# We stay home(less)!

*A research on the social space of homeless people and the impact of Covid-19*

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# Abstract

Currently the Covid-19 virus is still affecting the whole world and its impact is as relevant as ever. In the Netherlands, the country on which this research is focussed, the pandemic had an enormous impact on the population. This research is focussing specifically on the impact of the pandemic for the homeless population. The first aim was to provide insight in the social space and associated tensions of the homeless people in the Netherlands, with a regional focus on the cities Groningen and Assen. The second aim was to investigate in what ways the Covid-19 pandemic affected these factors. The central research question posed covering these two research aims was: How does the Covid-19 pandemic affect the social space and associated tensions for homeless people in Groningen and Assen?

This research used interviews and secondary data in the form of multiple policy documents and various media sources. The results showed both positive and negative outcomes of the pandemic for the homeless population. The most important conclusions were that the perceived space for homeless people in general became smaller, there was less spatial movement due to broader sheltering options and Covid-19 measures. The conceived space showed exclusion before and during the pandemic, but became more inclusive during the peaks of the pandemic. The lived space of homeless people was heavily influenced by the circumstances the homeless were in before and during the pandemic. There were feelings of vulnerability in shelters and on the street, but extended and/or private sheltering options gave a group of homeless more rest and a chance to recover. These outcomes highlight the importance of a safe place to stay for homeless people. Not only during a pandemic, but also in general.

Keywords: Homelessness, Covid-19, Triad of space, Social space, Conflicts in/between elements.

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# Preface

When I decided to start a master in socio-spatial planning previous february I would have never imagined it to look the way it did. After just a few weeks of physical education everything switched to online education. When the thesis market offered several topics on the impact of Covid-19 I immediately told myself that my thesis would not be on the thing that already impacted other aspects of my life. However, during my studies a great interest in inequality, and in particular spatial and social inequality, was developed. Therefore, when the topic of the impact of Covid-19 on specific groups of vulnerable people was introduced, I decided that my interest in this topic was too much to skip the subject of Covid-19.

This thesis, and especially the context of doing research during a pandemic, cost me quite some struggles and flexibility. However, thanks to a lot of people I was able to hand in a product that I am content with. I want to thank my supervisor Ina Horlings for her feedback, ideas, reflections and suggestions. I also want to thank all the people who made time for the interviews and gave me explanations whenever something was still vague to me about specific information on homelessness. I especially want to thank the people providing me new resources and giving me suggestions to take into account things I did not think about yet. Furthermore I want to thank my husband for being patient and trying to help whenever I was grumpy, stressed or stuck with my thesis. I also want to thank him for listening and being there whenever I had new thoughts or was enthousiastic about new interesting findings.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

*¨Shelter Organisations for homeless people trouble their heads about how to organize shelter in the context of Corona. Most homeless people are in poor health and are therefore particularly vulnerable. They are not able to withdraw into their own homes.´*
**Dagblad van het Noorden** 17-03-20, 14:00

This quote from a regional newspaper perfectly captures the essence of the problems homeless people, and the people working with them, deal with in the last few months. Since March 2020 the Covid-19 crisis and the measurements for protection against the spread of this virus have impacted the day to day lives of many people. In the Netherlands several restrictions are put in place, such as keeping a distance of at least 1.5 meters from others and a maximum limit for the amount of people in a certain space. They are meant for everyone to uphold (Rijksoverheid, 2020). It is still unclear if these restrictions will have a lasting character, resulting in a different design, perception and use of public space (Honey-Roses et al., 2020). However, not everyone suffers from the consequences of these restrictions to the same extent and experiences them in the same way. Some groups need to deal with a larger impact of the restrictions on their lives. Examples of such groups are singles, the elderly and homeless people (Lamker et al, 2020).

This research will focus on the last group; the homeless. Homelessness seems to be an increasing phenomenon within the Netherlands. In a time frame of 9 years the population of homeless people between the ages of 18 and 65 has more than doubled in number, increasing from around 17,800 people in 2009 to around 39,300 people in 2018 (CBS, 2019).
Research on homeless has always been difficult, not just because this group is relatively hard to find, but also because not every homeless person is willing and capable to participate in research. (Amore et al., 2011). Finding numbers on the size of the homeless population in a particular city of country is also not easy, since there is no method that includes all the homeless (Hwang, 2001). An often used method, counting the homeless that sleep in shelters, excludes the number of homeless always sleeping on the streets. Another group that is often forgotten and left out of the official numbers are the illegal immigrants, this group is often nearly impossible to find since they often do not use the shelters (Hwang, 2001). In the Netherlands the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS) estimates annually the amount of homeless within the country. As mentioned before, they found that the Netherlands accommodates a steadily growing population of about 40000 homeless people (CBS, 2019). This case study will be conducted in the Dutch city of Groningen. This municipality has a relatively stable population of approximately 200 homeless people (de Jonckheere, 2019).

The reason for choosing the homeless population is that it has been shown that pandemics have a bigger impact on the poor and marginalized (Perri et al., 2020). In the case of homeless people this is even worse, since shelters have proven to be an excellent environment for contamination of infectious diseases. Not only because of the sharing of living spaces, but also because there is often overcrowdedness, it is harder to keep the commanded 1,5 meter and the alternation of visitors within the shelters is high. In addition, Covid-19 is more dangerous for people with underlying health problems, which is often the case within the homeless population (Perri et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic was a reason for the governments to apply certain measures that also impact the use of public space. Previous research has shown that an increase in control of the urban space has led to spatial exclusion for homeless people (Bergamashi et al., 2014). Since tensions are already present within the social space of homeless people, it is interesting to see if these tensions increase because of the Covid 19 pandemic. Likewise it is interesting to see if and how policy makers thought about this group in their decision making. They are already a marginalized group, since they do not possess political, social and economic power and are often disadvantaged in these power relations (Berndt and Colini, 2013).

## 1.2 Knowledge gap and academic relevance

The Covid-19 pandemic raises questions on how society uses and should use space. Basic understandings of relations between concepts like people, communities and space seem to stagger (Lamker et al. 2020). A pandemic with consequences like this is new to our contemporary society, and there is a knowledge gap in how different groups are affected by this and in how to ensure that existing inequalities will not be exacerbated and fortified in this time of crisis. The aim of this study is to contribute to spatial science gaining knowledge about this new situation and its accompanying new policies, that will contribute to filling the knowledge gap this new societal state exposes.  This research adds to a better understanding of the implications of the pandemic for the social space of the homeless. The results of the case study and the information which can be drawn from it are valuable for spatial policy makers to think about vulnerable groups and their need for safe spaces. In addition, this research answers to the call for more kindness in spatial planning for the vulnerable, especially in these times (Forester, 2020).

## 1.3 Societal relevance

As mentioned before homelessness is an increasing problem. The homeless population is growing and in times like these this is both a social and health problem. It is important to gain an understanding of the change in social space and associated tensions for the homeless, since a better understanding can help mitigate the tensions.

Next to this understanding and mitigating the inequality affecting homeless is highly important from a societal point of view, as high spatial inequality will lead to other forms of inequality which can result in increased poverty. It has been suggested that on a macroscale inequalities also affect the economic growth rate itself and may increase the risks of conflict, or call for more redistributive spending by the government (McKay & Perge, 2015).

## 1.4 Research objectives and central question

The first aim of this study is to provide insight in the social space and associated tensions of the homeless people in Groningen and Assen. The second aim is to research in what ways the Covid-19 pandemic affected these.

The central research question covering these two research aims is:
How does the Covid-19 pandemic affect the social space and associated tensions for homeless people in Groningen and Assen?

To answer the central research question the following sub questions were formulated:

- What did/does the perceived space of the homeless in Groningen and Assen look like before/after the pandemic?
- What did/does the conceived space of the homeless in Groningen and Assen look like before/after the pandemic?
- What did/does the lived space of the homeless in Groningen and Assen look like before/after the pandemic?
- Were tensions present in the social space of the homeless in Groningen and Assen before/after the pandemic resulting in more or less exclusion, marginalization and injustice?

# 2. Theoretical framework

## 2.1 Lefebvre's theories of space

*¨Lefebvre's production of space ideas remain contentious but highly relevant for the investigation of city transformation in general and how the planning of urban space can contribute to social injustice in particular¨* (Soja 2010; Harvey 2012; Leary-Owhin, 2015, p. 7).

### The production of space

The most important scholar in light of the production of space and its underlying power relations is Henry Lefebvre (Gottdiener, 1993). The work of Henry Lefebvre was not widely spread before the 1990's. However, after a translation of the book ´The production of space´ came to be, Lefebvre's theories and insights became a central topic of discussion within the field of geography throughout the western world (Gottdiener, 1993). Lefebvre (1991) refers to space as both physical and mental. He states that the relationship between the physical and social side of space cannot be separated and this results in the concept of social space. Social space is a social construct and is therefore not neutral. By saying that space is produced, Lefebvre suggests that space can be compared with other economic goods (Molotch, 1993). Humans create the spaces in which they then live their lives. The creation of this space is influenced by the interests of the different classes. In addition to this, the produced and built space can amongst other things, be bought and sold (Molotch, 1993). Lefebvre believes the Marxist notion that ¨our lives have been colonized by capitalism, so too has its location — social space¨(Elden, 2007, p.105). For this reason it is very important to understand the production of space in these times of increasing urbanization and a growing world population.

### The right to the city

Larger towns and cities in industrialized countries are the geographical places where the scarcity of space is most visible. Therefore the class struggle in space is also most visible here. In his book ´The right to the city´ Lefebvre philosophizes about this class struggle in space. The slogan ´the right to the city´ became very popular, but the precise notion of whose right to the city and what the right was is still a topic of debate. The definition that will be used in this research is the definition of McCann (2005). The right to the city according to him, is the right not to be marginalized in decision making (McCann, 2005; Attoh, 2011).
In 2008 Harvey introduces the concept of the right to the city as: ¨the right to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade and to do so in a fundamental and radical way¨ (Harvey, 2008). The power

of shaping the observable space has always been in the hands of the few people in power. Harvey makes a case that it is important for the poor and oppressed to have this right to the city as well. In the past space was not a scarce resource, but it becomes more and more in short supply (Elden, 2007). Therefore Lefebvre concludes that: "Today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.68).

A version of this city in which everyone has the right to the city would be one that embodies the concept of sharing cities, introduced by McLaren and Aygeman (2015). Their work is focused on just sustainability, a theory of sustainability that is driven by justice, and therefore promotes a pathway that creates just outcomes and takes into account social needs and welfare for a sustainable future instead of primarily "green" outcomes that are only environmentally focussed (Aygeman, 2008). McLaren and Aygeman (2015) make the case to "understand cities as shared spaces and acting to share them fairly". They state that it is in human nature to share, but the commercialization of the public realm and other developments made sharing more difficult. Therefore policy makers and urban governance should be focussed on equity and justice and by doing this they naturally promote a cultural shift towards more trust and collaboration. This will not only result in an increased social investment in the public urban space, but also inherently increases an attitude of sharing through this enhanced public realm. This "sharing paradigm" with the dominant goal of "sharing the entire city" should be leading in the cities of the future according to McLaren and Aygeman (2015).

## The triad of space

The idea of ´one true space´ is dismissed by Lefebvre, who states that space is not just an abstract concept. He proposes the concept of ´truth of space´ instead, in which conceptual and embodied aspects of the human being producing their own social space are included (Carp, 2008). The imbalance between this abstract notion of space and the other factors that should be taken into account can be analyzed with the conceptual triad that Lefebvre (1991) offers. Every element in this triad stands for a facet of the production of social space. The connections between these elements show the practice of how people produce space and are influenced by this space in their lives (Carp, 2008). The triad consists of three elements: perceived space, conceived space and lived space.

Perceived space is the space where actions and interaction take place. This is where social relations develop and daily routines are carried out, both collective and individual. Since spatial practice is observable, this perceived space is also referred to as the readable and visible space (Lefebvre, 1991; Wiedmann and Salama, 2012).

Contrary to the perceived space, the conceived space is abstract, since it is based on the visions, principles and beliefs of the people in power. These people can mark the social and physical space and therefore influence the ''concrete'' notion of space. Conceived space is conceptualized by scientific theories and is therefore an outcome of science, knowledge and ideology (Lefebvre, 1991; Wiedmann and Salama, 2012). Planners and policy makers are the ones who create these ´representations of space´. Hence these are not neutral; they impose a value of how and whom the public urban space should be used (Leary-Ohwin, 2015).

In addition there is the lived space. Lived space is characterized by Lefebvre as the unconscious space that is directly linked to the passive experience of the user of the space. According to Carp (2008, p.135) lived spaces: ¨are recognized through the embodied, highly subjective, and intersubjective experiences of living here and now in felt relationship to past, present, and future.¨
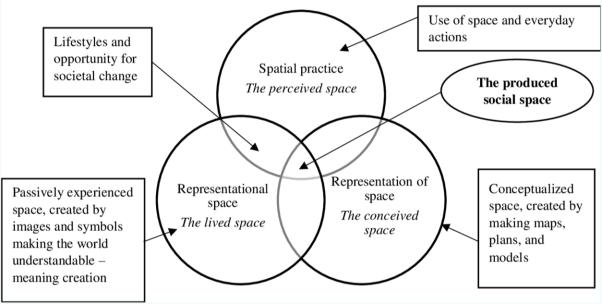


**Figure 1:** *The spatial triad (Thodelius, 2018).*

## 2.2 The social space of homeless people

### Defining the homeless

For this research the key concept is the social space of homeless people. To carry out research on the homeless population a definition of homelessness is important to have a clear distinction of who will and who will not be included in the case study.

The concept of homelessness however is not one that is easy to define. Consensus has not been gained on a definition either in the scientific or political context throughout the decades (Amore et al., 2011 ; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998). This lack of definition is not only a problem for theoretical reasons, but is especially problematic when taking into account policy making (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998). Some scholars, like Springer (2000) argue especially for proper language use when speaking about homeless people. Being without proper housing is a tangible concept, while being without a home can have multiple interpretations. As a result they propose to use the word houseless instead. Amore et al. (2011) decided on their own definition which defines homeless as sufficing to two criteria:

¨1. Living in a place of habitation (during the reference period) that is below a minimum adequacy standard; and

2. Lacking access to adequate housing.¨

They provide a clearer view on what adequate housing is using the ETHOS model, which states that adequate housing can only be considered adequate if the housing can be afforded for a long period of time and is a safe and healthy environment both physically and socially. They state that the exceptions to these criteria are ´culturally recognized exceptions´ such as hospitals and prisons. This conceptualization is often used within the European Union.

Rossi and Wright (1987) were the first scholars to make a distinction between different kinds of homelessness and identified two groups. The first group is what they call the ´literal homeless´. This group would be included in almost every definition of homelessness since they do not have access to conventional and (semi-)stable housing. The second group could be called the ´precariously housed´ and was used to describe people with weak or temporary housing situations that could be categorized as (semi-)stable. This category could include people living in motels, campers or other temporary forms of housing (Rossi and Wright, 1987). This definition also has a cultural factor since a weak housing situation might look different from country to country.

In this research the so-called literal homeless people will be the main focus, since these are the people that are without a place to retreat in times of a pandemic and are therefore more likely to be impacted by the pandemic itself. Considering the scope of this research, operationalization of the elements within the spatial triad to fit the literal homeless is needed for this case study. Therefore an approach to Lefebvre's elements is based on literature on the homeless and their use of space.

## Perceived space

The perceived space or spatial practice of the homeless population can be analyzed by looking at what space they use and for what actions. The dominant space used in the everyday lives of the homeless people is the public urban space. The description of public space in urban planning has been ´open space´for the last decades, referring to the opposite of closed spaces like home and work. These open spaces referred to were usually streets, parks and publicly owned places outdoors (Tonnelat, 2010). However urban spaces are in rapid development and more and more public spaces shift from commons to semi-public or semi-private spaces. When following this conventional idea of public space, the public realm is shrinking at a fast pace because of these rapid developments. Privatization and shopping mall development are two examples of this.

Nowadays one could argue that the definition of public space should be a space that is accessible for the ´public´, without specifying ownership of the space (Tonnelat, 2010). Since most literal homeless people do not have access to private space, they do not only use the public space like the rest of the users, but often also use public space as private space. Therefore access to the public space is essential for the homeless (Doherty et al., 2008). Public space in a sense is the home of the homeless where their everyday life takes place.

For some homeless the public space is also the place they find or earn their survival resources. These places are labelled 'sustaining habitats' by Bergamaschi et al. (2014). They give an example of one of these ¨sustaining habitats¨ in the form of the central railway station in the city. Contrary to the majority of the visitors of this station the homeless do not come here with the main reason of transport, but they use available services like waiting rooms and toilets here (Bergamaschi et al., 2014). Another example of such a sustaining habitat in the Netherlands would be the supermarket where the 'straatkrant', a tabloid homeless people can sell to make money for their first necessities, can be sold and free coffee can be drunk.

The choice of homeless people for the public urban space is not coincidental. The strong bonding with city centres is a rational choice for survival. The daily reality of being homeless forces rational choices to be made for short term survival (Bergamaschi et al., 2014).

### Conceived space

The conceived space of the homeless is abstract and is shaped by scientific knowledge and people in power. Since the majority of the everyday lives of literal homeless people is carried out in public spaces, the conceived space is influencing the homeless more than housed people. Homeless people cannot retrieve into their private space when the conceived space is less convenient or enjoyable to them. The conceived space is one of the elements that can be a major cause of conflict and tension. If the perceived and conceived space are contradicting, meaning the way homeless use space and the way policy and plans want and allow them to use space are conflicting, tensions will rise (Doucette-Préville, 2015). For this research the dominant views on spatial practices within society will also be included in the element of conceived space. Even though these views are not conceptualized visually by policy makers or planners, they are conceptualized norms inside the minds of people.

### Lived space

The lived space or the representational space of the homeless can be analyzed by looking at the way space is experienced by the homeless, as a result of the perceived and conceived space. An example to illustrate this is the shaping of the homeless identity. The lived space of the homeless is the public space. Being seen carrying out private life in public spaces, and for example carrying one's belongings, shapes the homeless identity (Bergamaschi et al., 2014). The conceptualization of norms and values inside people's mind makes carrying out one's private life in public deviating, both within the mind of the homeless individual and within the minds of the bypassers. To cite Bergamaschi et al. (2014): *¨Once a person is reduced to living on the street, the "traditional" supports of his life gradually become weaker and weaker, and ultimately tend to disappear. As a consequence, these people are deprived of their former identity; their life on the street shapes a new one. Hence, urban public space is not only the place where they spend most of their day, but it is also a mechanism which contributes towards shaping a new identity.¨* (Bergamaschi et al., 2014).

Other forms of these lived experiences as a result of tension between and within the elements of the triad are marginalization, exclusion and injustice. In a previous research that uses Lefebvre's triad of space in a case with homeless people we can also see these tensions. Doucette-Préville (2015) compared the spatial practices of the homeless population with the representations of space that the policy makers of the city present. Correspondingly, he compares the spatial practices of the homeless population with the social practices of the general public. The spatial practices of these groups differ, which causes tension. Doucette-Préville (2015) concludes that the dichotomy between the homeless and the housed population will remain and we should come to terms with the difference in usage of the public urban space. Not only does this research show that tension exists within the spatial triad itself,

but it also shows the tension between the different social spaces of people. In the study of Doucette-Préville (2015) we can also indicate that tension arises because the conceived space does not match up with the lived and perceived space, resulting in marginalization, exclusion and injustice.

## 2.3 Tension and conflict

The fact that tension between the different elements of social space can result in (spatial) exclusion, marginalization and injustice is determined. To indicate whether this tension is present within the context of this study and whether or not this tension and conflict is increased by the Covid-19 pandemic these concepts should be defined, explained and operationalized.

**Exclusion**

Exclusion, as found in the Cambridge Dictionary is defined as: *''the act of not allowing someone or something to take part in an activity or to enter a place''*. The form of exclusion in which homeless are not allowed or at least discouraged to be in or use certain places is also referred to as spatial exclusion. There are several ways in which this spatial exclusion takes place. Bergamaschi et al. name several examples: *'From zero tolerance policing to anti-social conduct by-laws, from privatization to militarization, from gentrification to sanitization, from pervasive surveillance to exclusionary urban design, each can be considered as an example of this trend*.' Mitchell (1995) explains in his article 'The end of public space' the underlying mechanisms that make people want to hide the homeless within public space. He explains that since the homeless are always visible in public space they are not regarded as a part of the public anymore. The private life of a homeless person is carried out in public which is challenging existing norms and makes people uncomfortable. It is not just the aesthetic presence of homelessness that makes people uncomfortable, but also the underlying associations people will have with the homeless. The visual sight of homeless people stands for chaos and decay, which is believed to be contagious. In this belief a public square that harbours a homeless person will soon be believed to be a bad neighbourhood (Mitchell, 1995). Even though Mitchells explanation stems from a quarter century ago, nowadays there still is a common trend in spatial exclusion of the homeless according to multiple studies (Doherty et al., 2008; Bergamaschi et al., 2014). However, there is a difference between the European and American context. In the European context, in which this research takes place, the exclusionary measures are often not targeted specifically on the homeless, however the impact of these urban policies result in spatial exclusion for them (Bergamaschi et al., 2014).

## Marginalization

Next to being known as an excluded group, homeless are also often mentioned as a marginalized group. According to the Cambridge Dictionary marginalization is: *"the act of treating someone or something as if they are not important"*.  In the case of the homeless, there are many prejudices against them found within society that could make them marginalized. A recent research (Small, 2020) in which college students were asked for as many adjectives as possible to describe homeless people showed that the majority of the adjectives mentioned were negative with 74%. The five words that were mentioned most often were: dirty, hungry, poor, smelly and sad. After that words like uneducated, mentally ill, drunk, helpless and aggressive were mentioned most (Small, 2020). Because of these prejudices, media representation and experiences, the collective perception of homeless is quite negative.

This negative connotation that is present within society about the homeless community will affect the extent to which homeless will be taken into account in the debates on public affairs. Their voice could be seen as less important. When we look at the concept of public space used within political philosophy, it is inspired by the Roman and Greek ideas of public arenas where: ¨the public affairs of the city are discussed among an assembly of equal citizens¨ (Tonnelat, 2010). Are homeless people seen as equal and equally important citizens and do they have access to the discussion on public affairs regarding the use of the public urban space? There have been discussions about the way the right to the city should be applied to the homeless population. Some scholars even state that a right to the city for the homeless is an anti democratic right. This can be explained by the fact that is mentioned before; the way that homeless use public urban space can possibly make housed people uncomfortable. Attoh (2011) gives the example that laws that prohibit homeless to panhandle are often supported by a majority, while according to Mitchell (2003), these laws are the example of homeless not having a right to the city. The same could be applied to homeless occupying parks. Attoh (2011) therefore states that there is a lot of tension between the right of marginalized homeless versus the majority.

## Injustice

When looking at the concept of injustice it is first important to look into the concept of justice itself. Rawls (2009) introduces justice as fairness and then proceeds with the idea of a 'veil of ignorance' for approaching justice within decision making. This veil of ignorance implies that a just decision can only be taken if you imagine not to know your own place, wealth, social class, abilities and intelligence in the situation you are planning for. Therefore when one decides on people's rights and duties, one is not inclined to think only from one's own perspective and therefore is inclined to choose the best for every person within society, making it the most just decision.

The concept of justice was not made explicit for a long time by the majority of the scholars within the behavioural sciences, but since 1990 approaches to urban justice were developed (Carmon and Fainstein, 2013). These approaches could largely be partitioned in three main approaches: communicative rationality, recognition of diversity and the just city/spatial justice approach.

Another approach to judge how just or unjust something is, was introduced by Vallentyne (2007). He considers the distributive patterns within society to be most important to approach justice. These distributive patterns are egalitarianism, prioritarianism, sufficientarianism and the desert basis. Egalitarianism is the belief that everyone deserves the same rights and opportunities. Prioritarianism is the belief that people with less opportunities should be "the first priority" and receive certain benefits to level their status with others. Sufficientarianism resembles prioritarianism in a sense, since it also wants the people at the bottom to go up, but in this pattern the belief is dominant that everyone should have a sufficient amount of services and goods. So when more vulnerable people within society have a sufficient amount of services and goods, they won't be leveled up more to make everyone have the same. The last distributive pattern is the desert basis. This one is very different from the others, since it only takes into account how deserving someone is of certain benefits. Vallentyne describes this as: "based on character and agency of the individual" and believes desert should be based on the effort of the individual to contribute to society.
Within this research a choice will be made to reflect on justice or injustice with an egalitarian view. This view is chosen because of the author's personal belief that in times of a pandemic we should make sure everyone has the same rights and opportunities to make sure they can be safe and stay healthy.

# 3. Methodology

This chapter will focus on the methodology of this research. This chapter will start off with the operationalization of the homeless as the research population and of the concepts of the theoretical framework. After this the research strategy used is explained as well as the data collection. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the validity of the research and the implications the Covid-19 pandemic had on this research.

## 3.1 Operationalization of the homeless population

After the theoretical framework was composed and basic knowledge on the homeless population was acquired ,the research phase started. None of the general research used in the theoretical framework was on the homeless situation within the Dutch context, since these research papers were not easily available. In the theoretical framework a distinction was made between literal homeless and precariously housed. This distinction proved itself not applicable in the first interview. The Dutch context, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, does not have this binary system. During the pandemic shelters radically changed their policy, so the ¨literal homeless¨ did not exist anymore during the lockdown. Only two groups were still sleeping outside some weeks during the pandemic, the ones that chose not to use shelter and the so called non-beneficiaries. The non-beneficiaries are homeless people who, for some reason, are not considered for shelter. The non beneficiaries largely consist of two groups: people who live in the Netherlands without a residence permit and are therefore illegal and the so called ¨moe-landers¨, from centre and eastern Europe, who do not have a long enough employment history in the Netherlands. The non-beneficiaries have been sheltered for some weeks of the pandemic, as the chapter on conceived space will explain.

Therefore, since literal homeless was impossible to research during this pandemic, a decision was made to include what the Dutch context calls: ¨dak-en thuislozen¨, which literally translates to roof-and homeless. Therefore new definitions were needed and the Ethos (Ethos, 2005) light model was used, see table 1.

**Table 1:** *Different kinds of operational categories and their associated living situations and definitions (Ethos,2005).*

| | Operational category | | Living situation | Definition |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | People living rough | 1 | Public spaces / external spaces | Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters |
| 2 | People in emergency accomodation | 2 | Overnight shelters | People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation |
| 3 | People living in accomodation for the homeless | 3 | Homeless hostels | Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided |
| | | 4 | Temporary accommodation | |
| | | 5 | Transitional supported accommodation | |
| | | 6 | Women's shelters or refuge accommodation | |
| 4 | People living in institutions | 7 | Health care institutions | Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing |
| | | 8 | Penal institutions | No housing available prior to release |
| 5 | People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing | 9 | Mobile homes | Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence |
| | | 10 | Non-conventional buildings | |
| | | 11 | Temporary structures | |
| 6 | Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing) | 12 | Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence | Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence |

In this research homeless people living in health care or penal institutions, were not included. The group of homeless living independently in non-conventional dwellings was not identified within the interviews, nor in the other data sources and is therefore also not included.

## 3.2 Operationalization of the theoretical concepts

While the definition of the concepts is already given within the theoretical framework, it is important to operationalize the concepts to answer the research questions. Mentioned in the tables below are the research indicators that will be used to answer each question on the several different elements of the social space and the forms of tension that can occur.

**Table 2:** *Operationalization of the elements within the triad of space*

| Element | Entails | Research indicator |
|---|---|---|
| Perceived space (spatial practice) | - use of space<br>- everyday actions | - Daily schedule before pandemic<br>- Daily schedule after pandemic |
| Conceived space (representations of space) | - conceptualized space<br>- models, plans, rules<br>- social norms | - Plans on policy<br>- Adapted/revised policy for pandemic<br>- Covid-19 measures |
| Lived space (representational space) | - creating meaning<br>- based on experiences | - Experiences before pandemic<br>- Experiences during pandemic |

**Table 3:** *Operationalization of the forms of tension*

| Form of tension | Entails | Research indicator |
|---|---|---|
| (Spatial) exclusion | Not being allowed to enter/use space | - Are there exclusionary measures?<br>- Is access to space restricted? |
| Marginalization | Being treated as non important | - Is the homeless population included in policy/not forgotten?<br>- Do they have a voice in the matter?<br>- Are homeless treated different from usual? |
| Injustice (egalitarian) | Not having the same rights and opportunities | - Does the homeless population have access to safe space?<br>- Do they have a right to the city?<br>- Are they able to uphold the Covid-19 measures? |

## 3.3 Research strategy

In this study a mixed method approach is used in which qualitative data is collected through the use of semi structured interviews, a media analysis and policy documents. A secondary analysis of two empirical research papers is used for the triangulation of the data.

For this subject and study, a qualitative approach is preferred over a quantitative approach. The reason for this is the fact that a qualitative approach is accurate and useful in gaining an understanding of social structures, emotions, values and views and differences (Clifford et al., 2010). It is used to explore and uncover developing trends in people's thoughts, opinions and perceptions, something which is suspected to be especially the case in a fast changing and uncertain time such as the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated counter measures (Yin, 2003). Next to this, significantly more data is required for a quantitative approach, and since the focus group of this research was difficult to come in contact with, a qualitative approach was more applicable. At the start of this research this qualitative approach was given shape in the form of several interviews with both homeless people and experts on this topic such as employees at homeless shelters or researchers who focussed on homelessness. Data retrieved from these interviews were used to answer the subquestions.

However, the desired amount of interviews (12 with homeless persons and 4 with experts on the topic) could not be reached within the timeframe of this study due to multiple reasons. A professional was consulted for advice on the best way to come in contact with homeless persons and conduct interviews. The advice was to help for a certain amount of time, ideally multiple days, in a shelter for the homeless and build up a relationship of trust with several of the homeless persons there. This generally increases the odds of getting permission to conduct interviews, as they know who you are and that you have the right intentions. However, shelters were closed for people outside of the homeless due to the Covid-19 measures. Me lending a hand and interviewing people would mean that someone else had to stay outside due to a limited maximum number of people within the shelter. This restriction of course severely limited actual contact with homeless persons, and the opportunity to build up a relationship first. Because of the limited amount of interviews that I was able to conduct, additional data was obtained through inquiring multiple policy documents of the Dutch government on Covid-19, space and homelessness. Another secondary data source was various media articles of newspapers and websites on Covid-19 and its impact on the homeless population of the Netherlands. These were mainly used to answer the sub questions on the lived space and the conflicts within the spatial triad.

## 3.4 Data-collection

### Interviews

In this research it is investigated what the consequences are of the pandemic on the socal space for homeless people in the Netherlands, and sometimes more specifically in the geographical context of Assen and Groningen. To gather a sufficient amount of data a total of 6 interviews were conducted which lasted between 20 and 48 minutes and were held online via Google Meets (see Table 4). This varied from the amount that was planned to do, but Covid-19 had a considerable amount of impact on this research as explained in sections 3.1 and 3.4. One of these interviews was held with a homeless person themself. The remaining five interviews were conducted with individuals working with homeless people and one expert on this specific topic. Interviews were first transcribed and subsequently color coded (see Figure 2). Through coding, patterns emerged from the transcribed interviews, and relevant information was drawn from them. This information was then analyzed and used to discuss and draw conclusions.
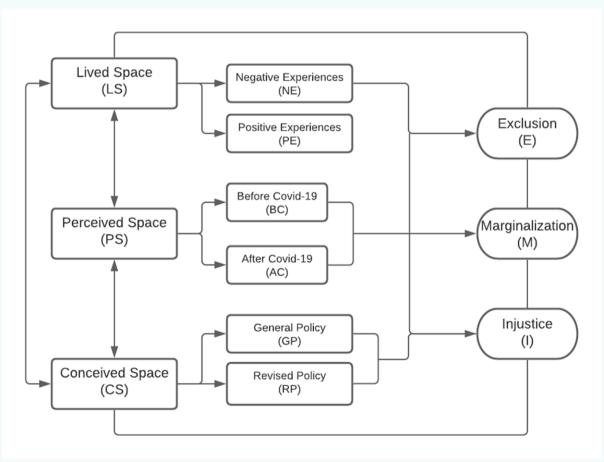


**Figure 2:** *Coding tree used for color coding*

**Table 4:** *Descriptive overview of interviews*

| Respondent | Role | Date | Length |
|---|---|---|---|
| L. Van den Brink | Volunteering coordinator Open Hof | 23-10-2020 | 25 min |
| C. Muusse | Scientist at Trimbos Institute and expert on this topic | 19-11-2020 | 48 min |
| L. Luring | Personal counselor Leger des Heils | 19-11-2020 | 20 min |
| L. De Boer | Head of sheltering at Kopland and Zienn | 24-11-2020 | 35 min |
| R. Jager | Counselor and support at Kopland/Zienn | 24-11-2020 | 25 min |
| R. Van Barneveld | Homeless respondent working as a volunteer with other homeless | 28-11-2020 | 37 min |

## Policy documents

For the chapter on the conceived space policy documents of the VWS were used, since these were the guidelines during the pandemic and give an accurate depiction of policy on sheltering and homeless in general. Since the pandemic has started, altered policies have been released and applied and each of these versions is analyzed. These documents were scanned and relevant information was gathered and used to obtain a clear vision and analysis on the policy for homelessness and the use of space. This was subsequently put in perspective of that specific time and situation of the pandemic.

## Grey/popular literature and newspapers

A total of 13 articles and webpages on Covid-19 and homelessness were found online and analysed for relevant information. Some examples of keywords that were used to find these articles were: homeless during Covid, homeless pandemic, no home Corona, experiences pandemic, homeless experiences. The developments of the pandemic, the consequences of its countermeasures and the impact it had on homeless people were used and experiences were placed in the context of the time the articles were published.

## 3.5 Selection of the research participants

The unit of analysis, or the case, was determined by defining spatial boundary, and in general terms this research focussed on the whole country of the Netherlands. However, due to practical feasibility and the importance of placing things in context locally part of this study was specifically concentrated on the cities Assen and Groningen. These resulting specific spatial boundaries were chosen mainly since the research population was not that big and the attainability of this group during the pandemic was low. The theoretical scope used is based on a literature study of the key concepts: The production of space, the right to the city, the spatial triad, social space, spatial exclusion, marginalization and injustice. The data was collected between 23-10-2020 and 28-11-2021. A longer research would have been very interesting in this case, but given the limited time available, this was as long as could be used.

## 3.6 Ethical considerations

The key issues between the researcher and the researched in qualitative research have been identified before by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). They came up with four important considerations that I have used in my interviews with the homeless:

1. Informed consent
The homeless person is informed and understands what the research is about. They have to be able to decline to participate and stop their participation if they want to.
2. Privacy:
The information that the homeless person shares will stay private, unless it is clear that the homeless person has no problem with this information becoming public.
3. Harm:
The information given by the homeless person should not be used in a way that could harm them or others.
4. Exploitation:
The homeless person should not just be ¨used¨ in the research, while getting nothing out of the interaction.

Cloke et al. (2000) add a fifth consideration of sensitivity. This was applied as: The researcher will have a sensitivity to the rights, beliefs and context of the homeless person. The researcher is aware of possible power imbalances. To ensure these criteria were handled properly a consent form was developed (see Appendix A). At the beginning of an interview this consent form was used to inform the respondent on the research and the goal of the interview, to ask if the respondent gave permission to the use of the data obtained from the interview, and that the respondent could stop the interview at any given time. Respondents were also asked for permission for the interview to be recorded, so that the interview could be transcribed

afterwards. Interviews were recorded using Google Meet and were stored locally on a hard drive.

Next to a scientific understanding about the ethics and considerations of researching homeless people, an expert was asked about specific recommendations and advice for carrying out the interviews with the homeless in this research. This resulted in the following considerations for this research:

1. Do not dumb down the questions and do not assume the homeless person to be anything other then an ordinary person of avarage intelligence.

2. Make the homeless person sign the consent form. Even if this will scare off the homeless person from participating. Informed consent is important for this group and letting them sign a consent form will show that you respect their choice.

3. Be cautious about questions that could be sensitive. Don't ask direct questions about the reasons for their homelessness. Be careful in the formulation and do not make assumptions about the homeless persons situation.

## 3.7 Covid-19 and the homeless research population

Even though I chose the thesis subject and wrote the methodology during the pandemic, my predictions were rather optimistic. I expected that life would return to normal after the first lockdown and was keen to research how the lockdown influenced the lives of the literal homeless. In reality the Covid-19 measures stayed in place during my research and interviewing this vulnerable group within society was hard, or even impossible. My first research design became useless after contacting homeless facilities and realizing that they were either too busy to participate or were closed. Visiting such organisations to interview people was not possible, since letting me in would mean not letting a homeless person in. This made things difficult, but a few people working with the homeless did agree to let me interview them online. To reach homeless people I found it unethical to approach them in real life during a pandemic as I could not build up a relationship of trust first as advised by an expert, but I did put on appeals in three homeless groups on facebook. I received one message from a homeless person that was willing to be interviewed. Additionally, I found data on the experiences of the homeless during the pandemic in several articles and webpages. The disadvantage of this kind of information was that I could not ask additional questions to these specific persons to understand their thoughts and situations better. Next to this I came up with one research paper which contained empirical data on the perceptions of homeless people and which connected perfectly to my research. After this I contacted people whom I heard of doing research on the same subject, which was unfortunately not useful since these studies were either just health related or not started yet. I did get some information from Christien Muuse from Trimbos, whom I interviewed. She helped me get my hand on various other sources used in this research.

# 4. Results

## 4.1 Perceived space: The everyday lives and spatial practices of the homeless

This chapter will discuss the findings on the use of the perceived space of the homeless population before and during Covid-19. It is important to understand that the homeless people included in this research have differing perceived spaces, since their everyday life and spatial practices rely heavily on the operational category they fit in. Therefore a choice is made to explain for each of these operational categories of homeless how their perceived space changed because of the pandemic and its associated measures. This chapter will start by providing a section on the general impact of Covid-19 on the homeless population and will thereafter give examples on how the spatial practices and everyday lives of the different categories of homeless people changed throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Covid-19 and general impact on perceived space

The most obvious change in the perceived space, of both homeless and housed, that could be identified is the change in daily rhythms. The pandemic changed the structure of everyday life, since many places people regularly visited were closed. In general this resulted in less movement amongst the homeless population, especially after the shift from night shelter to 24/7 shelter (Interview Van den Brink; Trimbos, 2020). Some homeless people had nowhere to go outside of the shelter, since the places they used to visit regularly were all closed. An example of this is mentioned in the Trimbos research paper: *"He used to go to walk-in houses, the library and the Albert Heijn for coffee. Now he just stays inside as much as possible."* (Trimbos, 2020).

Although in general less movement could be identified amongst the homeless population and some homeless people could stay within shelters 24/7, not all homeless chose to stay in. This can partially be explained by the nice weather that also made housed people go out to enjoy the sun (Interview Muusse). Another explanation that was mentioned was that some homeless experienced a sense of restlessness that made them want to go outside. There were people still visiting the walk-in facilities when these were opened, not for shelter, since they had shelter during the day now, but mainly for a conversation and being in another place. As Van den Brink mentioned: *"They are just not able to be in one place the entire day, they are not used to that rytm."* (Interview Van den Brink).

Another spatial practice that could be identified was the crowding of surviving habitats. This could be observed during the first lockdown, when many walk-in and day facilities were

closed. As Van Barneveld explained: *"I visit the train station quite often and I always see the same people sitting there. Nowadays there are wall outlets in there, which is a good place for the homeless to charge their phones. These places are more crowded now, also with people I didn't see before. Probably because other facilities are closed."* (Interview Van Barneveld).

This crowdedness can be explained by the fact that other sustaining habitats were closed or became useless, since surviving habits became less or impossible. For example selling street tabloids at the local supermarket or a spot in the city centre that was used to ask for money became less viable surviving habitats, since there were barely people in the streets and keeping distance while handing money or the tabloid is hard or impossible. Siebe Zwerver, who works at a foundation that provides the street tabloid to homeless people, mentions the same: *"There are not that many people in the city now and that is where our sellers have to get it from. Also keeping 1,5 meter distance is hard, like when you have to take the money someone gives."* (DVHN, 06-04-2020). Klaas, a young homeless man in Groningen city explained the same reasons about why asking for money became hard: *" The shelter costs 6 euro a night, which has to be handed cash. Normally I already think that it is hard to beg and moonlight together. Now it is impossible. There is nobody in the streets. Who do I have to ask?"* (Sikkom, 16-04-2020).

Other surviving habitats were walk-in homes and places that facilitated daytime activities. These were mainly closed or had to cut their participants, because they didn't have the capacity to harbour the same amount of people while upholding social distancing. Another reason why these surviving habitats closed or limited their hours of operation was the age and vulnerable health of many volunteers. Not all the volunteers dared to come to their volunteering job and expose themselves to people and therefore might expose themselves to the virus (Interview Van den Brink).

## From sleeping rough to being sheltered

Creating a detailed picture of the perceived space of these so-called rough sleepers is very difficult, since the majority of this group consists of people who are hard to find, since they are actively avoiding care and sheltering or are not allowed to use the facilities that other homeless can use.The research of the Trimbos institute was able to include this group in its research, since they were able to interview non-beneficiaries. (Trimbos, 2020)

The Covid-19 pandemic gave new opportunities for people who were usually sleeping and living rough. Where the everyday lives of these people were usually carried out in the public urban space, during the lockdown municipalities and sheltering organizations were urged to provide sheltering for these people, both beneficiaries as non-beneficiaries. (Trimbos, 2020) The chapter on the conceived space gives an exact timeline on when these people were being sheltered and when they had to survive on their own again. The word survive was used by

multiple professionals that were interviewed about the homeless population (Interviews Van den Brink, Jager, De Boer) when talking about the time between shelter and services. Therefore the term surviving would be especially fitting to describe the daily schedule of these people who do not use these services. As mentioned in the section above, the pandemic made most forms of surviving habits impossible.

Even though these surviving habits were made harder or impossible for this group, the research of Trimbos institute also shows a positive side for this group in the lockdown:*"For people who did not have any right to shelter before the Covid-19 measures, the extension of sheltering meant great progress, even if it was large scale shelter in an empty gym. Professionals see people blossom up when they are under roof: what is going well is that this vulnerable group of people are now being helped where they usually weren't helped. We see this group get better: It is extraordinary what a bed, a meal and some attention can do. All of the sudden we think: this man could maybe get a job or we can have a good conversation about going back to Romania."* (Trimbos, 2020). Not just non-beneficiaries were taken in extra in shelters during the lockdown, also a lot of people normally avoiding care and shelter decided to apply now and received help. A homeless professional explained this process: *"That we are able to bring in people who avoid care is very good news. We did kind of expect this (since people are easily tempted with a private bedroom), but it is nice to see that it really works.* (Trimbos, 2020) *"*

## Life in shelters

The second group of homeless are the people in emergency accommodations. This group usually carries out the majority in the urban public space and has access to a shelter at night. This group is one of the main groups that Het Kopland works with. Their shelter usually opened at nine in the evening and then people were supposed to get out around ten in the morning. The everyday actions within these shelters consisted of eating some food or taking a shower if you arrived, going to sleep, and the next morning getting back out again with a sandwich in your bag. What people did outside of these shelters was for most getting through the day and trying to take care of yourself. There are some daycare facilities where homeless people go and are able to drink coffee and have a conversation or do the laundry (Interview Jager). The interviews also showed that some of these people used to go sit in libraries or drink coffee in a supermarket (NPO3, 2020; Trimbos, 2020). A part of the people staying in night shelters has a volunteering or a paid (minority) job.The volunteering and daycare facilities closed in the lockdown, resulting in less movement to and from these places. The minority that had a paid job usually kept working. (Interview Jager) Other people wander through public urban space and see what they encounter. When the weather is good they might sit in the park enjoying the sun, but it is less enjoyable to wander outside in winter times (Interview Jager). Being in the public urban space, selling the street tabloid and panhandling also

occurred within this group and this group was therefore also influenced by the difficulties in these activities during the Covid-19 pandemic (Sikkom, 2020; DVHN, 2020).

The majority of the night shelters transformed into 24 hour facilities during the lockdown. This is not just an indicator that more of the daily lives of these homeless will be carried out here, but also that they receive more care. Rene Jager tells about it: *"We transformed into a 24 hour shelter, where the care for the homeless became priority instead of how to keep people from being in the public space, since that is what the reality looked like".* (Interview Jager).
Most night shelters did not have the capacity to uphold 1,5 meter distance , while scaling up for non-beneficiaries, and were trying to find temporary solutions to live in for their clients, like portacabins, hotel rooms and empty gym halls. The way in which night shelters arranged the sheltering for their clients did impact the experience the homeless had and also influenced their daily lives (Interview Muusse). People who had private accomodations, like hotel rooms or a room in a facility stayed in more (Trimbos, 2020).

Then there was a group that was within operational category two before the pandemic, but chose to be in category one during the pandemic, since they felt more safe sleeping outside from Covid-19 contaminations (Het Parool, 2020). More on the experiences and the reasons of these people will be told in the chapter on perceived space.

**Live within homeless accommodations**
The homeless in the third group already had a more steady form of accommodation, making their everyday lives carried out less in the public space and more in a private setting. Luring, Jager and De Boer both also worked with these groups. The forms of accommodation they provide are mainly focussed on getting people back in sustainable living accomodations and helping them to connect back within the regular field.
Since these people have a somewhat steady place to stay, many are able to have a steady way to fill in their days. From volunteering, to participation jobs or regular paid labour, most have daily activities. In the Salvation Armies shelter it is obligatory to have a way to spend your day at least four days a week. When these people get home from their jobs they cook and two times a week they eat together in the shelter.

When we are talking about the negative impact Covid-19 has had on homeless people this group was hit more than most other homeless categories, since they did not have any advantages like a room they didn't have yet, but their normal activities and counseling trajectories to get back to housing all shut down. A way in which Luring identified this negative impact was in the way the empty days resulted in more clients being intoxicated from either alcohol or drugs. She explained that for some people living in their shelter, day activities

are the only way to get their heads out of boredom leading them into using substances. She explained that it might also have to do with negative thoughts being more present when you are on your own all day with not much to do, so drinking or using drugs makes you forget the negative thoughts and in some cases emotional pain (Interview Luring).

## Temporarily conventional housing

The fourth category of homeless was not widely present within the research papers or interviews. But it is important to note that, for some people that lived in temporarily conventional housing, the pandemic had a huge impact on their daily lives. Examples could be identified of people losing their place at friends or family because of fear of the virus (Trimbos, 2020; NPO3, 2020). Instead of carrying out their daily lives and spatial practices within conventional housing, they had to use shelters, which influenced their daily lives. An example of this is Nordin, where he usually stayed with friends and had the freedom to go where he wanted at any time of the day, he was now supposed to be in at ten. He explained that this influenced his social relations, for example by being unable to go to his girlfriend whenever he wanted (Nordin, Trimbos, 2020). The Trimbos research also included one participant that went from the second category to living with family, since his family wanted to keep him safe from Covid-19 and saw the shelters as a higher risk place. In this case the daily lives and spatial practices also change, depending on the time within the pandemic and the attitude of the hosts towards social distancing.

## Summary perceived space

The general impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the social space of the homeless population cannot be described as negative or positive. There was less spatial movement amongst the homeless, since most homeless had more possibilities to stay indoors. Another reason for the decline of spatial movement was that, during the pandemic, surviving habits were not always possible, resulting in less use of surviving habitats. As a result, the surviving habitats that were still accessible were visited by more people.

When looking at the different categories of homeless people different impacts can be identified. For some groups, like the rough sleepers and users of the night shelter, the pandemic had a mainly positive impact. They were now welcomed in shelters or could use shelters 24/7. Some of these people got a private room and/or more care then they received before. However, not all impact for this group was positive, since surviving habits became harder and some people didn't feel safe in the shelters from the virus and chose to sleep outside.

In general, the pandemic had a negative impact on homeless living within homeless accommodations. They often already had a private room, but their daily activities and

counseling were altered by the pandemic. The group living in temporarily conventional housing sometimes also experienced negative impact from the Covid-19 pandemic, since not every host wanted the risk of another person in the house that could possibly contaminate them with the virus. The impact of Covid-19 can be seen as both positive and negative for the perceived space of the homeless people depending on the operational category and the perceived space of the homeless before the pandemic.

## 4.2 Conceived space: Policy, plans and associated sentiments

This chapter will provide an analysis of the conceived space of homeless people before and after Covid-19. This chapter will start by briefly touching upon a very important policy report on homelessness that was released by the RVS. Then the general policy on sheltering homeless people before Covid-19 will be introduced, followed up by the guidelines that were provided during the pandemic. The sentiments of civil society that are a result of social norms and policy during the pandemic will also be discussed in this chapter.

### Recovery starts with a home

The principle of the importance of providing housing to homeless before anything else was adopted by the RVS, the Dutch public council of health and society. The RVS introduced a new policy report on april the 20th 2020; Recovery starts with a house (RVS, 2020). A place to live is, according to this policy advice the onset from where all other forms of help, in all other aspects of life, should start from. This implies a radically new way of helping homeless or nearly homeless people and asks for a shift in focus from fixing the homeless situation to preventing it. This advice is written with an emphasis on the fundamental and human right to housing. This policy advice, in combination with the increase of awareness of the vulnerable position of homeless because of the Covid-19 pandemic, could be a reason for a shift in homeless policy as we have seen thus far.

### General policy on homelessness and shelter before Covid-19

The dominant policy carried out in the Netherlands on homeless care and sheltering is created by the department of public health, wellbeing and sport (VWS) and is called Plan van Aanpak (translates to action plan). The first phase of this plan was focussed on getting homeless people the care and shelter they needed. The second phase, started in 2011, was also focussed on prevention of homelessness and recovery. Additionally, more attention was given to young homeless and homeless that were hard to help within the existing shelter structure. To check if this action plan actually works a few indicators are composed to periodically reflect on:

- More homeless reach a sustainable, stable mix of sheltering and day activities.
- Living and sleeping on the streets (in)voluntarily does (almost) not occur anymore.
- The applications of unknown clients in the centrum municipalities decreases.
- The re-application of clients in the central municipalities decreases.
- The outflow from shelters to autonomous forms of living increases.
- The support for former clients increases, also from other policy areas.

The part of this homeless policy that is especially of interest for this research is the arrangements of sheltering. When someone becomes homeless or is homeless and applies for shelter, the municipality in which this person applies for sheltering will be responsible for the most straightforward form of sheltering ¨bed, bad, brood¨(translates to bed, bath, bread). Next to this the VWS appointed so called central municipalities. These municipalities are often home to a larger city and will get in touch with the homeless person to see where an individual help trajectory would be most successful. The municipality that gives best opportunity for the specific homeless persons reintegration to a housed person will be responsible for that person. Only 38% of the central municipalities have explicit policy on how to decide where a person can be sheltered best, but the Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (VNG, translates to Union of Dutch Municipalities) have made an assistance document with indicators to make this decision that 37 of the 41 centrum municipalities are familiar with.

This document provides criteria to access which region or central municipality is most suitable to shelter and help the client, the dominant criteria are:
- The geographical location of the residence of family and other people with whom the client has positive social relations.
- The geographical location where demonstrable familiarity is with social assistance and aid organizations.
- The geographical location where the client has made use of sheltering or aid before.
- The municipality in which the client is signed in according to the national basic registration.

The term that is used by policy makers, policy documents and that was mentioned in the interviews for this criteria is "regiobinding" (translates to region binding). It refers to the relationship of the homeless person and the region in which they apply for sheltering. Lieuwe de Boer, director of the region Groningen en Drenthe with homeless sheltering and aiding organization Zienn and Kopland, explained that there is a clear reaction from the central municipalities to want to arrange good sheltering for "their citizens", so they tend to make distinctions to see which citizen belongs to their geographical location. "Ironically, a part of this group, not even a insignificant part, is not easy to attach to a geographical location." (Interview De Boer). De Boer also gave an explanation on how their organization and their

central municipalities (Groningen and Assen) used the criteria of the VNG. The criteria is used in a way that the municipality can decide where someone has the best chance to succeed when it comes to housing. He explains how the central municipalities pays for the sheltering and how they have the trust from the municipality to make a proper judgement on where a person has the best perspective (Interview De Boer).

## Policy in times of Covid-19

Since the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in national general policy on the use of public space, there will be a brief recap on the measures implemented.  From the 12th of march, most people's lives started to change. People were asked to work from home if possible, large events got cancelled and people with the slightest symptoms of a cold were supposed to stay home. The Dutch government also implemented special emergency regulations in march, making it prohibited to be in a group of more than 3 without keeping distance and making social distancing within 1,5 meter the norm. From the 23th of march till june 23 the so called "intelligent lockdown" was proclaimed in the Netherlands.
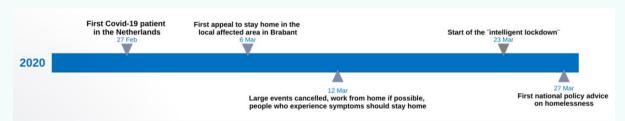


**Figure 3:** *Timeline development Covid-19 March 2020 and the release of the first general policy on homelessness and Covid (Rijksoverheid, 2020).*

## The first lockdown

On the 27th of march the VWS (Richtlijn opvang, 27 maart 2020) came out with nationwide policy to provide a guideline on how to organize sheltering during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the first version, ten new versions have been released to keep this advice up to date during policy liberalisations and new regulations. The parts of this policy advice that were relevant for the social space of homeless people were directed at night sheltering and day activities for the homeless people. The baseline of the advice for night sheltering is to arrange places to sleep at night for ¨beneficiaries¨. Mentioned is, that from a humanitarian perspective, it is also ¨desirable¨ to realize places to sleep for ¨non-beneficiaries¨. Notions are given about keeping 1,5 meter between the beds and trying to divide group accomodations in smaller compartments. When this is not possible other locations can be used to harbour clients.

A very remarkable sentence within this policy advice was:

*¨Homeless people are allowed to go outside into the streets. The extra measures from the cabinet and the guidelines of the RIVM do not require homeless people to be obligated to stay in.¨* (VWS, richtlijn opvang, 27 maart 2020). Even though the general advice at that moment was to stay indoors, it is still the autonomous choice of the individual whether they want to take a walk in the park for example. The fact that this is explicitly being mentioned in the case of the homeless people, while this is not mentioned for housed people, gives an idea on the autonomy of homeless people in sheltering.

Another striking sentence was: *"It is important for the public health that there are enough places during the day where homeless people can get warm, get their sanitary requirements, get a meal and other forms of support." (VWS, richtlijn opvang, 27 maart 2020).*

The choice to stress the importance for public health, not for the well being of the homeless or humanitarian reasons, gives an insight on the priority of the VWS in this policy advice. This connects to a statement made in the interviews. Muuse explained that fear for the spreading of Covid-19 was a main reason for the better sheltering conditions within the first lockdown. It was not just for the homeless people themselves, but also to serve the public health and prevent large outbreaks amongst the homeless population (Interview Muusse).


**After the first lockdown**

On may 29 a new national policy advice was given to fit the liberalization of the intelligent lockdown. The 1,5 meter distance was still supposed to be upholded. Sheltering was advised to be given in the form of shared rooms for two people or in private rooms when possible. Throughout the lockdown, the use of alternate sheltering locations was encouraged, but the updated advice after the intelligent lockdown is for municipalities to search for sustainable ways of sheltering, fit for the 1,5 meter society, instead of short term solutions. This advice is grounded on the idea of a more wide approach to homelessness that prioritizes getting people into proper housing and giving them assistance where needed. The advice is to prevent people from ending up in shelters and make their stay short term while setting up an assisting trajectory into being housed. Furthermore, day shelters, daytime activities and meal services are also allowed and advised to open and start again.

A very big difference between the policy during the lockdown and the policy after the lockdown is the sheltering of non-beneficiaries. During the intelligent lockdown, effort is asked from municipalities and sheltering organisations to extend their services to non-beneficiaries. After the lockdown the advice of the VWS (VWS, richtlijn opvang 29 mei 2020) is to actively dismantle the sheltering of non-beneficiaries. This dismantling should be finished at least before juli the first 2020.

**Another Covid-19 wave**

On 9 oktober 2020 a national press conference was held in which prime minister Rutte expressed worries on the increase of contaminations in the Netherlands. The same day the VWS came out with a new national policy advice concerning the shelter and care for homeless people during the pandemic (VWS, richtlijn opvang, 9 october 2020). Attention was asked for advice to stay home would be recurring , since in that case non-beneficiaries should also be sheltered again. Special winter cold arrangements, that usually start when temperatures drop below zero so nobody will be sleeping outside in the freezing cold, were encouraged to be arranged earlier. Covid-19 would make these arrangements more difficult, since instead of just putting in more beds, the 1,5 measures have to be upholded while creating more places to sleep. Sheltering organizations and municipalities when encouraged to already look for places in which these special winter arrangements could be carried out. For this winter arrangement registration would normally not be needed, since it makes sheltering more accomodating. Registration was now advised to make sure that organizations would be able to contact people if an Covid-19 outbreak was identified within these night accommodations.

Another subject this policy update entailed was the shift from sustainable forms of sheltering to encouragement to look further into permanent solutions. These permanent housing will make functioning within the 1,5 meter society easier, but will also promote people's recovery.

The increase that was mentioned in the start of this section persisted, resulting in stricter measures and a new policy advice from the VWS (VWS, richtlijn opvang, 5 november 2020). The main adjustment in this version is that non-beneficiaries are to be sheltered again, this policy is supposed to last for at least two weeks. The next VWS update therefore already rectificates this adjustment and non-beneficiaries are again not encouraged to be sheltered (VWS, richtlijn opvang, 5 november 2020). The Trimbos research paper also included some of these so called non-beneficiaries. Muuse (Interview Muusse) told about one person that had serious health conditions. He was very happy to be in a shelter during the first lockdown, but he also resigned himself to the fact that he would be back on the streets soon. ¨*I came from under the bridge and I will go back to under the bridge.*" (Trimbos, 2020; Interview Muusse).

**Sentiment of the civil society**

Although the sentiments within civil society are not part of the conceptual framework that was used, this section was an important result of policy and existing social norms during the pandemic and therefore effused from the conceived space. During the press conferences regarding Covid-19, people were often encouraged to look after and care for eachother. This social norm of looking after each other could also be identified in the research. Van Barneveld experienced this social norm when he started a sandwich action. They went into the streets with a bag full of sandwiches and some coffee to offer the homeless a drink, something to eat

and a conversation. They explained what they were doing to local residents that responded to it by buying fruit to hand out and looking out for people who were homeless.Van Barneveld, homeless himself, feels like before the homeless were seen as nuisance, while people now invite a homeless person in for some coffee. He feels an increase in compassion in general. *¨Normally, people here keep to themselves, but they reconnect because of this.¨* (Interview Van Barneveld). Christien Muusse noticed this same sentiment: *¨We will care for each other and for our homeless. You saw a lot of civilians helping out, people brought food, cooked for them, things like that also just arose.¨* (Interview Muusse).

Not all the extra attention for homeless people was positive. For example, in the first lockdown there were exponentially more reported cases of nuisance from people, about people on the street. These reports did not just entail cases of homeless people, but a part of them were. To what extent nuisance reports on specifically homeless people have increased is not possible to say since the nuisance cases get a code that is not directly related to the personal situation of the person. For example, when a homeless person is drinking beer in front of someone's house, this will just be categorized like a case of youth drinking beer on a playground. As Christien Muuse, researcher at Trimbos institute, explained during the interview, a possible explanation of this increase in nuisance reports could be that people were spending more time at home. She emphasized that her theory to explain this was not scientifically tested or proven, but gave the example that when a homeless person is drinking a beer on the sidewalk, as he does everyday, this might have been more notable since the person seeing this is now home instead of working in the office. Another possible explanation would be that the homeless person would be literally more visible, since the streets are less crowded. A real life example Muuse gave on this was about a day shelter located in a busy street in Amsterdam. This shelter was still opened for a really limited group of people and some people were standing in front of the door. Before Covid-19 this street would be buzzing with tourists and visitors, but now the locals noticed the homeless people more, since the streets were that empty. Muuse explained that the interaction of a changing place and the same behaviour might be interpreted differently and therefore might be more likely to be experienced as nuisance.

Not only did homeless people become more visible for people in the streets, but homeless people were also more visible in the media. De Boer, working for Kopland/Zienn, told about the burst in attention from news outlets. *"During the first weeks of the pandemic there were daily calls from both local and national press. Everyone wanted to write something about it."* (Interview De Boer). There was a lot of interest in how the organisation handled the pandemic, the lockdown and the sheltering. *"At some point we sheltered people within a fairly fancy hotel in the city centre. We got a lot of positive reactions and noticed a shift in the public*

*opinion on homeless people. To a certain extent homeless got a sense of approachability, that was often not associated with this group."* (Interview, De Boer). This increase in attention might have to do with the fact that a lockdown uncovered the vulnerable people within society, making people more aware of their existence and struggles. (Interview De Boer).

As mentioned before, the general social norm of looking after each other in times like these also played a role. There was a general increase in compassion. De Boer told: *¨We have been applauding people working in health care, that was a general sentiment, but I see that is declining now.¨* (Interview De Boer). He notices the decline of this compassion by the decline in interest: *¨The past month I had one call from the local news paper, that is such a difference from the start of the lockdown, maybe you can see that as a criterion¨* (Interview De Boer). Another example on how the compassion was declining after the first wave of contaminations is that in the first lockdown evicting people was not done and there was a call for being compassionate with your renters during this time. In the second lockdown people are being evicted again and new homeless are being created (Interview Jager).

## Summary conceived space

Although many municipalities do not have explicit policy on homelessness and sheltering for their region, the general measures that are used to decide if someone has  right to shelter are comparable. The important factor in this is where a homeless person has the biggest chance to succeed in rehousing, which is indicated by the binding with the region.
In times of Covid-19 national policy was introduced resulting in national guidelines used by the municipalities and homeless shelters in the Netherlands. During the first lockdown shelters had to rearrange themselves to respect social distancing and including non-beneficiaries if possible. After the first lockdown, non-beneficiaries are excluded from the policy again. However, during this time it is stressed to look for sustainable solutions to house beneficiaries in a more private setting. When contaminations rose again after the first lockdown new advice was provided to start sheltering non-beneficiaries again if the general advice was to stay home. In the last policy updates there was again a call for a more sustainable solution where the policy advice referred to the recovery that homeless people could experience with a sustainable place to stay.

The social norms and sentiments that could be identified during the first lockdown were a more caring attitude towards people in general and also for homeless people specifically. Furthermore the homeless population got more attention, in both positive and negative ways. There were more nuisance reports, but also more media coverage for homeless and homeless organizations. This increase in compassion seemed to fade the longer the pandemic lasted.

## 4.3 Lived space: experiences and meaning making

This chapter will focus on the experiences and meaning making as a result of the changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It will start by elaborating on the experiences of mental health of homeless people during the pandemic and will follow up with the experiences on the pandemic itself. The next section will be on the feelings and experiences of being homeless and will then be followed up by a section on what having a place to stay means for the homeless people within this research.
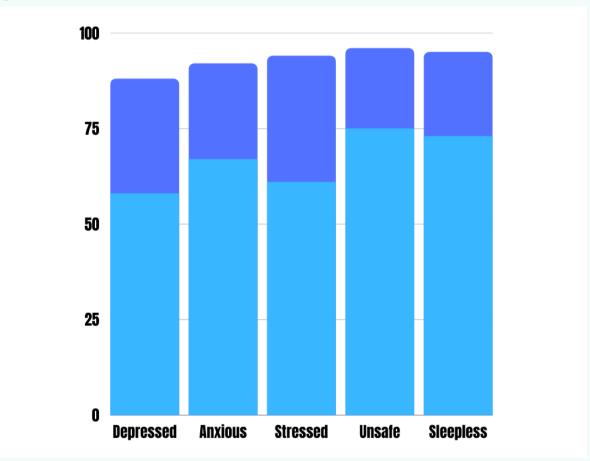
**Experiences of mental health**



**Figure 4:** *Experiences in mental health of homeless people in relation to the Covid-19 crisis. Light blue: identical emotional state as before the Covid-19 crisis or not applicable, dark blue: significantly worse emotional state during the Covid-19 crisis (NSG, 2020).*

The Nederlandse Straatdokters Groep conducted a research (september 2020) among 376 homeless people in 9 cities in the Netherlands. The questions were mostly health related. In the section on mental health the majority of the respondents answered that they felt the same as before Covid-19 or they didn't have any depressed (58%), anxious (67%), stressed (61%)

feelings. On feeling unsafe (75%) and having trouble sleeping (73%) the majority also said they experienced it the same as before Covid-19 or not at all.

However, a part of the homeless population did experience exponentially more negative feelings. Most common were feelings of stress (33%), depressed feelings (30%) and anxious feelings (25%). 21% of the respondents indicated that they felt less safe than before Covid-19 and 22% had more trouble sleeping.

The extra depressed feelings and feelings of stress and anxiousness can partly be explained by lack of perspective. The lack of perspective in housing was already present before Covid-19, but the pandemic added a new layer of uncertainty: How long will the pandemic last? How long can I stay in this hotel/shelter/emergency shelter? Where will I go after the pandemic is gone? (Trimbos, 2020) A case mentioned in the Trimbos research is Nordin, he experienced living without a house as difficult, but feels an extra limitation because of the Covid-19 measures. "We are already at the bottom of our lives. It is like you are stuck, have nothing and are ill. What will happen when we get out of this crisis. Life will be different, for everyone". (Nordin, Trimbos, 2020).

Not just in terms of housing a lack of perspective was uncovered by the pandemic, but also in terms of social life and money. In the research from De straatdokters groep (2020), participants indicated that their social life was influenced by Covid-19. According to 56% the contact with friends and family had changed and 53% said that contact with people in the street changed. The majority of these changes were perceived as negative by the research population.
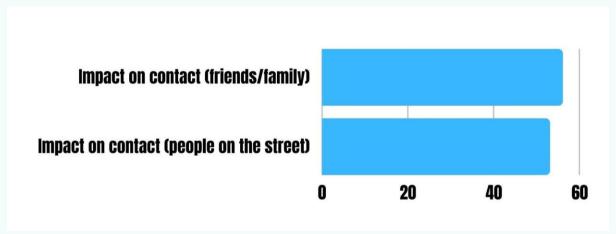


**Figure 5:** *Impact in the form of change due to the Covid-19 crisis on the social life of homeless people (NSG, 2020).*

Then the Trimbos research shows that there is a group that usually participates in daytime activities and walk-in homes. As mentioned in the chapter of perceived space these were mainly closed or had to cut their participants, because they didn't have the capacity to harbour the same amount of people while upholding social distancing. This had a huge impact on the social lives of people, since these were for some homeless people the only time of their day in which they had social interactions (Trimbos, 2020).

These daytime activities were often also a way to earn some extra money. *"For a lot of people the 10 euros they could earn was very important, sometimes to buy alcohol or drugs. That also gives extra stress. There is a lot of insecurity about how things will go from here"* (Trimbos, 2020). The research from de Straatdokters groep also showed that 45% of the respondents had less money since Covid-19, 43% of the respondents were afraid to have even less money in a while. In the Trimbos research paper there is the case of Ellen. The first weeks of the pandemic were financially very difficult for her, since the 15 euro she normally earned with volunteering was no longer given to her. For her this meant she had no money to spend on cigarettes or other extras. In her case financial help was already applied for before and two weeks in the crisis this help was granted.

As mentioned in the chapter on perceived space, getting money from sustaining habits also became a less viable option. Some street tabloid foundations decided to provide the tabloid digitally and asked people to donate to read it. The money was divided under the people usually selling the tabloid (DVHN, 06-04-2020). Another reason that these sustaining habits are less viable that is not mentioned in any research, media source or interview, but that could play a role in the declining incomes of sustaining habits is, that since the Covid-19 crisis, people are less likely to carry cash money. Stores ask for payments by card and prefer not to receive cash, therefore spare change might be less likely to be given to a street tabloid seller or a homeless person asking for money.
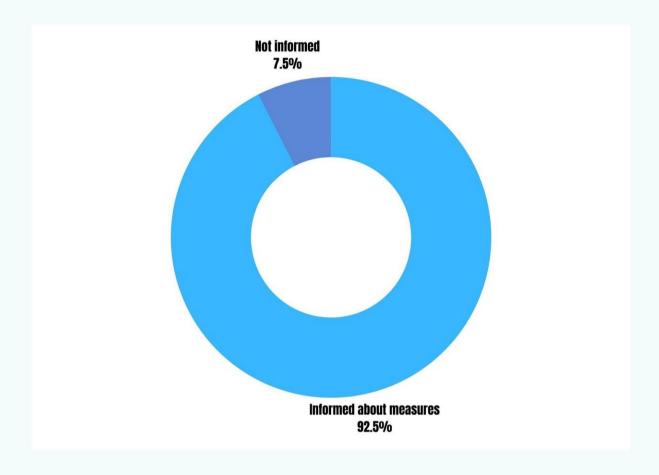
## Covid-19: feeling safe and protected?



**Not informed**
**7.5%**

**Informed about measures**
**92.5%**

**Figure 6:** *The amount of homeless people that were informed on the Covid-19 measures (NSG, 2020).*

When it comes to being informed on the Covid-19 restrictions, 92,5% say that they know what is expected of them and they follow the rules most of the time or always. However, the rules to stay indoors if you cof, sneeze or have symptoms of a common cold, were not always followed. Research participants mention that upholding this rule is hard and not always possible for their specific situation.

The feeling of being contaminated quicklier because of lack of places to stay indoors is also living amongst some people within the homeless community. *''Virologists ask everyone to stay indoors. The fact that I am not able to do that scares me, we are very vulnerable right now.''(Daniel, NPO3, 20-03-2020).* Daniel is homeless, but works as a chef in a restaurant and therefore, at the time of the interview, he has no options to stay in a shelter. Shelters have a lower capacity because of the Covid-19 measures and priority is given to people who are seen as the most vulnerable, since Daniel has an income he is excluded from the shelter for now, because he is seen as self-reliant.

Feelings of being vulnerable for Covid-19 are also felt inside the walls of the homeless shelters. Especially during the first weeks of the lockdown, while shelters were still trying to arrange a safer way of sheltering. Martijn, a homeless person trying to explain the situation in the shelters at this time says: *"Look, most of them try to uphold the rules, but there are always a few guys standing too close to me. That all feels pretty unsafe"* (Martijn, NHnieuws, 15-10-20). Nordin also talks about these feelings: *"I am at risk. If I compare myself to friends who have their own place to live...Even if I do exactly what is asked from me, I can't. There are 50 people on one address. Then 1,5 meter distance won't work. You walk through common hallways. There are 4 showers for 50 people. You are in the shower realizing that 30 people might have showered before you in that spot."* (Nordin, Trimbos, 2020). Dennis, who slept in a night shelter before, but now tries to arrange a place to sleep at friends' places, tells: *'' I think it is dangerous to sleep there now, you are in close proximity to each other and not everyone is as clean. I am especially careful, since I don't want to contaminate my little kid."* (Dennis, NPO3, 20-03-2020) Another homeless person, René, chose to sleep in a tent outdoors, since he feels more safe there for Covid-19, describes the situation as "a ticking time bomb". He is telling about the winter shelter that is mainly used by non beneficiaries (often without a Dutch nationality): *"There are people from all over the world here who are not really taking the measures seriously. It is just waiting for the first contaminations "*. (Rene, Parool, 15-03-2020).

This same expression of the *"ticking time bomb"* is used by Lonneke van den Brink, coordinator at dayshelter De Open Hof. One contamination will lead to an explosion of Covid-19 contaminations. Shelters harbour a lot of people with frail health. Not just the homeless, but also the volunteers, who are often elderly people. Most homeless do not keep distance from each other. They try to keep distance from the volunteers, but it seems that most of the visitors of Open Hof do not see the value the Covid-19 measures (Interview Van den Brink). Laura Luring, personal counselor for the Salvations army in Assen, also noticed this discerning sentiment amongst some of their clients. Some even felt personally offended by her colleagues following the Covid-19 measures. *"Some clients were mad too. ' You guys are putting on facemasks for us, against us. We are not dirty or something.' It impacted their thinking and feeling."* (Interview Luring). Some of these clients that did not want to uphold the measures were the ones in most vulnerable health.Some clients mentioned that they will die in the worst case scenario, but they seem to not care about that. It feels like their own life has less value to some of the clients (Interview Luring). Van den Brink thinks it has more to do with that most of the visitors of Open Hof are more concerned with their next meal and where they will sleep that night, and not with a virus, that they have just a chance of getting. This idea is supported by the quote of Daniel saying: *"As a homeless person you are always worried, it is my second nature to not think about the risk of the virus rational. That will become too much."* (Daniel, NPO3, 20-03-2020)

However, as there are many different stances and degrees to upholding the Covid-19 measurements amongst housed, there are the same variations found amongst the homeless population and drawing the conclusion that homeless must be more concerned with their essential necessities and therefore see less value in the Covid-19 measurements is selling the homeless people upholding the rules short (Interview Muusse).

**Feeling like a homeless person and Covid-19**

The Covid-19 crisis influenced people in different ways, having more impact for some than others. In the case of homeless people and their identity, different impacts can be identified. As mentioned in the previous section, a part of the homeless population feels extra vulnerable. Some homeless feel more invisible, out of place or feel more conscious of the fact that they have nowhere to go.

Monica, who is homeless since three weeks at the time of the interview, is telling: *"I used to sit in a bar or in the library writing in my diary. That is not possible anymore. We are like zombies now"* (Monica, Rtlnieuws, 27-03-20). Before Covid-19 Monica felt like she had options to go to places, now she feels like a walking dead person in an empty city.

Klaas told a similar narrative: *"We barely existed before, but now, with Covid-19, it seems that we don't exist at all anymore. I may be homeless, but still a person. Like the others, but we are not being seen, not receiving help."* (Klaas, Sikkom, 16-04-2020). Something that both Klaas and Monica experienced is a feeling of dehumanization. Monica felt like a zombie, Klaas mentioned that he is still a person. Implicitly you hear their identity, and sense of self as a fellow human instead of just a homeless person, is being threatened.

Another example of this is Hiba, a student who has no place to stay and now lives on the streets: *"My counselors tell me that they also find it a difficult situation, that they feel for me and things will be alright. That is easy to say for them, they sit inside. I cannot go anywhere anymore."* (Hiba, NPO3, 20-03-2020) Before Covid-19 she used to work as a volunteer, spend time in the library and use the restroom in restaurants and hotels. Right now she can only wait for the shelter to open again and her "regular" days are empty and just full of waiting. In this case, the homeless identity of a homeless person is being emphasized by the fact that they have nowhere to go. Regular activities that allowed them to participate within society are cut off, so the identity beyond being a person without a house is slowly fading to the background and this person is more aware of the fact that she lives her life on the street.

*- An important sidenote: The times of these interviews were in the first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis. At these times shelters did not have the capacity to shelter the same amount of people as before in a safe way, because of social distancing. From the 27th of March onward, national policy advice was created, resulting in more clarity and room for action for organisations working with homeless people. After this policy it took a few weeks to create capacity, but interviews like these were not found in the media after april 16. -*

The awareness of being homeless also relates to a slogan often shared on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic: stay home! Van Barneveld told in his interview about how this slogan was used by the municipality he lives in: *"It is very confronting, we stay home. We can't stay home if we don't have a home."* (Interview Van Barneveld). Van Barneveld was very passionate about enlightening the people around him to not use this slogan, since it implies a choice that some people just don't have. This slogan can be confronting to hear for people who are homeless. It emphasizes the homeless identity and for some painfully confirms the lack of housing and choice that they experience (Interview Van Barneveld).

Feeling out of place and being more conscious of your situation were also felt within the night shelters and the 24/7 shelters.  Some homeless people that usually stayed within hostels or with friends, but were now dependent on shelters because of Covid-19, feel out of place here. Like Dennis: "I don't feel like I belong there, they are a different kind of people".  Dennis is not relating to the other homeless people in the shelter and seems to not have adopted the homeless identity. "A different kind of people" sleeps in shelters, not people like him. Nordin, who is now living in a temporary housing unit felt the same: *"I knew I wanted to be out of here as soon as possible, since I don't have as many problems as those people here, I just don't have a roof over my head. I thought: I will get out of this, I will be different from the rest. But the longer you are here, the more you adapt to your environment. Slowly you get drowsy, because of the emptiness"* (Nordin, Trimbos, 2020). Nordin is explaining how he at first didn't feel like one of 'those people', but slowly became more like them.

## Having a place to stay
Next to the people who felt more aware of their homeless identity or felt out of place, there was also a group of homeless who had the opportunity to have a place to stay for the first time in a long time. Nordin, that felt he was slowly becoming one of those homeless people, did experience positive feelings about having a place to stay. *"I am just really grateful that the moment I close my door, I am in my own world"* (Nordin, Trimbos, 2020). This feeling was often felt by the Trimbos research group. These feelings were especially present with people who were staying at hotels or had more individual forms of shelter (Interview Muusse). This can be compared to night shelters where some people are attentive all night, because they do not

want their shoes to be stolen: *"It is an entire different life when you have your own room with a door you can lock"* (Interview Muusse). This rest is also seen with the clients of other homeless organizations. Clients start to look beyond the present and think about problems they want to tackle: *"This gives us the rest to think about what I want to do in the future, not just thinking about where I want to sleep tonight or what I will eat today. It is really great to close the door behind you and not feel urged"* (Interview De Boer). To add some background, the night shelter of "Het Kopland" transformed into a 24/7 shelter. Their usual opening times were extended, therefore clients didn't have to leave in the morning, but decided whether they stayed in or went out on their own. De Boer mentioned how they as an organisation also reaped benefits of this construction: *"We can do what we are good at, that is helping people go from unpleasant circumstances to better ones".* (Interview De Boer).

Both the research papers also showed feelings of rest and calmness, that were especially present in people that had access to more individual shelter and did not have to go out in the streets during the day (Trimbos, 2020; Straatdokters, 2020). As a result of these feelings their health improved, their blood pressure went down for example, and they had more room in their minds to think about bettering their situation. The results of these feelings of destressing were not only seen in health, but according to René Jager, (Kopland, Zienn) working for both Kopland and Zienn, this was also noticeable in the number of incidents. Jager explains that within this group behavioural problems and substance abuse is often present and this could lead to (violent) incidents. Since Covid-19 these incidents have decreased significantly. This has to do with the new way of working (24/7) and therefore the destressing of this group (Interview Jager).

## Summary lived space

Negative feelings were experienced by a part of the homeless population during the lockdown. These feelings could be explained by lack of income, social interaction and perspective resulting. There were also feelings of vulnerability present within the homeless community, since not everyone felt like they were able to protect themselves from the virus.
There were also positive experiences, mainly identified within the group that received a more private form of sheltering. Homeless that had privacy or could stay in during the day felt more rest. This resulted in less conflict, less health problems and more perspective for the long run. This chapter shows that the degree of negative or positive feelings largely depends on the circumstances the homeless people were at, whether they had a private place to stay or nowhere to go.

## 4.4 Conflicts within the spatial triad

### Exclusion

After composing the theoretical framework the underlying assumption was that the conflicts within the social space must have been increased because of the Covid-19 pandemic, since previous research showed that increased control in the public urban space resulted in more exclusion for homeless people (Bergamaschi et al., 2014). After the analysis this view is more nuanced since the research showed that although feelings of exclusion were present, part of the homeless population was more included than before the pandemic.
One of the strongest examples of exclusion that could be identified within this research is the exclusion of the so called non beneficiaries. Before Covid-19 this group was being excluded from shelters through policy, but every time the advice was to stay home during the pandemic, this group was urged to be sheltered by revised policy again. If the measures decreased, the policy was revised again to decrease the sheltering of non-beneficiaries.

Another peak in exclusion can be identified in the start of the lockdown. At that time shelters and other homeless facilities were not prepared and did not have the capacity to carry out their usual tasks while upholding the Covid-19 measures. More people had to be rejected from shelters and walk in facilities. The access to space that the homeless population used before was restricted. This resulted in feelings of exclusion, some homeless people had nowhere to go anymore. When looking at places that were useful before the pandemic, like the library, restaurants or hotels, these places also became restricted in access because of the pandemic during the first lockdown. Although it is important to note that these exclusionary measures were for the entire population and not just for the homeless people.

### Marginalization

Contrary to the expectations, the attention for the homeless population skyrocketed during the first lockdown. As mentioned by De Boer, a lockdown quite literally makes homeless people more visible. The first increased attention came from the media, articles on homeless people and shelters helping them were more present than usual. Throughout the pandemic, this attention seemed to decrease. The general population also had an increased interest in the lives of homeless people. Neighbourhoods became more involved with homeless in their area and showed more positive actions towards them. Negative attention towards homeless people in the form of more reports on nuisance was also present. This attention could be explained by people being home more and by the increase in visibility of the homeless, as a combination of less housed people in the streets and more homeless facilities closed.
When we take into account the policy regarding Covid-19 the first thing that comes to mind is the slogan: Stay home! Although this slogan is useful to influence the majority of the

population it is obviously made without homeless people in mind. The implications of these words on homeless people is also not included with creating and spreading this slogan. On the contrary only for days after the intelligent lockdown was announced policy was available on how to cope with sheltering during the pandemic. The policy advice got revised and kept up to date according to each phase of the pandemic. Therefore it can be concluded that homeless people were therefore not forgotten in policy.

When measuring marginalization as having a voice in the policy, marginalization was present during these times. The VWS policy advice was not made in a manner in which homeless people themselves participated or had a say in the making of the policy. However, policy for crisis situations, meant to be made and introduced in a short time span, is not suitable for participatory methods, since these methods often take time.

**Injustice**

A form of injustice that can be seen in the social life of the homeless people is associated with the concept of region binding and non-beneficiaries. When the right to the city is defined as the right not to be marginalized in decision making, it can be concluded that non-beneficiaries and people without region binding are not having a right to the city. They are experiencing spatial exclusion in local sheltering policy and do not have any say in the matter. One could argue that to have the right to the city a homeless person should have the so-called "region binding". When arguing from a desert base, non-beneficiaries and people without region binding should be included in the local sheltering policy if they worked here. In that case they earned their right to the city and with this their right to shelter. When following the egalitarian justice perspective, it is fair if everyone has the right to the city, not just people born there, having a social circle there or working there.

The biggest form of injustice during the pandemic was found in the spatial inequality among the homeless and the extent to which they were able to protect themselves from the virus. When applying an egalitarian perspective to the pandemic and the homeless population, everyone should have the same opportunities to protect themselves.

Not every homeless person could stay indoors or could keep up social distancing during the pandemic. The examples seen in this research of people feeling unsafe from Covid-19 in shelters show that these homeless people did not have the choices and opportunities housed people had during these times. The homeless people deliberately choosing not to use sheltering during these times, show that non individual forms of sheltering are not suitable during these times.

# 5. Discussion, conclusion and reflection

## 5.1 Discussion

### Social space

This research shows that the social space of homeless people has had a huge impact from the Covid-19 pandemic. The chapter on the perceived space showed that the different operation categories of homeless people had differing changes in their daily lives and spatial practices. Some of these changes were positive, for example more people were being sheltered and therefore more people that avoided care could now be helped. Negative changes could also be observed. More homeless people had nowhere to go and some people that had a place to stay could not stay there anymore because of Covid-19.

The conceived space of the homeless population also had considerable changes. In general these changes could be marked as positive. Clear national policy advice was given during the pandemic and was kept up to date according to the different phases in the pandemic. This policy encouraged shelters and municipalities to arrange more individual sheltering and included the group of non-beneficiaries during the peaks of the pandemic, while they were excluded before. The general public's sentiments on the homeless people during the lockdown also showed a positive shift. There was more empathy and interest for the homeless from the media and housed people in their neighborhoods. However, these positive outcomes seemed to decrease when the number of contaminations went down and measures became less strict. The exclusion of the non-beneficiaries also restarted at this point.

The lived space showed both positive and negative outcomes of the pandemic. More negative feelings were identified, while at the same time some homeless people (the ones with private accomodations) experienced more rest and progress than before. While the majority of the homeless were informed on the measures, many found it hard to follow in the context of shared shelter. This caused feelings of vulnerability amongst these homeless, their housing situation felt like a risk in times of a global pandemic. The homeless identity and therefore the experience of feeling homeless seemed to have increased during the pandemic, mostly because places where homeless felt like they could participate like the rest of the population were closed.

## Catalyst for conflict

The section on conflicts in the social space clearly shows that exclusion, marginalization and injustice were present before Covid-19 and although the pandemic showed the vulnerable position of homeless people, it cannot be stated that the pandemic was a catalyst for conflict with negative results throughout the homeless population. However, it can be stated that the negative impact of Covid-19 for the general population was felt harder within a part of the homeless community, since interaction between the elements of the spatial triad had more impact on this group.For example, policy prohibited people from close interactions. This prohibited most spatial practices within the lived space; partaking in daycare, surviving habits, volunteering jobs or rehousing activities. This influence resulted in lack of perspective, money issues and less social interactions in the lived space. These impacts can be categorized as increasing spatial, financial and social exclusion. However, in this case the measures responsible for these forms of exclusion were not specifically targeted towards the homeless population. Although through their more vulnerable financial, spatial and social positions, these measures could have a bigger impact on this group, resulting in more exclusion.

During the first weeks of the lockdown shelters and other homeless facilities were not prepared and did not have the capacity to carry out their usual tasks while upholding the Covid-19 measures. More people had to be rejected from shelters and walk-in facilities. The access to space that the homeless population used before was restricted. This resulted in feelings of exclusion and dehumanization, some homeless people did not have anywhere to go anymore. When looking at places that were useful before the pandemic, like the library, restaurants or hotels, these places also became restricted in access because of the pandemic during the first lockdown. Although it is important to note that these exclusionary measures were for the entire population and not just for the homeless people, the vulnerable position of the homeless person does expand the negative experience within the lived space. Since these people are to some extent excluded from society in general (no house, often no paid job, often weak social ties) the spatial exclusion experienced has a bigger impact and magnifies their vulnerable position as a homeless person, thereby magnifying their identity as a homeless person.

This can be said for the general Covid-19 measures as well. Although these measures were applicable for everyone, it was harder to follow them in certain situations, for example in the contact of living in a shelter with a lot of people around you. This is another example of interaction between the three components of the triad. The perceived space resulted in policy that is harder to uphold for the conceived space that homeless people live in, resulting in feelings of vulnerability amongst the homeless population in the lived space.

**Catalyst for change**

The statements made in interviews and media that the pandemic fastened progress around homeless policy are very interesting. De Boer from 'Het Kopland' even went as far as saying in the interview that Covid-19 was a "catalyst" for change and they couldn't have reached what they did during the Covid-19 pandemic in the previous five years. Many possible explanations could be given for this progress, like the visibility of homelessness and their vulnerability or the fact that pandemics are moments where bureaucracy works differently. Another explanation that is worth mentioning when discussing this progress and marginalization is the public health. As was mentioned in the policy advice given by the VWS (Herstel begint met een huis, 2020), it is important for public health reasons to get people out of the streets. One could conclude that change for homeless people is able to occur if the general population has an interest, for example their health. In this case the interest of the homeless population, a minority, is marginalized, since their wellbeing is less reason for change than a general interest of the majority.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to gain insight in the social space and associated conflicts of homeless people and on how Covid-19 influenced these. Although the research could not follow the original design, resulting in less primary data, some very valuable conclusions can be drawn from this research. The social space of the homeless population was already influenced by the vulnerable position they were in. The perceived space of many homeless people that was focussed on survival (place to sleep, surviving habits) was influenced by the pandemic resulting in less spatial movement and therefore less opportunities for surviving unless they received adequate sheltering. During the first weeks of the pandemic, this especially resulted in spatial exclusion and unjust situations where people felt vulnerable to contaminations. The conceived space was already a space of exclusion versus inclusion, based on the binding and rights the homeless had in the region. High number of contaminations with Covid-19 made these policies temporarily more inclusive. The changes in the conceived and perceived space were very influential on the lived space of homeless. This impact varied according to the situation the homeless were in before and after covid-19. People who had no access to adequate sheltering often felt worse off, while people who got more privacy or more time indoors because of Covid-19 experienced more rest and could make progress in working towards a new and better situation. This outcome is in line with previous research and the idea of housing before anything else and recovery starts with a house. This outcome also stresses the importance of the outcomes of class struggles in space; these are important to people's identities, daily lives and can even be a predictor for peoples futures. This has

implications for planning practice, since planners can either plan to reduce spatial and social inequality and plan for better futures for vulnerable people within society or not take into account the subject of inequality which could subsequently result in more spatial exclusion and injustice.

Recommendations for further research would be to follow up this study with a larger scale research with a larger sample size to really explore the depths of the impact that the Covid-19 crisis had and still has on this marginalized group of people. Since a lot of data for this research is retrieved in the early stages of this pandemic (media sources, Trimbos research, Straatdokters Groep research) I think taking into account the rest of the duration of the pandemic would show new insights. It would also show if the decline of compassion and the increase in exclusion as seen with declining contaminations would continue along this road. Another research suggestion is to look at policy and the inclusion/exclusion of non-beneficiaries, there seems to be a research gap when it comes to non-beneficiaries in general, while the impact of a pandemic painfully magnifies the vulnerable and often hopeless situation of this group. The use of the theoretical framework including the social space would be very useful for further research, since it brings together both policy, the use of space and the experiences of the homeless population, providing a multi-level perspective.

## 5.3 Reflection

As mentioned in the methodology the biggest mistake I made was the too optimistic estimation of how the pandemic would unfold. This resulted in more difficulties and stress in finding research participants. Part of these difficulties and stress could have been avoided by sticking to the planning better and being more proactive. For example, I started early with emailing and contacting homeless organizations, but the first round of contact only resulted in one interview. Instead of calling the homeless organizations that did not react to my email I decided to contact new organizations as I didn't want them to feel bothered by me in such a stressed and difficult time. However, making calls and being more assertive could have led to more expert interviews. This has taught me that when I start my career I should try to be more assertive to reach my goals.

I would have liked to have more primary data to use for my research. As explained in the methodology this was not achieved. I am content with the amount of experiences I found, but the lack of primary data does make the research less convincing, since I could not elaborate more on several positive and negative experiences.

Another limitation of my research were the geographical boundaries. I wanted to choose a case study on Groningen, but realized soon that one city would not get me the amount of data that I needed during these times. Therefore I choose to include Assen, but even this couldn´t assure enough primary data. The secondary data did not have my geographical focus and therefore it is hard to say to what extent it was applicable to both Groningen and Assen. In hindsight I might have asked homeless organizations to hand out questionnaires to achieve more primary data. I could have specified the perceived space of homeless in these cities by handing out a map of the city and asking in the questionnaire to dot what places they visited before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. I could ask them to elaborate on each dot and answer some questions on their feelings and experiences before and during Covid-19. However, I don´t know if I would have been able to get these questionnaires to be handed out and if the homeless people would be willing to participate.

Despite these limitations I am confident about my outcomes. Especially since triangulation was achieved through the secondary data and the fact that I did not find large discrepancies between my primary and secondary data. I was able to discover interesting findings and had enough finding to reflect on and to link to the theoretical framework. I also felt confident enough in my conclusions.

Another reflection that was important to myself is that I really enjoyed doing this research and seeing the outcomes. I acquired so much knowledge on this topic and even used some of this knowledge recently in a discussion on the topic if homelessness is a choice. I feel like this research is the perfect ending to my masters, grasping more knowledge on spatial inequalities and spatial vulnerability in my own country and giving me more insight on the kind of planner I want to become; a planner that plans with kindness, alleviating inequalities and injustice.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – Form of consent

Hartelijk bedankt dat u mee wilt doen aan mijn onderzoek over de impact van het ¨nieuwe normaal¨ op de sociale en ruimtelijke ongelijkheid die daklozen naar aanleiding hiervan mogelijk ervaren. Dit afstudeeronderzoek voer ik uit voor mijn master Socio-spatial planning binnen de Faculteit Ruimtelijke Wetenschappen aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Het interview zal afhankelijk van hoeveel u wilt vertellen/beantwoorden ongeveer een half uur duren.

Ik wil u graag op de hoogte brengen dat:

- U deelname vrijwillig is. U kunt u ieder moment bedenken en het interview stoppen zonder een reden te hoeven geven.
- U vragen mag overslaan als u hier geen antwoord op wilt geven.
- U mij achteraf mag mij vragen bepaalde antwoorden of het gehele interview toch buiten het onderzoek te houden.
- De eventuele geluidsopnamen alleen door de onderzoeker zelf beluisterd worden om de antwoorden schriftelijk te verwerken.
- U mij altijd om meer informatie over het onderzoek mag vragen.

Verder wil ik u vragen te omcirkelen wat voor u van toepassing is:

- Ik heb er wel / geen problemen mee als je het interview opneemt.
- Ik heb er wel / geen problemen mee als je mijn naam gebruikt in je onderzoek.
- Ik heb er wel / geen problemen mee als je letterlijke teksten van mij (citaten) in je onderzoek verwerkt.

Verder geef ik hiermee aan dat ik akkoord ga met mijn deelname in dit interview onder de bovenstaande voorwaarden.


Naam en handtekening van deelnemer                    Datum


_____                    _____


Ik verklaar dat ik de deelnemer heb geïnformeerd over het onderzoek. Ik zal de deelnemer informeren over dingen die de deelname van hem/haar in het onderzoek zouden kunnen beïnvloeden.


Naam en handtekening interviewer                    Datum


_____                    _____

## Appendix B – Interview guide homeless respondent

Ieder interview start met een kennismaking en het uitleggen en ondertekenen van de consent form. Ik zal de participant vragen hij/zij graag heeft dat ik u of jij gebruik in mijn vragen en de vragen daaraan aanpassen.

Kun je iets vertellen over hoe je dagelijks leven er voor de Covid-19 pandemie uitzag?
- verder vragen over ´sustaining habitats´
- verder vragen over dagelijks terugkerende plaatsen en hoe deze werden gebruikt

Waar voelde je je voor de pandemie wel of niet welkom?
- doorvragen naar het waarom achter het gevoel van wel of niet welkom zijn

Had je voor de pandemie je wel of niet het idee dat er naar jouw stem geluisterd werd? Denk je wel of geen invloed te hebben op hoe de gemeente met jij ruimte die jij gebruikt omgaat?

Kun je iets vertellen over hoe je dagelijkse leven er nu uit ziet?
- terugkomen op ´sustaining habitats´
- terugkomen op dagelijks terugkerende plaatsen en hoe deze werden gebruikt

Waar voel je je nu wel of niet welkom?
- doorvragen naar het waarom achter het gevoel van wel of niet welkom zijn

Heb je nu wel of niet het idee dat er naar jouw stem geluisterd wordt? Denk je wel of geen invloed te hebben op hoe de gemeente met jij ruimte die jij gebruikt omgaat?

Hoe kijk je tegen deze veranderingen aan?
- doorvragen naar eventuele positieve of negatieve gevoelens

Ben je wel of niet bang om zelf ziek te worden?
- doorvragen waarom
- doorvragen of hij/zij het idee heeft zichzelf te kunnen beschermen tegen Covid-19

Hoe kijk je aan tegen de maatregelen die de overheid heeft genomen tegen de verspreiding van het virus? - doorvragen naar eventuele positieve of negatieve gevoelens

Als je zelf nu de burgemeester van deze stad zou zijn, zou je dan wel of niet dingen veranderen? - doorvragen naar eventuele veranderingen die hij/zij zou willen.

## Appendix C – Interview guide homeless expert

Ieder interview start met een kennismaking en het uitleggen en ondertekenen van de consent form. Ik zal de participant vragen hij/zij graag heeft dat ik u of jij gebruik in mijn vragen en de vragen daaraan aanpassen.

Kun je wat over je baan vertellen?

Is je baan wel of niet veranderd door de Covid-19 pandemie?
- verder vragen naar eventuele verandering

Heeft de organisatie waarvoor je werkt wel of niet iets veranderd door de Covid-19 maatregelen?
- verder vragen naar eventuele verandering

Kun je iets vertellen over hoe je dagelijks leven van je cliënten er voor de Covid-19 pandemie uitzag?
- verder vragen over ´sustaining habitats´
- verder vragen over dagelijks terugkerende plaatsen en hoe deze werden gebruikt

Kun je iets vertellen over hoe het dagelijkse leven van je cliënten er nu uit ziet?
- terugkomen op ´sustaining habitats´
- terugkomen op dagelijks terugkerende plaatsen en hoe deze werden gebruikt

Hoe kijk je tegen deze veranderingen aan?
- doorvragen naar eventuele positieve of negatieve gevoelens

Hoe kijk je aan tegen de maatregelen die de overheid heeft genomen tegen de verspreiding van het virus?
- doorvragen naar eventuele positieve of negatieve gevoelens

Als jij het Covid-19 beleid omtrent daklozen mocht veranderen, zou je dan wel of niet bepaald beleid willen aanpassen?
- Doorvragen naar eventuele veranderingen die hij/zij zou willen.