

## Chapter 13

# Confusing the Spatial with the Social: Can Ethnography Offer a Way Out?



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**Abstract** Urban renewal policies applied over Europe since the 1990s have been characterized by an integrated approach towards neighbourhood regeneration, combining an interplay of social and spatial intentions and strategies. In this contribution, we develop an ethnographic account of the occupation of the ground floors in the social high-rise estate of Peterbos, Brussels, in order to show the necessity for studying and translating such interplay locally. While over time, urban designers and spatial planners developed several proposals to include facilities in the plinths of the buildings in order to ‘activate’ the neighbourhood and make it livelier and more vibrant, we highlight such ‘activation’ by shopkeepers, social and community workers is less straightforward. The current occupancy of these spaces is characterized by the embodiment of the spaces by facility managers; their strategies, and those of their clients within and outside the spaces; and different forms of in- and exclusion. As such, the contribution highlights how an ethnographic approach could contribute to making more informed decisions on the design of such spaces.

**Keywords** Urban regeneration · Modernist estates · Ground floors · Ethnography

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### 13.1 Introduction: The Social Effects of Urban Regeneration

In response to the rather insensitive and undemocratic town planning approaches of post-war modernism,<sup>1</sup> urban regeneration policies of the last decades in Europe have been explicitly geared to achieving both social and spatial aims. A social effect is expected from physical measures (Van Kempen and Bolt 2009) through projects that cover issues such as unemployment, social cohesion, and education.

The Neighbourhood Contract programme has played a pioneering role in this (see, for instance, Berger 2019; Lenel 2014). It is applied in the most vulnerable areas of Europe, which combine high unemployment rates, low average incomes, and high density. In these territories, urban design and architecture projects are developed in partnership with local associations. Projects address public space, housing and public facilities, and socio-economic issues. Combining these interventions, the programme aims to socially revitalize neighbourhoods mainly through the transformation of the built environment. Such social revitalization is further supported by the development of participatory trajectories. Citizen participation in this programme is seen as a way to increase urban planners' understanding of an area and directly engage residents in the transformation of their surroundings. As such, citizen participation is a central element of the aim of social transformation.

While integrated and socially sensitive regeneration programmes are generally appreciated, the aims underlying them have not been unanimously welcomed. Many scholars have criticized urban transformation interventions aimed at, for instance, increasing social cohesion and social mix (Atkinson 2008; Blanc 2010; Blokland and Eijk 2010; Lenel 2013; Levin et al. 2014; Loopmans 2010; Van Kempen and Bolt 2009). Authors like Fijalkow (2017) have highlighted that pointing at the need for social cohesion overshadows local experiences and promotes the idea of a lack of social cohesion. It stigmatizes the current population by describing it in terms of problems. Expressing the need for a more social mix is even more stigmatizing, as it starts from the idea that a wealthier population would offer a solution to the 'lack' of social cohesion. While a considerable body of literature in the field of urban studies has been dedicated to the subject, to our knowledge less is known about the way this plays out in the context of the architecture and urban design practice. In this contribution, therefore, we show how regeneration intentions, combining social and spatial aims, are applied in the high-rise estate Peterbos in Brussels, Belgium. We do this by providing an ethnographic account of the occupation of the ground floor of the estate, which is currently undergoing regeneration. In Brussels, high-rise social estates are generally not subject to integrated and comprehensive planning policies that approach the neighbourhood as a whole. Their regeneration is tackled

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<sup>1</sup> In the Brussels Capital Region, town planning activists coined the term 'Bruxellization' to refer to the laissez-faire approach of city authorities regarding urban planning, leaving the matter up to real estate developers. Spatially, this was reflected by drastic slum clearance programmes, with areas being replaced by high-rise office towers and housing.

case by case and only partially, according to the strategic plan<sup>2</sup> of the social housing company (in charge of the renovation of housing) and/or efforts<sup>3</sup> of the municipality (often in charge of the regeneration of public space). Neighbourhood Contracts were developed in these areas only recently, and for the first time in Peterbos.

Large-scale social estates are especially interesting for studying the dual aims of regeneration, as they are subject not only to interventions targeting social cohesion and social mix but also to projects aimed at crime reduction, improved neighbourhood reputation, and residential stability (see, for example, Arthurson 2012; Kleinhans 2004; Tunstall and Fenton 2006; Van Kempen and Bolt 2009).<sup>4</sup> Although theories on the connection between design and social effects have been widely criticized by scholars in the field, specific ideas continue to be part of regeneration intentions (Bolt 2018). This contribution will show how these rather speculative intentions influence architecture and urban design practice and hamper the development of a careful understanding of the actual use, occupation, and appropriation of spaces. By doing so, it hopes to highlight the potential merits of ethnography for developing a more subtle social reading of space.

## 13.2 An Ethnography of the Ground Floors in Peterbos

The social housing estate of Peterbos is located at the western fringe of the Brussels Capital Region and is composed of eighteen high- and mid-rise blocks. Eleven of the eighteen buildings host public facilities on their ground floors, while the others accommodate dwellings and technical or storage spaces. Since 2017, the neighbourhood has been subject to various renovation programmes. Some of these renovations are executed by social housing companies, which benefit from regional subsidies, while others are organized by the municipality, which was granted a Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract programme. This programme includes a master plan for the public space and the construction of public facilities. The ethnography of the occupation of the ground floors in Peterbos was developed in parallel with and independently from the renovation projects. However, being present in the neighbourhood from the start of the programme gave us a certain degree of influence on

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<sup>2</sup> At the regional level, the *quadrennial investment plan* defines a framework for each company according to a strategic plan that they have to present to the regional agency.

<sup>3</sup> As the owner of the public space, the municipality can invest using the municipal budget or apply for different forms of funding at the European, national, and regional levels (Mosseray, Aernouts, & Ryckewaert, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The assumption of a causal relationship between the built environment and human behaviour is not innocent. The architectural determinism of authors like Oscar Newman (1972)—who promoted concepts such as defensible space, situational prevention, and security design—inspired Alice Coleman (1985) to entirely denounce the heritage of large-scale social estates. It also supported politicians like Thatcher in their intention to privatize or demolish a substantial amount of social dwellings. Also, in France, the residentialization (the splitting up of large-scale social estates in autonomous residential units) of the social stock is seen as a cure for the social problems associated with it (Cupers, 2016).

them. This position permitted us to participate in various committees to discuss the project and, on some occasions, present our findings or reflections on the site. As the regeneration process is ongoing at the time of writing, it is difficult to measure whether or how our contribution will influence the final outcome. Our presentations and discussions did lead to some changes in the urban development process. They impacted the way the region conceives the renovation processes. Until now the renovation of the buildings was left to the housing companies, renovating one building (part) after the other. Throughout our discussions and due to our collaborations with the planning stakeholders, we were able to put the need for a broader study on the agenda, in order to develop a vision of the area as a whole.

Our ethnography in the neighbourhood of Peterbos was part of the SoHoLab action research project in Brussels and was mainly based on participant observation, for which one of the researchers lived in an apartment in the estate for twelve months. During these months, she also worked in a social services centre on the ground floor of one block. The ethnography was mostly conducted by the first author (further below named 'I'). Both authors ('we') engaged with the wider research framework (see also Aernouts et al., this book) and participated in discussions with governing bodies and urban designers.

Moving in provided me with the opportunity to participate in the daily life of the neighbourhood. As a resident, I was able to use the services on the ground floor as any other resident could. Some of these services were specifically dedicated to certain uses and people. Therefore, for each place, I adapted the method of observant participation in order to be able to regularly visit it as a 'legitimated' participant: becoming a visitor of the restaurant for the elderly, working one day a week at the social services desk as a volunteer, enrolling in a sewing course during the summer holidays, doing grocery shopping in the neighbourhood, using the local laundromat, and visiting the community centre. I regularly visited these different facilities and got to know all the social assistants, concierges, community workers, and technical staff working on the site. I accepted any invitations for a longer discussion. The service providers of the grocery shop, the municipal social desk, the community centre, the social restaurant, and the youth club became privileged witnesses in the neighbourhood. Apart from visiting the facilities, I experienced the neighbourhood spatially, taking walks in the area, meeting and visiting neighbours, observing the way people use public space, listening to conversations, and speaking with passers-by.

In participant observation, the main instrument of the ethnographer is their personality. It is, thanks to my personal relationships with service providers or users of these services, that I could observe, participate in, spatially experience, and discuss the ground floor services. I collected this data in my notebook. Furthermore, I recorded interviews with professionals and residents in order to trace their discourses and personal residential or working trajectories in the neighbourhood. This contribution is specifically based on four in-depth recorded interviews, organized after two years of exchange.

I developed tools to engage with the built form during the ethnographic fieldwork, including diverse exercises in order to obtain a detailed understanding of the built environment as an independent component. For example, the subject of ground floor

occupation arrived very quickly in the fieldwork, as it is a delicate subject for the associations present in the neighbourhood. They want to be present and visible while they need enough space to support their collective activities. Therefore, spaces on the ground floor were continuously under pressure, being considered a potential place for facilities. In order to help the associations with their aims, I mapped all ground floor occupations. This enabled them to envisage the renovation of existing spaces or argue for the need for additional space in another block.

As attention to the ground floors of the blocks became more present in urban regeneration discussions, I began to focus on their spatial arrangement. I combined methods of participant observation and 3D sketching. Building on observations in the grocery shop of Emine, a local shopkeeper, I then systematically started to map all ground floor facilities. I conducted interviews with each service provider and drew the ground floor spaces and interior arrangements in 3D. These drawings formed the basis for analysing and projecting the way users and residents appropriated and adapted places throughout time. I also used photography to support my analysis and worked with a visual artist living in Peterbos to personify each individual story from the interview in a drawing.

### **13.3 The Ground floor's Place in the Regeneration Discourse**

The design of the ground floors in Peterbos contains remnants of the CIAM modernist architecture movement. Some blocks are constructed on piles, which reinforce the idea of an infinite green carpet. In several buildings, modernist elements such as covered promenades, a colonnade, transparent spaces, and a rhythm of horizontal slabs can be found. In contrast to the initial design, the ground floors became rather functional spaces and less valued as patrimonial and architectural elements. They were either filled in to accommodate specific functions or closed down as a security solution. Facing a lack of places for facilities, local associations transformed technical spaces into workspaces. The ad hoc implementation of facilities and private dwellings over time resulted in a makeshift assembly of low ceilings, little daylight, bad acoustics, and dark spaces, blurring the architectural quality of the few CIAM principles that were applied in the neighbourhood (Fig. 13.1).

Rather than focusing on this loss of architectural quality, urban designers and architects turned their gaze to the occupation of the ground floor in the different renovation plans that were developed during our research in Peterbos. This interest resulted in a common agreement that the 'activation' of the ground floor was a crucial element of a successful renovation operation. It would provide a necessary transition between the public and the private sphere, deemed necessary in order to increase



**Fig. 13.1** The architecture of the ground floors in Peterbos

social surveillance.<sup>5</sup> It also presented the possibility to expand new activities and facilities in order to support a functional mix. Further, it would, create landmarks and support a ‘positive’ appropriation.

The architects in charge of the design of the final master plan refined the Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract programme’s proposal, suggesting a more careful reading of places yet still speaking in terms of ‘activation’ and ‘new functions’. They envisaged commercial and economic activities to offer more facilities and services to local residents and potentially create job opportunities. Nevertheless, they faced several limitations that narrowed their ambitions and reflections. Social housing companies are not allowed to support non-residential uses in their buildings above a certain percentage. Next, the architects were asked to design a master plan for the public space that did not officially include the ground floors. The ethnography will illustrate how activating the ground floors faced not only legal and architectural challenges but should also overcome social obstacles.

## **13.4 The Neighbourhood Facilities: At the Nexus Between a Collective Mental Geography and Individualities**

### ***13.4.1 The Grocery Shop of Emine***

I visited the grocery shop of Emine for the first time with my colleague. Emine was excited to have two ‘international’ visitors (being French and Dutch speaking, we communicate in English) in her shop and welcomed us with her best English. We were looking for some food in order to be able to continue our field visit, and she offered us a sandwich of her specialty. We naturally visited this shop instead of the two others, quite similar, present on the site, maybe due to its proximity to the playground. For us, it represented the most lively place in the afternoon.

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<sup>5</sup> This idea was also coined in Newman’s (1972) concept of defensible space: Architecture should be surrounded by a defensive area, which is provided by a gradient between public and private space. This would allow for social control from the dwellings and as a consequence prevent crime.

Some weeks later, I visited the shop as a 'resident' in order to buy bread. I began to recognize the faces of some people sitting in the shop, who were talking with the owner and other customers. During my first visits, I didn't dare ask for a coffee and sit there. Once she finally questioned me about my presence, Emine remembered my visit from a few weeks ago with a friend. From that moment onwards, we developed a close relationship: I passed by at least once a week and, depending on the crowd, chatted with her and other customers. She then referred to me as someone special whom she could confide.

Her shop is where Emine spends most of her time. Since 2013, she and her husband work there 7/7 from 9 to 9. Their life trajectories resulted in them investing in the shop as a common project. Previously, her sister had owned the shop, and before that, her cousin. This has contributed, since the 1990s, to the continued use of the name 'chez la Turque' in the neighbourhood. Emine left her much-loved job (working as a lacemaker at the Grand Place in Brussels for about 15 years) after she got married in order to work with her husband, a newcomer from Turkey. As her husband did not master any of Belgium's national languages, she saw the shop as an opportunity to work together, applying the same strategy her sister and cousin applied previously with their Turkish husbands.

Contrary to her sister, Emine does not rent the apartment above the shop, which is attached to it. With her husband, she decided to stay in their newly renovated home 10 km from the area. She expresses the difficulty of commuting, leaving her with very little free time at home.

She took over the shop and was confident she would be able to manage the enterprise differently and better than her sister. The previous bankruptcy and bad experiences with burglaries did not scare Emine. However, she points to various difficulties involved in maintaining a shop like hers: being accepted by the neighbourhood, the threat of theft, coexisting with youth hanging around the place, the high expectations of her clients... As she invested her savings in this project, she does not have any alternative than persevere in the running of the shop, despite the difficulties of the neighbourhood. Recently, however, after seven years, Emine and her husband have decided to hand over the shop, as the difficulties became too significant.

In terms of space, Emine struggles to find the right layout: to be visible enough, respect the rules of the landlord, manage her stock, and organize her space as protectively as possible and yet be welcoming. She describes her shop in terms of protection first: she created a shield with shutters, window protection, and cameras. Her counter fences in half the merchandise. From there, she is able to see outside without being seen too much. Her position next to the playground brings in many children buying sweets, an aspect of her job she likes (Fig. 13.2). However, her central position in the neighbourhood, together with the 'protective' adaptations, sometimes turns out to be at her disadvantage. Her shop is often appropriated and invaded by a group of youngsters, who use it to shield themselves from the police. She is therefore in constant negotiation with them.

Emine also mentions the necessity for her to adapt her offer to specific needs, for example by acting as a nearby grocery shop for physically disabled people who represent an important part of her clients or by developing a partnership with residents





Fig. 13.2 The shop of Emine



who sell their homemade dishes. These adaptations not only result from the socio-economic situation of residents but also from the particular needs they face. Emine therefore sells specific products (bottles of water that are too heavy for pedestrians to carry a long way) and offers specific services (hot coffee, sandwiches, home delivery, and the fulfilment of individual requests).

### 13.4.2 *Facilities as Points of Reference*

The deep personal involvement highlighted in the story of Emine reflects a common trend in Peterbos. In my interviews with the managers of the different facilities in the neighbourhood—the shopkeepers, community workers, municipal employees, and volunteers (largely women)—it became clear that their individual investment often results in embodying their service (Fig. 13.3). Residents refer to ‘*chez Françoise*’, ‘*chez Khadija*’, ‘*le groupe de Youssef*’, ‘*le local de Pierre*’, ‘*chez la Turque/ chez Emine*’, and ‘*avec Julie*’ to describe the municipal social services desk, the social restaurant, the youth club, etc. These people’s individual life stories, together with their long-term presence in the neighbourhood, contribute to making them common figures and references. Youssef grew up in Peterbos. As a young man, he was looking for a space to do activities with his friends. Françoise, the initiator of the social desk, explains her long attachment to the municipality and the neighbourhood. She encountered many difficulties in finding colleagues and worries about her succession in the future. Newer users of the ground floors, such as Emine, express the necessity to be accepted by the neighbourhood, given the long engagement of others. Most managers entered the estate due to their life trajectories: being a former or current resident, having an immigrant background, being attached to their municipality... Being ‘on the first line’, they are often confronted with difficult life circumstances, such as loneliness, poverty, and disease. The trajectories and their understanding of these conditions contribute to their deep involvement and enable the preservation of facilities in the neighbourhood.



Fig. 13.3 Artistic interpretation of four facility managers (©Frederic Chapelle)

### 13.4.3 *Facilities as Chameleons*

The ‘in-between’ position of facility managers, who are physically present but do not experience residents’ difficulties, makes them engage with the spatial layout of the neighbourhood in a specific way. Some architectural elements support their occupation, while other elements invoke uses that they do not desire. A colonnade allows the pharmacy to display lettering and the Pakistani manager of the grocery shop to cover his fruit and vegetables outside. The location of Emine’s shop enables her to attract some clients while it discourages others, who are afraid of experiencing undesirable situations. The low wall in front of her shop invites youth to hang around, which makes some people feel uncomfortable. Also, Françoise, the social assistant that manages the social desk near Emine’s shop, appreciates her central position in the neighbourhood as a way to welcome as many residents as possible. For the same reason, the community workers located in the extreme north of the neighbourhood, which is less frequented by passers-by, moved their community space in order to attract more residents to their activities. Yet, the central position of Françoise sometimes makes her feel trapped, for instance when she is exposed to aggression in front of her window. She feels that the transparency of her desk is detrimental to the intimacy she would like to offer to her visitors. Likewise, once they moved, the community workers decided to relocate their offices to a more remote location in a former dwelling. The location is less transparent, allowing them to be less visible and keep their distance from regular clients with psychological problems.

The location and spatial layout of the facilities have obliged facility managers to develop adjustment strategies. The story of Emine shows how the geographic location and architecture of the shop lead her to engage with its spatial layout in a certain manner, resulting in a specific architecture and aesthetic. Her adaptations are in line with the opportunities offered by high-rise buildings and with the legal status of renting, as they depend on the rules and expectations of the landlord. In the case of the shop, many windows have been sealed by shutters in order to prevent vandalism, creating an image of an unused or closed space. Initially, Emine wanted to put advertising on the closed shutters, but this was not allowed by the landlord. She also decided to diminish the surface of the shop to reduce the cost of rent and the risk of theft, while improving the view of her merchandise. These practices show how activating and giving life to the surroundings cannot be reduced to the presence of facilities.

More generally, each of the facilities present in the eleven buildings today reveals different kinds of adaptations (Fig. 13.4). These adaptations—the shutters of Emine, curtains of the sewing course, drawings on the window of the computer class, a reorganized public terrace of the community centre—make the facilities less identifiable to people that do not live in the neighbourhood. Residents develop their mental maps differently. Over time and depending on their needs, they have learnt what the neighbourhood has to offer. Within the neighbourhood, residents use spatiotemporal references—through shared terms such as ‘*chez la Turc*’, ‘*à la plaine*’, ‘*au riso*’, and ‘*le parc du pont*’—to refer to the facilities offered there. Behind these names,

they see the services the area offers, and they orient themselves to these accordingly: where to find administrative help and at what time, where to buy a sandwich without any apparent sandwich bar being present in the neighbourhood, or where to get a free coffee.

Consequently, facilities and their services are often hidden from the general public. Recognizing the activities taking place behind these shutters or small doors requires a knowledge of the shop's interior and of implicit rules. Emine, for instance, hides certain activities because she might be at the limit of legality by offering these services, but also because they are not offered to everyone. In her case, only women are invited to sit to have their coffee, while men will be offered takeaway coffee only.



**Fig. 13.4** Peterbos ground and public facilities—Facades of ground floor facilities (community centre—computer classroom—grocery shop—pharmacy—social restaurant—grocery shop—grocery shop—social housing company desk—social desk—sewing classroom)

### 13.4.4 *Facilities as Spaces of Encounter and Coexistence*

Emine's story illustrates how ground floor facilities can become places of encounters, mixing generations, origins, or genders while also welcoming visitors to the neighbourhood, from social workers to clients of drug dealers to children. The location, interior of the shop, and Emine's personality add to this. However, these encounters are experienced in manifold senses, as places of not only exchange and meeting, but also conflict and confrontation. Broadly considered positive, supporting sparks of social cohesion, the facility also generates uncomfortable feelings. As the shop front is from time to time the scene of violent exchanges between municipal workers and youngsters hanging around there, some residents avoid it as much as possible. These ad hoc scenes and consequences influence the overall appreciation of the place by residents.

Moreover, other ground floor facilities, such as the social restaurant, the sewing course, and the youth club, are meant to function as places of encounter, welcoming a mixed public. In reality, they accommodate a public sharing the same ethno-cultural background (Fig. 13.5). The story of Khadija, who is responsible for the senior restaurant, highlights this. She expresses her pain when discussing the very racist welcome the exclusively European (Belgian, Spanish, and Italian) restaurant regulars once gave to a veiled woman. This de facto categorization of facilities leads to unwelcoming reactions and even rejections. Without minimizing the importance of non-mixed places, qualifying all neighbourhood facilities as places of encounter needs to be nuanced from this perspective.

Building on this lens of encounter and diversity, the value of more flexible uses of space appeared to me during the fieldwork. For instance, the ground floor of Block 3 historically welcomes two associations (a youth club and a community organization), which together constitute a sort of community centre. Both projects have different objectives and target groups but coexisted for years until 2020, embodying a successful, flexible, and inclusive place that attracted mixed groups (mainly in terms of generational diversity: elderly and adults on one side and youth, children, and their parents on the other). Although the staff of the organizations got along well, they did not see the advantage of sharing a space. They decided to split, as the place could not be appropriated enough by the young public and had too many



**Fig. 13.5** The sewing course and the social restaurant

logistic challenges. Although this and other places, such as the social restaurant, were implemented with the goal of offering an open and flexible space, a series of decisions led to the allocation of spaces to a specific organization catering to specific groups, excluding others.

### **13.5 A Potential Role for Ethnography in Offering a More Subtle Social-Spatial Reading?**

What can we learn from an ethnography of space? Could it help us develop more socially sensitive accounts of spatial interventions, instead of giving social justifications for spatial design? In this contribution, we discussed three dimensions that characterize facilities and that, according to us, need careful consideration when rethinking the ground floor spaces: the embodiment of spaces by facility managers; the way these facility managers and their clients engage with space; and the forms of in- and exclusion that accompany this.

First, 'activating' ground floors preferably builds on a reflection on the kinds of activities that may take place. In a modernist typology, historical building blocks that can be used to read and orient oneself in the city do not apply. In Peterbos, ground floor activities became important landmarks. Not necessarily the spaces in and of themselves, but rather the offer in and embodiment of the spaces by facility managers create spatiotemporal references. We see that this role of facility managers is strongly intertwined with their personal history and attachment to the neighbourhood. Still, they continue to encounter several challenges when becoming (and remaining) facility managers, which makes such activation of spaces not obvious.

Second, a call for activation requests an understanding of how facility managers and their clients engage with space. In urban design, the activation and appropriation of places are often associated with a spatial interface between the private and the public, between the street and the building. As such a link is not obvious in high-rise estates, spatial professionals may want to generate activity on the ground floor in order to support this kind of appropriation. This is in line with the idea that a mixed-use neighbourhood is the desired pattern of physical development that can achieve a more vital, vibrant, attractive, safe, viable, and sustainable urban lifestyle (Mehta 2009). The layout of the shops in Peterbos offers some interesting insights into the nature of the transition. While architectural components such as a colonnade support the display of goods and personalizing of shop fronts, other elements, such as a low wall, are not necessarily seen as desirable, as they attract loitering teens. Many glass facades have been partially covered (e.g. from totally open to totally closed) in reaction to their exposure to large public spaces. Inside, the decoration of interiors by facility managers builds on a transition within the space, with some areas of the facility being more open and public and others more closed, while still keeping an eye on the more public spaces. Next to these material adaptations by facility managers meant to discourage or attract clients, we also identified immaterial strategies, such

as offering services to people whom facility managers could identify. These material and immaterial components and strategies create different gradients of intensity and attractiveness and punctuate life in the neighbourhood.

Third, in the design process in Peterbos, ground floors were defined as places to be equipped in order to support appropriation, encounters, and potential social cohesion. However, residents have an ambivalent attachment to these places. Some facilities generate activity, while others are avoided by residents. Depending on the service provider, the offer, and the location, we can distinguish three gradients of encounter: between diverse groups, such as in shops, where loose communities are constructed; within certain groups, mostly through social or community organizations; and between and within groups at the same time, in multifunctional spaces that invite diverse groups in one location.

Ultimately, spatial design remains the material outcome and result of construction and renovation processes. The social realities and social constructions already at stake can support the reimagining of this design, but the interpretation and spatial translation of this reading remain in the hands of the designer. Succeeding in providing for the diverse spatial concerns of the groups exploiting, using, and occupying it is the first step towards a more socially sensitive urban design. The images supporting this contribution show that this might start not only with a careful reading of a space but also with experimenting with new forms of expression and representation.

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