> Janis: "Yeah, but Saturdays are the worst! Nothing is open on Saturdays. We hardly ever eat on Saturday."
>
> –David and Janis

The meals at the Food Centre and church are only offered once a day. The couple explained how they carry as many leftovers as they can to ensure they can have two or even three meals on most days of the week. Similar stories were shared by more participants, as well as observed by the field researcher. For most participants, taking leftovers from free community meals and food programs is absolutely necessary to meet an acceptable level of food security. It is also a time-consuming process due to traveling and the time required to partake in the programs. Storing leftovers was another complicated process, in particular for participants who were experiencing homelessness at the time of this. For instance, David explained how keeping perishable food items during summer is almost completely impossible due to the absence of refrigeration. In winter the cold temperatures can help to keep food frozen, although the abundant wildlife in and around the city also provides challenges to this way of storing food. David shared the following anecdote on this subject: *"One night we brought some fried chicken back to the tent and buried it under a pile of snow. The next morning, we couldn't find the chicken, but we did find chicken bones scattered around the site. Those damn coyotes had found our stash and ate the chicken!"*

Janis and David's story illustrates the complexity of the basic needs struggles that many of the participants face. Each individual and household faces a different set of challenges in different socio-cultural contexts in terms of meeting basic needs. Challenges in one domain unavoidably pose challenges in another. The difficulty to meet basic needs for Calgary's low-income population is widely recognized by municipal government and non-profit organizations combating poverty. GFL's many resources and programs designed to aid people experiencing poverty to meet basic needs are a testimony to this awareness. To most participants, however, the resources and programs make it possible to only just meet basic needs. Moving beyond basic needs to work on a better future is hardly an option.

3.6.2 Mobility practices

All of our participants who rely on public transit as their main mode of transportation describe using it as a time-consuming and frustrating process. Participants mentioned poor connections, delays, and poorly accessible stops as their main frustrations. The area has seen many changes in terms of public transit since the construction of the bus rapid transit lane on 17th Avenue. Most participants detest the changes - in particular the construction of the new central bus lane. Tina, a woman in her sixties, explains how there used to be more bus stops located along 17th Avenue. For Tina, who, like some of the other participants, has impaired mobility, fewer bus stops means that it is a lot harder to walk to the nearest stop. Additionally, the bus stops are now located in between busy car lanes, meaning participants must cross the street before arriving at the stop. Traffic lights also do not seem to favor pedestrians on 17th Avenue. Many participants described missing the bus while waiting for the light to change. Dolly rather accurately summed up participants' frustrations with public transit in GFL.

"The bus routes... [Calgary Transit] say it's easier. I say F-no! Ha ha. They say they have made it easier, but it is actually harder. They made the center lane but only half the buses use it, the other half still use the regular lanes. So it's like, what's the point? You are not decongesting traffic and now you have this meridian that keeps cars from turning and people have to cross all the time. (...) It's a waste of money. It has actually made it worse. It has made it harder for pedestrians. Harder for people in wheelchairs and walkers. And it's even harder for vehicles! Like, did they pay attention to people who use it? Did they ask anybody?"

– Dolly

Dolly's explanation demonstrates how participants feel the changes to public transit are imposed on them, without taking their experiences into account. As a result, some participants refrain from using public transit altogether. Such is the case for Joan, who claimed she walks everywhere by choice because it keeps her healthy. She also expressed that it limits her options to access support resources offered within her neighborhoods. When the field researcher probed her if her reluctance to use public transit really was by choice, indeed to 'stay healthy', or that there perhaps was another motivation for not using public transit, she admitted that the low-income transit pass at a price of twelve dollars per month was simply too expensive for her. Generally, participants who refrain from using public transit remain within the GFL area during a typical week. Therefore, regardless of their true motives for not using public transit, the fact that participants prefer to not use transit places a renewed emphasis on support and resource provision within and between the neighborhoods. Because the bus rapid transit line in the center of 17th avenue

predominantly promotes to get riders to the downtown area, and makes fewer stops than the traditional bus line, it does not benefit participants who wish to travel within the GFL area.

3.6.3 Housing practices

Because all participants in this study rely on some form of income support, they spend almost their entire income on housing. For many participants this creates extremely precarious housing situations. Incidental costs related to health care, education, fines, or even mundane issues such as birthdays can cause a month's rent to be missed. Over the course of the fieldwork multiple participants drifted from being housed to homelessness. Becoming homeless is accompanied by serious risks, especially during the harsh winters in Calgary. It is therefore striking how some of the participants who had experienced or were experiencing homelessness expressed their preference for rough sleeping over staying in shelters, most of which are in the downtown area. They explain how, to them, downtown represents a very insecure environment, because police frequently arrest the homeless loitering near office buildings, but more importantly because they perceive the downtown shelters and service organizations as a very competitive environment. Carole and Tina both described how, in the shelter, they used to sleep on a chair with their legs pressing down in their boots, only to prevent the boots from being stolen while they were sleeping. Furthermore, many participants suffer from various forms of trauma and related mental health issues which impact their capacity to stay in large groups, such as in shelters downtown. Janis recounted how she clung on to a man to guide her through her time in the shelter, only to realize later that he was isolating and abusing her for money to buy drugs and alcohol. Janis' story illustrates how people's vulnerabilities are ruthlessly exploited in competitive environments such as the downtown shelters.

Those participants that did have housing for extended periods of time often express unhappiness with their living circumstances. Multiple participants lived in rooming houses during the study. Although some had no complaints, the majority experienced problems regarding other tenants, the relationship with their landlord, or finding peace and privacy in their home. Some participants mentioned sharing a house with people in abusive relationships or with persons battling addictions or mental health issues, all of which make for a problematic and unstable living situation. Participants also referred to landlords who failed to take care of the wellbeing of their tenants e.g. by taking a long time to fix broken pipes, by not dealing with mold issues appropriately, or by being negligent in terms of the overall upkeep of the house. Most participants experience a sense of frustration regarding a lack of peace and privacy within their home.

Some share how they do not have a key to their own room and therefore do not feel safe leaving their belongings there. Amy expressed how she felt she had no choice but to cohabit with an older couple to share housing costs. In exchange for a discount on rent, Amy agreed to provide informal care for the elderly couple. For Amy this arrangement eventually became too intense to handle. She describes how the lack of privacy triggered old mental health issues to surface, which caused her to temporarily move to a local hotel. Staying at the hotel cost her all the money she had managed to save from sharing the room with the elderly couple. Eventually, at serious risk of becoming homeless, she moved back in with her ex-husband with whom she admits she has a very troubled and unhealthy relationship.

> *"I had a difficult time finding a place for myself. That's why I'm back with [my ex-husband] now. I just didn't know where to look or who to talk to. (...) What I liked about the [hotel] was that I had*

a space of my own and had control over it, you know? That I didn't have to let anyone in, and the hotel staff backing me up on that. Not letting anyone up without my permission I mean."

– Amy

Amy's story portrays the impossible dilemmas many of the participants face regarding their housing situation. Generally, their housing practices show that our participants are exposed to a complexity of vulnerabilities in the struggle to find adequate housing. We found how mental health problems in particular can be exacerbated due to precarious housing situations. Furthermore, due to the (perceived) lack of housing options, participants are prone to becoming victims of questionable landlords, exposing them to even greater risks of becoming homeless, for example.

We also must consider the challenges that Calgary's climate poses in terms of shelter for the homeless participants. During an extremely cold spell mid-January 2020, temperatures remained well below minus 20 degrees Celsius for over a week (see Fig. 2). Some of the homeless in the GFL area indicated to stay within the GFL area and sleep rough, because they do not feel welcome in the downtown shelters as they rarely stay there and are consequently treated hostile by the other people staying there. Other participants refer to the common practice of strategically committing a petty crime to have shelter in jail for the freezing nights. During the mid-January cold spell many service providers in the GFL area shut their doors, forcing some people to take their chances by sleeping rough.

3.6.4 Social practices

GFL residents facing poverty exchanged stories and experiences among themselves, which instills a sense of solidarity and fosters reciprocal emotional support which is essential to participants' manners of coping with poverty. Furthermore, important forms of local knowledge are constructed within the community. In some cases, this local knowledge is very tangible information regarding the extensive and therefore sometimes incomprehensible system of resources and services in the area, e.g. which places serve free meals on which days or which agencies offer free haircuts. Participants also pass on more informal forms of local knowledge like which businesses along 17th Avenue will open their washrooms to the public, or which restaurants will allow people to have a meal on credit in case they are short on money.

In other instances, the local knowledge shared between participants refers explicitly to the social conventions that govern life in GFL. During an interview, Paul, an indigenous man, explained how one needs to be able to 'play a role' in tense social situations that can arise in the area. There are several gangs active in the area, including indigenous gangs. Paul explained how in brief encounters on the streets he wants to convey that he is to be respected, i.e. not to be harassed.

> *Paul: "I used to be involved in the gangs here. I was like the poster boy of an indigenous gang member (laughs)! (...) Not anymore. I am trying to take care of my family now. Keep them safe, you know? (...) There are desperate people here that will rob you if you show weakness. That's why you have to show they can't mess with you. Yeah. I have a look for that.(laughs)"*

Interviewer: "You, you look at someone a certain way? To scare them?"

Paul: "Yeah. Yeah. Well. You know. Back off! The look in someone's eyes will tell you if they're real or not. You can tell if someone has gone through serious shit."

– Paul

During a walk, the field researcher and Paul encountered a group of other indigenous males walking on the sidewalk. Paul made a quick hand gesture, extending his arm with his palm facing the ground. The field researcher inquired about the meaning of the gesture. Paul replied *"I told them that I am Blackfoot. From the plains."* Many similar types of encounters were observed that illustrate how participants draw on local knowledge and identities to negotiate safety.

To participants who grew up in GFL this local knowledge is instilled from an early age, as David described during an interview. David grew up in one of the now demolished trailer parks in GFL. He was a shy child, and often bullied because of it. Additionally, he comes from a family of bikers that has an intimidating reputation in the area. David describes how from an early age he has demonstrated an awareness of local social identities that provides him safety from within his family network, but which simultaneously isolates him from his peers. His story reveals the beneficial and harmful sides to local knowledge.

"So... What I did was... Whenever I was bullied or beaten by other kids, I would just run home as fast as I could! Because when they saw, they knew. When they saw where I lived, they usually left me alone. That was one of my ways to keep safe."

– *David*

David's quote illustrates how local knowledge, i.e. on different groups and identities, has two-sided and often dividing effects. On the one hand, he utilizes his family's reputation in the area and the biker identity to achieve a sense of safety. On the other hand, this same identity isolates him from most other residents who do not belong to the group of bikers. This way, the ethnic and cultural diversity of GFL creates a complex social space in which different groups develop different practices to cope with poverty.

Some participants suggested that different ethnic groups are in competition with each other over the limited resources available in the area. Our findings underline this notion that the restrictive nature of service provision to be an important source for exclusion from basic needs services as well as competition between different groups in GFL. Participants explain how services and resources tend to target specific groups defined by indicators such as age, gender, marital status, or household composition. Take for example the case of Saad, who blames his split from his wife and daughter on the fact that they were taken into shelters separately when they first became homeless. Shelters do not take in families as a unit, the men are usually given shelter at a different location. John describes the restrictive character of certain support services as follows:

> "Everything seems to be designed around drug users. We don't qualify. 'Sorry you're not a drug user!' 'Well, I am sorry!' (…) Also, we are a couple and prefer not to be split up. Couples also never qualify."
>
> – John

We observed how, in times of impending funding cuts, service providers were frantically looking for funding options to continue their

work and retain their employees. In fact, some agencies appeared so preoccupied with fulfilling the requirements of funders that serving vulnerable community members almost seemed a secondary objective. Our participants' stories illustrate how the fragmented and restricted landscape of service provision pushes them to make impossible choices between e.g. family and shelter, or love and housing. As a consequence, many participants develop a distrust toward some service providers as well as a tendency to rely on themselves and community networks to cope with poverty.

In general, the social dynamics of GFL show that to be embedded in community networks and having access to information on support and resources alleviates participants' experience of living in poverty in GFL significantly. Participants who grew up in the area all possess extensive community networks as well as a highly developed sense of local knowledge, providing access to important support and resources. However, highly developed forms of local knowledge and social and cultural differences also create divisions that cause exclusion from and competition over resources between certain groups.

3.7 Different meanings of poverty in place

Our findings demonstrate a highly conflicted picture of GFL as a social space. We found a widespread sentiment among our participants facing poverty, in which they find their understanding of poverty to be different from what is projected upon the neighborhood by outsiders and new developments. In this section, we illustrate the different and sometimes opposing meanings of poverty encountered in GFL.

Joni described her idea of poverty to resemble a spectrum – an analogy many participants understood – within which people facing poverty struggle to maintain what she referred to as 'dignity and respect' while constantly struggling to meet basic needs. Participants describe cases in which people experiencing poverty are faced with additional or aggravated adversity – e.g. losing a job or becoming homeless – and end up failing to meet personal hygiene and health standards, e.g. having regular showers, having a clean change of clothes, or maintaining oral hygiene. When basic hygiene and health standards begin to decline, the prospect of procuring a job or finding stable housing becomes even less likely. Participants who have trouble meeting these health and hygiene standards embody a rough image of poverty with which most people feel uneasy, which has consequences for the ways in which they are treated in public spaces.

Wanda provided an example of the sensory aspects of poverty, talking about a certain smell that evokes connotations to poverty. The 'smell of poverty' to which Wanda refers does not apply to everyone living below the poverty line. It naturally possesses various forms and is perceived differently by each individual, yet it is unambiguous and simultaneously highly stigmatizing. Even if equating a smell with poverty is far too generalizing and stigmatizing for individuals facing poverty, it is very much a part of the space that is Greater Forest Lawn to many participants, simply because it is encountered on a daily basis. According to Wanda, one encounters the smell frequently in the study area, for example on the streets, in buses, or in washrooms. For Wanda, as for other participants, these encounters are merely a fact of life encountered regularly in the area.

Participants refer to many more symbols that link poverty to the area. Most mentioned are expressions of mental health issues, e.g. people yelling or being aggressive in public; poor physical health, e.g. persons with impaired mobility or rotting teeth; addiction;

loitering; and prostitution. All these symbols contribute to a perceived stigma of the neighborhood. To most participants this stigma symbolizes how poorly the area is understood. However discomforting or painful, the same symbols that create the stigma also evoke a sense of common ground due to recognized and shared lived experiences in the area. In turn, this encourages reciprocity in terms of helping each other out and giving back to one another when possible. In this sense, despite all the prejudices and misunderstandings about the area, many participants feel relieved in their experience of poverty, simply because it is so prevalent around them. Diana describes how, in the struggle to maintain a sense of human dignity, notions of respect and common courtesy receive an elevated importance.

> *"There is a hierarchy in poverty that you will seldom see, but it is there. You will find a lot of people in poverty, whether they are on the street or just barely getting by, still demonstrating a lot of respect for each other. You will still see the courtesies shown. A lot of these homeless people will open doors for you and if you say 'thank you' you've just made their day! (...) When you don't have a lot to do with in terms of money, it's probably more about the social contact. It's like 'oh, maybe I'm not so bad because that person just said hi to me.'"*
>
> *– Diana*

In this quote Diana points to a human approach to poverty that many participants find lacking in their daily encounters with people on the street. It is the 'courtesies' that to many participants make a meaningful positive difference in the experience of poverty. Strikingly, Diana underlined the importance of one of the key priorities of

Calgary's urban and Canada's national poverty reduction strategy – dignity. In the next section, we describe how practices to maintain a sense of dignity are oppressed by the type of urban development along 17th Avenue.

3.8 Making the neighborhood look good

Neighborhood developments, such as the BRZ on 17th Avenue, are commonly the result of decisions made by local government. Often these decisions are in favor of so-called economic development and regeneration. Despite efforts by local government directed to achieve 'community consultation' or 'public engagement', participants express feeling excluded from the decision-making process regarding new development in their neighborhood. Amy explains how she feels community consultation often overlooks the most vulnerable groups:

> *Amy: "These things are always done in the usual places like there [points to a community association building] ... but they never come here, outside, like asking the people who stand outside. The people who don't ask for help anymore."*
>
> *Interviewer: "Who are those people?"*
>
> *Amy: "The people who don't believe it [their situation] will get better, who have given up looking for government to help them, who help each other."*

– Amy

Amy's story shows how most of the community consultation appears to be conducted in places with people who already find support. A group of individuals that are struggling to find the support they need are left out of the consultation process. Consequently, the structural exclusion of vulnerable groups is reinforced through community consultation, as poverty is repeatedly represented in ways already known to and supported by community resources and organizations.

Further evidence of this phenomenon was observed in the community assessments conducted by City of Calgary community social workers during the fieldwork period; most of the findings repeated the same issues of the previous community assessments. In addition to suggesting that current neighborhoods developments are ineffective in addressing the experience of poverty in the neighborhoods, the ongoing poverty issues also point to an enduring underrepresentation of a hidden target group. Most participants strongly identify with or recognize this 'hidden group' experiencing poverty. Their political and social exclusion from neighborhood developments evokes and reinforces sentiments of injustice, exclusion, and despair. Moreover, we argue it deprives them of their right to GFL.

As a result of consultation processes in which our participants do not participate or feel represented, their daily routines come under pressure because of new developments. According to most participants, these new developments give the impression of wanting to regulate the image of an impoverished area for it to become more attractive to outsiders. Some of the most notable changes in the area participants list are increased police presence pressing down on homeless, drug users, prostitutes, and loitering groups; the demolishing of trailer parks; fewer pawn and payday loan shops; and an increase in art installations along 17th Avenue.

Most participants do perceive an increased sense of safety because of these changes. At the same time, however, participants have a strong sense of hypocrisy surrounding the changes. During an interview, Nina expressed a widespread sentiment among participants of how poverty is an undeniable part of GFL, yet it is actively hidden from view through new developments. She provided an example of this while talking about a volunteer-run initiative seeking to help community members meet their food needs by placing free food pantries across the GFL area (see Fig. 3). Like small free libraries, people in need can access the free food pantries which are stocked with non-perishable food items by volunteers and residents. The initiative had been a success and the pantry team were looking to expand by adding more pantries. However, they encountered resistance in various ways.

> *"They didn't want the pantry near the entrance of the community hall because that would attract the wrong type of people. Yeah. You know [Cilla]? (...) She is like the owner of 17th Avenue. 'NO PANTRIES ALLOWED ON 17th AVENUE' [spoken in an announcing manner]. Attracts the wrong crowd. And this is what bugs me. Everywhere they are trying to hide poverty. I hate it!"*
>
> – *Nina*

For many participants Nina's description of 'hiding poverty' addresses their core concern about the area. Many refer to the various ways in which they feel pushed away, either passively by new developments, or actively by being removed from places they used to frequent. For instance, Janis and David had experienced several stints of homelessness and described how they were always being asked to leave certain restaurants, in their view based on their appearance.

This underlines our findings on the displacement and oppression of expressions of poverty for the sake of aesthetics and commerce.

To our participants, 17th Avenue is increasingly viewed as a site for the consumption of 'desirable' ethno-cultural diversity and even poverty itself. However, it hardly conveys participants' perceptions of what GFL represents. George phrased it rather succinctly: "the developments along 17th Avenue seem to benefit a more affluent population than the people who are in poverty." During the group discussion frustrations were voiced about so-called 'rich' people from the city's Southwestern quadrant who came to enjoy exotic cuisines in 'the hood', as it was phrased. What annoyed them particularly was that this activity provided these visitors with an image of open-mindedness and involvement in GFL, while participants argue they are merely consumers, adding nothing to the neighborhood. In this sense, the ongoing developments on 17th Avenue can be seen as the epitome of the displacement and marginalization of vulnerable groups in favor of more economically 'desirable' developments and those who want to consume the ethnocultural diversity. Consequently, GFL as a social space is increasingly torn between the spatial practices of those trying to cope with poverty and the new developments that impose a spatial code of desirability and consumption.

3.9 Discussion

In this chapter we described how the daily routines that enable participants to get by in life are precariously balanced with many intersecting social, spatial, economic, and political structures. Consequently, informal coping mechanisms represented in everyday spatial practices are easily disrupted or oppressed by changes to the neighborhood. In terms of everyday routines, we found overwhelming evidence that the challenges to meet basic needs take up a

significant part of every day. In general, the everyday struggles participants face were found to be deeply interwoven with each other. Hardships in one area, e.g. housing, inevitably cause new, or exacerbate existing challenges in other areas of life, such as food security and hygiene. The housing insecurity experienced by many of our participants – even if they were housed in e.g. a rooming house – removes a stable base of privacy and social stability to work on change and a better future city (see Munoz, 2018; Langegger & Koester, 2016; Sparks, 2010; Klodawsky, 2006; Mifflin and Wilton, 2005).

Our findings furthermore display how social identities play an important role in navigating the social service system as well as in negotiating safety and support in terms of meeting basic needs. Most participants perceive the social service landscape in GFL as restrictive and complex. It is worth noting that the impending funding cuts cause a deep sense of unrest among participants. Most of them worry about their ability to meet basic needs when funding for support service will be cut. The cold spell in Calgary mid-January, in which support services in GFL were largely unavailable, underlined the importance of local support structures within the area for our participants.

This chapter also sheds light on practices that assert the right to the city for poor, albeit in ambiguous and small-scale ways (see Speer, 2019; Deverteuil, 2014). Most importantly, we found how, in spite of the difficult living circumstances, to many of our participants GFL represents a safe haven – a place where it is acceptable to be poor, if only because many people around them are also poor. This creates a common ground of shared experiences resulting in GFL as an accepting and inclusive social space for those in poverty. Nonetheless, we argue that our participants' right to a safe and inclusive

GFL is continuously challenged by new developments and looming cutbacks in terms of local support provision.

The findings on symbolic meanings of poverty in GFL expose more ways in which participants' right to GFL is oppressed in favor of more economically desirable images of GFL. To most of our participants, new developments in GFL seem predominantly concerned with 'making the neighborhood look good' rather than making a positive difference in the daily struggles of residents faced with poverty. These findings reveal how 'unattractive' expressions of poverty are suppressed by new developments, ultimately pushing spatial practices belonging to poverty into darker, more obscure corners. Notably, our findings on the meaning of smell in our participants' daily lives underline the importance of smell and other sensory factors in the experience of poverty in place, which has been discussed in the developing body of research on 'urban smellscapes' (see Henshaw, 2013; Power, 2009). Furthermore, tensions between developments and lived experiences expose the ineffectiveness of public engagement efforts. Consider how, while the BRZ on 17th Avenue claims to actively engage the local population, the vast majority of our substantive group of participants feel their views and stakes are poorly represented – or even trodden on – in the BRZ's developments. Deconstructing the spatial code put forward by the 17th Avenue BRZ branded 'International Avenue' illuminates how our participants experience many forms of oppression and displacement regarding their struggle with poverty. We found how developments that promote consumption in the ethnically diverse restaurants and shops on 17th Avenue offer little room for informal local initiatives developed to assist residents facing poverty. As such, community members experiencing poverty increasingly feel that their views and needs are swept aside in favor of economic development. Based on our findings, we argue that the redevelopment of 17th Avenue attempts to hide signs and symbols of poverty due to their

economic undesirability. This argument aligns with the thesis that in our current system profit and private property prevail over 'all other notions and rights one could think of' – and indeed the right to the city of the urban poor (Peck, 2012; 2014; Harvey, 2008; Kohn, 2004).

Furthermore, stakeholders pushing new developments along 17th Avenue Southeast fail to meaningfully engage the local poor population, which thereby denies poor residents the right to negotiate changes to their neighborhood (see Pierce et al., 2016; Huisman, 2014). Instead, these stakeholders attempt to and succeed in effectively hiding poverty by removing the negative symbols and signs associated with it. We adamantly deplore this strategy, and instead recommend all stakeholder involved in urban development to invest in gaining an understanding of local practices, to identify coping mechanisms of people experiencing poverty, and to consider how interventions might support these practices instead of disrupt them. This requires a shift from thinking about development in poor areas in terms of desirability and profitability to becoming more aware of and more involved in local practices. In the case of GFL, Calgary, we recommend that the International Avenue BRZ should reconsider its strategy to celebrate the diversity of the area in such a way that it acknowledges instead of hides the poverty tied to GFL. We contend that a promising way to achieve this is to build lasting relationships with poor community members to achieve a deep understanding of their everyday practices, which is not realistic to achieve through ephemeral 'moments' of public consultation. We also recommend that during extreme cold spells some form of coordination of service and resource provision is set up within GFL to ensure the most vulnerable of residents are protected. Even when the economic climate in Calgary is as harsh as its winters, local government should play a leading role in safeguarding and coordinating these recommendations in future developments.

Ultimately, we argue that the right to the city in areas such as GFL comprises the right to urban development in harmony with one's own everyday practices. This way urban development aligns better with the Canada wide policy on poverty reduction because it helps those facing poverty to achieve a sense of human dignity and to feel acknowledged instead of being suppressed and pushed further to the margins of society. We argue that this view on the right to the city in urban development is an important step in sustainably addressing socio-spatial inequality. Perhaps even more important, this view opens up meaningful ways to harness existing strengths and inspire change from within areas such as GFL.

Figure 3.2 17th Avenue SE in Greater Forest Lawn, Calgary during a cold spell (photo by author).

Figure 3.3 A free food pantry in the neighborhood of Penbrooke (photo by author).

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4

Enduring rural poverty

Stigma, class practices and social networks in a town in the Groninger Veenkoloniën

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Abstract

In the Groninger Veenkoloniën, a former peat region in the northeast of the Netherlands, persistent poverty is more prevalent compared to other rural regions in the country. Grounded in participant observations and supplemented by in-depth interviews capturing the social life history of 21 participants, this chapter paints a detailed picture of the social networks and class practices of those experiencing persisting poverty in the examined town and surrounding region. In addition, we explore the relations between the rural context and lived experiences of class and poverty. Our findings highlight the complex experience as well as spatial embeddedness of persisting poverty. We find that, although the specific circumstances to which the participants are exposed vary greatly, the repercussions in terms of the characteristics of their social networks and practices are very similar. In general, the social networks of participants are fragmented and small, tightly knit, and characterized by clear power imbalances. The most formative experiences that result in the isolation of networks of poor are found to occur in the home and family situation during childhood years. We argue that poverty and the region's history are intricately interwoven resulting in a socio-spatial stigma which in turn contributes to the persistent and intergenerational character of poverty in the rural context of our study. Due to the long history of stigmatization, dismantling the socio-spatial stigma attached to the Groninger Veenkoloniën will presumably take multiple generations.

4.1 Introduction

In the years of economic upturn preceding the global COVID-19 pandemic, the share of households living in poverty in the Netherlands decreased slowly yet steadily (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2018a). Simultaneously, however, persistent poverty, i.e. households living in poverty for at least four years, was rising (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2018a). Historically, urban regions tend to exhibit higher concentrations of poverty than their rural counterparts. Therefore, it is striking that a number of Dutch rural municipalities show persistent poverty rates comparable to urban centers. The Groninger Veenkoloniën have always been relatively poor (Keuning, 1933). In this region, persistent poverty is more prevalent compared to other rural regions (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2018b; Edzes and Strijker, 2017). In the Groninger Veenkoloniën, the children of poor parents are likely to remain poor in adulthood (van Oosterhout, 2018; Edzes and Strijker, 2017). Research shows that both welfare dependency and persisting poverty have a strong intergenerational character Meyer et al. (2015); Moore (2005); Antel (1992). Why persistent poverty is so inextricably linked to certain rural regions and continues over multiple generations is still poorly understood.

The notion that poverty transcends economic definitions derived from e.g. income is commonly accepted. Concepts such as social exclusion and social capital have become inextricably linked to poverty and have consequently been the subjects of vigorous research. However, most empirical investigations into socio-spatial dimensions of poverty have been set in urban locales (see Rivera et al., 2019; Sampson et al., 2002). In contrast, notably less empirical investigation has been done into social dimensions of poverty in rural contexts – even though scholars have historically debated the differences in social dynamics between cities and the countryside, and in

fact used to describe urban and rural social fabrics as polar opposites (see Tönnies, 1887; Simmel, 1903). Affirming this notion is the growing awareness in rural studies that the role of the rural in social mechanisms underlying enduring poverty requires a better understanding (see Rivera et al., 2019; Edzes and Strijker, 2017; Shucksmith, 2012; Milbourne and Doheny, 2012; Meert, 2000).

This chapter takes an ethnographic approach to study persistent poverty in a rural town in the Groninger Veenkoloniën. Grounded in participant observations and in-depth interviews capturing the social life history of 21 participants gathered over the course of one year, this chapter paints a detailed picture of the social networks and class practices of those facing poverty in the studied town and surrounding region. In addition, we explore the relations between the rural context and lived experiences of class and poverty.

4.2 Persistent poverty and the rural

In any context, poverty is considered a complex problem with many different possible causes and intertwined with other problems including unhealthy lifestyles, obesity and diminished mental health (see Visser, 2016; De Meyer et al., 2015; Townsend, 2014; Lee et al., 2009; Moore, 2005). Although various definitions of poverty are used, in this thesis and chapter, which focuses on poverty in a Dutch rural context, we view poverty as a relative concept. Relative poverty, a term coined by Peter Townsend, rejects absolute classifications of poverty in terms of e.g. income and is therefore better suited to be applied in different geographic contexts. Instead, relative poverty revolves around the subjective experience of a lack of resources deemed necessary to achieve a life considered normal and

acceptable relative to the societies in which people live (Townsend, 2014 in Commins, 2004). A qualitative study among parents living in poverty defined in absolute terms indeed demonstrates that individuals and households have very subjective experiences and perceptions of coping with low income poverty (Besselink et al., 2013; see also Anderson, 2000).

As stated before, research shows that socio-economic and cultural factors are crucial in the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Meyer et al., 2015; Guiaux et al., 2011; Wagmiller and Adelman, 2009). Edzes and Strijker (2017) hypothesize a number of social mechanisms that potentially contribute to intergenerational poverty in the Veenkoloniën. Firstly, social norms that promote dependency on welfare and disregard for education are passed on from generation to generation; limited parental social networks restrict access to information e.g. about employment; limited intergenerational transfer of different forms of financial and human capital prohibit full participation in society (see Guiaux et al., 2011); and finally, institutional factors such as prejudices in educational advice or in social institutions exist, which inhibit upward social mobility. To better understand the potential mechanisms described above, the experience of poverty should be understood within the rural context (Woods, 2013).

Over the past decades, rural regions have undergone significant economic transformations in terms of diversification, agricultural intensification, and digitalization (Salemink et al., 2017; Strijker, 2005; Fuller, 1990). The European countryside has undergone uneven development creating new and widening socio-economic disparities across and between rural regions (Bock, 2016). However, these disparities have predominantly been investigated in terms of urban-rural divides, rather than zooming in on the heterogeneity within the rural towns. Some scholars ascribe this gap in empirical investigation

to rural poverty's supposed 'invisibility'. According to Commins (2004), this invisibility emanates from several causes. For one, rural poverty is characterized by a 'spatial pervasiveness' caused by lower population densities in the countryside as compared to cities. Another factor adding to rural poverty's invisibility is that life in the countryside is generally placed within romanticized narratives, referring to the 'Gemeinschaft-like' social structure of the countryside (Edensor, 2002). These narratives project the rural idyll and a problem-free way of life in which notions such as poverty and deprivation play only a small part (MacKrell and Pemberton, 2018; Woodward, 1996). Similarly, due to strongly articulated rural senses of place and community, a proper acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of the countryside as well as socio-economic differences in the rural population is obstructed (Lee et al., 2005; Commins, 2004; Edensor, 2002). Rural poverty's invisibility might explain why the role of rural contexts in enduring poverty has received relatively little attention in poverty research, in Europe at least.

However, in North American research the spatial aspects of rural poverty have been looked at more closely. Economic downturns have long lasting effects in rural economies because they are quicker to recess and slower to recover. Furthermore, rural labor markets tend to lack diversity, which amplifies the effects of industry decline and job loss simply because families and individuals will have to travel further to find new employment due to rural regions geographic remoteness (Tickamyer et al., 2017). Declining economies in rural regions are found to have a particularly negative effect on men. Several studies demonstrate how the loss of employment in rural contexts especially undermines the traditional masculine identity of provider creating a tension in gender roles (Jensen and Jensen, 2011; Sherman, 2006). In economically disadvantaged rural regions, social capital becomes of increased importance in rural communities to be resilient in the face of social and economic challenges (Flora et

al., 2016). Studies for instance show how high levels of social capital and a strong embeddedness in family and community networks in rural regions is conducive to informal economic activities in order to cope with precarious labor contracts (Jensen, 2018; Slack et al., 2017; Tickamyer and Wood, 2003, 1998).

In some rural regions, poverty becomes inextricably tied to a region's history, e.g. Appalachia in the U.S., or indeed the Veenkoloniën in The Netherlands (Tickamyer et al., 2017; Duncan, 1999). Such rural regions offer specific opportunities to understand intergenerational aspects of poverty due to their small scale, the familiarity among social actors, the strong spatial boundedness of communities, and a tendency to maintain a rigid class structure (Greenberg, 2016; Duncan, 1996). Various scholars underline the importance of stigma connected to rural regions with a history of poverty (Tickamyer et al., 2017; Eason, 2017; Sherman, 2006). Stigma, in the context of rural poverty, is woven into the social fabric of rural communities. Sherman (2006) puts forward the notion of 'moral stigma', in which is associated to certain families, who, based on family histories, are branded as morally inferior within the wider community. Due to the importance of social values in rural communities, coping strategies of poor stigmatized families are usually elected because they are socially rational, rather than economically optimal.

4.3 Class practices in social networks

The enduring and intergenerational problem of poverty in the Veenkoloniën indicates the existence of a distinct underclass (see Scott, 2012) with limited prospects of upward mobility. Since the economic shift to Post-Fordism, understandings of class in relation to social

stratification and poverty have changed dramatically (see Shucksmith, 2012; Harvey, 1989).

In an increasingly creative and global economy – associated with growing socio-spatial polarization and a so-called erosion of the middle class (see for example Hulchanski, 2010; Foster and Wolfson, 2010) – structuralist conceptions of clearly demarcated production-related classes are considered less potent for meaningful social analyses. Contrastingly, a constructivist understanding views the concept class as continuously contested and socially constructed rather than representing a rigid, objective, and absolute structure (Shucksmith, 2012; Bourdieu, 1987). Bourdieu explains that boundaries of class in social space could ideally be viewed as imagined planes, fuzzy, in constant flux and subject to everyday representations of union and separation. In this regard, class represents groups of actors that take up similar positions in social space. Bourdieu asserts that class boundaries in social space can be defined intrinsically, in the sense that one's social position derives from 'primeval social experience', which is a type of highly developed social intuition rooted in shared norms and values; and relationally, which draws on the idea of othering with regard to boundaries being constructed in relation to other social positions – i.e. belonging or not belonging to that position in social space (Bourdieu, 1987). Relational dimensions of class can be traced in interactions and social ties between class groups. Studies into class and rural poverty offer insight into how poverty and class are reproduced through interactions between different families and groups within rural communities (see Jensen, 2018; Duncan, 1999). Due to the high degree of social familiarity in rural communities, power imbalances between different classes eventually carve out a trajectory of which families and groups get access to opportunities and advantages (e.g. in terms of employment) and who does not (see Duncan, 1999, 1996).

Because actors belonging to the same class share a similar position in social space, they are exposed to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors. These conditioning factors exert a homogenizing effect, and therefore individuals exposed to similar conditions develop similar practices (Bourdieu, 1987). Conditions of existence can be interpreted as the circumstances people encounter in life. These can be macro-scale circumstances such as contested gender roles, changing consumption practices, and increasing polarization (see Shaker and Rath, 2018; Hulchanski, 2010; Foster and Wolfson, 2010; Morgan, 2005), or meso-scale circumstances, e.g. the closing of a local supermarket (Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017), or micro-scale circumstances, e.g. suffering a stroke and rehabilitating afterwards (Meijering et al., 2017). Conditioning factors are understood as factors that influence how people react to certain circumstances and how this may influence future practices.

According to theories of practice, everyday practices such as parenting, relationships and participation in social activities reflect shared understandings of class (see Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001; Bourdieu, 1987, 1977). Reckwitz (2002, p. 253) elaborates that everyday practices reflect forms of knowledge; how people view the world, the objects in it (tangible or abstract), others and themselves in relation to each other. Shucksmith (2012) adds that class practices have particular spatial dimensions in the sense that they are intertwined with social constructions of the rural. The ways in which marginalized individuals and groups are represented and represent themselves in relation to place instigate the reproduction of inequalities, which are thus imbued in place (Tickamyer et al., 2017; Sherman, 2006; Duncan, 1999).

An appropriate way to start exploring class practices is by closely examining the characteristics of social networks of poor and their position in social space (Lee et al., 2005). In a sociological

sense, examining social networks entails looking at the structure of social ties and how they facilitate support or exclusion processes (Klärner and Knabe, 2019). Social networks and the resources located within them have a strong determining effect on the opportunities and life prospects of individuals (see Putnam, 2001; Forrest and Kearns, 2001). When individuals and groups are excluded from important resources and information, the likelihood of poverty enduring over multiple generations increases (Guiaux et al., 2011; Reimer, 2004).

4.4 Methodology

4.4.1 A (very) brief history of the Groninger Veenkoloniën

The Groninger Veenkoloniën, the peat districts in the eastern part of the province of Groningen in the Netherlands, have a rich agricultural and industrial past. As early as the 17th century, peat was extracted from the land. A canal system was developed in which many small side canals running into the peat fields were connected to the main canals for drainage and transport. The main canals were embedded in a (trans) national system of waterways, which provided good trade connections to larger towns and cities (Keuning, 1933).

The agricultural land – left behind after most of the peat was harvested – as well as the man-made water infrastructure allowed for other industries to develop in the region. A thriving shipbuilding industry developed in the 18th and 19th century. The region also became home to potato starch and strawboard industries, which reached their zenith in the mid-19th century. The large scale of the strawboard industry provided employment for many local low-skilled

workers. While the strawboard industry flourished, the production processes caused much pollution and the wages for the factory workers were low (Keuning, 1933). In this context, the Dutch Communist Party became very popular and influential in the region halfway through the 20thcentury. Eventually and gradually, due to political pressures and a lack of innovation the strawboard industry disappeared almost completely from the region, causing a surge in regional unemployment rates. The disappearance of the strawboard industry left behind large abandoned factory buildings; whose chimneys still dominate parts of the region's skyline to this day.

Our study was initially based in one particular town – which we will not name for ethical reasons – in the rural region of eastern Groningen. It is a mid-sized town in the region with a population currently between 5000 and 10,000. Inevitably, the town's economy took a severe hit when the strawboard industry disappeared and nothing substantial replaced it. Presently, the municipality in which this study is based exhibits the nationwide highest shares (4%) of persistently poor households in rural municipalities[3] (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2018b; Central Bureau for Statistics, 2018c). In the Dutch context, the Groninger Veenkoloniën is remote from economic centers and the region has a poor reputation among people living outside the region (see Thissen et al., 2010; Rijnks and Strijker, 2013).

As the study progressed, the area from which participants were recruited was expanded to include surrounding villages and hamlets. We opted to do this as – even though the town as a geographical unit was integral to participants' experience of poverty –

[3] The Central Bureau for Statistics employs five categories for urbanization based on population density from which we classify the last two as 'rural': 1] Very highly urbanized, 2] Highly urbanized, 3] Moderately urbanized, 4] Not very urbanized, 5] Not urbanized (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2018c).

our participants' stories and contacts were not exclusively tied to the town. Rather, their experiences were embedded in the wider region of the Groninger Veenkoloniën. Therefore, the findings presented in this chapter should be viewed as an account of how poverty is experienced by participants living in the Groninger Veenkoloniën – most of them based in what we will call 'the town'.

4.4.2 Participatory approach

From the earliest stages, this study took a participatory approach to ethnography. This entails that, although the broader theme of rural poverty was determined before entering the field, the definitive aim and scope of the research was determined in consultation with participants. In the research phases that followed four participants became coresearchers in the study (see Mey and van Hoven, 2019). The co-researchers helped with recruiting participants and assisted the field researcher in the interpretation of early findings, in the final analysis, and in the dissemination phase (e.g. presenting and drafting reports) of the research. One female co-researcher was prominent throughout the research. She grew up in intergenerational poverty and works as a so-called 'professional by experience', which can be understood as a peer advocate. In her work – which is still low-paid – she assists social workers by drawing from her own experience. Not only did this co-researcher make valuable contributions to the analysis and dissemination phases, she also co-interviewed several participants.

4.4.3 Observations and interviews

The methodology consists of participant observation combined with informal interviews and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The participant observations lasted from April 2018 to April 2019 and predominantly took place in two municipal workplaces where people worked on welfare jobs. Both workplaces were operating thrift stores; one located in the central town, the other in a small village close by. The welfare jobs are not paid for in the sense that the workers receive a salary. Rather, the work conducted for the position should be seen as a compensation for receiving welfare. The daily operations of both workplaces consisted of collecting and delivering used furniture with a van and preparing the furniture for sale as well as selling it in the store. Generally, the male workers would be in the van collecting and delivering furniture while the female workers took care of sales and the upkeep of the store. The field researcher participated in all activities. In addition to the observations at the thrift stores, participant observations were conducted at citizen initiatives aimed at supporting those in the region with low income and at institutions and organizations involved in providing care and support for low-income households. Over the entire fieldwork period the field researcher was in regular contact – meaning twice a month or more – with circa 60 people with low income.

As literature reveals how the experience of poverty is complex and sensitive, much effort was dedicated to gaining a good rapport with participants. After participating in welfare jobs for a certain time, the field researcher felt he gradually became an accepted and trusted figure for the people he worked with. From this point on, the field researcher started to approach participants for interviews, which were recorded, and for which informed verbal consent was obtained. With permission by the faculty's ethical commission, we chose to obtain verbal consent considering the inability of some participants

to read and comprehend written consent forms. In total, 21 persons shared their life history for this study. In the occasionally sequential interviews participants were asked about significant social experiences within the following themes: early childhood, schooldays, adolescence, adulthood, family life, friends, social activities, housing history, connection to the town/region, and their experiences regarding institutional support and care. Some participants were interviewed in joint sessions. This gave participants an opportunity to compare their own story to those of others, often revealing striking similarities, which will be described in the following sections. Due to the extensive range of topics covered, the interviews lasted from 2.5 to 5.5 hours. About half of interviewed participants, the field researcher knew directly as co-workers, and others were recruited by referral and with help from the coresearchers.

The interview participants' sex distribution is somewhat skewed toward females (thirteen females compared to eight males). Somehow the women encountered during fieldwork appeared to be more inclined to share their views on sensitive subjects compared to the men. Most men the field researcher approached for an interview declined, many of them expressing discomfort with speaking about sensitive issues such as poverty and their upbringing. For the analysis, drawing from the informal interviews with many men during observations mitigated the issue of the skewed sex distribution. These informal interviews occurred spontaneously but were always conducted with the informed consent of the participant. To all participants the field researcher introduced himself as being a researcher. To ensure this researcher role remained clear throughout the project, the field researcher always chose public spots to write notes, continuously informed people he spoke to about the state of the research and tested ideas and hypotheses arising from the fieldwork against participants' views, so that everyone could be reminded of the primary purpose of his presence: research.

Most interview participants were older than 40 (fourteen aged 40 or over compared to seven participants younger than 40). This phenomenon was reflected on quite extensively in field notes. The most likely factor concerns the fact that older people have simply had more time to process the hardships they have endured and were thus better able to share their stories. Many younger persons were interviewed informally during the observations. Consequently, perspectives and experiences from the interviewed participants were compared to notes from the informal interviews and the field diary to ensure a degree of evenness in terms of age distribution.

4.5 Enduring poverty: the context of existence

Most participants in this study report to have endured difficult circumstances over the life course. In terms of socio-economic conditions, all persons mention the unfavorable socio-economic circumstances in the East Groningen region. Older generations (in their forties and older) often mention how they used to be employed in the industrial sector that flourished in the region. Eventually, all the older generations we spoke to became unemployed due to various economic downturns, e.g. bankruptcy or substantive budget cuts. Younger generations (younger than 40) mention how difficult it is to find employment that is not temporary. Nevertheless, most people do not consider these socioeconomic conditions unique nor the most influential for their socioeconomic situation of enduring and intergenerational poverty. Rather, most participants attribute more meaning to social issues, often unrelated, or not directly related to finances. Starting in early childhood and continuing into later life stages for most, people recollect their situation as being different and

more difficult compared to what they observe to be 'normal'. The most influential difficult circumstances for the experience of poverty are reported in a person's home and family situation, and in their personal housing history.

First and foremost, almost every participant describes difficult circumstances in their home and family situation. These occur in social relationships with parents, siblings, other relatives, and partners. Among the most frequently reported difficult conditions, by both female and male participants of all age groups, are physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, as either a victim and/or witness; drug and alcohol abuse, as either a user and/or victim; and finally, conflicts with family members, often related to a form of abuse. Out of respect for the sensitive nature of the stories shared with us we do not elaborate on the details of these difficult circumstances. It should, however, be understood that these difficult circumstances – most of these endured as early as childhood – have a decidedly formative effect on the lives of the persons with whom we spoke.

Second, in addition to difficult conditions endured within the home, most participants have experienced precarious conditions regarding their housing situation. These precarious conditions vary, among other things, from getting evicted to being placed in a foster home, having conflicts with neighbors, and being forced to move out due to restructuring or demolition. Because of these precarious housing conditions, many people indicate to have moved frequently throughout their lives, often beginning in early childhood. All participants who moved frequently during their childhood indicate that opportunities to make new contacts and to build friendships and meaningful relationships were seriously hampered. Following participants' stories, it seems that families moving to a different town is in some cases a strategy to ensure that only a limited number of people know about their real and troublesome home and family situation.

Participants often indicate they are ashamed of their home and family situation and/or afraid that it might become known in light of any possible associated legal consequences associated.

Sooner or later during childhood, all participants express to have experienced certain moments of realization, in which they notice the difficult conditions to which they are exposed in life are neither common nor acceptable in most other households. Here lies the root of a strong sentiment of inferiority, exclusion, and shame, shared by many participants.

> *"At a point in time you begin to notice, when you visit other children from school, that things are different. And only then you realize how different your home situation is. But you don't know any different, so you think it is normal. And then you discover it really isn't normal. And that's a terrible eye-opener. It gives you a feeling of inferiority."*
>
> *–Joshua (in his thirties)*

The sentiment of inferiority is reproduced in ordinary, yet significant experiences participants have every day at school, work, at their sports clubs or in public spaces. In fact, the sense of otherness and shame runs so deep that, in a social sense, many people operate from dispositions such as feeling different, excluded, and inferior for the rest of their lives. Most of the people interviewed for this study explain how they keep battling with the experiences they endured in childhood. Difficult circumstances in the home and family situation in particular leave deep scars. In fact, a notable majority of participants mention having developed mental health issues, which they often associate with the conditions they encountered in their early years. Reported issues include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, social anxiety, agoraphobia, hyperventilation, anger and rage

issues, and chronic stress. Often, these mental health issues are suppressed or go unrecognized until a certain trigger point is reached. Ironically, this trigger point often seems to coincide with relatively good periods of stability, as the following women eloquently describe during their joint interview:

> *Mary: "When I was 15 years old I made my mother choose. Either my father leaves or I leave. Luckily, they got a divorce. And then it became quiet. Just like she [R2] mentioned. But... your mind is still in turmoil. And you're still going to school, trying to get an education. But you still don't manage somehow. I couldn't concentrate. Oh— [becomes emotional]"*
>
> *Lucy: "Because you became so used to the tension – the pressure belonging to that way of life and it suddenly disappeared. And nothing replaced that pressure. Only opportunity and space, which allowed everything to surface that you had been suppressing all that time! And suddenly... Suddenly it all came out."*
>
> *– Mary (in her sixties), Lucy (in her fifties)*

In this case, mental health issues added an extra layer of complexity, which surfaced after the situation had somewhat stabilized. The story demonstrates the many dimensions of precariousness that many of the participants face.

4.6 Socio-spatial stigma in a rural town

Participants allude to how perceptions of poverty are contained in a type of stigma. Certain families in the town have a reputation for being poor. This reputation derives from knowledge on these families' histories, often interwoven with the history of the town. In fact, we found how some families with the same last name have very different social reputations derived from which specific family line they belong to and where in the region that family was settled. For example, one particular family line was inextricably tied to a side-canal just outside the town with a history of disorder and poverty. Even when people have a different last name due to marriage, people in the town are still very aware of their family's history. Older participants in particular recall how historically – before areas became redeveloped – poverty used to be concentrated in certain areas and hamlets in the region. These hamlets and areas were located on the fringes of town or on so-called 'wijkjes', which are roads following the old side canals of the major peat canal, and almost exclusively housed poor people.

> *"We lived on a side canal. That was the lowest of the lowest. People in our street were all in the same situation. No one had a car. No one had a phone. If my mother needed to call the doctor or something, she needed to go to the principal's house to make a call. Those types of things. Everyone was from the same milieu."*
>
> *– Lucy (in her fifties)*

Stigmatized places of poverty described above unavoidably become linked to the stigmatization of people, families and groups that lived

there, creating a socio-spatial stigma. Our participants demonstrate an intricate knowledge on the social history of others – e.g. where people grew up and to which family line they belong. One story frequently mentioned by participants talks about a certain family historically settled in a small hamlet located on one of the side canals. According to the hamlet's reputation, it used to be a place with much poverty and disorder – e.g. frequent bonfires, fights, and drug dealing. Participants describe how there were rumors that the police did not even visit the area out of fear of the residents, who, according to legend, lived in a separate world with their own law and order. In the 1950's, many of the families – like the one described above – living dispersed along side-canals were placed in a then newly developed area on the fringes of the town. Participants express how, based on the fact where families lived, people in the town continue to associate particular families with poverty and disorder. Likewise, the family in the story is still a notoriously poor family in town. In this sense, images of poverty and disorder are inextricably linked to stigmatized places.

Some participants explain how they dislike those areas in town where poor families became concentrated. They indicate a struggle to feel comfortable in the rather rough social environment in which they feel they must actively assert themselves to not become socially isolated. Simultaneously, some participants describe how they feel comfortable in and connected to the poor areas. How it provides them, despite the rough and direct rules of interaction, with a sense of familiarity, safety, and acceptance, which they feel enables them to cope with the challenges in life.

> *Interviewer: "How would you describe the people that lived in your neighborhood?"*

Tom: "As people who had less, 'minima'. And yeah, they are the type of people that will help you. In any way. Whether you need money or food. I always felt welcome. So for me it was a very nice neighborhood. For as far as I can remember I have always only been friends with people on welfare or people who at least know what it's like. Yeah, I feel more connected to those people than to people who have enough money and don't have to worry."

–Tom (in his twenties)

Some participants become so accustomed to the way of life in the social environment of poverty in these particular towns and areas in town that it becomes difficult for them to adjust to social environs elsewhere. One woman recalls an experience of when she moved to a wealthier town. After the move, she felt that she was being treated in a slightly different way than she was used to in her old town, which made her feel uncomfortable. In a way, she felt she was not receiving the respect she desired. She claimed people were spreading rumors about her situation, which caused her much distress culminating into a series of confrontations with people in her new town. Eventually, she moved back to her old town – the poorer town – and she felt much more at ease socially:

"Interviewer: And why is that connection to the town so strong?

Bonny: That's difficult to say precisely. Well, when I moved back here after having lived in a better town for a period of seven years, I felt relieved to be back. Back there, people were talking behind my back. Once, I walked up to someone's

door and said: 'OK, so you are talking behind my back? Please tell it to my face now, I know you're gossiping about me. That's how we do things in my town.' Around here it's more direct and a lot of people are scared of that. Maybe it makes it more difficult to make friends like that, but I would rather have a single friend who is honest with me than that I too have to go behind one's back."

–Bonny (in her thirties)

The quote above illustrates how the notion of respect is reproduced slightly differently in various places in the region. In addition, the comparisons participants draw between their views on social aspects of poverty in an urban context as opposed to their experience of poverty in a rural context also shed light on place-specific factors relevant to the experience of poverty.

Jenny: "I notice people view poverty differently in the city. Because people in the countryside are like 'mind your own business, I am not poor.'"

Interviewer: "And why is that do you think?"

Jenny: "It has to do with shame. Because in the city it is normal to be poor. Because my next-door neighbor probably doesn't know me anyway. And the person living across the street doesn't either. I would have to check my navigation device. Tower 4? No idea who lives there. But around here you do know. Imagine a Food Bank van would park in front of here. I wouldn't dare to get out of the

house! Well... I would, but I know many people who wouldn't leave the house anymore."

Interviewer: "Because people know each other around here..."

Jenny: "People know each other. Everyone knows everything about everyone. And that makes it very complicated."

–Jenny (in her forties)

The quote reflects that detailed knowledge of the comings and goings of neighbors and peers are a source of the shame many participants report to feel. Moreover, this knowledge is viewed as an explicitly rural characteristic. As the woman explains, this makes the experience of poverty and class very complex. On the one hand, participants express a sense of kinship, which is a source for support and understanding, while on the other hand it seems to be crucial to uphold an image of self-reliance. Many participants express how they want to avoid standing out or to be seen as someone from the bad part of town, in fear of being judged by and losing the respect of peers and neighbors. The social rules that govern the practices of our participants thus seem to be intertwined with the socio-spatial dynamics the town.

"Everyone has an opinion about another and that's why I think, growing up in a town like this, most people really want to be 'normal'. Be normal according to the standards in the town."

–Sheila (in her twenties)

4.7 Social networks

The characteristics of social networks must be understood in relation to the context of existence and the socio-spatial stigma discussed before. Despite the variety of difficult conditions people encounter, they have similar consequences regarding the social networks and class practices. Based on our data, we conclude that the social networks of our participants exhibit the following characteristics: they are small, tight, and have a strict social hierarchy. Within these networks we clearly observed class practices, which are also described in the sections below.

4.7.1 Fragmented, small, and closed-off networks

From the observations a picture emerges of a fragmented landscape of many small and closed-off social networks of participants. This means there is not one single network of those experiencing enduring and intergenerational poverty, but rather many small networks consisting of no more than a handful of families and close friends, for which it is hard to obtain membership.

The insulated nature of these small networks is closely connected to coping strategies for the difficult and sensitive home and family conditions discussed above. However, the relations between networks, practices and the context of existence should be viewed as relational rather than causal relationships. Many participants express how, from an early age, they conceal their home situation from outsiders to avoid shame, judgment, and the confirmation of their sense of inferiority. Consequently, developing a social network beyond the family and those closest to the individual becomes very difficult.

Simultaneously and perhaps counterproductively, cordoning off one's social network increases the likelihood of being misunderstood and judged by outsiders.

In a previous paragraph we discussed a quote by a young man in his early thirties who expressed to have a moment of realization in which he noticed how different his situation was compared to others. Strikingly, the following quote by a woman in her sixties addresses a very similar experience of perceiving difference and how she conceals this difference from others. In fact, all age groups report similar experiences and practices, which suggests that the social experience of poverty of older compared to younger participants has changed but little.

> *"There are certain things that you notice aren't normal. But it is your family, so you feel loyal to them. (...) When you visit friends from school and their home situation is totally different... so totally different... and you see the difference. Ohhhh – that's not something you talk about. (...) I would always say let's meet at your place because I was terrified they would [see the situation at home]. I was happy to have a friend in the first place!"*
>
> *–Mary (in her sixties)*

Another often-mentioned cause for the perceived barrier for making new contacts, especially those beyond the small and closed-off networks, is frequently moving to a new house. Causes vary from not making rent and getting evicted to moving to a cheaper rental unit or moving out of the parental home as a strategy to not lose benefits. Consequently, the housing situation for many people we spoke to has been, and for some still is, experienced as very unstable. Especially in childhood, making new contacts and building relationships

is often viewed as a pointless exercise due to the frequent moves. In the case of the woman quoted below, her father initiated many moves in her childhood. He found it unwise to remain living in the same area for longer than a short period of time due to his involvement with illegal activities. Only later in life, when conditions had stabilized somewhat, did the woman realize she did not know how to properly establish contact with new people and build relationships.

> *Lola: "You just have to start again everywhere. You don't have friends anywhere, you are bullied everywhere. And when you finally have some stability you have to leave again. So there is no real way to build a trusted relationship with anyone. After a while, you just don't bother anymore."*
>
> *Interviewer: "How does it feel to have missed that? Do you miss it?"*
>
> *Lola: "Well, I'm only starting to realize that now. It's not that I trust people or make contact easily, but I'm trying to work on that."*
>
> *–Lola (in her forties)*

Lola also expressed how her father undermined her confidence in social relationships by suggesting people only wanted sex or other services from her. As a result, her and her siblings' networks remained very small, which simultaneously decreased the likelihood of detection of the father's activities. Therefore, moving frequently is not always just a result of financial problems, but it can also be a strategy to veil certain activities that cannot stand the light of day. Generally, our participants indicate only very few peers share the same experiences and housing history as they did, which limits the size of social networks substantially due to perceptions of difference

and inferiority. Simultaneously, it makes the social contacts that did survive the frequent moves and difficult times all the more tightly knit.

4.7.2 Tight networks: "show respect to get respect"

In stigmatized places, such as described above, people have developed emotionally close relationships forming small networks. Referring to the close nature of relationships, multiple participants express how their social networks provide them with feelings of safety and acceptance, rooted in shared experiences and challenges. Simultaneously, according to participants, outward contacts are often under pressure because outsiders have generally not been exposed to the same conditions. Many of the people we spoke to mention they often perceive to be misunderstood and judged harshly by outsiders – whether that be in formal relationships, e.g. with institutions, or informal relationships, e. g. at school, work or at sports clubs. The negative experiences with outsiders are often actively told and re-told within participants' own network, feeding into the collective sense of being inferior or excluded. Ultimately, a general distrust toward outsiders develops within the networks, reinforcing their tight nature.

Participants often refer to respect as a key value in their social contacts. Previously, we pointed out how respect is intricately interwoven with histories of places. Sharing a family history in a certain place creates a sense of common ground and acceptance, rooted in shared fates. As such, there is no sense of inferiority toward families coming from the same place. In contrast to the more conventional understanding of respect pertaining to keeping people's basic rights and wishes in regard, respect seems to encompass a number of other

values and norms. Among the most important are unconditional loyalty toward loved ones, holding those of higher positions (i.e. elders or community leaders) in high esteem, being direct and honest, and understanding each other's hardships by showing consideration for emotional issues.

Our participants indicate how paying and getting respect is like walking a tightrope. Not paying due respect in any situation is considered very offensive, which is often the cause for the misunderstandings and conflicts people experience. A telling example of a violation of the respect principle and the subsequent reaction was observed when a coordinator of the local Food Bank summoned the researcher, while on a coffee break with his coworkers, to help with the preparations for the distribution that day. In a rather snide way, she remarked: *"Time to roll up your sleeves now. Enough with the sitting around and drinking coffee."* The field researcher laughed politely in response and went to assist with the preparations. When he returned, his coworkers at the welfare workplace were fuming with anger. *"How dare she put you in your place like that!"* a female coworker exclaimed. *"She has no idea you just cleaned out a house this morning. I'm surprised you helped her. I would never move a muscle for that woman."*

The field researcher asked his coworkers what aspect of the coordinator's behavior made them so angry with her. They explained how her comment showed a lack of respect and understanding for the work people did in the workplace. Indeed, people in the workplace, the researcher included, had worked hard that morning and were enjoying a well-deserved coffee break. Nonetheless, the field researcher had noticed their disdain toward this coordinator before, so their attitude toward her could not be attributed to this single incident. His coworkers explained that the woman in question had shown disrespect in their eyes many times before. For example,

through the manner in which she habitually pinched her nose when she walked by the warehouse where people smoked and how this and similar actions made them feel like being treated as inferior: *"She sees us as some sort of miscreants who do nothing but sit on their asses, smoke and drink coffee all day. Well, if you treat me like that, I don't want anything to do with you."* Because the coordinator had (perhaps unaware) not treated the group with due respect, the woman was treated with high levels of distrust and was shunned from the group. During fieldwork, many more instances were observed where a participants' network closes its ranks to form a front to outsiders who, in their eyes, do not pay due respect. Therefore, not being paid respect feeds sentiments of being excluded and a feeling of 'us against the rest', which causes the network of persistently poor to become even more closed-off and tighter.

In some cases, participants express that if they do not feel they receive respect, they sometimes resort to aggressive behavior. As one man put it: *"becoming aggressive at least makes them take you seriously. It gives you back some control."* The same outward distrust and belligerence, rooted in perceived prejudices and lack of respect, was observed in many other areas such as contact with social workers or relationships with schoolteachers and superiors in the workplace. Therefore, the tight nature of our participants' social networks, as well as their conflict-ridden outward relationships, is intricately linked with the notion of respect. A plaque on the wall in the home of a participant commemorates the rule that governs many of the people interviewed: "Show respect to get respect."

4.7.3 Social hierarchy and community leaders

Tied to the notion of respect, the networks of participants display a strict hierarchy. On the scale of families, we found how this makes the networks prone to power imbalances and abuse. Our data reveals a picture of clear gender role divisions vested in traditional norms. Women are expected to manage the everyday household chores and to take care of the children, whereas men take up the role of provider in charge of the household finances. The latter role is very much threatened by the disappearance of unskilled work in the region. Participants often refer to instances where the man in the household takes up a dominant position and tries to cover up the dire financial situation. Bills and dunning letters are withheld up to the point where repossession or even eviction is inevitable. Women and children in the household are commonly held in the dark regarding the finances through methods of intimidation and domination – particularly potent in small networks – so that the ultimate consequences come as a shock.

> *R: "We lived there for about three years, but we found out he [mother's boyfriend] never paid the rent. I was about twelve or thirteen when the receptionist called me out of the classroom. She tried to be very calm, so I got the feeling something was not right. (...) When I came home there already was a moving truck. They were repossessing all kinds of things. We were left on the street, I wasn't even allowed into my own bedroom."*
>
> *I: "Did you see it coming at all?"*

R: "Not really. We were suspicious though. He also abused me, you know? I don't know how he managed it, but we hadn't seen a bill all this time. But we did suspect the bills weren't getting paid because... When you're on welfare and you can afford to do whatever you like... That doesn't seem right of course. But you know, my mother was also afraid of him so she didn't dare to confront him either."

–Tom (in his twenties)

On a wider scale, another powerful position within networks of poor is taken up by community leaders. Community leaders have a prominent role in advocating right of the poor, organizing informal support, and reproducing an image of 'outcasts. The authority or respect of community leaders seems to derive from a personal history of hardship, endurance, and resistance against the fate of poverty. The community leaders to whom we spoke and to whom participants referred can be characterized as charismatic and influential figures centrally positioned within multiple networks of persistently poor. Due to their many connections to different networks of poor they have a powerful gatekeeper type position and exert a great deal of influence within and across different networks of poor.

Furthermore, the community leaders we identified exhibit an active social media presence. Through sharing stories, media articles, opinions and experiences of wrongdoings and inequities, community leaders take up a leading role in constructing a collective sense of solidarity and at the same time exclusion. Many Facebook support groups exist that explicitly focus on exchanging goods and services among welfare recipients and those willing to help. In addition to community leaders' personal social media pages, these Facebook groups are also used as a communication channel. Many participants

referred to posts on these pages, which underscores that community leaders are indeed influential figures. Although the powerful position of community leaders in some ways reinforces social exclusion, they do not abuse their power like dominant figures in family networks and mostly try to advocate the rights of the poor.

4.8 Discussion

This chapter set out to shed light on rural aspects of poverty by looking closely at class practices and social networks. Our findings highlight the complex experience as well as the highly relational nature of persisting poverty in a rural context. Bourdieu (1987) and Shucksmith (2012) postulate that those in similar social positions and exposed to similar conditions develop similar practices. Indeed, we find that our participants are exposed to an array of difficult conditions over their life course, which shape their perceived social position and practices. More often than not, the difficult conditions take place in social rather than financial realms. In this sense, our findings confirm earlier assertions that poverty is a complex problem extending beyond financial definition (see De Meyer et al., 2015; Townsend, 2014; Besselink et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009; Moore, 2005).

Scholars recommend viewing social experiences of poverty in relation to constructions of rural places (Tickamyer et al., 2017; Woods, 2013; Shucksmith, 2012; Duncan, 1999). We argue that social reputations of poor families are inextricably tied to the stigmatization of places in the town and region. Spatial stigma becomes ingrained in perceptions of poverty in the town and region which are reproduced over multiple generations. Ultimately, this creates a highly developed social intuition (see Bourdieu (1987) shared by most people in the town. We stress stigma within the region creates a 'legacy of inequality' (see Flora et al., 2016; Sherman, 2006) and

contributes to the enduring as well as to the intergenerational character of poverty in the Groninger Veenkoloniën (van Oosterhout, 2018; Strijker and Edzes, 2017; Meyer et al., 2015; Moore, 2005).

In terms of the social networks of rural poor, we firstly conclude that the social networks of our participants are small and fragmented. There is not one single network of poor but rather many different ones often not in contact or possibly even in conflict with each other. We find that many participants are conditioned to keep their social world very small – to shield shameful situations at home, and to prevent hurt from outside – thus reinforcing a socially excluded position. Practices to deliberately keep networks small therefore serve as a way of coping, however, are also likely another factor adding to rural poverty's invisibility (see Commins, 2004). We conclude, that despite the variety in difficult conditions experienced between participants, the consequences of how they operate in a social sense and the ways in which this shapes their social networks are remarkably similar. We find that experiences and difficult circumstances encountered in childhood form a deeply rooted social disposition of inferiority, exclusion, and shame. We argue that this social disposition creates a sense of social isolation, which in turn reinforces social exclusion. To children that grow up in isolated and excluded networks, this sense of inferiority and stigma becomes deeply internalized. We argue that this feedback loop is a major contributing factor in the intergenerational and persisting character of rural poverty.

Secondly, the networks of participants are tightly knit, built on close and emotional ties rooted in similar experiences and endured hardships. A key value which governs many social norms in the participants' networks is respect. Adding to the understanding of social exclusion in rural areas (Klärner and Knabe, 2019; Shucksmith, 2012; Guiaux et al., 2011), we illustrate how participants

regularly perceive a lack of respect in contacts outside their own network. The intricate notion of respect plays a key role in the outward distrust and many conflicts observed within the networks, which ultimately reinforce social exclusion. Arguably, the outward distrust encountered by outsiders feeds stigmas about families and places of poverty.

Finally, networks of poor shared a similar form of social hierarchy. On the scale of family networks, the hierarchy is characterized by uneven power distributions, which make vulnerable members of the network prone to various forms of abuse. Similar forms of social organization that favor an abuse of power might be found in groups to which membership is exclusive and social networks are kept small as a consequence – e.g. certain clubs, cults, or religious groups. On the role of power in exclusion processes (Shucksmith, 2012), we suggest the abuse of power within participants' networks cannot be viewed separately from the small size and tight nature of these networks. One feature of the social organization of the networks that does transcend multiple networks of poor concerns the observed community leaders. Despite their influential role within networks of poor, community leaders often go unrecognized in or are excluded from policy and interventions as well as in research into social dynamics of rural poverty.

In a broader perspective, by comparing experiences of older and younger generations, we argue that, even though in general the Dutch countryside has changed over past generations (Salemink et al., 2017; Edzes and Strijker, 2017), the social experience and nature of persisting rural poverty has hardly changed. We believe policies' evident inability to address enduring rural poverty is likely since most policies and interventions exhibit a normative character. Generally, policy and interventions are directed toward getting poor people to participate more in some or many domains of society. We argue that

in this process, the traumatic and profoundly shaping circumstances people in enduring poverty encounter over the life course often go unrecognized. Consequently, policies and interventions – and more generally government – are perceived as impersonal, overly complex, and rigid. In this light, we recommend that policy and interventions focus on first understanding individual situations, the networks and experiences of poverty; and second set realistic and tangible goals for support catered to individual situations and priorities and utilizing the qualities present within social networks.

Overall, the strong embeddedness of stigma in family and community networks coupled with the strong hierarchy in terms of social class is a central component of understanding the persistent nature of poverty in the Groninger Veenkoloniën. Therefore, in addition to an individual approach, addressing persisting and intergenerational poverty requires a specific regional approach aimed to gradually mitigate this socio-spatial stigma. This regional approach should first and foremost focus on gaining access to and trust of closed and isolated networks of rural poor, before trying to dismantle the socio-spatial stigma. Due to the long history of stigmatization, dismantling the socio-spatial stigma attached to the Groninger Veenkoloniën will presumably take multiple generations. Breaking down the stigma can only start with acknowledging the difficult conditions of existence rural poor have had to endure and work from there toward more inclusive and equal rural communities.

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5

Before, during, and after the field

Reflections on ethnographic fieldwork using a participatory approach

Abstract

Based on three ethnographic studies of the everyday practices of marginalized groups in disadvantaged areas, chapter five discusses the entire ethnographic research process, from entering to leaving the field. One important contribution comes from the discussion of how to incorporate a participatory approach in every stage of ethnographic research, from problematization to analysis and even dissemination. Furthermore, the chapter discusses how different methods interact with each other and how they enhance the understanding of everyday practices of marginalized groups in disadvantaged areas. Co-analysis of ethnographic data adds another dimension of meaning to the data gathered as participants themselves help to relate the everyday to more structural issues, e.g., socio-spatial inequality. The chapter concludes by arguing that ethnography, employing a participatory approach, is at its core a democratic science particularly suited to foreground perspectives of marginalized groups in times of growing polarities.

5.1 Introduction

In times of increasing socio-spatial inequalities, ethnography is a recognized approach in social science for the study of social and spatial disparities. Due to the high level of detail in ethnographic studies, this approach is particularly suited to deepen the understanding of complex societal and spatial issues through conveying everyday social dynamics and lived experiences of inequality (see Isaac and Bernstein, 2021; Meij et al., 2020a, 2020b; Speer, 2019; Langegger and Koester, 2016).

One of the main strengths of ethnography is its pioneering ability to foreground insider meanings and interpretations that are absent from or overlooked in existing debates and research methods. A large part of this strength comes from the dialectic use of methods, in which empirical evidence is tested by means of triangulation of different qualitative methods. Grounded in detailed accounts of the everyday, ethnographic studies produce knowledge and insights based on a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning (Wilson and Chaddha, 2009).

While its inductive and deductive ways of knowledge production are counted among ethnography's main strengths, contextualizing inductive insights derived from situated data in broader trends and theories is at the same time also one of the main challenges. In contrast with more systematic methods of social science research, ethnographic data collection relies heavily on the ethnographer as the 'instrument of data collection' who acts as a mediator of the data through interpretation and writing (Coffey, 1999). Consequently, it is particularly important to reflect on the ethnographer's positionality and the mutual effects which the ethnographer has on participants and the research process.

Furthermore, to validate initial observations (which form the base of every good ethnography), ethnography involves using multiple methods ranging from interviews in various settings, desk research, and focus groups, to more experimental digital, sensory, or visual methods (see Pink, 2021, 2011; Pink et al., 2015). From there, the ethnographer receives the task to not only observe, write up, and interpret the peculiarities of the everyday but also to test, connect, and contrast these to higher levels of abstraction, e.g., academic theory, political ideals, or policy. As such, ethnography has the capacity to bridge disconnects between marginalized groups and spaces in society and the socio-spatial policies, interventions, and politics aimed at these groups and spaces.

However, ethnography is also considered a difficult, time-consuming, and expensive method. At the same time, considering the complicated process of ethnographic research, the best way to learn ethnography is by means of personal experience (see Ravindran, 2020; Hancock and Morrison, 2018; Arias, 2008). Consequently, and regrettably, students in geography, sociology, and other social science fields are presented with little opportunity to develop the necessary skills to successfully carry out an ethnographic study.

While most empirical articles based on ethnographic research hardly or only briefly reflect on choices made regarding the research process, this chapter offers extensive reflections on the strategies used and challenges met while performing ethnographic studies. An important contribution is the discussion on how to produce even better grounded images of lived realities by using participatory methods in every stage of ethnographic research, from problematization to analysis and even dissemination. These grounded images are particularly useful to convey deeper levels of understanding of the everyday lives and perspectives of marginalized groups. Ultimately, this chapter foregrounds ethnography as a democratic

approach to social science with the capacity to empower the position of marginalized groups and spaces in Western societies.

To come to this argument, this chapter discusses the ethnographic research process in three ethnographic case studies in various geographic contexts: one in an urban neighborhood in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands; one in a rural region in the province of Groningen in the Netherlands; and one in an urban neighborhood in Calgary, Alberta in Canada. All three case studies focused on the everyday practices and perceptions of people in disadvantaged areas.

Drawing on examples from fieldwork for these case studies which I conducted myself, I discuss the strategies used and challenges encountered during the ethnographic research process. Furthermore, I evaluate how different methods applied during the fieldwork mutually interact and how they enhance the understanding of everyday practices of marginalized groups in disadvantaged areas. For each step of the research process, I discuss how I connected and collaborated with participants in order to ensure that what I wrote up – i.e. the ethnography – remained firmly grounded in the everyday practices and perceptions of the participants. To provide context to this discussion, I start by giving an overview of ethnography as a tradition in social science research.

5.2 Ethnography: a research tradition

Ethnography does not have one single definition, nor does it consist of only one method. Rooted in anthropology, ethnography has become an increasingly popular approach to social science, employed

in disciplines such as nursing and medical science, education, sociology, and geography.

Duneier et al. (2014, p. 1-2) state that ethnography is first and foremost concerned with the first-hand study of community life. It is an approach to social sciences which investigates people's lives, actions, and beliefs within their everyday context. By studying everyday life from an insider perspective, ethnography is well suited to explore and understand social and cultural practices and analyze these in relation to broader socio-economic and political contexts (Schensul and Schensul, 1999; Jackson, 1985). Hammersly and Atkinson (1983) note that ethnography essentially focuses on the mundane ways in which people make sense of the world.

In a more activist sense, another principal task of ethnography is to provide some form of benefit to the studied groups. This is mainly done by helping so-called outsiders (e.g., policy makers, service providers, or society in general) better understand how the studied groups give meaning to their practices and live together in particular contexts and places (Ellis, 2011; Whyte, 1979).

A large and growing number of ethnographic studies in sociology and geography contribute to our understanding of social and spatial inequality. Many of these studies convey the ways of life and perceptions of so-called vulnerable groups, i.e., groups in society with limited power to control their opportunities and prospects. Ethnographers reveal symbolic and ideological meaning by drawing on such detailed portraits of everyday life (Madison, 2011). Considering this ability to uncover deeper symbolic and ideological meaning in everyday action, ethnography is an approach well suited to achieving a more emancipated understanding of pressing contemporary issues such as poverty, race, and inequality.

An ethnographer gathers data by being present in the field and witnessing, engaging with, and partaking in the everyday affairs

of the studied community or place. Participant observation is widely considered the core method of ethnography. Jorgensen (2015) defines participant observation as a unique method for researching the activities, feelings, and experiences of human life, in which the participant observer gathers information by actively engaging and interacting with people in their everyday life environs.

Early ethnographic approaches to urban social issues were first employed at the sociology department of the University of Chicago in the early to mid-20th century. So-called Chicago School ethnographers produced descriptive narratives of the social worlds of everyday life in urban settings. They commonly inhabited the neighborhoods they wrote about to become submerged in the community under study. Deegan (2001, p. 20) describes how early Chicago School ethnographers *"walked the streets, collected qualitative and quantitative data (...) and had autobiographical experience emerging from these locales."* Contemporary critical ethnography pays tribute to these early scholars, as it is still concerned with lived experiences in everyday life and how these fit in broader structures and theory.

Gathered ethnographic data are given analytical meaning by relating the specific details of everyday life to general trends and structures in society. Although the empirical focus of ethnography is on the everyday, in line with Gidden's structuration theory, it is important to realize that general trends and structures are inherently influenced by the agency of actors carried out in everyday life. Rather than following a traditional, more or less linear course of data collection and analysis within a pre-determined scope, ethnography takes a looser and more uncertain path in which the study aims, and scope are more fluid. In his appendix on the ethnographic method in his book *Sidewalk*, Duneier describes ethnography as a diagnostic process, which underscores the fluid nature of ethnography:

"I begin observation by gaining an appreciation of the "symptoms" that characterize my "patient." Once I have gained a knowledge of these symptoms, I return to the field, aided by new diagnostic tools – such as photographs – and try to "understand" these symptoms." (Duneier, 1999, p. 342)

This quote illustrates how ethnographic fieldwork is a dialectic process and how triangulation of different methods determines the direction of fieldwork. Furthermore, the quote underlines that to 'do' ethnography requires an unknown yet certainly lengthy period of time. To become familiar with the 'symptoms' of a place, the ethnographer needs to spend considerable time observing without having a specific research question in place. After acquiring a first sense of the relevant issues involved in a particular setting, the ethnographer considers a preliminary problem statement and presents a methodological strategy to gather information related to the problem before re-entering the field to better understand these issues. The combination of methods and approaches is seen as a core strength of ethnography (Kusenbach, 2003; Hammersly and Atkinson, 1983).

5.3 Three studies

This chapter's discussion of the ethnographic process is based on three case studies which comprise my doctoral research project on everyday practices in disadvantaged areas. To recollect and analyze my experiences of doing the research, I reviewed my notes pertaining to the research process and other research paraphernalia (e.g. photographs, flyers, leaflets, gifts, and letters from participants, and more). This resulted in the discussion below.

The first study on which this chapter draws was set in a disadvantaged neighborhood in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands (see Meij et al., 2021). The area exhibited one of the highest concentrations of residents with disadvantaged socio-economic

backgrounds in Groningen –virtually 100 per cent of the housing consisted of social housing – and had a history of social disorder. To improve the area, the social housing corporations could employ an emergency intervention to create a more balanced mix of residents in terms of socio-economic status. The intervention allowed the corporations to assign the dwellings according to social and economic criteria of their choosing.

The aim of the study was to understand how this intervention affected local social dynamics and everyday rhythms of long-term residents as well as newcomers brought in by the intervention. The fieldwork for this study lasted four months from April through July 2017, during which time I resided in the area, providing me with a position in which I indeed was a part of the everyday life in the area.

The second case study was set in a rural context in the region of the Groninger Veenkoloniën in the Netherlands (see Meij et al., 2020a). The aim of this study was to explore everyday practices in relation to the high occurrence of long-term and intergenerational poverty in the region. Fieldwork for this study lasted for one year from April 2018 to April 2019, during which time I volunteered to work on welfare jobs at institutions where many participants experiencing long-term unemployment were obliged to work.

The third and final case study on which this chapter draws was set in a disadvantaged neighborhood in Calgary, Alberta in Canada (see Meij et al., 2020b). This study focused on understanding the everyday practices of participants facing poverty in relation to ongoing urban development in the area. Arguably, Calgary only has two seasons: a dry and warm summer and long and cold winter. By conducting the fieldwork from August 2019 to February 2020 both seasons and their effect on the everyday practices of participants were witnessed.

Figure 5.1 An apartment block in the location of the first case study in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands (photo by the author).

Figure 5.2 The main canal running through a town in the Groninger Veenkoloniën. The photograph was shared from a personal collection by a participant.

Figure 5.3 A community barbecue to celebrate the launch of a free food pantry in Greater Forest Lawn, Calgary.

5.4 Before the field

Usually, researchers have a general research interest or a notion of a problem statement in mind before they enter the field. However, similar to grounded theory, in ethnographic research observations and other data gathered will be the main generating force for research questions and aims (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; 1990). Relying on empirics to provide direction to the research also helps since this way problem statements are more likely to align with the frames of reference of the people facing these problems on an everyday basis.

It is important to recognize that it is impossible to be in the field as a completely unbiased observer. Thornberg (2012) writes about how the idea of purely inductive research and analysis, as it is sometimes depicted in the grounded theory approach, fails to recognize the embeddedness of the researcher in an historical, ideological, and socio-cultural context. Even if literature review is postponed until after fieldwork, that does not necessarily mean a study has been conducted without theoretical bias or some degree of framing. It can be assumed that most people conducting ethnography have a fairly extensive educational background or at least have educated themselves to such an extent that they are aware of contemporary theories and ideologies related to the research subject. Thus, instead of trying to eliminate the issue of theoretically framing the study with the risk of excluding valuable observations, ethnographers benefit more from reflecting on this issue and how it influenced the study and data gathered.

Prior to the case studies, as an undergraduate and master's student, I was already interested in and passionate about theories and debates on socio-spatial inequality and socio-spatial development. When I set out to conduct the fieldwork, I took this baggage with me and it certainly framed the way I made observations. In fact, I would

not even have chosen these settings if I did not have some pre-conceived idea on the socio-spatial issues involved. The idea of conducting research that is not 'contaminated' by pre-existing theories was therefore unattainable from the start. Still, despite my partially framed approach to the study setting, my principal aim remained conveying the lived experiences and insider views of the people participating in my study. To achieve this goal, it is important to frequently reflect on questions as to who determines the relevant problematic issues and how that fits within the ethnographer's research interest. In a good ethnographic study, the answers to these questions should always reflect the participants' views and experiences (Duneier et al., 2014; Schensul and Schensul, 1999; Gans, 1965).

5.5 Entering the field

As so often happens in ethnographic fieldwork, I began looking for potential participants in locations that were easily accessible. The first places I visited during my Groninger Veenkoloniën and Calgary studies were local social services organizations. This is without question a form of 'convenience sampling', against which Duneier (2011) warns. Duneier stresses that the point of entry in fieldwork often determines the scope of the study. What ethnographers come to understand and can explain is as such constrained by the social networks to which they gain access. Considering this constraint, an ethnographer can never treat first encounters and observations as data in their own right. There should always be an extended effort to corroborate or expound observations using additional methods, which I discuss in greater detail in the next section.

During my first week in the Groninger Veenkoloniën, I became acquainted with a peer advocate who worked at the local social service organization. She taught me an indisputable lesson: not

everyone who is poor (especially those experiencing long-term or intergenerational poverty) comes to the social organization she worked for. She gave advice on where to look for groups that feel unheard and are generally 'given up on' by social services.

The first place she told me to visit was a thrift store where long-term unemployed people worked in welfare jobs. Strategy-wise she recommended me to first become a 'familiar face' before recruiting participants for in-depth interviews. This still is a form of convenience sampling, because it was a place that was accessible for me and put me in touch with a sample of the group in which I was interested for my research. Duneier (2011) recommends engaging in inconvenient sampling, which entails consciously reflecting on questions as to which groups are excluded from the sample due to the point of entry, as well as trying to establish contact with these excluded groups to expand and enhance the sample. In the Groninger Veenkoloniën I managed to connect to other groups through Facebook groups, visiting local events, and frequenting stores and public spaces in the main town.

Although it is generally a good idea to try and expand the participant sample, this also comes with risks. Certain groups of the same research population might not necessarily like each other. Therefore, having access to one social group might prohibit access to another. These challenges are realistically never completely overcome, which once more emphasizes the need for critical reflections on (implicit) biases and prejudices both the researcher and participants might have that prohibit the possibility of a complete and balanced sample (see Madison, 2011).

5.6 Methods in conversation

As stated above, participant observation is considered the core method of ethnography. However, a comprehensive ethnographic study employs multiple methods and approaches (Duneier et al., 2014; Duneier, 1999; Hammersly and Atkinson, 1983). Therefore, ethnography encompasses a wide range of methods used for the purpose of triangulation – i.e., understanding social phenomena through more than one method and perspective. Ethnographic fieldwork is a dynamic process in which the field researcher tests different methods to acquire a deeper understanding of the studied subject. Methods and strategies I used during my studies include:

- participant observation
- systematic observation
- in-depth interviews
    - semi-structured
    - unstructured
    - in and outside the home
    - sit-down and walking interviews (see Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018; Evans and Jones, 2011)
- focus groups
    - using a large map to discuss important places
- visual methods
    - photo elicitation
    - videos
- co-analysis (see Mey and Van Hoven, 2019; Buffel, 2015)

Over the course of fieldwork tentative categorizations of data were made, as well as preliminary interpretations of their meaning. To test these preliminary analyses, other methods were employed to achieve

a degree of triangulation. One example of this process occurred during the Groninger Veenkoloniën study.

During participant observation, many male participants expressed how they usually dismissed possibilities of re-entering the job market, usually because these possibilities would not lead to a steady job or income. They would rather opt for staying on welfare, as that would provide them with a similar income without the obligation of having to work 40 hours a week.

Over the course of the study, one encounter with a man of around 35 made a particular impression. Like other people I had seen, this man's body was entirely covered in tattoos, including up his neck and on his face as well as tattooed teardrops near the eye – a commonly known gang symbol for having committed a murder. To provoke him a little, I asked this man why he had had his neck and face tattooed. Surely that would harm his chances of finding employment. With a smirk he responded that *"the tattoos would be at the bottom of the list of reasons why I would be rejected for jobs."* The tattoos on the man's face seemed to represent a symbolic embrace of an outcast identity.

This is one example of ethnography's ability to uncover extra layers of meaning behind participant attitudes and behavior. Numerous similar statements from other participants prompted me to pursue this issue and to acquire a deeper understanding of the reasoning behind these notions of retreatism. I approached several the participants for one-on-one interviews to acquire deeper insight into the stories behind the observations.

Another underlying meaning for the apparent unwillingness to work appeared from the interviews I did across all my case studies. Every person I interviewed on this subject described disorganized and insecure personal circumstances, each unique to the individual, but all so fundamentally unsettling that they seriously undermined

the individual's ability to hold down or apply for a job. These circumstances sometimes included volatile home situations or unresolved psychological traumas. None of the participants felt employers were able to understand their situation, let alone accommodate for it.

In this way, a deeper comprehension arose from the interviews of the situation of long-term unemployment all participants found themselves in. The security of income from welfare prevailed over potential opportunities to enter the job market and possibly build a career. Income from a job was regarded as a liability because a job, to an extent, merely represented a certainty for another disappointment by being fired or let go at the end of a temporary contract. Many participants based this expectation on previous experiences. Therefore, in the context of severe personal distress, being welfare dependent acts as a mechanism that offers some stability in an otherwise very unstable and disorganized existence. Effectively, the legitimization along the lines of *"I would be stupid to work 40 hours a week for the same income as I get now for sitting on my ass"* often used, in most cases was merely a façade constructed to obscure a deep sense of insecurity about personal skills and capabilities.

What is described above illustrates rather plainly how multiple methods interact with and complement each other in ethnographic fieldwork. Observed practices that might at face value be interpreted as self-sabotaging were followed up on in interviews and turned out to contain a strong coping element. The fact that I observed people while also sharing in their daily activities helped to gain the level of rapport and trust needed to peel back an extra layer of meaning to the practices observed.

In my second (Groninger Veenkoloniën) and third (Calgary) studies I also experimented with co-analysis. This helped me make decisions on which patterns to use to build my empirical puzzle as

well as place the lived experiences of my participants at the center of my research (see Cobb and Hoang, 2015; Duneier et al., 2014; Duneier, 2011). In each study I hypothesized how mechanisms of social exclusion worked in that area. Generally, I would draw a social network model and ask participants if they recognized the patterns. This gave them the opportunity to provide suggestions for change or nuance to the patterns I had discerned, while I, as the principal researcher, ensured the patterns remained translatable beyond the individual to larger groups.

In all types of qualitative social research there are certain participants who seem a little more eloquent and contemplative than others about the subjects in conversation. In certain ways, these specific participants became protagonists in my studies. I asked some of these participants if they would like to help me think about the analysis of the data I was gathering. These participants effectively became my co-researchers (see Mey and Van Hoven, 2019; Buffel, 2015) and the analysis stage of the research became part of the fieldwork. Being careful not to exclude data that was outside of the frame of my co-researcher's lived experience and analyzing together with co-researchers, enabled me to firmly ground my findings in the lived realities of the people I studied.

5.7 Leaving the field

After a comprehensive ethnographic image is constructed through participatory methods and analysis, it is time to leave the field. I always find this stage of the process challenging due to the open character of data collection; it is common to be left with many unused findings. However, it is important to commit to the choices made together with participants regarding the aims and scope of the research. At the stage where no more new data is collected and the

final piece (the ethnography) is completed, the ethnographer enters the dissemination stage.

Because ethnography is committed to empowering marginalized groups, it has always been important to me to present the stories and perspectives of participants to a broad audience. Naturally, as a researcher whose job it is to produce scientific results, I am expected to produce a peer-reviewed article which will be published in an international scientific journal. In my experience, this means very little to the participants, besides possibly deriving some sense of pride from their stories becoming part of a scientific product. What participants are commonly after are tangible results, preferably in the form of change and improvement of their situation. In this respect, the perspective on ethnography presented in this chapter spills over into participatory and action research (see Pain, 2004; Kindon and Pain, 2007; Mey and Van Hoven, 2019).

At the end of my first study in the city of Groningen, I felt the need to communicate my findings to the stakeholders involved in the social mixing intervention. However, I was a young and inexperienced researcher, still very much grappling with his own views on socio-spatial inequality and how to better address it. Due to this inexperience, I felt inhibited to come up with strong and clear arguments and recommendations. Sharing my research findings with the stakeholders therefore did not result in much more than cordial reactions and encouragements to continue my work.

For my second study in the Groninger Veenkoloniën, I was adamant to make more of an impact, not only for my own satisfaction, but more so to have a positive effect on the lives and perspectives of my participants. At this stage in my career, I had more experience under my belt. I had also planned a longer period of time for fieldwork, which gave me the opportunity to understand the lives of the participants on a deeper level. In turn, this gave me the

confidence that my findings were truly a portrayal of the lived experiences of the participants. Based on this confidence, I was able to formulate much stronger recommendations and present claims that originated directly from the participants to stakeholders.

In addition to making the voices of participants heard in echelons concerned with policy making and service provision, I held a large amount of presentations for varying audiences together with one of my co-researchers. We jokingly said to each other we were 'on tour' with our research. Not only did presenting together strengthen the message that our findings were firmly grounded in lived experiences, but we also hoped it had an emancipating effect on the audiences to whom we presented.

Because most presentations were followed by a discussion, it gave my co-researcher as well as professionals and academics the opportunity to directly discuss the findings with each other. Besides having an empowering effect on my co-researcher, presenting, and discussing findings together gave a real sense of urgency and relevance to the discussion, which in my experience is rarely seen in discussions with only academics.

As I had to travel and reside abroad which was expensive, my third study in Calgary was tied to a tighter time schedule than the study in the Groninger Veenkoloniën. In only six months' time I had to enter, become acquainted with, understand, analyze, and leave the field. In hindsight, this harmed my ability to collaborate with participants after I left the field – because when I left the field, I literally crossed an ocean.

Nevertheless, I made serious efforts to disseminate the results of my study in a way which participants found meaningful. Due to the difficulties participants experienced on a daily basis to navigate support services in the area, some participants and I agreed I would seek collaboration with certain service providers in the area and

design a map depicting locations where basic needs services were offered in the area. This map, in an adapted form, was published in the journal article in *Geoforum* (see Meij et al., 2020b), however, much to my regret, the map has not been distributed in the area yet. Due to the time difference, geographical distance, and the developing COVID-19 pandemic, it has proven difficult for me to maintain the connections required to distribute the map on a wider scale.

Nonetheless, reflecting after the fact, I would still choose to dedicate the larger part of my available time to getting to know the field, rather than sinking too much time and energy into effecting change. As it stands now, I published a journal article which contains several concrete and applicable recommendations and created a map which can be used by community members seeking basic needs support. How these products are used is ultimately in the hands of local stakeholders.

Eventually there comes a time at which contact with participants becomes less frequent or ceases completely. Because of the intensive nature of ethnographic fieldwork, I feel I have developed a lasting and mutual connection with the places and people I studied. With some participants I developed friendships, and those who live in the Netherlands I still meet regularly to chat. It is harder to stay in touch with participants in Calgary, but we have been in contact a number of times during the pandemic. We have agreed to meet when I return to Calgary.

5.8 Ethics and positionality in the field

In all qualitative social research, and particularly in ethnography, the field researcher is the main instrument of data collection. It is important to reflect on how one conducts and positions oneself in the social world one aims to study across all stages of the research (Emerson et al., 2011; Hammersly and Atkinson, 1983). True to the tradition of ethnography, the core method in each of my studies is participant observation. There are various ways to approach participant observation. The most common distinction is made between covert and overt observations. Whyte (1979, p. 57) writes that completely covert observation is possible when a researcher studies his or her own society or group, because only then will a researcher have the anonymity required to blend in.

An architect in the tradition of Jan Gehl (2011) may choose to study public life in a covert fashion without much ethical consideration because the data they gather is generally not considered sensitive. In contrast, an anthropologist, sociologist, or geographer is far more likely to gather sensitive data, which requires proper ethical practice (e.g., informed consent), making covert observations problematic in an ethical sense.

In my first study in the city of Groningen I inhabited the area of study. I therefore opted to begin fieldwork by doing covert observations of public street activities. Perhaps I was too shy and inexperienced to simply approach people and state my research purposes but being a covert observer did present me with a comprehensive image of the daily rhythms active in the area. I did not consider the data I was gathering to be personal or sensitive, I was simply developing a 'feel' for a typical day in this neighborhood. In some respects,

I felt like I was observing people's activities like a fly on the wall. However, after some time people started to notice me with my notebook spending long periods of time out on the street. I do not know what other thoughts crossed people's minds, but one woman in the area thought I was counting the dogs in the area to check whether people were paying dog taxes.

From that moment, I decided to purposely introduce myself as a researcher to the people I encountered on the streets. I also acquired verbal or, in case of an in-depth interview, written consent – a method approved by the ethical committee of my university. Of course, I could not do this with everyone I observed in the area, but at least the people with whom I had had conversations were informed about my purpose. In the fieldwork for my next studies, I made a conscious effort to make myself known as a researcher and, as I will describe in more detail below, the notebooks I used as a field diary were a useful aid in this procedure.

In terms of positionality, I wanted to level the playing field between researcher and participant as much as possible in all my studies. I felt that the skewed relationship between researcher and participant, most palpable in a sit-down interview setting, would influence the interpersonal dynamics in a way which might limit the openness and trust between the participants and myself. Moreover, I felt that to truly comprehend the lived experience of my participants, I had to live it with them to some extent. Therefore, I always attempted to connect with people during their own daily activities. During my first study I noticed a large group of dog owners among the long-term residents who seemed to be close to each other. Instead of asking members of this group what type of interactions they had with other dog owners in an interview setting, I decided to borrow the dog of my parents-in-law, Max, and actively participate in dog walking.

In my second study in the Groninger Veenkoloniën I adopted an immersive approach in which I participated directly in the work people were doing, such as cleaning and pricing donated goods, driving around in the thrift store's van, and lifting heavy pieces of furniture. My natural clumsiness helped to even the relationship between the participants and myself: during the work it was I who needed guidance and reassurance from my co-workers, who were also my participants.

For my Calgary study, I volunteered at an indigenous cooking program at a community food center. To spend time together during an intensive period of fieldwork, my partner and I decided to volunteer together, and for practical reasons we brought our young daughter along. While I always introduced myself as a researcher and explained my aims and motives for the research, participants became acquainted with me in a different role as well: as a father and partner. I believe this enhanced the trust between me and the participants in a very natural way. I am also convinced that to show more of oneself than only the researcher role makes the researcher-participant dynamic more reciprocal and indeed natural. While some might argue that a researcher ought to maintain more distance to participants to achieve a degree of objectivity, I believe a more personal connection does justice to the subjectivity of the data gathered which helps grounding findings in lived experiences.

Connecting to participants on a personal and emotional level does, however, raise an ethical dilemma. Is it ethical to effectively blur the dynamics between researcher and participant in order to collect increasingly detailed data? I argue it is, as long as the researcher repeatedly informs participants about the (changing) aims and goals of the research as well as the aim of the participant-researcher conversations, which is ultimately to collect data. In my experience, visibly taking notes in the field diary (e.g., between cooking

activities) served as an effective and frequent reminder to participants of my researcher identity. Furthermore, a researcher should actively remind participants about the possibility to speak off the record. This way, the participant retains agency over sharing or choosing to withhold certain information.

5.9 Discussion

Ethnography's capacity to relate everyday experiences to broader structural issues is especially valuable in times of increasing social and spatial divides. This chapter discusses ways to approach ethnographic fieldwork to convey firmly grounded images of lived realities of marginalized groups, e.g., people facing poverty, in disadvantaged areas.

Besides describing important considerations, challenges, and opportunities encountered during the ethnographic research process, I conveyed the importance of meaningfully connecting to the field and becoming, in a way, a part of everyday interactions and practices of participants. Engaging with participants should occur prior to determining the problem statement that directs the research. This way, in contrast to problem statements derived exclusively from literature study, it is much likelier that the research aims connect to the lived experiences of participants. This increases the relevance and validity of the research. During fieldwork, the aims and scope of the study should continuously be reiterated in collaboration with participants to ensure the study does not drift into irrelevant areas or dead ends.

In contrast to most other qualitative methods in social science, in ethnography the field researcher acts as the instrument of data collection – instead of, e.g., a structured interview guide (Schensul et al., 1999; Coffey, 1999). Through trusted relationships and situated interactions, which are neither common nor easy to achieve in

sit-down interviews or focus groups, I was able to reach an intuitive level of understanding of the lives and views of participants. A thorough comprehension of insider meaning is critical when trying to understand why marginalized groups, whose practices and beliefs fall outside dominant norms in society, behave and believe as they do.

Throughout this chapter I described instances of how these connections and interactions led to deeper, sometimes unexpected layers of meaning, thereby illustrating the power of ethnography to uncover insider meaning (Madison, 2011; Ellis, 2011; Whyte, 1979). In addition to reaching deeper levels of understanding, the personal approach and level of trust that can develop between participant and researcher makes ethnography well suited to reach so-called hard to reach groups.

When enough data has been gathered so that patterns and structures start to emerge, the next step is to embed detailed information rooted in everyday life within wider debates on socio-spatial inequality. In this manner, inductive ways of reasoning meet deductive ways of reasoning (see Wilson and Chaddha, 2009). I described how I introduced participatory methods to analyze the data produced through fieldwork. Co-analysis, being part of the participatory approach, adds another dimension of meaning to the ethnographic data because participants themselves help to relate the everyday to more structural issues, such as socio-spatial inequality. However valuable and rich the data produced through ethnography might be, my reflections confirm this approach is also time-consuming and consequently expensive, which forces the ethnographer to make choices in the research process that save time and money but still maintain a high level of quality.

Overall, based on my experience across the three ethnographic studies, I underline that ethnography possesses an explicit ability to lay bare often overlooked disconnects between views and

practices of marginalized groups and socio-spatial policies, interventions, and politics. Guided by the theoretically informed researcher, participatory analysis makes it possible for participants to add their voice to academic, professional, and political debates. This way, ethnography produces and combines multiple forms of knowledge that deepen our understanding of complex social issues. Consequently, ethnography – employing a participatory approach – is at its core a democratic method particularly suited to foreground perspectives of marginalized groups in times of growing polarities.

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6

Discussion and conclusion

Lives on edge

6.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of this thesis is to gain an in-depth understanding of everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas and how they shape and are shaped by socio-spatial inequalities. Zooming in to detail on everyday life in disadvantaged areas, three ethnographic studies provided detailed and grounded insights into the complex and ambiguous nature of everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas. In the context of growing socio-spatial divides, this thesis concludes that people experiencing poverty find themselves increasingly pushed further to social and spatial edges of society.

Everyday practices of people experiencing poverty are infused with tensions between getting by and getting ahead, which become exacerbated because of growing social and spatial inequalities. The complex everyday practices of people experiencing poverty are easily (and inadvertently) disrupted or oppressed by socio-spatial interventions designed to mitigate socio-spatial inequalities (e.g. social mixing, revitalization projects, and neighborhood restructurings). A persistent focus on the socio-spatial appearance and ineptitude of socio-spatial interventions to align with the daily lives of people experiencing poverty are identified as important contributing factors in this process. Overall, the mutual effects between everyday practices and socio-spatial inequalities, create and exacerbate tensions as well as new processes of inequality in which already poor and marginalized groups and individuals become disconnected from their towns, cities and societies in social and spatial senses. Consequently, the lives of people experiencing poverty are increasingly 'on edge', in terms of both their own practices and socio-spatial interventions.

Before a more detailed synthesis of the main conclusions of this thesis, the following paragraph provides a brief summary of the main points and findings presented in previous chapters.

6.2 Ethnographies of everyday practices of poverty

Chapter two describes everyday life in a disadvantaged neighborhood in the city of Groningen targeted by a social mixing intervention. Through the concept of rhythm, the everyday practices of two specific groups of long-term residents (i.e., those who experience a degree of poverty) and newcomers (i.e., the more advantaged residents who moved in as part of the social mixing intervention) are discussed. The main motivation of the housing corporations behind the social mixing intervention was to improve the neighborhood's livability. By appointing dwellings only to 'exemplary' newcomers, i.e., renters with a clean criminal record and steady income, or who are enrolled in an educational program, the area's livability was supposed to improve. Chapter two furthermore presents important findings on the everyday impacts of this social mixing intervention on local power dynamics, which include the process in which long-term residents perceive their everyday rhythms to be challenged by the group of newcomers, who generally uphold different norms and have a different daily rhythm.

On a larger spatial scale, chapter two touches upon a trend in which concentrations of poor and marginalized groups (in this case long-term residents) are spatially deconcentrated over a larger area. Such a strategy spatially dilutes socio-economic problems such as poverty and might even improve the general livability of neighborhoods, however, it ignores underlying issues such as social exclusion.

In fact, I argue, that in a social sense the long-term renters see their ways of life (e.g. their norms and beliefs), their daily rhythms (e.g. behavior), increasingly challenged. As a result, people experiencing poverty feel increasingly 'unhomed' (see Davidson, 2009) and excluded within their neighborhood, thereby reinforcing and exacerbating social inequalities within the area.

In chapter three, the everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in the Greater Forest Lawn area in Calgary are described in detail. Due to the severity of poverty with which participants were faced, their daily practices were dictated by efforts to meet basic needs. This contrasts with the experience of poverty in the Netherlands, where welfare benefits are up to a standard which alleviates worries about meeting basic needs such as shelter, food, safety, and hygiene. Chapter three also depicts how development in the area, which was predominantly aimed at economic growth, failed to meaningfully engage with local poor and marginalized groups, thereby excluding them from the economic growth.

As such, changes in Greater Forest Lawn were perceived by participants to be pushed upon them without their input in these developments. In fact, most participants described how their everyday practices to meet basic needs, such as food and hygiene, were challenged by the development. Participants in Calgary perceived most of the development in the area as attempting to 'hide poverty' for the sake of (economic) desirability. Chapter three ends with the conclusion that the right to the city includes the right to urban development in harmony with the everyday practices of poor and marginalized groups.

Chapter four provides a window into the everyday practices of poor and marginalized groups in a disadvantaged rural context. The Groninger Veenkoloniën is a rural region in the North of the Netherlands exhibiting high incidence of intergenerational poverty

(i.e., when multiple generations of the same family experience poverty). One of the main findings presented in this chapter concerns the characteristics of the social networks of participants experiencing intergenerational poverty. These networks are small, tight-knit, and exhibit a hierarchical organization based on notions of respect and trust. In these networks, it is possible for children to grow up under harsh and disadvantageous social circumstances, which make them prone to power abuse and instills in them a low sense of self-worth. This low self-worth is reinforced through negative experiences outside of participants' own network, making this small network as a haven of trust and acceptance even more important. At the same time, it is a place where different forms of abuse are prevalent. The feedback loop of unfavorable conditions within children's/participants' own network and negative experiences outside of this network is a major contributor to the intergenerational character of poverty in the Groninger Veenkoloniën. Another important finding on the intergenerational aspect of poverty is the socio-spatial stigma that exists in the region. This stigma is rooted in an intricate knowledge of the region's social history and the social reputations of certain networks. Because the stigma is interwoven with the history of the region, it becomes ingrained in perceptions of poverty associated with certain groups and families.

Chapter five explores the value of the ethnographic approach for the type of knowledge produced in the three case studies. Ethnography invests ample time in establishing trust and rapport with participants, which has positive effects on the level of detail in the knowledge produced. This is particularly valuable considering the importance of local and personal circumstances in the experience of socio-spatial inequalities (Small and Feldman, 2012). This chapter contributes to the practice of ethnography by discussing the incorporation of a participatory approach in every stage of ethnographic research, from problematization to analysis and even dissemination.

Co-analysis of ethnographic data adds a deeper layer of meaning to the gathered data, as participants themselves help to relate the everyday to more structural issues. Furthermore, co-analysis helps to foreground lived experiences of people experiencing poverty and marginalization in a context of growing social and spatial divides. Overall, the combination of participatory and ethnographic approaches to improve the democratic character of socio-spatial research is an important methodological contribution of this thesis.

6.3 Tensions between everyday practices and socio-spatial inequalities

Each of the three case studies in this thesis describes the contribution of everyday practices of people experiencing poverty and marginalization to the construction of delicate social, spatial, and temporal systems that enable participants to cope with poverty. Simultaneously, however, the same practices also limit opportunities for improving their socio-economic situation, thereby reproducing, and thus reinforcing socio-spatial inequalities.

6.3.1 Social dimensions of everyday practices

Participants in all three case studies shared their personal life stories which were defined by harsh and difficult circumstances in many life domains. These circumstances exert conditioning effects on how

most participants operate in a social sense. In terms of social networks, most participants are part of small, isolated, and tight-knit social networks which display unfavorable internal power dynamics. These network characteristics are described in detail in chapter four regarding long-term and intergenerational poverty in the Groninger Veenkoloniën, but the basic characteristics apply to networks observed in each study. Although practices vary between groups and individuals, the social practices of people experiencing poverty are generally tied to the neighborhood or town in which they live, thereby contributing to processes of social exclusion and marginalization (see Madanipour et al., 2015; Madanipour, 1998)

As a way of coping with everyday challenges (extensively described in chapters two, three, and four), many participants deliberately keep their social networks small. Within these networks, a deep common ground of shared experiences develops. This in turn creates an accepting and inclusive social atmosphere which helps participants to cope with poverty and marginalization. Underlining the urgent problem of precarious housing (see Huisman, 2016; Townshend et al., 2018), chapters three and four identify precarious housing as another important factor in explaining the small size of the social networks of people experiencing poverty. Confirming earlier findings, this thesis demonstrates that having to relocate frequently undermines the stability of the home as a base for social relations, which reinforces the experience of social exclusion and isolation (see Munoz, 2018; Langegger and Koester, 2016; Sparks, 2010; Klodawsky, 2009; 2006; Mifflin and Wilton, 2005).

While the small networks offer trust and acceptance, there is a lack of mutual understanding with people outside people's own network due to the isolation stemming from the small size of the networks. Chapter three illustrates the competition with other groups and individuals experiencing poverty, e.g., over resources or social

status. Tensions encountered outside of people's own network regularly result in conflict with other people experiencing poverty or, for instance, service providers, schools, agencies, or colleagues, which increasingly limits prospects for improving one's socio-economic situation. Furthermore, these conflicts also emphasize the importance of people's own familiar and trusted network.

Adding to the complexity of the social context of people experiencing poverty and marginalization are the unfavorable power dynamics within these small and isolated social networks. A strongly articulated social hierarchy within these networks makes individuals particularly prone to different forms of abuse, which often first occur during childhood (chapter four). Consequently, the abusing person is often someone older and of higher standing in the social hierarchy, which makes it difficult to seek help. When a person is abused within such small and isolated networks, this individual rarely considers it a possibility to seek help from others without jeopardizing their position within their network, which offers important forms of trust and acceptance. This way, the abuse can continue for long periods of time with severely traumatizing effects on the individual. The unfavorable power dynamics within social networks highlight yet another form of tension people experiencing poverty and marginalization are facing. While the smaller networks offer important elements for coping, they are also intimidating and damaging environments which are difficult to leave.

The tensions between hostile and friendly elements in these networks are an important contributing factor for the debilitating levels of stress associated with poverty (see Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013; Mani et al., 2013). I furthermore argue the ambiguity of social networks adds to intergenerational dimensions of poverty and socio-spatial inequalities. Chapter four illustrates how experiences in early childhood instill a sense of difference and exclusion in people

experiencing poverty. Born into an already small and isolated network, they cling to the support and acceptance found within this network, simply because it is all they know. As a result, from an early age, people experiencing poverty have been conditioned to keep their social world small, thereby seriously limiting prospects of escaping the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Simultaneously, because most families are pre-occupied with getting by (i.e. surviving), it is more likely that ambitions and potential of children growing up in poverty are overlooked or underestimated. The underestimation of potential occurs within and outside of the family structure, and harms educational prospects of children from poor families (Visser, 2019; Duncan et al., 2017). In a Dutch context, this is reflected in underassessment of primary school students who grow up in poor families (Engbersen and Omlo, 2020). Overall, the most important conclusion that can be drawn with regard to the social networks of people experiencing poverty is that the ties that help participants cope with everyday challenges are simultaneously the ties that bind them to their disadvantageous situation, because it is perceived as difficult or undesirable to change their social context.

6.3.2 Spatial and temporal dimensions of everyday practices

Lefebvre (1991) argues that everyday practices construct a social space, which is imbued with spatial codes, i.e., rules on how to behave in certain spaces. In the previous paragraph, relating to the social dimensions of everyday practices, I argued that people experiencing poverty and marginalization construct a social space of support and solidarity. This paragraph discusses important spatial and temporal tensions that challenge this social space which reflected in

everyday spatial practices of people experiencing poverty and marginalization.

Spatial practices of participants in Greater Forest Lawn (chapter three) clearly reflected how their basic needs were seriously challenged. Places that offered basic needs support were visited daily. Most people that frequented these places had a similar socio-economic background, which created an atmosphere of support and solidarity among people experiencing poverty. However, the great physical distance between these places offering services and support meant that traveling between these places took an exceptionally long time, giving a rather roaming character to the everyday practices of many participants and leaving little time for other activities during a day. Additionally, the downtown area (where a lot of support services were located) was perceived as an oppressive and intimidating environment. This was partly due to hostile design[4] present in the downtown area and partly to the competition for resources between different groups. The latter once more highlights the ambiguity of a context that provides support and trust as well as danger and conflict. Overall, the spatial practices contribute to a fragile system promoting individualistic practices aimed at meeting basic needs.

This contrasts with the findings in a Dutch context (chapters two and four). Because the welfare system in the Netherlands enables people to meet basic needs, everyday practices are not dictated by the struggle for basic needs. This leaves much more time for other (less individualistic) coping practices, such as giving and receiving emotional and instrumental support to family, friends, and neighbors (chapters two and four).

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[4] Hostile design is a form of architectural design which discourages unintended use of public space. A widespread example is benches found in public spaces with an armrest in the middle to prevent homeless people from sleeping on them.

While the city of Groningen study explicitly focuses on temporal orderings (i.e., rhythms) of everyday life; time, was generally found to be a principal factor in how people perceive and experience place. In terms of everyday life, time has a structuring effect on space and practices. As stated before, in Calgary (chapter three), the time-consuming process of traveling to different service providers to meet basic needs, creates tense weekly rhythms which serve a main purpose of getting through the week. This contrasts with the everyday rhythms of participants in the Dutch context (chapters two and four).

Practices to structure the day were found to have a positive effect on the social lives and self-worth of people experiencing poverty and marginalization. The daily walks of a group of local dog owners in the city of Groningen structured the day as well as organized social encounters and support within the neighborhood. This latter function of pet keeping practices is particularly important considering the isolated social context of people experiencing poverty and marginalization. The meaning of pet keeping practices in disadvantaged neighborhoods provides an interesting subject for more in-depth future research.

Chapter two also finds how neighborhood tensions are likely to increase in case of clashing everyday rhythms, i.e., arrhythmias (Lefebvre, 1991) of different groups. The negative impact of these arrhythmias was exacerbated by flaws in the spatial design, e.g., bedroom windows located near public spaces where residents tend to socialize. Spatial design could therefore incorporate solutions on how to let different daily rhythms co-exist while causing minimal tensions. On a larger timescale, diverging life course prospects and the intergenerational character of poverty create different attachments to the neighborhood for residents experiencing poverty and newcomers, which creates tensions around the question of 'whose neighborhood is it?'

Another common thread between all three case study locations is the socio-spatial stigma connected to those areas. This stigma reproduces socio-spatial inequalities in various ways. Socio-spatial stigma is rooted in people's identity and perceived position in relation to their everyday socio-spatial context (Meyer et al., 2016). In every case study, it was apparent that participants carry an internal sense of difference and inferiority in relation to their socio-spatial surroundings. This sense of inferiority pertained to the position of the neighborhood or town in relation to the wider city or region, but it was also experienced in respect to their own social position within their neighborhood or town context. Because people feel inferior (or at least different) to their socio-spatial surroundings, the isolation processes described in the previous paragraph are reinforced.

As described above, in the rural context of the Groninger Veenkoloniën (chapter four) the socio-spatial stigma is rooted in an intricate local knowledge of the history of the region and the town, and of certain families that have been living there for multiple generations. In urban contexts (chapters two and three), personal and family histories are less intertwined with the socio-spatial boundaries of disadvantaged areas. One explanation for this might be that the population turnover is generally lower in rural areas as opposed to disadvantaged urban areas (Bergstrom et al., 2010; van Ham et al., 2021). Nevertheless, living in disadvantaged areas is experienced as stigmatizing in urban contexts, too. An important contributing factor in this experience is that the relative socio-economic position of residents experiencing poverty becomes spotlighted due to the introduction of newcomers from a different socio-economic background. As a result, socio-spatial stigma influences the ways in which people perceive and behave themselves in such a way that it reinforces processes of social exclusion and othering.

6.3.3 Superficial socio-spatial development

In the three case studies, I observed and analyzed various forms of socio-spatial development and interventions within the context of the everyday practices of people experiencing poverty and marginalization.

In the city of Groningen, I analyzed how the social mixing intervention accentuated differences in daily rhythms between long-term (disadvantaged) residents and newcomers (more advantaged). Due to the introduction of different norms to the neighborhood, which are easily upheld by newcomers using institutional reporting mechanisms, a process of 'unhoming' occurs for long-term residents. While the neighborhood might have improved on aggregated indicators, already poor and marginalized groups and individuals feel more isolated and estranged from their own neighborhood.

Similar processes unfolded in Greater Forest Lawn (Calgary), where participants felt pushed aside by socio-spatial redevelopment along 17th Avenue Southeast. As a social space, Greater Forest Lawn is imbued with many tensions between the development in the area which promoted desirability and consumption at the cost of everyday practices and perceptions of people trying to cope with poverty. In the context of Greater Forest Lawn (Calgary) these oppressive character of development has particularly devastating effects on people experiencing poverty, as their everyday practices are largely dictated by meeting basic needs.

In the Groninger Veenkoloniën, the latest relevant socio-spatial restructuring, which demolished row houses in a disadvantaged neighborhood in one of the towns to break up a pocket of poverty, occurred years prior to the study. In fact, this concentration of

poverty was the direct result of the largest and most impactful restructuring in the town which happened midway through the twentieth century. In this restructuring former peat and factory laborers who lived in shacks scattered around the rural lands were housed in a particular area in the town. While this place (and other concentrations of poverty) developed regional notoriety for poverty and criminal activities, tight and exclusive networks of poor families developed too. The socio-spatial history of the town became inextricably tied to the social histories of these families. Long after the last restructuring this knowledge is still widespread in the town, underlining the role of socio-spatial stigma. Ultimately, breaking up this concentration of poverty did not result in better prospects for most of these families as they continue to live in intergenerational poverty.

Within a Dutch context, in the case of the Groninger Veenkoloniën and the city of Groningen, social problems such as poverty are spatially diluted over a wider area. In other research this process is referred to as 'social cleansing' of disadvantaged areas (Lees and White, 2020). This might create the appearance of a 'better' and more livable neighborhood, but chapters two and four demonstrate that this process in fact alienates poor and marginalized groups and individuals from their neighborhood, their town.

In Greater Forest Lawn, the regeneration of 17th Avenue Southeast displays a different type of ignorance. The concentration of poverty in the Eastern quadrant of Calgary is arguably too large to be addressed with only social mixing. Instead, serious efforts are made to transform the central and commercial 17th Avenue Southeast, which runs through the heart of Greater Forest Lawn, to make it appear less degenerated, less impoverished, and more appealing to people who wish to consume the ethnic and cultural diversity of the area. Chapter three extensively describes how participants feel this development disrupts and limits their everyday practices.

Above all, I argue that the socio-spatial developments studied in this thesis reflect a tenacious focus on making the areas appear less impoverished and more desirable. Despite the strong, visible concern with keeping up socio-spatial appearances, these developments largely fail to achieve more prospects for improving the lives of people experiencing poverty and marginalization. Simultaneously, these socio-spatial developments oppress and disturb everyday practices of people which enable them to cope with and reduce the harm inflicted by the experience of poverty and marginalization. This creates a twofold damaging process in which already poor and marginalized people are disadvantaged in terms of life opportunities as well as in their capacity to cope with poverty and marginalization. Ultimately this way socio-spatial development drives people who experience poverty further to edges of society for the sake of a clean socio-spatial appearance.

6.4 Closer to the edge

The introduction of this thesis described how socio-spatial inequalities in Western societies are recognized as an urgent problem, but nonetheless continue to increase (Van Ham et al., 2021; Townshend et al., 2018; Small and Feldman, 2012; Peck, 2012; Musterd and Murie, 2006). An important dimension to socio-spatial inequalities, which is currently underrepresented in academic debates as well as socio-spatial development, is the lived realities of people who suffer the consequences of increasing socio-spatial inequality the most: people experiencing poverty.

On the one hand, everyday practices enable people to cope with and reduce harm experienced by poverty, while on the other hand the same practices limit opportunities to improve socio-economic conditions. Adding to the complexity, working toward

achieving better prospects and opportunities in disadvantaged areas through socio-spatial development runs serious risks of disturbing coping practices, which places people experiencing poverty and marginalization in more precarious positions. Ultimately, the mutual effects between everyday practices and socio-spatial inequalities drive already poor and marginalized people further onto social and spatial edges of society.

The findings in this thesis hold several implications for future academic research as well and socio-spatial development in general. Because people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas are exposed to an array of harsh and often traumatizing social conditions, often from early childhood, interventions and policy regarding poverty should invest in creating opportunities for youths. To determine ways to mitigate the damaging effects of growing up in poverty and disadvantaged areas, future research should investigate the experience of poverty in childhood and how these experiences shape identities and prospects. In this effort, participatory ethnography can bring forward important and grounded insights on this experience, as was described in chapter five.

For policies and services aimed at adults, it is important to recognize a lot of damage and trauma has already occurred during childhood years. Although current social work and interventions regarding poverty and marginalization recognize the need to adjust support to individual situations, the ambiguities of everyday practices are not yet fully integrated into social work and services. Therefore, future research should investigate ways to integrate these ambiguities in social work and socio-spatial interventions in such a way that people are offered realistic and accessible opportunities for a better future without harming their capacity to cope with the challenges presented by poverty and socio-spatial inequalities.

Due to the fixation on socio-spatial appearance in socio-spatial development, people experiencing poverty and marginalization feel as though their lives are actively obscured from sight through socio-spatial development. An important cause for the disconnect between everyday practices and socio-spatial development is the ineffectiveness or inability of current public participation methods to meaningfully translate citizen perspectives into policy and interventions. Building meaningful and sustainable relationships with residents in disadvantaged areas requires serious investments of local stakeholders, which is made even more difficult in the face of increasing austerity and neoliberal governance (Peck, 2012; van Lanen, 2017; Suzuki, 2020). Some scholars have argued that powerful stakeholders in socio-spatial development (e.g., municipal governments and social housing corporations) use participation as a method to impose and simultaneously validate their own visions and policies (Huisman, 2014). Altogether, poor and marginalized groups are excluded from the opportunity to influence changes to their neighborhood or town, which feeds a general distrust toward governments and organizations, posing even greater challenges for meaningful participation.

In future efforts to align everyday practices with socio-spatial development, careful consideration should be given to the ambiguities of coping practices and limiting practices that reproduce social exclusion and socio-spatial inequalities. Again, the main challenge is to encourage practices that achieve better prospects through socio-spatial development, without undermining coping practices. This challenge could be overcome by reforming methods for participation in socio-spatial development incorporating lived experiences of people who face(d) poverty. In co-creation with people who have experienced poverty, future research on participation processes could actively imagine ways for socio-spatial developments to move beyond current modi operandi of participation based on fleeting moments

of public participation toward more meaningful ways of connecting socio-spatial development to everyday practices in disadvantaged areas.

I argue that socio-spatial development which fails to meaningfully engage with everyday practices of people experiencing poverty and marginalization dispossess people experiencing poverty and marginalization of the right to the city, and – echoing calls for a translation of the right to the city to a rural context – the right to the village (see Barraclough, 2013). Development with a focus on socio-spatial appearance ignores the main underlying problem of socio-spatial inequalities, i.e., the lack of socio-economic prospects of poor and marginalized people living in disadvantaged areas. In a spatial sense, making areas appear less impoverished without achieving better opportunities and prospects for poor and marginalized groups, resembles sweeping dirt under a carpet – the problem does not disappear, it is merely obscured from sight. Moreover, this way of addressing socio-spatial inequality and poverty leaves people experiencing poverty and marginalization increasingly powerless to influence changes to their neighborhood and in extension their futures. Many scholars have referred to this socio-spatial process as gentrification by stealth or state-led gentrification (Lees and White, 2020; Doucet, 2014; Bridge and Butler, 2011).

While socio-spatial disparities continue to grow, current ways of socio-spatial development contribute to a trend in which already poor and marginalized groups are pushed closer to the edge. In spite of their increasingly precarious position, I demonstrated that people experiencing poverty can find ways to cope with poverty even in the face of oppressive development which was supposedly designed to help them improve their situation. Moving forward, it is crucial for socio-spatial development to let go of persistent and hegemonic norms as to what constitutes livable or economically desirable

environments, and allow people experiencing poverty to imagine and develop their own socio-spatial environment in ways that are meaningful to them. Ultimately, working toward inclusive neighborhoods, towns, and cities, begins with restoring and reimagining the right to the city and town for people experiencing poverty in the context of their everyday practices.

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Hannah and Erik volunteering at the Alex Community Food Centre in Calgary

Dog walking with Max in the city of Groningen

English summary

Lives on Edge

Everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas

Growing socio-spatial inequalities is a worrying trend, which is harmful for social, economic, and health prospects of people experiencing poverty. While causes for growing socio-spatial inequalities are often related to global economic currents, the consequences in terms of e.g. poverty, housing, service provision, are experienced in the context of the everyday.

Lives on edge aims to advance the understanding of the relations between experiences of poverty and socio-spatial inequalities by zooming in on everyday life in places and of people on the edges of society. Using three different ethnographic studies, this thesis presents in-depth and detailed insights into everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas and the ways in which they shape and are shaped by socio-spatial inequalities. All studies were conducted in socially, economically, and spatially marginalized areas relative to their socio-spatial context. Additionally, chapter five reflects on the value of ethnography as a scientific approach to study subjective and contextualized experiences of phenomena such as increasing socio-spatial inequalities.

The introduction of this thesis, chapter one, *Growing social and spatial divides*, provides a background on the scientific debate concerning increasing socio-spatial inequalities in a Western context. In current societies, which are profoundly shaped by globalization

and neoliberalism, economic growth and prosperity equates to the growth of so-called global cities. Places that exhibit less favorable circumstances for economic growth simply matter less in social and economic terms. On many scales and in many contexts, wealthy areas are getting richer, while poorer areas are becoming poorer.

In light of the trend described above, many socio-spatial developments focus on improving the conditions in disadvantaged areas. An important emphasis is placed on increasing livability, which supposedly benefits residents experiencing poverty as well. A surge in austerity and neoliberal governance after the 2008 financial crisis saw national governments in Western countries cut back on public spending and decentralize responsibilities to regional and local scales, often down to the community level. In this dynamic, citizens, volunteer organizations, and non-profit organizations are increasingly relied upon and expected to participate in the design and implementation of policy and decision-making. However, it is apparent that all groups do not participate equally. In particular people experiencing poverty are often poorly included and consequently see their interests poorly represented in socio-spatial policy and development. Altogether, the changing dynamics of governance and socio-spatial development underscore that the linkages between the everyday lives of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas and socio-spatial inequalities require a deeper comprehension.

Chapter two, *The time and place of social mixing. Everyday rhythms of long-term residents and newcomers in a Dutch neighborhood,* describes everyday life in a disadvantaged neighborhood in the city of Groningen. This area was targeted by a social mixing intervention in order to improve living conditions for all residents. Through the concept of rhythm, the everyday practices of two specific groups of long-term residents (i.e., those who experience a degree of poverty) and newcomers (i.e., the more advantaged residents who

moved in as part of the social mixing intervention) are discussed. In chapter two I present important findings on the everyday impacts of this social mixing intervention on local power dynamics, which include the process in which long-term residents perceive their everyday rhythms to be challenged by the group of newcomers, who generally uphold different norms and have a different daily rhythm. On a larger spatial scale, chapter two touches upon a trend in which concentrations of poor and marginalized groups (in this case long-term residents) are spatially deconcentrated over a larger area. Such a strategy spatially dilutes socio-economic problems such as poverty and might even improve the general livability of neighborhoods, however, it ignores underlying issues such as social exclusion. In fact, I argue, that in a social sense the long-term renters see their ways of life (e.g. their norms and beliefs), their daily rhythms (e.g. behavior), increasingly challenged. As a result, people experiencing poverty feel increasingly 'unhomed' and excluded within their neighborhood, thereby reinforcing and exacerbating social inequalities within the area.

In chapter three, *'Everywhere they are trying to hide poverty', Spatial practices of the urban poor in Calgary, Canada*, I paint a detailed picture of the everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in the Greater Forest Lawn area in Calgary. Due to the severity of poverty with which participants were faced, their daily practices were dictated by efforts to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, safety, and hygiene. Socio-spatial development in the area, which was predominantly aimed at economic growth, failed to meaningfully engage with local poor and marginalized groups, thereby excluding them from the economic growth. As such, changes in Greater Forest Lawn were perceived by participants to be pushed upon them without their input in these developments. In fact, most participants described how their everyday practices to meet basic needs, such as food and hygiene, were challenged by the development. Participants

in Calgary perceived most of the development in the area as attempting to 'hide poverty' for the sake of (economic) desirability. In this light, I argue that socio-spatial development failing to align with the everyday practices of people experiencing poverty is oppressive and marginalizes vulnerable groups even further.

Chapter four, *Enduring rural poverty. Stigma, class practices and social networks in a town in the Groninger Veenkoloniën,* provides a window into the everyday practices of poor and marginalized groups in a disadvantaged rural context. The Groninger Veenkoloniën is a rural region in the North of the Netherlands with a high incidence of intergenerational poverty (i.e., when multiple generations of the same family experience poverty). One of the main findings I present in this chapter concern the characteristics of the social networks of participants experiencing intergenerational poverty. These networks are small, tight-knit, and exhibit a hierarchical organization based on notions of respect and trust. In these networks, children are more likely to grow up under harsh and disadvantageous social circumstances, which make them prone to power abuse and instills in them a low sense of self-worth. This low self-worth is reinforced through negative experiences outside of participants' own network, making this small network as a haven of trust and acceptance even more important. At the same time, it is a place where different forms of abuse are prevalent. The feedback loop of unfavorable conditions within social networks of people experiencing poverty and negative experiences outside of this network is a major contributor to the intergenerational character of poverty in the Groninger Veenkoloniën. Another important finding on the intergenerational character of poverty is the socio-spatial stigma that exists in the region. This stigma is rooted in an intricate knowledge of the region's social history and the social reputations of certain networks. Because the stigma is interwoven with the history of the region, it becomes

ingrained in perceptions of poverty associated with certain groups and families.

In chapter five, *Before, during and after the field*, I explore and reflect on the value of the ethnographic approach for the type of knowledge produced in the three case studies. In ethnography ample time is invested in establishing trust and rapport with participants, which has positive effects on the level of detail in the knowledge produced. This is particularly valuable considering the importance of local and personal circumstances in the experience of socio-spatial inequalities. I pay explicit attention to the participatory approach which I adopted in all studies in this thesis. In chapter five, I describe how co-analysis of ethnographic data adds a deeper layer of meaning to the gathered data, as participants themselves help to relate the everyday to more structural issues. Furthermore, co-analysis helps to foreground lived experiences of people experiencing poverty and marginalization in a context of growing social and spatial divides.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, *Lives on edge*, I compare and contrast the main findings from the three empirical studies. Overall, I argue, everyday practices of people experiencing poverty are infused with tensions between getting by and getting ahead, which are exacerbated because of growing social and spatial inequalities. The complex everyday practices of people experiencing poverty are easily (inadvertently) disrupted and oppressed by socio-spatial interventions designed to mitigate socio-spatial inequalities (e.g. social mixing, revitalization projects, and neighborhood restructurings). A persistent focus on the socio-spatial appearance and ineptitude of socio-spatial interventions to align with the daily lives of people experiencing poverty are identified as important contributing factors in this process. Overall, the mutual effects between everyday practices and socio-spatial inequalities, create and exacerbate tensions as well as new processes of inequality in which already poor and marginalized

groups and individuals become disconnected from their towns, cities and societies in social and spatial senses. Consequently, the lives of people experiencing poverty are increasingly 'on edge', in terms of both their own practices and socio-spatial interventions. My hope is that the insights in this thesis help to recognize the central importance of experiential perspectives of people experiencing poverty in socio-spatial policy, development and research.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Levens op de rand
Ervaringen van armoede in achterstandsgebieden

Sociaal-ruimtelijke ongelijkheid ondermijnt het perspectief op een betere toekomst voor mensen die armoede ervaren. Toenemende sociaal-ruimtelijke ongelijkheid in de Westerse wereld is daarom een zorgwekkende trend. Hoewel oorzaken hiervan verweven zijn met wereldwijde economische ontwikkelingen, worden de polariserende gevolgen vooral gevoeld in de context van het dagelijks leven in steden, dorpen, buurten en straten.

Dit proefschrift heeft als doel om dagelijkse ervaringen van armoede, tegen een achtergrond van toenemende sociaal-ruimtelijke ongelijkheid, beter te begrijpen. Een diepgaand begrip van deze ervaringen is belangrijk. Enerzijds omdat het een onderbelicht ervaringsperspectief toevoegt aan kennis van maatschappelijke problemen zoals toenemende armoede en groeiende sociaal-ruimtelijke ongelijkheid. Anderzijds omdat het knelpunten in sociaal-ruimtelijke ontwikkeling aan het licht brengt die geadresseerd dienen te worden op weg naar eerlijke en inclusieve samenlevingen. Door middel van drie op zichzelf staande etnografische studies in de stad Groningen, plattelandsregio de Groninger Veenkoloniën en de stad Calgary in Canada wordt een gedetailleerd beeld geschetst van het dagelijks leven van mensen die armoede ervaren en de invloed van sociaal-ruimtelijke context op hun ervaringen. In elke studie wordt nadrukkelijk aandacht besteed aan de ontwikkelingen die erop gericht zijn deze achterstandsgebieden naar een sociaal-ruimtelijk hoger plan te tillen.

Daarnaast biedt hoofdstuk vijf in dit proefschrift reflecties op het gebruik van een etnografische aanpak met een participatieve benadering om ervaringen van armoede in achterstandsgebieden te bestuderen.

De inleiding van dit proefschrift, hoofdstuk een, *Groeiende sociale en ruimtelijke tegenstellingen,* schetst de kaders van het wetenschappelijke debat over groeiende sociaal-ruimtelijke ongelijkheid in de Westerse context. In de huidige maatschappij gekenmerkt door globalisering en neoliberalisme staat economische groei en voorspoed gelijk aan de groei van grote steden. Door deze nadruk op grootstedelijke groei neemt sociaal-ruimtelijke ongelijkheid toe op verschillende schaalniveaus, omdat plaatsen en regio's die minder gunstige voorwaarden hebben voor economische groei er simpelweg minder of niet toe doen. Niet alleen tussen grote steden en andere gebieden neemt ongelijkheid toe, maar ook binnen steden groeien verschillen tussen arme en rijke wijken. In de hele Westerse wereld is een trend zichtbaar waarin rijke gebieden almaar meer rijkdom vergaren, terwijl relatief armere gebieden steeds verder achterblijven.

Als gevolg van de hierboven beschreven trend richt veel sociaal-ruimtelijk beleid zich op de ontwikkeling van achterblijvende gebieden. Een belangrijke nadruk ligt op het scheppen van een prettige leefomgeving, waarvan wordt verondersteld dat dit ook positieve effecten heeft op inwoners die armoede ervaren. In huidige vormen van sociaal-ruimtelijke beleid vragen lokale overheden nadrukkelijk om bewonersparticipatie; zowel in de ontwikkeling als uitvoering. Niet alle bewoners participeren echter in gelijke mate. Met name armere bevolkingsgroepen worden onvoldoende bereikt en betrokken en zien daarom hun belangen en wensen voor een betere leefomgeving minder terug in sociaal-ruimtelijk beleid. Als gevolg van deze ontwikkelingen zijn Westerse samenlevingen in toenemende mate in

geografisch, sociaal en economisch opzicht verdeeld tussen arm en rijk.

Hoofdstuk twee, *Het dagelijks leven in een gemengde wijk,* is gebaseerd op een studie in een buurt in de stad Groningen die wordt gekenmerkt door een concentratie van armoede en sociale problematiek. Om de leefbaarheid in deze buurt te verbeteren hanteerden de lokaal actieve woningcorporaties en gemeente strenge regels voor het toewijzen van vrijgekomen sociale huurwoningen. Nieuwe bewoners moesten voldoen aan een aantal belangrijke criteria zoals het hebben van een baan of het volgen van een opleiding en een verklaring omtrent gedrag (VOG). Via deze weg, zo werd verondersteld, zou de buurt voor alle bewoners een betere plek worden om te leven, omdat de leefbaarheid van de buurt zou verbeteren.

Ik analyseer de veranderingen die plaatsvonden in het dagelijks leven van de buurt als gevolg van de toetreding van nieuwkomers die aan bovengenoemde criteria voldoen, met gebruik van het concept 'ritme'. Ritmes van oorspronkelijke bewoners die armoede ervaren kwamen onder druk te staan doordat nieuwkomers andere ritmes en normen hanteerden en op andere wijze controle uitoefenden op het in stand houden van deze ritmes en normen. Op een hoger schaalniveau wijs ik op een trend waarin ruimtelijke concentraties van armoede (de oorspronkelijke bewoners) in ruimtelijk opzicht worden uitgedund door de toetreding van nieuwkomers die geen armoede kennen. Dergelijke sociaal-ruimtelijke ontwikkelingen dringen ruimtelijke concentraties van armoede terug en verbeteren in zekere opzichten de leefbaarheid. Echter, deze insteek negeert en creëert, al dan niet bewust, belangrijke processen van sociale uitsluiting die het voortbestaan van armoede in de hand werken. In feite worden de dagelijkse ritmes en sociale normen van oorspronkelijke arme bewoners onderdrukt, omdat oorspronkelijke bewoners zich in toenemende mate vervreemd voelen van hun buurt waardoor sociale

verschillen worden uitvergroot en spanningen tussen oorspronkelijke bewoners en nieuwkomers toenemen. Uiteindelijk ervaren arme bewoners hun sociale positie als meer precair als direct gevolg van het streven van gemeente en woningcorporaties naar een gemengde wijk.

In hoofdstuk drie, *Overal wordt armoede onzichtbaar gemaakt*, beschrijf ik de dagelijkse levens van mensen die armoede ervaren in de arme wijk Greater Forest Lawn in de Canadese stad Calgary. In contrast tot armoedebeleving in een Nederlandse context staan in Calgary de basale behoeften als onderdak, voedsel en hygiene zwaar onder druk. Het dagelijkse leven van deelnemers aan de studie in Calgary staat zodoende grotendeels in het teken van het vervullen van deze basale behoeften. Om de wijk te verbeteren waren de sociaal-ruimtelijke ontwikkelingen in Greater Forest Lawn hoofdzakelijk gericht op economische ontwikkeling van de hoofdstraat, 17th Avenue, die dwars door de wijk loopt. Het bleek dat arme bewoners onvoldoende werden betrokken in deze ontwikkelingen, waardoor ze niet meeprofiteerden van de economische ontwikkeling in het gebied. Als gevolg zagen zij de nadruk op economische ontwikkeling vooral als opgelegd van hogerop. Sterker nog, de dagelijkse praktijken die arme bewoners ondernamen om te voorzien in hun basale behoeften werden in hun beleving fors belemmerd. Belangrijke plekken voor arme bewoners, die hen hielpen te voorzien in hun basale behoeften, moesten wijken voor nieuwe winkels en restaurants. Als gevolg hiervan liggen belangrijke plekken nu verder uit elkaar waardoor zij grotere afstanden moeten afleggen om te voorzien in hun basale behoeften. Daarnaast zendt dit ook een impliciete boodschap aan inwoners die armoede ervaren dat hun perspectief er minder toe doet dan economische ontwikkeling van het gebied. Vanuit het perspectief van arme bewoners werden hun dagelijkse praktijken zoveel mogelijk onzichtbaar gemaakt om het gebied aantrekkelijker te maken voor economische ontwikkeling.

Deze manier van sociaal-ruimtelijke ontwikkeling ontneemt arme bewoners het recht op sociaal-ruimtelijke ontwikkeling die ruimte laat voor hun dagelijkse praktijken. Hierdoor geraken zij verder in de obscuriteit.

In hoofdstuk vier, *Het ontstaan en voortbestaan van armoede op het platteland,* schets ik een gedetailleerd portret van de dagelijkse praktijken van inwoners die armoede ervaren in de plattelandsregio de Groninger Veenkoloniën in de provincie Groningen. Dit gebied wordt gekenmerkt door een lange geschiedenis van armoede. Intergenerationele armoede - wanneer meerdere generaties van dezelfde familie in armoede leven - komt relatief vaak voor. Een uitvoerige beschrijving van de sociale netwerken van (intergenerationele) armoede in deze plattelandsregio biedt belangrijke inzichten in het ontstaan en voortbestaan van (intergenerationele) armoede in een plattelandscontext. De netwerken van arme inwoners zijn over het algemeen klein van omvang, hecht en vertonen een duidelijke hiërarchie gebaseerd op noties als vertrouwen en respect. Kinderen die opgroeien in dergelijke netwerken worden blootgesteld aan moeilijke sociale en economische omstandigheden die hen vatbaar maken voor (machts-)misbruik, mentale en sociale problemen en een negatief zelfbeeld. Ervaren vooroordelen en uitsluiting buiten het eigen netwerk bevestigen dit negatieve zelfbeeld, waardoor een nog sterkere nadruk komt te liggen op het vertrouwde en kleine eigen netwerk dat hen tegelijkertijd bindt aan een situatie van armoede. De wisselwerking tussen negatieve ervaringen binnen en buiten het eigen netwerk vormt een belangrijke grondslag voor de intergenerationele overdraagbaarheid van armoede in de Groninger Veenkoloniën.

Een andere belangrijke sociaal-ruimtelijke component in het voortbestaan van armoede in de Groninger Veenkoloniën is het sociaal-ruimtelijke stigma dat sterk ontwikkeld is in de regio. Dit stigma is geworteld in wijdverspreide kennis binnen de regio over reputaties

van families en generaties in armoede en voedt de vooroordelen bij buitenstaanders die worden ervaren door deze families. Omdat dit stigma is verweven met generaties van dezelfde families in de regio is het stigma zeer hardnekkig en blijken (intergenerationele) processen van sociale uitsluiting van bepaalde groepen en families in armoede moeilijk te doorbreken.

In hoofdstuk vijf, *Voor, tijdens en na het veldwerk,* reflecteer ik op de etnografische aanpak die ik gebruikte in de drie beschreven studies. Uniek is de participatieve benadering die ik gebruikte in de meeste stadia van de studies; van probleemstelling tot data-analyse, tot het delen van bevindingen. Door veel tijd te investeren in het ontwikkelen van een vertrouwensband met veel deelnemers was ik in staat diepe en gedetailleerde kennis over armoedebeleving in de drie gebieden te vergaren. Met name het samen met de deelnemers analyseren van de verhalen zorgde voor een diepere betekenis onder de dagelijkse ervaringen van mensen in armoede en hoe die verband houden met de sociaal-ruimtelijke context en ontwikkelingen daarin.

In het concluderende hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift, hoofdstuk zes, *Levens op de rand,* beschouw en vergelijk ik de bevindingen van de drie etnografische studies in het licht van toenemende sociaal-ruimtelijke ongelijkheid. Dikwijls worden de dagelijkse levens van mensen in armoede gekenmerkt door een wankel evenwicht tussen overleven en vooruit komen. De overkoepelende conclusie van dit proefschrift met betrekking tot de sociale praktijken van mensen die armoede ervaren is dat de sociale structuren die ervoor zorgen dat de beleving van armoede als dragelijker wordt ervaren, mensen tegelijkertijd gevangenhouden in hun situatie van armoede. Deze gevoelige en tweeledige effecten van sociale structuren omtrent armoedebeleving vragen om een sensitieve benadering van sociaal-ruimtelijk

beleid waarin de dagelijkse sociale realiteit van mensen die armoede ervaren centraal staat.

De precaire balans tussen overleven en vooruit komen blijkt makkelijk te verstoren door sociaal-ruimtelijke ingrepen (zoals sociaal mengen, lokale economische ontwikkelingen en wijkvernieuwingen). Een hardnekkige nadruk van sociaal-ruimtelijk op leefbaarheid en economische ontwikkeling gekoppeld aan het onvermogen om mensen in armoede betekenisvol te betrekken bij de ontwikkeling van beleid en interventies dragen in grote mate bij aan het verstoren van deze balans. Over het algemeen creëert de schurende wisselwerking tussen de dagelijkse praktijken van mensen in armoede en sociaal-ruimtelijk beleid nieuwe vormen van ongelijkheid en worden bestaande ongelijkheden geaccentueerd of verergerd. Zodoende raken kwetsbare bevolkingsgroepen verder gemarginaliseerd in hun dagelijkse omgeving en bevinden zij zich steeds dichter aan de randen van de samenleving. Mijn hoop is dat de inzichten uit dit proefschrift aanknopingspunten bieden en bijdragen aan de verdere bewustwording dat het ervaringsperspectief van mensen in armoede een centrale plek verdienen in sociaal-ruimtelijk beleid en onderzoek.

Colophon

Lives on Edge

Everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in disadvantaged areas

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Growing socio-spatial disparities in Western countries is a worrying trend which harms opportunities for a better future, particularly for people experiencing poverty. While the causes for growing socio-spatial inequalities are connected to global economic currents, the polarizing consequences are experienced in the context of everyday life, by ordinary people in cities, towns, and streets.

Lives on edge aims to comprehend the ways in which people experiencing poverty are affected by increasing socio-spatial inequalities in the context of their everyday lives. Based on three ethnographic case studies in the city of Groningen (the Netherlands), the city of Calgary (Canada), and the rural region of the Groninger Veenkoloniën (the Netherlands), this thesis paints a detailed picture of the everyday practices of people experiencing poverty in these disadvantaged areas and how local socio-spatial developments relate to their experiences. The ethnographic evidence from these case studies demonstrates that participants feel that their everyday practices are increasingly marginalized and oppressed with respect to their social and spatial surroundings. An exacerbating factor in this marginalizing process is the tenacious focus of local socio-spatial developments on appearance, rather than focusing on achieving better prospects for vulnerable residents. As a result, the lives of people experiencing poverty are increasingly on edge.