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# Everybody welcome? How popularity limits the access to public parks

## A comparative study of two urban green spaces in the city of Lüneburg, Germany

*Master Thesis*


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# 0. Abstract

Urban Environmental Injustice appears in public parks as a reflection of societal issues, limiting the accessibility of green spaces for different social groups. Factors of park design, functionality, and discourse impact the image and use of the park. Using a Feminist Political Ecology lens, this paper unwraps the underlying structures in the contrasting cases of the Clamart-Park and the Kurpark in Lüneburg (GER) from a past and current perspective. The experience of socio-natural relationality in the material context of the two parks is thereby at the core of the research. Social groups vulnerable to crime and queer people feel more comfortable in the strictly regulated and purposefully designed Kurpark. Social groups vulnerable to stigmatisation and socio-spatial exclusion use the Clamart-Park as a meeting point in the city centre. Conflicts occurring in the latter resemble deeper societal issues. The Clamart-Park's narrative as a space of fear and the Kurpark's regulations reinforce distributive injustice, reflecting exclusionary patterns for the affected groups. The low recognitional justice for marginalised groups intensifies this conflict. Procedural justice is partly achieved through round tables but faces limits of making everybody feel heard. Commoning practice, acknowledging both the needs of vulnerable users and their proposals to ease the tension in the parks, can help to overcome this issue. Finally, there is a need for more public spaces responding to the diverse needs of the citizens, as well as an increased flexibility in the social system's structures to enable all groups to participate in creative commoning projects.

Keywords: Urban Environmental Justice, Feminist Political Ecology, Case Study, Public Parks, Commoning

# 1. The story of two parks and the issue of stigmatisation

In the past decades, public parks have become an increasing part of urban growth agendas towards green, resilient, smart, and sustainable cities (Cooke, 2020). They provide physical and mental health benefits for humans and habitats for urban biodiversity, giving them great value and potential for the living quality of a city (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). Yet, these benefits are challenged if parks do not meet the demands of the citizens, causing them to be abandoned or contested as dangerous places (Jacobs, 1961). Within the social tendency of people leading more private lives and relying less on shared resources, these parks deepen their negative characteristics and create mistrust between different social groups (Samanani, 2017).

Policies to meet this challenge and 'save' the neglected green spaces often do not take the perspectives of all social groups into account, especially not the marginalised lower-income groups or vulnerable people being affected by green space transformations (Anguelovski et al., 2019). These structures of discrimination and exclusion lead to a growing tension in public spaces, making a shared use based on trust even harder to achieve (Doshi, 2017). There is a need to reconsider who the green space is for and who decides its characteristics and usage (Cooke, 2020). However, the idea of making a city "just green enough" remains a balancing act between its societal and economic functions, let alone the ecological aspects of public green (Verheij & Corrêa Nunes, 2021; Wolch et al., 2014, p. 241). As a simplified application of this issue, Jane Jacobs identifies a tendency of neighbourhood parks towards "extremes of popularity and unpopularity" when this balance is not reached (Jacobs, 1961, p. 116).

In the German city of Lüneburg, a similar trend in the surrounding parks can be observed. Two parks stand out as contrasting examples. First, the Kurpark is the representative city park of Lüneburg, located right outside the city centre. It is regularly used and occupied by the citizens, providing space for different social groups and functions. Social and cultural events are organised, which people of different backgrounds attend in their leisure time. Second, the Clamart-Park has a very different status. Although very centrally located, it is a known spot for the drug scene to meet, or used as a crossing road for passengers, or else remains mainly abandoned. This leads to tensions between different social groups, especially affecting vulnerable residents. In the news, the park is mostly mentioned in relation to crime and alcoholism, creating a highly conflicted discourse on the park (Lüneburger Landeszeitung, 2021). These underlying issues behind the 'unpopular' Clamart-Park and its drug dependent users are one of the focus points in my research.

Based on these very different perceptions, the following problem definition can be outlined: The tension between different users of the Clamart-Park creates mistrust and a lack of diversity among its users. Currently, the public discourse about the park's unpopularity largely covers the point of view of middle-class residents as the most heard and well-represented citizen group. Meanwhile, the experiences of more marginalised groups using the park regularly are not really discussed, also in relation to their exclusion from other places. These contrasts raise questions of stigmatisation and (un)equal or socially differentiated accessibility to urban green (Johnson et al., 2021). The benefits

of having access to urban green spaces emphasise the need to investigate when access to these spaces is limited. As such, this paper thrives for the ideal of making both parks accessible for all user groups, overcoming stigmatisation and fear.

In the following section, I will first present the theoretical framework of this study based on the dimensions of urban environmental justice. Then, I turn to the purpose of this study and explain the conceptual model used. Consequently, I will present the research design and the methodology. Eventually, in section 5, I present the findings of my case study. Section 6 features the discussion of the findings in the light of feminist political ecology literature, and finally, Sections 7 and 8 conclude with key messages, future research directions, and reflections.

# 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will cover the following steps. First, it will set the context of the study by exploring the history of urban parks. Second, it defines the three dimensions of Urban Environmental Justice (UEJ), with the Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) lens at its core. Following up, it operationalises the two concepts with three factors shaping the parks' popularity. Third, I introduce commoning to overcome injustices.

## 2.1. The meaning of history in constructing a popular image of public parks

The inequalities in accessing urban green must be understood within their historical and social context (Anguelovski, 2016). Too often, there is a lack in the historical understanding of a place, a disconnection between the present narrative and all past events (Rademacher, 2015). Lefebvre claims that "space is a process; it is fluid and alive" (as cited in Özkan and Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020, p.5). This certainty of change offers the opportunity to see the commons not as a static resource but as a dynamic activity, being sensible for its intertwined past and present phenomena (Birge-Liberman, 2010; Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). History is complex and largely influenced by local reinforcing patterns of "power, privilege and property", which tend to induce similar events over time (Birge-Liberman, 2010; Resurrección, 2017, p. 74). Thereby, the decision-making processes are the key underlying mechanism of the developments of urban design and functionalities of the public parks, requiring a critical historical perspective on their associated narratives (Birge-Liberman, 2010). Parks are deeply affected by values and actions defining urban politics, including the prominent role of production and capital accumulation from the eighteenth century onwards (Birge-Liberman, 2010). Thus, political decisions and recognition account for the maintenance of parks and reinvestment in its value, determining whether the park is highly esteemed or neglected (Birge-Liberman, 2010). The long existence of parks produces norms of park use, shaping and strengthening the perception of the public on these places, which impacts their functionalities until today (Loughran, 2020). In the context of Lüneburg, identifying the underlying drivers of urban environmental injustices, based on previous decision-making processes for the park design and use, helps to understand reinforcing power structures and exclusionary patterns.

The history of urban parks reveals the connectivity between their design and associated functionalities and discourses. In the beginning, park design was merely targeted at the social needs of white men and women and their families from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Birge-Liberman, 2010). It evolved in the mid-nineteenth century with an emerging "urban leisure class", aiming to create reproductive spaces which would balance out the problems occurring from rapid industrialization and population growth (Birge-Liberman, 2010, p. 1395). The roots of these developments are rational understandings of planning from the last century, fostering a top-down and elite-oriented management from the start. Such coordinative approaches do not include residents in an early state of the park design, which makes it difficult to improve the spaces for the benefits of all (Anguelovski et al., 2018). At that point, the citizens and decision-makers recognised that based on the park's attractiveness, they could create value of recreation and public health while also generating economic advantages of prosperity and increased property values (Birge-Liberman, 2010). This understanding enabled to justify the creation of parks instead of urban development through housing or industry (Birge-Liberman, 2010). Key functionalities of parks should be either exertive as in sport and games or receptive as promenading and fine arts, both in larger crowds and smaller "neighbourly" groups (Birge-Liberman, 2010, p. 1394).

This traditional view on public parks is shaped by a Western thought of including both a right to exclude and a right not to be excluded (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). It was only the increasingly democratic regimes of the twentieth century, striving towards mass consumption of recreation, which improved the functional mix and accessibility of parks for a larger range of people (Birge-Liberman, 2010). Thereby, the baby boom in the 1960s contributed to the creation of more child-friendly green spaces (Loughran, 2020). The parallel development of a new neighbourhood and public park simultaneously, may increase the quality of life in the area and supports the willingness to pay more by potential new residents, but also reinforces social privilege of middle- or high-class, risking "green gentrification" (Jo Black & Richards, 2020; Loughran, 2020, p. 2342). Gentrification processes are further driven by the municipality's aim to attract more tourists, limiting the park's accessibility for marginalised groups (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021; Birge-Liberman, 2010). As a consequence, a limited recognition of these citizens' needs can lead to a neglection of less attractive public parks by local politics in terms of general improvements, inducing a relative isolation of the place and a downward spiral of deterioration and value decrease (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021; Birge-Liberman, 2010). A long history of a park as a place of violence or insecurity can be internalised in the perception of urban residents, reinforcing these expectations as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Campbell & Laheij, 2021).

In terms of queer identities, historical data are hardly collected. City archives tend to lack these subcultures in their stock, showing the power of creating a collective identity that recognizes only a limited group of citizens (Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021). If these efforts have not been done in the past, they may be lost. Thus, it is difficult to recollect historical evidence from many decades ago.

## 2.2. Accessing urban environmental justice in public parks

In the Anthropocene, rapid urbanisation increases the scientific research on urban nature and the relationship between human action and non-human environments (Rademacher, 2015). A large and growing body of literature has investigated different trends and mechanisms of Urban Environmental Justice as a determining factor for the accessibility of public parks (Rigolon, 2016). To explain the cases of Lüneburg, it is necessary to define the roots and meanings of UEJ from a critical perspective. UEJ aims to unravel the dynamics behind urban nature, which negatively affect socially vulnerable groups (Anguelovski, 2016). A critical approach questions underlying power structures and intersectionality, shaping social inequality between state power and marginalised groups (Menton et al., 2020). This view should include the demands for greater distributional equity, the recognition of the needs and conditions of different urban communities, and their saying in processes creating and reinforcing injustice and unequal power structures over time (Anguelovski, 2016). These three dimensions are (1) distributional, (2) recognitional, and (3) procedural justice (Menton et al., 2020).

First, *distributive justice* focuses on the accessibility and public space allocation for all social groups (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). The distribution of harms and benefits resulting from the allocation of urban parks determines the capability of an individual to achieve well-being and flourish in their everyday life (Coolsaet, 2020; Menton et al., 2020). In the urban context, an equal distribution of access to green spaces would be the natural preference to achieve justice (Coolsaet, 2020). Thereby, distributive injustice can be identified and measured by the variables of "risk exposure" to exclusion or safety deficits connected to that place (Coolsaet, 2020, p. 29). The linkage between ecology and society reflects in political decisions regarding the accessibility of parks, but also in global trends of rapid urbanization and green gentrification (Rademacher, 2015).

Second, *recognitional justice* describes the respect for differences between social groups using public parks, ensuring the personal dignity of each citizen as well as collective identities and needs (Menton et al., 2020). It carries aspects of self-respect and self-worth, including the "right to be different" (Coolsaet, 2020, p. 52). At both, the individual and collective level, a focus on social interactions recognises the quality and safety related to public parks, as well as their assigned values and meanings (Coolsaet, 2020; Kabisch & Haase, 2014). The role of urban (sub-)cultures is thus connected to the materiality of the parks in which they are lived (Coolsaet, 2020).

Third, *procedural justice* questions the ability of affected social groups to participate in and influence the decision-making processes around urban parks (Coolsaet, 2020; Kabisch & Haase, 2014). It addresses the residents' territory, well-being, and communities, with a focus on vulnerable groups who disproportionally experience injustice in their use of public parks (Coolsaet, 2020). Analysing the procedural justice means understanding which groups should be included and how they can be engaged effectively in the process. While at the same time recognising existing power positions through representation and influential social ties (Coolsaet, 2020). Usually, these concerns come in

line with a proposal of participation in environmental governance. However, participation needs to be treated sensible to be effective in overcoming power injustices (Coolsaet, 2020).

Within the transformation of urban societies towards increased heterogeneity, immigration, globalisation, and economic restructuring, a differentiated view is needed (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). Feminist Political Ecology helps to understand and reflect on the multi-layered identities and structures behind the questions of UEJ and park accessibility. FPE belongs to the subfield of Political Ecology, which investigates the power mechanisms defining "the people's unequal and differentiated access and control of resources" at multiple governance scales (Resurrección, 2017, p. 75). This depiction allows the confrontation of marginalised social groups within the public discourse and the means to deal with "othered populations" (Menton et al., 2020, p. 1624). While most research on political ecology looks at the human-environment intersection more generally, there is an increasing subfield focussing at the urban environments from a feminist perspective (Anguelovski et al., 2020; Elmhirst, 2015; Rademacher, 2015). This perspective is crucial to capture and reflect on the socio-natural relationship between different identities and urban green spaces (Rademacher, 2015).

These dimensions of urban environmental justice will be operationalised by using a framework inspired by Chatterton and Hollands (2003) about the factors shaping a park's popularity. They are a determining variable to identify the park's accessibility for potential users. Therefore, this paper will analyse the "making" of urban spaces through processes of (1) the production of parks through urban design, (2) the utilisation of parks through their environmental and social functionalities, and (3) their regulation through decision-making processes (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003, p. 5). First, the urban design of the neighbourhood is the 'hardware' for producing functionalities and space. Second, the kinds of environmental and social functionalities of public parks further define their consumption and the accessibility for different social groups. Third, decision-making processes shaped by public discourse can give a broader understanding of how these images are continuously constructed and reconstructed.

### 2.2.1 Production: Urban setting and design

The first factor impacting the image of a public park is the urban design as a mean producing environmental injustice. It focuses on the analysis of the parks' 'objective' material characteristics. This includes the size of the park, its infrastructure and design, the surrounding buildings and their type, housing prices and income inequalities (Coolsaet, 2020).

Park quality manifests in available park amenities, maintenance levels, and crime safety, all of which influence how and to what degree a park is visited by residents (Rigolon, 2016). The dynamics resulting from the production create "powerful geophysical realities", which can be both enabling and constraining (Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021, p. 6). As such, design is a political choice, which challenges the urban environmental justice. From a governmental perspective, it is crucial, as green spaces count as "representational space" for the cultural city scape and impact everyday practices of its residents (Loughran, 2020, p. 2324). FPE understands the materiality of parks as creating and reinforcing social power structures, which can lead to social separation or mutual identification with

a place (Rademacher, 2015). Design creates "lifestyle choices" about whose and what needs a neighbourhood park can serve and if and how people will use it (Jo Black & Richards, 2020, p. 2). There, the role of plants in a park is crucial for place- and community-making and can make it more diverse and inclusive (Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021). While a density of plants can create space for otherwise marginalized queer identities or drug addicts and homeless people, the choice of undesired plants in a park can be a political mean of spatial exclusion (Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021).

An uneven park development for different governmental purposes can be linked to inequalities the accessibility of these spaces, for example due to age, gender, sexuality, class, or their intersectionality (Elmhirst, 2015; Loughran, 2020). There, spatial segregation through built patches can create spaces of safety or fear within parks, which deepens the disconnection between different social groups (Lang & Mell, 2020). Consequently, an urban design inviting crime can result from lower quality of parks in general, but also from high vegetation density, poor lightning, and separation from the surrounding streets, which relate to a (perceived) lack of surveillance and security (Loughran, 2020; Madge, 1997; Rigolon, 2016). Such differences impact the number and quality of accessible public parks for different social groups (Rigolon, 2016).

### 2.2.2 Utilisation: Environmental and Social Functions

The second factor depicts how the utilisation of public parks through ecosystem services and social functions affect the parks' accessibility for different identities. The factor can be distinguished from the others by focusing on the experience of the users of the park in their socio-natural relationality.

To begin with, *ecosystem services* add a natural value to parks. They include the provision of green space for more biodiversity, the regulation of the city climate, or the cultural endorsement of mental and physical well-being (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). While rainwater infiltration makes the city more water resilient, noise reduction can reduce stress and improve physical health (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). From an FPE perspective, biodiversity seems to foster the use of the park by a diverse set of users (Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021). There, the park can function as a cultural sphere for "constructing subjects" in favour of the green space (Loughran, 2020, p. 2325). There is potential in creating a common value for the residents by strengthening the human-nature interaction for each of the places.

However, urban biodiversity and associated ecosystem services increasingly often remain "neglected and undervalued" (Devy et al., 2009, p. 25). This neglect is rooted in the increasingly isolated treatment of green spaces from their societal surroundings (Threlfall & Kendal, 2018). Shaped by Western conceptualisations, the ideal of nature strictly separates the environment and human culture, whereas both are very connected (Rademacher, 2015). This "alienation", as Grimwood (2017) states it, can be linked to planning and management practices based on efficiency and economic growth (p.506). This is especially the case in urban parks, which directly mirror culturally and politically shaped attempts of human control over natural surroundings in the otherwise human-built urban environment (Rademacher, 2015). Thus, even assuming that there are enough green

spaces available to provide ecosystem services for everybody, the residents' connection to the environment remains limited (Grimwood, 2017).

To assess the existing connection, it is necessary to identify embodied ideas and practices of nature within everyday social life (Rademacher, 2015). In that context, it is the *social functions and relations* that make a park successful (Jacobs, 1961). For instance, recreational activities like doing sports or walking the dog are social benefits related to parks as a meeting place or a space to relax while experiencing nature (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). Conflicts about the territoriality and not meeting the preferences of social groups can constrain the accessibility of parks, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups (Verheij & Corrêa Nunes, 2021). The FPE lens on complex subjectivities can unfold these injustices. They are influenced by the daily discourses and practices in the environmental surrounding of public parks (Resurrección, 2017). Intersectional positionalities create limited access within existing power structures (Elmhirst, 2015). In urban park settings, the density of strangers and continuous changes in the built environment and population flows create conflicts between groups based on their challenges of risk, uncertainty, and vulnerability, which makes their different realities necessary to assess (Campbell & Laheij, 2021).

The following social groups with a potentially lower accessibility will be emphasized more in this paragraph: (1) citizens vulnerable to crime, including *women, families,* and *elderly people*, (2) *queer people* as a social group between crime vulnerability and stigmatisation, and (3) citizens with a potentially lower accessibility due to precarity and stigmatisation, including *homeless citizens, drug dependent persons,* and *urban youth*.

First, looking at the accessibility of public parks for citizens with a higher *vulnerability to crime* is strongly related to their complex rational and emotional connection to the place (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). While most rational elements resemble in the decision-making of urban design, the social functionalities of spaces are also much impacted by emotions. Emotions are a driver of action and sense-making, both consciously and unconsciously (Resurrección, 2017). Security is one of the "urban vital systems", with fear or lack of safety being its key variable (Campbell & Laheij, 2021, p. 288). If there is no sense of security in a park, the residents will avoid it (Pérez-Tejera et al., 2022; Polko & Kimic, 2022). Fear can be divided into two dimensions. While the objective dimension is the actual danger based on facts, the subjective dimension implies the perception and interpretation of these occurrences, either by an individual or a social group (Polko & Kimic, 2022). Creation of fear in one context can therefore be transferred unconsciously to another one, eventually creating mismatches between embodied everyday realities and planning programs to meet this fear (Resurrección, 2017). Such "landscapes of fear" connected to other precarious identities, are particularly emphasised in elite settings, which have most means to make themselves be heard (Campbell & Laheij, 2021, p. 288). The perception of precarity and disorder in the community increases the fear of crime, for example through homelessness, drug consumption, or litter (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; Pérez-Tejera et al., 2022).

Fear of crime disproportionally affects women, disabled, and elderly people (Pérez-Tejera et al., 2022). *Women* experience more fear than men when using urban parks and public spaces in general (Polko & Kimic, 2022). Women's fear of these spaces is "closely linked" to men's behaviour, induced by experiences of verbal and physical harassment, and reinforced by their socialisation and a shared awareness of unsafe surroundings (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003, p. 154).

Looking at *families*, it is important to include deeper understandings of children's "socio-natures" to create beneficial spaces for them (Heynen, 2018, p. 450). Grimwood (2017) emphasises the importance of "human-nature connections" to child development (p.506). Activities within a natural environment can be empowering, as they allow children to take more responsibility for their own bodies (Grimwood, 2017). In Germany, a study found that parks were used differently by Turkish families, who emphasised the role of meeting friends in a larger group and gathered with their families to eat and relax in the green spaces (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). In comparison, *elderly people* access parks to relax and get fresh air in a natural environment, that is also clean and well maintained (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). Particularly at night, older residents experience fear of becoming crime victims to a similar degree as women (Polko & Kimic, 2022, p. 2). There, less people may increase the fear of crime in public parks (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the role of green spaces increased as a need for vulnerable groups to "escape" (Anguelovski et al., 2020, p. 1761).

Second, between the vulnerability of crime and stigmatisation by others, *queer people* deal with public spaces as a highly contested issue. The relationship between queerness and public spaces is intertwined in their increased vulnerability to gendered, racialised and sexual violence, based on intersecting identities (Angeles & Roberton, 2020). In Germany, the number of offenses against sexual orientation and identity was recorded as 870 in 2021, of which 164 were violent offenses (Statista, 2021). The number is rising every year. In this context, gentrification processes through plant removal for a more "family-friendly" environment can further diminish this space for queer and other marginalized communities (Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021, p. 16). The social structures of capitalism, gender, and power undermine the patterns of accessibility. They shape the way municipalities deal with how parks become spheres of different social interaction at night (Loughran, 2020) (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). In contrast to this lack of public safety, parks can create spaces of interaction and dialogue, connected to ecological and feminist activism (Heynen, 2018).

Third, the accessibility of parks can be limited for citizens due to precarity and *stigmatisation*. Driven by the uncertainties and inequalities of capitalism, precarity is a "politically induced and unequally distributed state of frailty and dependence" beyond only the dimension of material scarcity (Campbell and Laheij, 2021, p.289). One of its underlying problems is the massive interference of wealthier people in the lives of "urban poor", based on generalising narratives that diminish the precarious group's ability to engage in society themselves and communicate their diverse needs (Anguelovski, 2016; Campbell & Laheij, 2021, p. 286). These spaces create "new forms of identification", regulating and protecting the vulnerable groups within self-organised informal institutions (Campbell & Laheij, 2021, p. 286). The "social discrimination" of marginalised groups

makes them locate in less desirable or abandoned parks because they do not feel accepted in other places (Coolsaet, 2020, p. 32; Jacobs, 1961; Rigolon, 2016).

This resembles in the precarious groups of *homeless* and *dependent drug users*. The long history of stigmatisation of homeless and drug-dependent people as being lower-class citizens is shaping the public discourse and fostering their socio-spatial exclusion (Becker & Kunstmann, 2001). Although I classify them as 'stigmatised' users, it needs to be considered how these groups are very vulnerable to crime as well, especially from within their social sphere and because of their 'weak' image. Uneven spatial distributions limit their accessibility of public spaces to meet, making them vulnerable to urban environmental injustice (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020; Verheij & Corrêa Nunes, 2021). In Germany, the state provides homeless people with access to social services such as cash assistance, job training, and shelters co-organised by non-profit organisations (Von Mahs, 2013). Yet, there are deficits of outreach and quality of service, reducing their trust in the German welfare-system (Becker & Kunstmann, 2001). Discrimination shows in high rental prices in the inner city, remotely located day centres, and "exclusionary community attitudes" towards homeless service facilities (Von Mahs, 2013, p. 130). They further experience criminalisation and harassment by the police, or the challenges to define and ascertain mental illness for homeless population (Becker & Kunstmann, 2001; Von Mahs, 2013). Their socio-spatial exclusion, lack of social ties and a reinforcing negative image have a negative psychological impact on these people, which further diminishes their abilities to overcome their condition (Von Mahs, 2013). A recognition of their use of green spaces could help to develop the living conditions on individual, community, and structural level and mitigate psychological health issues of these groups (Becker & Kunstmann, 2001).

Another precarious group is the *urban youth*. Young people are more likely to use drugs in public parks than in other spaces, as parks offer a safe space from parental or authority surveillance (Kotlaja et al., 2018). Green spaces are further valued by young people for "sitting, sunbathing, and playing" in a rather natural setting (Kabisch & Haase, 2014, p. 130). According to Campbell and Laheij (2021), young people's precarity in terms of limited financial resources and uncertainty about reaching their future goals makes them use strategies that could also be applied elsewhere. Their perspective can be helpful to find new and creative modes of interpreting and re-inventing functionalities of parks in connection with precarity.

Finally, the socio-natural relationality of public parks mirrors conflicts and interactions within and between these different social groups during day and night. The conflicts that occur are a trade-off between the diversity of people and the homogenisation following gentrification and touristification, making marginalised social groups feel less welcome and not able to meet their preferences (Anguelovski et al., 2020; Samanani, 2017; Verheij & Corrêa Nunes, 2021; Villamayor-Tomas & García-López, 2021). Because public space and parks are taken for granted, there is less individual feeling of responsibility and the willingness to engage (Samanani, 2017). A commodification of previously shared places connected to a sudden increase in tourism negatively affects the sense of community and place and constrains the opportunities for these places to provide room for alternative use (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021; Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021). Trends of gentrification affect the nightlife of parks (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). While shifting gender relations and

increased queer cultures in the nightlife improve its opportunities for women and gay people, both female and male precarious citizens are being excluded from the gentrified mainstream (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). There, public parks offer an alternative space to the gentrified nightlife, improving the availability and accessibility for precarious identities (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003).

### 2.2.3 Regulation: Policies, Power, Discourse

The third factor of popularity analyses how decision-making processes around public parks are negotiated, accepted, and contested, creating a public discourse that reinforces exclusion and mistrust among different social groups. It looks at the dynamic context of actor relations and discourse patterns (Heynen, 2014). The factor differs from the others in focusing on the "regulators" of public parks as socio-ecological spheres, emphasising (1) policymaking, (2) power relations, and (3) the public discourse.

First, *policymaking* in urban environments implies assumptions about consumption patterns of the community, which need to be critically reflected and potentially reconfigured (Rademacher, 2015). It is important to conceptualise how safety and quality of life are understood and managed in their local context (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). Within an increasingly complex society of more fragmented identities, current strong regulative measures controlling the access to parks bear the risk of homogenisation and being disproportionally targeted at marginalised and previously discriminated social groups (Beckett & Godoy, 2010; Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021). The regulation of this space becomes especially visible during the night. This happens rationally through police interventions and closing off the park at night or on an emotional scale from stigmatisation to criminalisation of the area (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021). This highlights the necessity of public investments and a well-organised crime data collection and analysis, next to accountability and human rights training of regulative authorities (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). Decision-making around public parks can only produce a fair outcome of environmental justice, if its users and involved stakeholders are equally recognised in the political process about different spaces (Coolsaet, 2020). However, facing increasing complexity, police and security guards as regulative forces have difficulties in ensuring stability and order (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). There, a higher degree of political independence enables more flexibility to create integrative and tailor-made solutions for local accessibility issues instead of a "zero tolerance" approach to minor disorders (Beckett & Godoy, 2010, p. 278; Loughran, 2020). A change in the political government can be a window of opportunity to deal with parks as a socio-ecological sphere in a different way. In this regard, it helps to integrate the FPE perspective on different and intersecting identities to understand multi-dimensional experiences in park environments (Loftus, 2020; Rademacher, 2015).

Second, locked-in *power relations* manifested in urban environments lead to an uneven development of green spaces, influenced by the dynamics of public discourse (Heynen, 2014). Reproduced hierarchical power structures partly originate in the narrative of parks as being "neutral and inclusive spaces" where in fact there are mechanisms of socio-cultural segregation and spatial exclusion (Lang & Mell, 2020, p. 505; Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). This leads to conflicts over

space, reflecting a struggle over power, governance and just accessibility of parks (Elmhirst, 2015). From the FPE perspective, the positionality of different social groups in the public sphere can thus be related to priorities within the current political agenda. Different positionalities shape the way certain groups are vulnerable to decision-making processes and experience forms of harm resulting from them (Resurrección, 2017). Participation processes built on negotiation and mutual action beyond elite users can create more representative spaces by focusing on social needs and functionalities instead of assigned attributes (Birge-Liberman, 2010; Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021).

Third, the *public discourse* is influenced by senses of safety, locality, community, and everyday functionalities, shaping the perception of urban parks (Lang & Mell, 2020). Currently, the predominantly white middle-class population has a privileged position in the common narrative of being "the people" whose needs the local policies must address (Loftus, 2020, p. 982). Thereby, public discourse enhances the mistrust and 'othering' of socially discriminated groups, challenging the possibility to find a common ground, which leads to exclusion and displacement of vulnerable residents (Anguelovski, 2016; Loftus, 2020). The role of the media is thereby crucial in communicating simplified depictions of society, which easily wins power over complexity-oriented and more integrated approaches to overcome environmental injustices (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). It also shows the lack of advocacy for these groups within the socio-ecological system (Cooke, 2020). The right of the city to exclude vulnerable social groups from public property, challenges for instance homeless lives (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). It undermines the observation that parks are perceived to be particularly threatening to the urban population, especially women, children, and elderly people (Madge, 1997). The public discourse of gender dynamics manifests in the role of emotion as fear makes it stressful for women to use public parks, especially at certain times and in certain settings (Doshi, 2017; Elmhirst, 2015; Madge, 1997). The victimisation of women in their relationship to public space thereby reinforces patriarchal structures (Resurrección, 2017). Thereby, the neighbourhood can play an important role as a form of informal social control next to a low formal regulative power, which increases the protection from crime in the specific area and thus its safety (Beckett & Godoy, 2010; Jacobs, 1961; Kotlaja et al., 2018).

## 2.3. Overcoming environmental injustice through commoning.

The three described layers constructing and impacting the image and accessibility of public parks can be met with a commoning transition towards a shared responsibility of creating more welcoming environments for everybody. It offers a proactive view to overcome urban environmental injustices within trends of capitalism-driven individualisation of urban societies (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). FPE theorists researched the disconnection between human and urban nature and the increasing loss of a shared understanding of the commons. Based on their different realities, it is necessary to reduce the alienation between common spaces and their daily users to achieve UEJ. This requires four steps: (1) demystification of urban green as a public good, (2) identification of effective tools, (3) fostering an ethics of care, and (4) overcoming injustice through commoning.

First, the key task of the municipality is to *demystify urban green as a public good* accessible for all and instead to re-politicize the common from an FPE perspective, reaching recognitional justice (Anguelovski et al., 2018, 2019). This requires a more holistic view on fragmented and intersecting identities affected by greening policies and related power structures on the one hand, and an embedded view on the socio-cultural context of the neighbourhoods on the other hand (Elmhirst, 2015; Loftus, 2020). Further understanding is needed about what makes a good quality of life for the local citizens. In this process, it is important to highlight the tension between historically shaped meanings of shared spaces and policies aimed at their neutralisation (Lang & Mell, 2020). It is important to create meaning for parks, not just as natural surroundings but as places to interact and foster well-being (Pellegrini & Baudry, 2014). There, problematising social relationships between conflicting groups helps to overcome stigmatisation and eventually reach consensus (Elmhirst, 2015; Samanani, 2017). Creating alliances with different social groups and creative people helps to find innovative and just solutions (Anguelovski et al., 2018; Verheij & Corrêa Nunes, 2021).

Second, there is a lack of *effective tools* by the municipal system to address issues of environmental injustice, such as policies against governmental discrimination in the legal system (Coolsaet, 2020). Integrative local investments into infrastructures of social services and education can be used to create more connected, respectful, and engaged communities (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). These processes of reconfiguration need to be democratic and inclusive for all to achieve procedural justice (Cooke, 2020). Integrating equity indices can support these developments, emphasising the social benefits over an economic perspective (Cooke, 2020; Jo Black & Richards, 2020). There are different strategies to move from regulative policies towards investments into informal, healthy communities that can partly self-regulate the occurrence of crime (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). Based on the example of Bogotá, the local government can address the citizens needs to build trust by using inclusive social policies to deal with marginalised social groups connected to crime (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). There, the city understood security as something beyond sheer law enforcement (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). Instead, the municipality focused on increasing social services and creative means of raising public awareness and citizen involvement to reach a safer and more egalitarian city (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). In a broader scope, a pro working-class perspective can be crucial in new regulations to maximize social benefit for otherwise marginalised citizens (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021).

Third, a feminist *ethics of care* can bring together both social and environmental needs in their necessary relationality (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). Care is merely seen as a private matter in an increasingly individualised society, leaving the care of the commons to the municipality alone (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). Traditional means of control encourage regulations that objectify nature, whereas care resembles a more reflexive approach on agency and social practices within natural environments (Arora et al., 2020). In its ideal, ethics of care functions as a solidarity model for sustaining both social and environmental resources (Grimwood, 2017). This relationality can deepen the sense of community and the willingness to engage (Chatterton, 2010). It could allow to approach parks as urban commons not in terms of rights, but in terms of trust (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020; Samanani, 2017). An awareness of the plurality of emotions, values and

perceptions connected to the public park enables to collaborate and solve conflicts (Elmhirst, 2015; Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020; Samanani, 2017).

Fourth, bottom-up *commoning* projects can help to enhance the care for public parks. Commoning has the maintenance of "relationships between human and non-human communities" at its core, aiming to create "collectively-governed systems for free, fair, and sustainable lives" (García-López et al., 2021, p. 1201). As such, the commoning process implies a larger social transformation. Instead of top-down management, it can encourage different social groups to form utopias and experiment with them (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). As a grassroot movement, commoning can transform public parks into autonomous spaces, giving them a very new and different character, making them more welcoming for a broader range of people (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). Precarious identities can have different approaches finding meaningful creative solutions that increase the accessibility of parks within a general improvement of their well-being (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). Such community mobilisations are capable of building new "equitable green spaces", but also vulnerable to trends of touristification and gentrification (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021, p. 222; García-López et al., 2021). As transformations have a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability before stabilising in a new equilibrium, they carry the risk to increase precarity even when there are attempts to reduce this issue (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; van der Brugge et al., 2005). A sensible approach is needed for places that previously have been connected to insecurity, as they could make people less willing to participate (Anguelovski et al., 2018). There, commoning strategies should recognize the "playfulness and boldness" of urban residents to maintain their identity and authenticity (Campbell & Laheij, 2021, p. 296). This requires both continuous mobilisation and engagement of key actors within a supportive legal framework for the initiatives to grow (Villamayor-Tomas & García-López, 2021). Adaptive learning can be an important mean accompanying and enabling this process (Grimwood, 2017).

# 3. Purpose of the study

While there is wide research on mechanisms behind urban environmental injustices, overcoming strategies based on an FPE understanding of fragmented identities and their interrelations as key aspects of access to urban commons remain largely unexplored (Loftus, 2020). The perception of a park's popularity visualises underlying injustices. The two contrasting cases in Lüneburg can be a meaningful addition for this research field.

The purpose of the study is to fill the knowledge gap between long-grown structures of environmental injustice and mistrust between citizens, questioning the potential to create a sense of community. Thereby, the research aims at a better understanding of the role of public parks as spaces for different social groups and functions by focusing on vulnerable groups. Empirical work through the case studies adds a new layer to this analytical framework. For the planning practice, this allows to identify ways of commoning to make access to green spaces more just for all citizens. Further, these findings can enrich the scientific discourse by embedding the issues of UEJ within the holistic

view of FPE at its core. Embedded in this theoretical context, the final goal of the research is to understand and help overcoming limited access of public parks based on real-life findings.

This leads to the following research question:

*How does popularity limit the access to neighbourhood parks for different societal groups?*

The question will be answered by analysing two cases of urban environmental injustice in the German city of Lüneburg. Based on the overall topic of what affects the accessibility of urban green spaces, three sub-questions can be derived.

1. What determines the popularity of neighbourhood parks in Lüneburg from a historical and present-day perspective?
2. How do issues of urban environmental injustice lead to mistrust and stigmatisation, limiting access to these spaces?
3. Can a new way of commoning help to overcome that issue of injustice, by using an FPE perspective on fragmented identities of the city?

These sub-questions define the argumentative structure of the case study analysis, which is introduced in the theoretical background of the study with the three factors of production, utilisation, and regulation. First, the findings of Kurpark and Clamart-Park will reveal the differences that define their popularity from a past and current perspective. Second, in the discussion, the findings on how places are used will be synthesised within the frames of distributive, procedural, and recognitional justice from an FPE perspective. Third, ideas on commoning will be critically discussed as potential means to overcome urban environmental injustice by creating spaces welcoming everybody. The conceptual model visualises the angles of the research (Fig. 1).

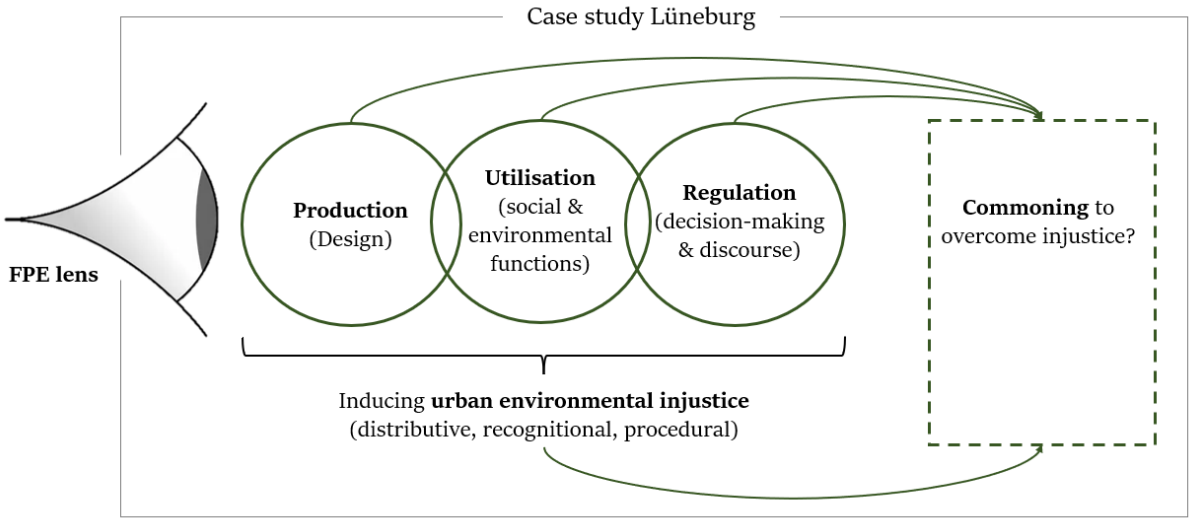


*Fig.1: Conceptual model visualising the theoretical research framework.*

# 4. Research design and method

Based on the research question, the research design will be qualitative with a case study approach. Thereby, elements of both grounded theory and feminist methodology are applied to depict the justice issues of the two parks in a comprehensive and sensible way. This process emphasises the voice of usually marginalised groups at the centre of the research and the iterative process of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Harcourt et al., 2022). The experimental multiple case study design allows a more robust outcome, while the theoretical framework increases validity and reliability of the results (Yin, 2014). The choice of the "two-tail design" between two "common" cases is the theoretical condition to compare the publicly positive connotated Kurpark with the contested Clamart-Park in the socio-cultural context of Lüneburg (Yin, 2014, p. 57). This approach helps to avoid the clash between perceived "uniqueness" of the single case and the aim of greater generalisability (Yin, 2014, p. 64). There is an inductive flavour to the study, starting with a strong exploratory focus based on observations and interviews, which later are interpreted and evaluated abductively within a larger theoretical context. The exploratory elements allow a degree of openness towards unexpected findings, so that previous hypotheses can be potentially falsified during the research process. The research design will follow three major steps: (1) preparation, (2) data collection, and (3) data analysis and interpretation (Kuckartz, 2007).

## 4.1 Preparation

First, the preparation phase requires identifying the object and goal of the study, which in this case is the question of why urban environmental injustice occurs in the two public parks and how it affects the park's image and social groups using them (Kuckartz, 2007). As an exploratory case study, the questions of how and why are crucial as they indicate the rationale and direction of the research (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, it requires the unit of analysis. The scope of the study is limited by (1) the spatial boundary of the two neighbourhood parks in Lüneburg, (2) the time frame with a short historical reflection on the parks' history and the present focus, and (3) the linkage to the theoretical framework. Based on FPE, it is crucial to show the diversity of stakeholders involved, looking at patterns of discrimination, vulnerability, and potential misunderstandings or emotions. Thus, the focus of the case study lies within issues of trust and safety as causes of tension in the use of the parks, emphasising the role of the drug scene in their park use (Yin, 2014).

The context of the case study is the city of Lüneburg, a small city of 80.000 citizens in the German region of Lower Saxony (Fig. 2) (Hansestadt Lüneburg, 2021). Its close proximity to Hamburg, the second largest city in Germany with about 1.9 million residents, makes Lüneburg an attractive location to commute to work (Hansestadt Hamburg, 2019). The local university contributes about 10,000 students and about 1,100 academic professionals shaping the city landscape (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, 2020). Due to the well-promoted and restored old town and inner city, there are many tourists coming to the city every year. In the elections of 2021, the Green Party gained most seats in the city council (Hansestadt Lüneburg, 2022). After 30 years of the social democrats being the leading party, now there is a political shift, undermined by the new female city mayor (NDR,

2021). Together, all these factors make Lüneburg a thriving city for its middle-class population and economy.

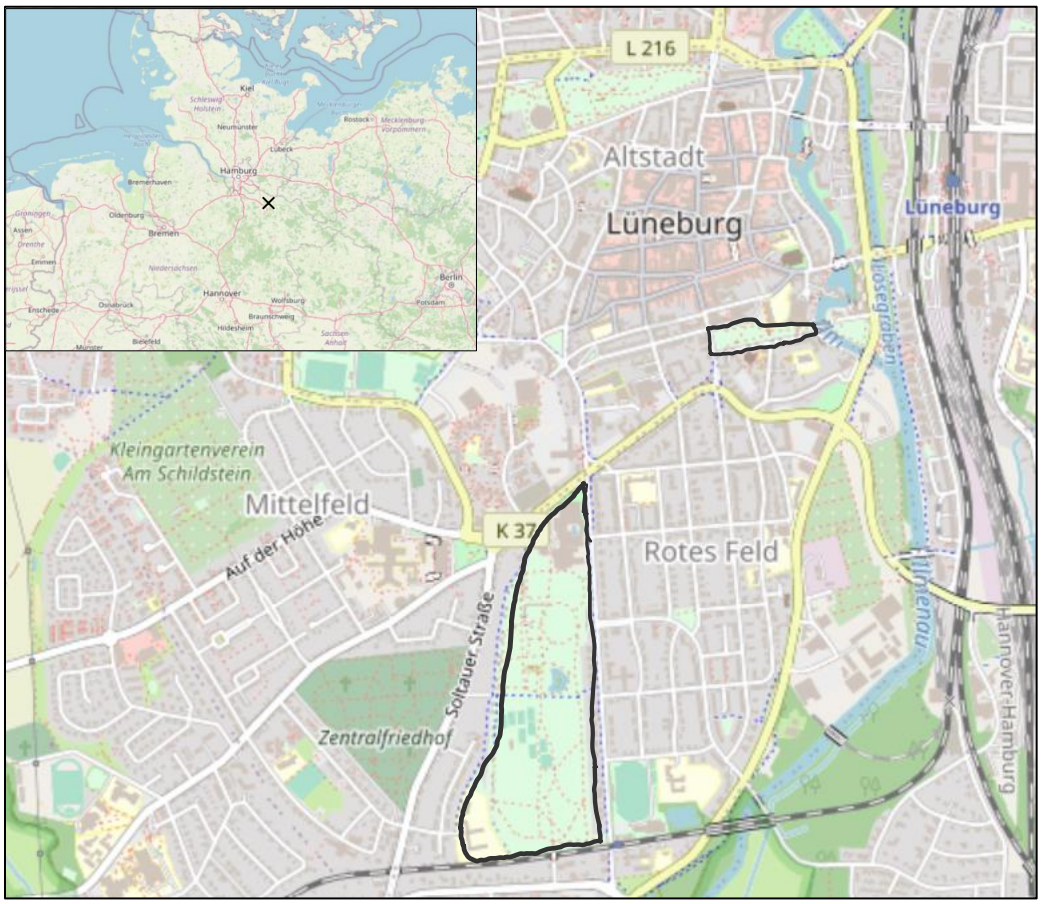


*Fig. 2: Kurpark (South) and Clamart-Park (North) in Lüneburg. OpenStreetMap, 2022.*

## 4.2 Data collection

Second, the data collection phase emphasises the role of feminist methodology in both secondary and primary data gathering. This includes high sensitivity to self-care and care for the people and surroundings involved in the data collection. This ethics of care points out emotions as a personal part of qualitative research, but also its role within exploring emotional geographies (Harcourt et al., 2022). Accessibility and safety of parks can be sensitive topics, especially when approaching vulnerable and disempowered people for the own research purpose (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). In this context it is important to actively deal with the emotions communicated by interviewees, but also to understand my own emotions that may influence the study. Fieldwork is not objective, so being openly subjective, while staying reflexive about it can be a powerful tool in interpreting the findings (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important to position my own discomfort in situations during the research and their impact (Harcourt et al., 2022). Self-care during the research is as important as caring and awareness for the well-being of the interviewees. This can foster better results, if the interviewer is prepared to invest her own personal identity in the relationship, and if the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical (Dickson-Swift et al.,

2008). For the data collection, this means noting both the answers from the interviews and the personal emotional responses resulting from them.

The *secondary data collection* helps to understand the broader context and potential reasons behind environmental injustice. Next to scientific literature, it includes historical photographs and local newspaper articles from the city archive, showing the development and discourse around the parks since the end of the 19th century. There, grounded theory looks at changes of social processes over time (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, it implies statistical and municipal data regarding the geography and population of Lüneburg.

The *primary data collection* consists of observation and transect walks through the specific parks (App. A2). The time frame of this process at the case study location was limited to the time between 06th May 2022 and 19th May 2022. Observing the parks during different times and collecting insights on their uses and users helped to later evaluate the interviews in their socio-spatial context (Strübing, 2018). Relationality is at the core of feminist methodology, not only between humans, but also between humans and non-human environments (Harcourt et al., 2022). Therefore, I chose transect walks as walking interviews that help to unfold the relationship between the interviewee and the place in an emotional sense (Evans & Jones, 2011). In this case study, I chose a general route of different spots in the parks which are beneficial for different purposes but was flexible for the interviewee's preferences according to their associations with the surroundings (Evans & Jones, 2011). It allows to conduct "science from below" by investigating and asking people's embodied experiences of public places in relation to multi-dimensional subjectivities and power relations (Resurrección, 2017, p. 77). It is beneficial to ask the citizens about their park use within their regularly used setting. Passing through a changing surrounding landscape can foster more intuitive answers, and make the underlying community structures of a place more visible (Evans & Jones, 2011; Geduld et al., 2021) Thereby, the interviews address local issues, tensions, and actions for practical solutions, which are elements of grounded theory (Bryant, 2019).

The collection of the data happens via notes and transcribed recordings of four of the expert interviews. Qualitative, semi-structured expert- and randomised interviews follow a line of four key questions that allow to synthesise the data. The questions include:

- When and how do you use the park?
- Who else is using the park?
- What is your perception of the park in terms of its design?
- Which emotions do you connect with it?

The main idea behind the randomised interviews is to unwrap voices that usually remain unheard (Harcourt et al., 2022). They contain views of people coincidentally using the park at the time of my observation. Thus, every experience during the process of data collection and the reflection on it can lead to another aspect, another segment to investigate further. Within the contingency between the sample and the phenomenon of investigation, feminist methodology is guiding in its ideas to improvise and embrace spontaneous encounters as part of a non-linear research process (Bryant,

2019; Harcourt et al., 2022). There, the iterative element of grounded theory emphasises the practice of building every next interview or observation on the previous experiences being done, supporting a more detailed and topic-sensitive investigation based on serendipity (Bryant, 2019; Charmaz, 2014).

Besides, the expert interviews start off with a narrative element about their personal background and connection to the parks and contain more personalised questions based on the expert's position. According to their specific answers it is then possible to ask further questions more freely. With their specific knowledge, experts can give valuable input on the research topic, supporting the possibility to reconstruct the situations of the parks thoroughly (Gläser & Laudel, 2010). Following experts shared their insights on the research topic during walks (n=4) and in their own preferred surrounding (n=3): the local streetworker, two members of the city council (Green Party and the Left), a first-year female student, the municipal green space planner, a police officer, and a trans-man who also studied in Lüneburg.

*Tab. 1: List of in-depth interviews.*

| Interview | Position / Gender | | Age | Method | Location | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Interview #1* | Politician Green Party | f | 22 | Transect walk | Clamart-Park | 11.05.2022 |
| *Interview #2* | Streetworker Lüneburg | m | 45 | Transect walk | Clamart-Park | 12.05.2022 |
| *Interview #3* | Municipal Green Space Planner | f | 40 | Sedated interview | Office | 13.05.2022 |
| *Interview #4* | First-year student | f | 22 | Transect walk | Kurpark | 15.05.2022 |
| *Interview #5* | Politician Left Party | m | 35 | Transect walk | Clamart-Park | 16.05.2022 |
| *Interview #6* | Police Officer | m | 40 | Sedated interview | Office | 18.05.2022 |
| *Interview #7* | Trans man, student | m | 23 | Sedated interview | Online | 21.05.2022 |
| *Interview #8* | Young mother, student | f | 25 | Sedated interview | Online | 02.06.2022 |

## 4.3 Data analysis and interpretation

Third, the evaluation of the data is pursued by linking it to the case study's propositions and relating it to interpretative criteria. It is important to interact with the data in a methodologically sensitive way (Bryant, 2019). There, grounded theory points out the iterative process of data and analysis in a constant reflection and development from which to derive the results (Charmaz, 2014). The translation of interviews from German to English means a loss of nuances but allow to describe the key arguments for a broader range of people (Harcourt et al., 2022). However, the main points will be translated back into German based on the ideal of conducting the research not only with the people, but also for them (Harcourt et al., 2022). The interpretation and analysis of the data happens through the categorisation of their content within the theoretical framework. Atlas.ti is used as a tool to code the different data in an organised way. The coding of the interviews contains the main codes of history, urban design, functionalities, public discourse, and policymaking with the three dimensions of distributive, recognitional, and procedural urban environmental justice (App. A1). The idea of data triangulation helps to synthesise the interviews (primary data), news and archival

documents (secondary data), and scientific literature from the theory (tertiary data). Based on these findings and interpretations it is possible to conclude the answer to the research question and finally formulate an outlook on how to overcome struggles of environmental injustice in Lüneburg. The developed outcome should be intelligible and usable by those people in the situations observed to have the possibility of receiving valuable comments and corrections (Bryant, 2019).

# 5. Results

## 5.1 Kurpark

### 5.1.1 History

The historical data about both parks is based on findings in the city archive, the archive of the local newspaper, and in-depth interviews.

The history of the Kurpark is strongly connected to Lüneburg's identity as a saline city. The saline was first mentioned as a 'healing fountain' in 1278. Its facilitation as a saline bath in 1814 eventually led to the creation of the Kurpark in 1906 as a very spacious area to walk through after using the saline- and mud baths for health and recreation (Unknown, 1983). Its original purpose differs from the Clamart-Park in its role as a city park to fulfil the needs of a growing middle-class with more leisure time. This meant a larger focus on its improvement and maintenance, also for the city's image and tourism. The original design of exotic trees and English inspired lawns with flowers, birds, and a pond shows the purpose of the park at the time for promenading, playing, and gathering activities (Interview #3, 13.5.22). In 1907, the first spa house opened with its characteristic cupola for citizens and visitors (Fig. 3).

*Fig. 3: First spa house with characteristic cupola, Kurpark, 1907-1940. Stadtarchiv Lüneburg, 2022.*

The concurrent construction of the salina aimed to support respiratory treatments (Unknown, 1983). In the following years, expansions such as the tennis court for sports activities were made (Unknown, 1983). However, during the First World War (WWI), the spa house functioned as temporary accommodation for refugees from East Prussia (Unknown, 1983). 1919 meant a big shift, as the spa became the municipality's property, which financially enabled renovation work and the building of the "Wandelhalle" (promenading hall, Fig. 4) next to a new health resort (Unknown, 1983).

*Fig. 4: Wandelhalle shortly after its finalisation, Kurpark, 1927. Stadtarchiv Lüneburg, 2022.*

During the Second World War (WWII), the spa house was used for Nazi propaganda (Stadtarchiv Lüneburg, 2022). From 1945-1956, it was confiscated by the British occupying forces as an officers' casino and for prison cells, while British jeeps and tanks crossed the park regularly (Unknown, 1983). Due to resource scarcity, parts of the park were used by the citizens to grow potatoes and vegetables (Unknown, 1983). For the city's 1000-year jubilee in 1956, the park became fully available for the citizens again (Unknown, 1983). From then on, it is run as its own establishment by the municipality of Lüneburg. The old spa house and its café have for many decades been an important part of urban society. It was popular to sit down for a coffee and a torte for the concert in front of the concert shell after taking a walk around the salina (Fig.5) (Unknown, 1983).

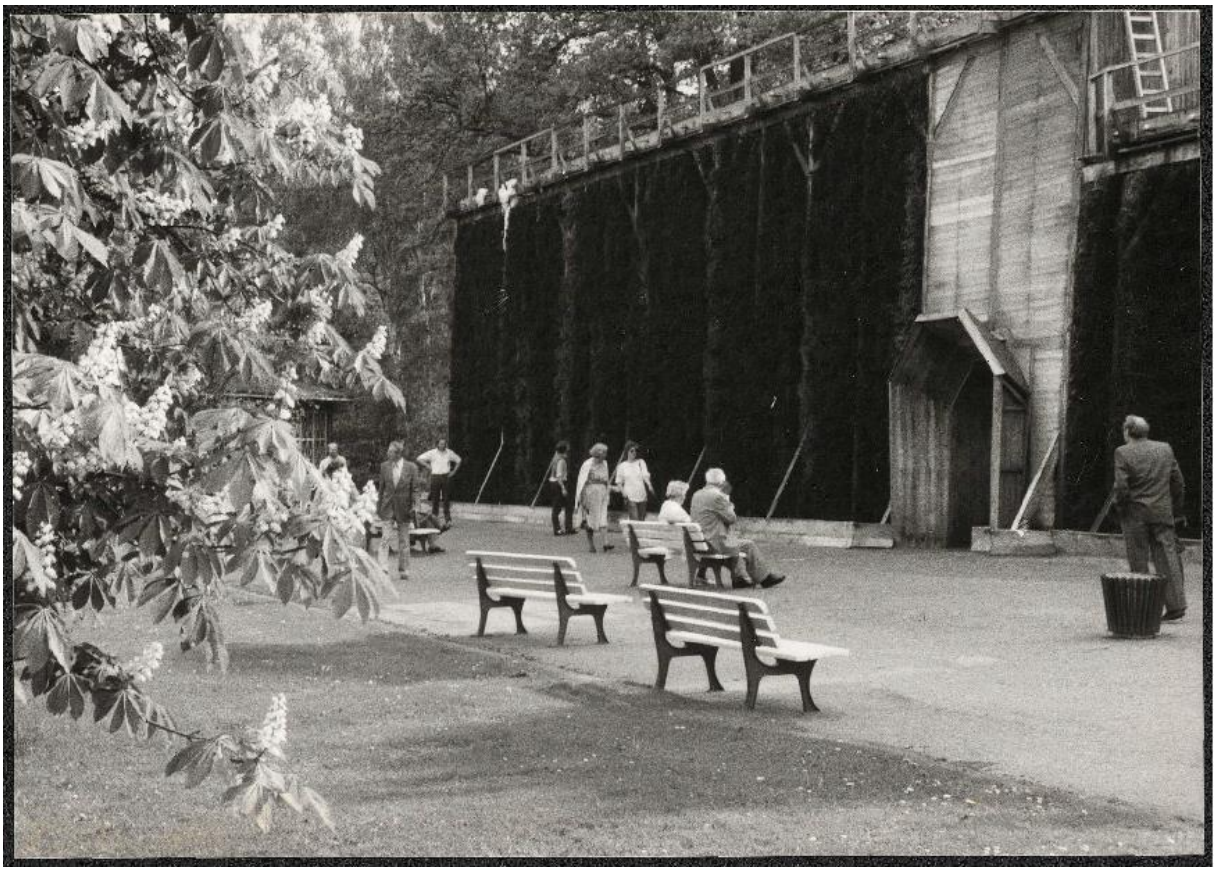

*Fig. 5: Salina, Kurpark, 1980. Stadtarchiv Lüneburg, 2022.*

The spa house's demolition in the 1970s was therefore highly contested by the citizens. Afterwards, the concert shell with its open-air audience was the only place for such large-scale events in the public space. However, they were always dependent on the weather, leading to large financial losses in the rainy north of Germany (Unknown, 1983). Since 1974, the Kurpark has existed with a modern health resort and its current landscape and design, with the public discourse reflecting the park as the "green lung" of the city for different age groups (Unknown, 1983). Conflicts around the Kurpark are reported in the local newspaper, as vandalism of the educational herb garden and the "Wandelhalle" (LZ-Archiv, 2022; Unknown, 1983). Today, the development of the park includes topics of senior-friendly design and biodiversity (Interview #3, 13.5.22; LZ-Archiv, 2022).

### 5.1.2 Production: Urban setting and design

As the Left politician claims, the design manifests the original purpose of the Kurpark as the spacious main city park (Interview #5, 16.5.22). It still resembles its original alternate flowers at different spots across the year but, according to the green space planner, shrubs and forbs are preferable for an environment that benefits both insects and humans (Interview #3, 13.5.22). She explains how a reduced vegetation is perceived as a safer environment but takes away significant dark corridors for species conservation (Interview #3, 13.5.22). The new illumination on the main pathways is more species-friendly and allows darker patches in other parts of the park (Interview #3, 13.5.22). However, one male interviewee evaluates it more as beneficial for seeing the own way than improving the park's safety.

The park is well-integrated into the surrounding neighbourhoods, with its residents' needs being considered through diverse design structures. While the east neighbourhood has more middle-class residents like families and some students, there is more social housing in the west, making the Kurpark attractive for a mixed set of users. The remoteness of the Kurpark in terms of city life and supermarkets makes it less attractive for people who are more connected to the city centre (Interview #2, 12.5.22). The salina and the lawn invite to stay and rest in the Kurpark, next to the fountain and pond, adding a water element (Fig. 6, Fig. 7) (Interview #5, 16.5.22; Interview #7, 21.5.22). Other structures include the dog lawn, playgrounds, and the herbal garden.

*Fig. 6: The fountain is a popular place to sit, rest, and play in the Kurpark, 2022.*

This design does allow a consume-free stay, which can be relaxing for precarious citizens (Interview #5, 16.5.22). However, a student interviewee claims the potential of the small café in the Kurpark to be more inviting for visitors (Interview #4, 15.5.22). The mix of both natural and artificial surroundings pleases a large range of citizens (Interview #5, 16.5.22). The city invests in the maintenance and cleanliness of the park as a representative city park. Thus, most concerns about green space planning and species conservation accumulate around the Kurpark (Interview #3, 13.5.22). The only critiques of the design regard the lack of enough public toilets, especially gender-neutral toilets, as expressed by the trans man and young mother I interviewed.

### 5.1.3 Utilisation: Environmental and Social Functions

The environmental functionalities named by the interviewees are mainly recreational, despite the regulative aspect of species conservation named by the municipal green space planner. According to one female student, the Kurpark resembles a "big garden" (Interview #4, 15.5.22). Another interviewee describes its relaxing bird and tree sounds (Interview #5, 16.5.22). In that sense, the

park is a place to benefit both human and non-human needs, with the personal focus of the green space planner on insects. The overall planning guideline is climate resilient adaptation by balancing and monitoring recreational and conservational functions (Interview #3, 13.5.22). There, the northern part provides well-kept green spaces with potentially "green islands" that are suitable for a diverse use, while the southern part has the opportunity for wilder spaces to prioritise and protect urban biodiversity (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Problems arise when people complain about the wild patches for species conservation because they perceive them as "unkempt and forgotten" (Interview #3, 13.5.22). For dog owners, the park is very relevant as one of the few places in the city where dogs can run freely on the lawn (Interview #3, 13.5.22).

*Fig. 7: Pond and vegetation of the Kurpark with different (non-)human users, 2022.*

In general, the Kurpark is more frequently used than the rather abandoned Clamart-Park. It is perceived as a beautiful, versatile, inviting, nice and calming environment in Lüneburg (Interview #4, 15.5.22; Interview #5, 16.5.22; Interview #8, 2.6.22). For most interviewees, it has a personal meaning connected to their memories of friends and daily lives (Interview #7, 21.5.22). The social groups using the park are very diverse, both across generations and socio-cultural contexts (Interview #8, 2.6.22). Looking at the three user categories (section 2.2.2.), citizens identified as 'vulnerable to crime' perceive the Kurpark as a positive and safe place for personal talks and private moments (Interview #4, 15.5.22; Interview #7, 21.5.22; Interview #8, 2.6.22). Based on the maintenance, a young mother describes it as one of the few very family-friendly parks in Lüneburg where she does not worry as much about her child getting in contact with disposables (Interview #8, 2.6.22).

The park is popular among students, runners, and elderly people. It is also well-known for groups playing Boule or dancing Salsa. The number of users depends on the day, with the weekends being

especially busy. One family I interviewed came by car from Kaltenmoor, an area with a lot of social housing and only a few small green spaces available Interview #5, 16.5.22). They appreciated the park not only as being nice for the kids to play there, but also as a place to gather with friends to share their cultural background. One interviewed student expressed her positive experience of the Kurpark as a private comfort zone during the day and a place to study or to relax with friends in the evening (Interview #4, 15.5.22). Elderly people appreciate the park for its opportunity to take a little walk and then sit on the benches.

Regarding queer identities, the trans interviewee explained the problematic role of public space for trans people, connected to the feeling of being exposed and potentially stigmatised (Interview #7, 21.5.22). This feeling is historically fueled by transphobic violence and the feeling of being different. However, he associates the Kurpark with important talks with his closest friends, his outing, and first encounters where he realised that he was read male. There, the Kurpark is a safe space for the queer community where events with many non-binary and trans people could and would be organised. Subcultures vulnerable to stigmatisation meet less in the Kurpark. The drug scene is not visibly present, and only rarely do homeless people sleep there. It is rather a place for urban youth to meet (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

Interactions between the users happen less on an individual scale but more in terms of public events in the concert shell (Interview #4, 15.5.22). One man describes light shows and open-air cinema as memorable. During the lockdown measures of Covid-19, the Kurpark was an attractive place to 'escape' one's confining home in a space big enough to avoid people (Interview #4, 15.5.22). Further, its proximity to the university makes the Kurpark attractive for student-organised events like the Climate Camp, a small festival with sustainable visions and workshops from the queer and left-activist community (Interview #4, 15.5.22). On the dog lawn, people from very different socio-economic backgrounds come together, sharing the incentive to take care of their dogs. One of the drug-dependent users lives close by and goes there often with his dog. Some people he knows from there have experienced him throughout many tough and good phases here. His role as a stigmatised user does not matter in the interaction with and between dog owners.

However, conflicts arise between users and uses. First, dogs without a leash can threaten birds during breeding season, which is regulated but hardly complied with by dog owners (Interview #3, 13.5.22). One mother explains that she and other families would seldom use or be more aware of the dog lawn (Interview #8, 2.6.22). There, an interaction without mutual care is more prone to conflicts (Interview #8, 2.6.22). Second, there is a continuous debate about whether to allow biking in the Kurpark. While some passengers appreciate the possibility of a biking route through the green space, others criticize the disruption and point to alternative routes on nearby roads (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Currently, biking in the Kurpark is fined. Third, elderly people criticise the litter caused by younger users, whereas younger interviewees appreciate the cleanliness of the park and the availability of dustbins (Interview #4, 15.5.22; Interview #8, 2.6.22).

### 5.1.4 Regulation: Policies, Power, Discourse

The framing of the Kurpark as a safe space by many people has two main reasons. First, because there are many people meeting regularly, there is a strong social control. Second, it is enabled by the strict regulation of the place through the Kurpark-statue (Interview #1, 11.5.22). This includes the closing of the park after 10pm and a security presence. As an authority, the police officer interviewed mentioned patrols there, or else being present for demonstrations and public events in the Kurpark, which is less necessary in the small and well-visible Clamart-Park (Interview #6, 18.5.22). The Left party demands loosening the formal statute, for example to allow barbecuing (Interview #5, 16.5.22). According to the Left politician, prohibiting measures are a sign of inability to handle the underlying problems (Interview #5, 16.5.22). Despite that, the Kurpark is currently on the political agenda with its broken salina (Fig. 8) (Interview #1, 11.5.22).

*Fig. 8: Salina out of order, waiting for repair, 2022.*

Vandalism based on alcohol abuse is a well-known issue in the Kurpark, also through newspaper articles (Interview #6, 18.5.22). Else, the discourse is shaped by positive associations from the park's users and event reports in the news. Anticipated changes are the implementation of a planning report that provides guidelines for the park's future development with a focus on mixed plantations for species conservation (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Such projects by the municipal green space planner would need to be approved by the responsible administrative department, the mayor, and the environmental committee of the city council (Interview #3, 13.5.22). According to the green space planner, these projects are necessary to reach climate resilience in Lüneburg, but they also always resistance (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Laws for insect and nature conservation are thereby an important tool to achieve these changes (Interview #3, 13.5.22).

## 5.2 Clamart-Park

### 5.2.1 History

While the Kurpark functions as the representative city park, the Clamart-Park is seen more as a green patch within the city to cross, not generating incentives to stay there. This originates from its history as a plain green space rather than a recreational urban park. The development of the Clamart-Park might origin in the demolishing of the city's wall embankment before WWII. The park's trees are about 100 years old, which leads towards a longer use of the area as a green space. As the space was not created as a park in the first place and had different functionalities throughout time, the park has been treated as negligible next to the Kurpark and other public parks in Lüneburg (Interview #3, 13.5.22).

The first pictures that depict the area of the current Clamart-Park show the importance of the place for remembrance culture. Around 1875, the Pietà was erected as a memorial to the fallen soldiers of the German French War 1870-1871 (Fig. 9).

*Fig. 9: Pietà shortly after being built, Johanneum in the background, Clamart-Park, 1872-1877. Stadtarchiv Lüneburg, 2022.*

At the time, it was an open area. Photographs of 1897 show the Pietà within a newly created park environment, which was redeveloped in the following years. Today, the statue divides both citizens and policymakers on its legitimacy to be there. During WWII, prisoners from concentration camps

had to do forced labour in the Clamart-Park. They were located close to the nearby public school, the Johanneum. The characteristic building of 1829 shaped the neighbourhood ever since (Johanneum, 2022). In 1939, the "Dragoner" statue was erected within the national socialist regime to commemorate the fallen soldiers of WWI (Fig. 10). In 1955, the green space was first mentioned as "Grünanlage Friedenstraße" in the local newspaper, in relation to being a place for couples to meet (LZ-Archiv, 2022). After 1973, the Pietà memorial was moved from the Western part of the park to the East (Fig. 11). However, the "Clamart-Park" as such only exists since 1985, when the twin towns of Lüneburg and Clamart renamed the green space for their 10th anniversary (LZ-Archiv, 2022).

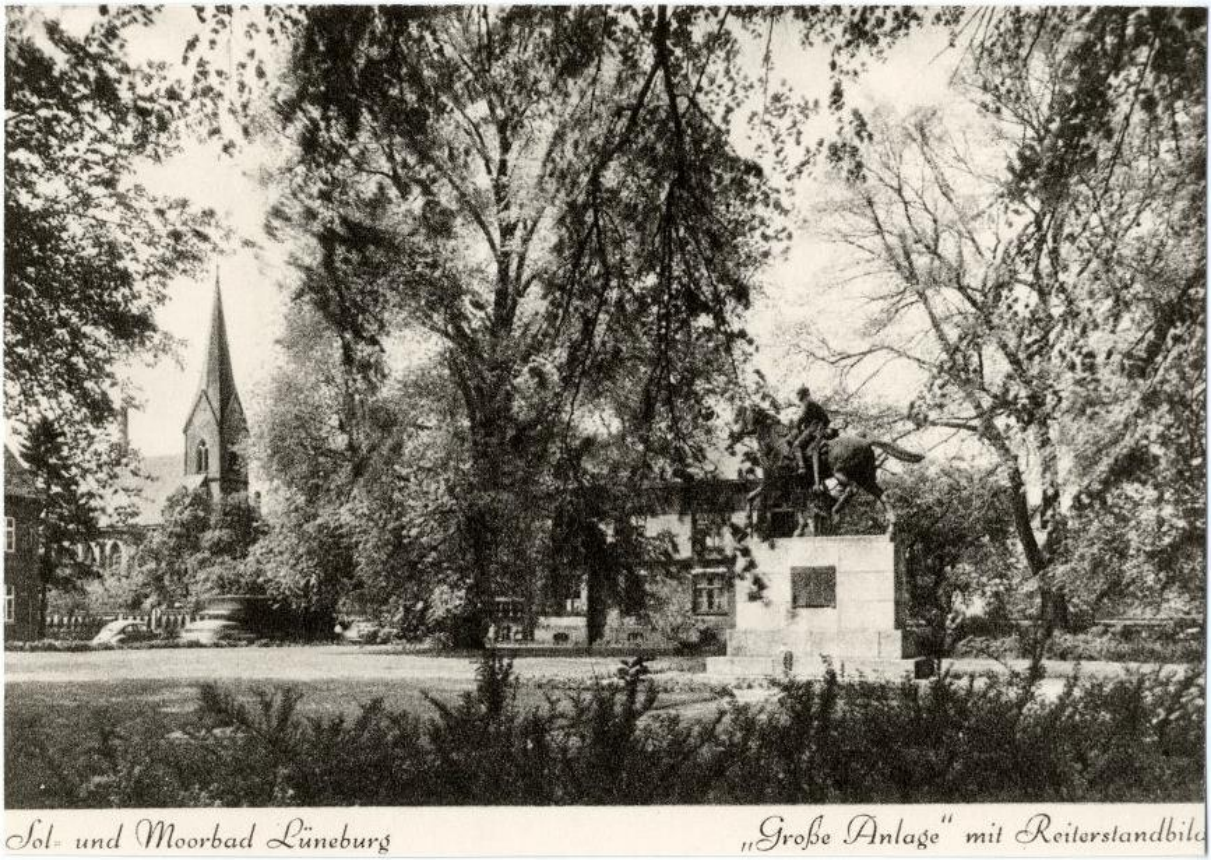


*Fig. 10: Dragoner memorial, Clamart-Park, 1955. Stadtarchiv Lüneburg, 2022.*

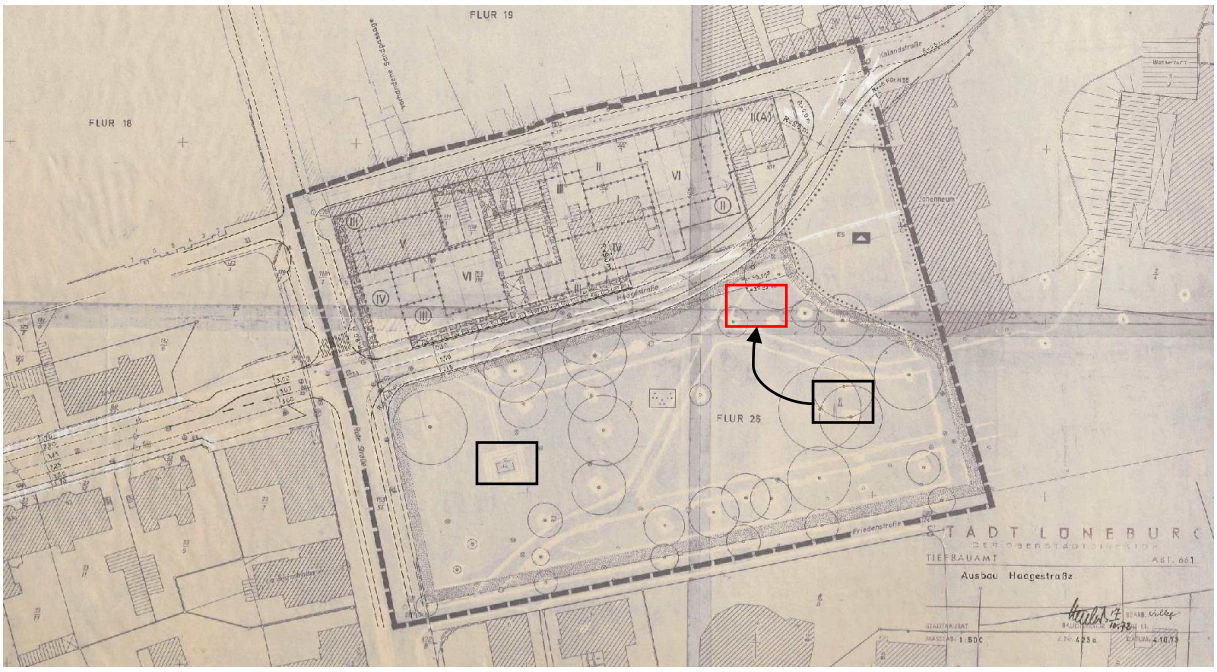


*Fig. 11: Previous design with the Dragoner memorial (left) and the Pietà (right) at each one side of the Clamart-Park. Today, the Pietà is located more in the corner of the park (red), 1973. Stadtarchiv Lüneburg, 2022.*

From there on, the park has been more contested in the public discourse, moving away from a romantic spot towards a meeting point for urban subculture. Newspaper articles from 1985 report conflicts between the police and punks using the Clamart-Park (LZ-Archiv, 2022). Further, antifascist protests and smaller fairs or events in the Clamart-Park have regularly been promoted from the late 1980s onwards (Lüneburger Stadtarchiv, 2022). In 1987, the city aimed to raise the park's quality and reduce nuisance by relocating the main bus station from the adjoining Rote Straße to the train station (LZ-Archiv, 2022). Since 1997, the local newspaper has mentioned drug users in the park's context. In 2012, as a reaction to the increased appearance of the alcoholic and illicit drug scene in the inner city, the city administrator initiated the street work project, which is an important mouthpiece for the scene until today (Interview #2, 12.5.22). The recognition of the homeless and drug addicted clientele also led to a more social focus in the park policy, connected to collaborations between the police, municipality, and Drobs (specialist centre for addiction counselling and addiction prevention). After the 2021 elections, new ideas about redeveloping the Clamart-Park reach residents and local authorities to make the inner city more attractive and climate resilient, which strengthens the biodiversity aspect (Interview #3, 13.5.22; LZ-Archiv, 2022).

### 5.2.2 Production: Urban setting and design

The production of the Clamart-Park is shaped by its mixed neighbourhood and nearby facilities that benefit the drug scene. The neighbouring Haagestraße contains services like a pharmacy, doctors, a hairdresser, and a bar, plus a public school and an adult education centre. The surrounding houses contain both social housing and new, higher-income buildings (Interview #2, 12.5.22; Interview #5, 16.5.22). Although there are some connections between neighbours, it is not a strong neighbourhood community.

*Fig. 12: Plain design of the Clamart-Park with lawn and benches, Pietà in the background, 2022.*

Its plain design makes it suitable for smaller public events and it is a balancing green area in the city centre (Fig. 12). The vegetation contains old trees and bushes that curtail the Clamart-Park to the three bordering streets, the school, and housing buildings, with less focus on species conservation (Interview #3, 13.5.22). However, the Clamart-Park is not described as aesthetic by the residents (Interview #5, 16.5.22; Interview #8, 2.6.22). Except for some paths, benches, and the two memorials, there are no elements that indicate a clear purpose for the use of the park, which makes it less inviting to stay (Interview #7, 21.5.22). Due to its contested status, the Dragoner statue is often smudged, which, according to the interviewed young mother, adds to the uninviting appearance of the park (Fig. 13) (Interview #8, 2.6.22).

*Fig. 13: Contested Dragoner memorial in Clamart-Park, 2022.*

The open side to the large Rote Straße in the west makes the Clamart-Park well-visible for demonstrations and thus a good meeting point, but also creates a nuisance that makes it less inviting to stay and relax (Interview #4, 15.5.22; Interview #5, 16.5.22). According to the Left politician, there could be more hidden corners in the park for privacy if needed (Interview #5, 16.5.22). The eastern part is seldomly used at all and thus quieter (Interview #5, 16.5.22).

The location in the middle of the city, plus the proximity to the street-medic providing substitutes and nearby shops to buy alcohol and tobacco, makes the Clamart-Park intuitively a place to meet up for drug-dependent users (Interview #2, 12.5.22). However, people from the drug scene using the park criticise the lack of a shelter during rainfall. It would prevent them to be forced to search for shelter in places where they are excluded. The nearby public school also makes the park and its surrounding roads a cross-path for the pupils' way there. The child doctor is next to it, which means that families could use the park to get there (Interview #8, 2.6.22).

### 5.2.3 Utilisation: Environmental and Social Functions

With less focus of the park on environmental services, its social functionality for mainly the drug scene and homeless people becomes more prominent. As a marginalised social group, the Clamart-Park offers the possibility to meet their friends in an environment where they are tolerated. To understand this utilisation, it is important to unwrap their positionality as a social group vulnerable to stigmatisation. Thereby, the walks and interviews with the local streetworker were crucial and

enabled a direct talk with people of the drug scene. Else, observations and spontaneous encounters of people using the park add to a more holistic picture.

In Germany, the Federal Ministry of Health reports that 2.5% of the population is addicted to alcohol and illegal drugs (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, 2021). According to the streetworker, the causes of addiction differ, but often deep psychological problems and a traumatising childhood play a leading role (Interview #2, 12.5.22). In 2017, 42% of all drug deaths were younger than 50 years (Ritchie & Roser, 2018). There are members of the local drug scene involved in minor crimes, compared to the clan-criminality located in the city centre, making them vulnerable to crime as well (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

*Homeless and drug-dependent citizens* constantly face sanctions and displacement in society, which creates a mutual mistrust with residents and institutions, including those providing social services (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Due to the slow building of social housing, homelessness is increasing in the city, which challenges existing social structures (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Accommodations have the possibility to ban people if they are violent or send them to another place, intensifying their unsettling feeling (Interview #2, 12.5.22). In that context, it is important for the otherwise excluded and displaced drug scene to feel part of public life. In the past five years, the drug scene has become bigger in the park, with people sitting on the benches. As a reaction, the city trimmed the bushes for greater visibility and control. When there is a razzia, a doctor's confirmation is needed to carry the substances, or else they will be confiscated (Interview #2, 12.5.22). However, the substitutes do not replace the satisfaction of the drug, for the interviewees, mostly heroin, but only ease the pain (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Drug-addicted people interviewed express negative side effects such as tiredness and decreased sex drive, which limit their ability to engage in and maintain social relationships.

Thus, the Clamart-Park is even more crucial for men and women of the scene to be connected to a non-excluding peer group (Interview #1, 11.5.22). The group is rather centralised, which enables social control and mutual protection. "There is no one here who has not saved someone else's life," the streetworker claims (Interview #2, 12.5.22). However, interviewees from the scene explain that since cocaine became more prominent in the city, the scene is splitting up. Heroin and cocaine have very different effects, whereas the latter makes people psychologically addicted and "greedy," as one of the drug scene interviewees says. Meanwhile, the number of heroin users is decreasing. Many scene members died in the past years from the drug's consequences, most of them around 40-45 years old. During an interview, a drug-dependent user expressed, "How does one feel as a junkie? You cannot understand it, until you have lived through it yourself". The radicalness of that feeling and its incomprehension by most citizens describes how disconnected this group is from the rest of society. This is reinforced within politics, where the Green Party politician says that she is the only person actively tackling these issues and addressing the clientele (Interview #1, 11.5.22).

Another stigmatised group is the *urban youth*, which is negatively affected by the lack of public places provided for them to escape authority control from teachers or parents (Interview #5, 16.5.22). During Covid-19, youngsters started to gather more in public parks, which caused complains of trash

and noise (Interview #8, 2.6.22). The younger generations of drug users are avoided by the older drug scene in the Clamart-Park because of their different behaviour and substance use.

*Queer people* face both vulnerability to stigmatisation and crime. In the homeless accommodation, 'gay' is used as an insult, which is also connected to many of the residents there being more right-wing and less reflected on the topic. Although gay men already lived there quiet openly, there also happens sexualised violence between men as a demonstration of power (Interview #2, 12.5.22). However, I talked to a lesbian couple living next to the Clamart-Park who regularly walk their dog there. They describe their interaction with the drug scene using the benches as friendly, as they know each other. The interviewed trans man emphasised his feeling of exposure and stigmatisation to be more prominent in the rather abandoned Clamart-Park than in the Kurpark (Interview #7, 21.5.22). This external perception adds up to the internal dysphoria that many trans people fight with. A more mixed use would ease that feeling. He adds that as a young trans man, the perceived sexualised danger became less after his transition (Interview #7, 21.5.22). The concerns related to being trans are less prominent than the concerns that were related to being a woman (Interview #7, 21.5.22). For trans women, the perception might differ.

Social groups more *vulnerable to crime* tend to avoid the Clamart-Park. For students, the park is not perceived as a place to intuitively stay due to its nuisance and different users (Interview #4, 15.5.22; Interview #7, 21.5.22). Thus, the park is mainly used to pass through or to attend events like demonstrations and craft markets. Sometimes elderly or handicapped people sit and rest there; recently, also Ukrainian refugees. There is a difference between objective facts and subjective perceptions when it comes to the actual violence of the drug scene. Most violence happens within the scene or in the shelter, where many people in existential crises live together (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Although the people are mostly sitting together peacefully, women and other vulnerable groups passing by can perceive violent action between these people as a personal threat (Interview #3, 13.5.22; Interview #8, 2.6.22). The young mother I interviewed tells the story of her female flatmate, who once saw a fight there. Together with her connection to the park with people day-drinking and talking loudly, she perceives them as dubious and, thus, as a potential danger (Interview #8, 2.6.22). She might use the park more if she was living in its direct neighbourhood or if it was more connected to her daily life, but the negative association holds her back (Interview #8, 2.6.22).

Families or single parents would sometimes come with their children to play for a moment, but it is not very common, more a matter of practicability if it is on the way (Interview #7, 21.5.22). For children, the plain green space is not inviting to play (Interview #8, 2.6.22). An older mother says that she has never really used the park since she moved to Lüneburg in 1991 but liked the children's festival. An elderly couple I interviewed at the local art fair said that they enjoy it now, but usually feel discomfort passing through the park. These perspectives, between lack of incentives to stay and fear of bad experiences, hinder these groups from using the space (Fig. 14). The police officer responds to the feeling of fear by the availability of surrounding streets to avoid the park (Interview #6, 18.5.22). Because it appears to be very different from other green spaces in Lüneburg, it is easy to project fear onto it, even if the fear may have originated elsewhere (Interview #7, 21.5.22). There,

interviewees claim that more liveliness would be beneficial to using the park more frequently for otherwise vulnerable groups (Interview #7, 21.5.22; Interview #8, 2.6.22).

*Fig. 14: Craft Art Fair in the Clamart-Park, attracting tourists and locals, 2022.*

Interaction hardly happens between these different groups. People would seldomly gather in the park, so despite the drug scene and occasional events, it remains rather abandoned (Interview #5, 16.5.22). The demonstrations are most frequently related to antifascism and climate action, but during strong Covid-19 measures, the "Querdenker" anti-Covid movement also met there (Interview #5, 16.5.22; Interview #6, 18.5.22). The very different users' needs and realities cause conflicts. Regular passers-by acclimated to the clientele (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Some of them would say "hello," but there are also people who rush through the park with their bikes and tell the drug scene to "piss off."

Conflicts repeatedly occur involving the drug and homeless scene. Parents and middle-class residents complain the most about the design and use of parks (Interview #2, 12.5.22; Interview #3, 13.5.22). Some of them live in the new housing nearby and do not feel comfortable with letting their kids play there, especially not when there are unleashed dogs or bushes used as public toilets (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Some of these residents call the police when they feel disturbed by the drug scene or other users. The lack of public toilets and alternative places to safely consume the drug without risking an overdose due to a higher stress level leads to two conflicts. First, it leads to drug consumption behind the Pietà in the bushes, which directly borders the parking ground of the public school, making it more of an issue because of the visibility for children (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Second, when homeless people and drug users went to the nearby adult education centre to use the toilet and to consume drugs, it created a conflict with its employees (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Feeling threatened by verbal

aggression and unable to communicate, they excluded them. A dialogue between the parties, accompanied by the streetworker, helped to ease the conflict (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

Another positive example is the children's festival organised by the local newspaper (Interview #3, 13.5.22). After people from the drug scene destroyed some of the festival booths as a response to their displacement, the organisers and streetworker initiated an active dialogue with the drug scene, which led to an agreement of temporary relocation (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Today, this co-operation happens more frequently (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

### 5.2.4 Regulation: Policies, Power, Discourse

The complex issues in the park make its regulation more complicated than in the Kurpark. There is a consensus among different interviewees that the conflict between the drug scene and other users requires tackling underlying societal problems rather than displacing them (Interview #3, 13.5.22; Interview #5, 16.5.22; Interview #6, 18.5.22). Different collaborations help to ease the conflict. The streetworker and social workers play an important role in mediating interactions between authorities and marginalized groups.

To assess the regulative role of *authorities*, I include insights from interviews with the police officer, the streetworker, and people from the drug scene. Drug consumption in the Clamart-Park is regulated by razzias. The police officer explains the ambivalent relationship between the two parties. On the one hand, the police understand the serious illness of drug addiction. On the other hand, they cannot approve criminal drug consumption, as no space can be immune from prosecution. This is necessary to provide safety for other vulnerable groups who otherwise might not use the park at all. However, the police recognise the Clamart-Park as a 'refuge' for the scene. With the streetworker present, the drug users say that the police act more nicely, possibly because of his moderating function. The police encourage the municipality to implement more social work to solve underlying problems. Their role is to provide data for future campaigns and policies. During Covid-19 lockdown measures, there was an informal agreement with the local police to allow the drug scene to gather in the Clamart-Park, which helped to keep criminality under control. In that sense, the streetworker describes the police as very progressive (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Instead of only sanctioning them, empathy is needed to deal with drug users who often also struggle with deep psychological issues. More specifically to the other park users and the overall environment, the green space planner regulates and takes care of the space (Interview #3, 13.5.22). She is also the person to provide green spaces for events, requiring a lot of administrative work and communication between different parties involved, usually with the regulatory authority, the waste management agency, and the fire brigade (Interview #3, 13.5.22).

While police, planners, and social workers are limited in their ability to influence the accessibility of public parks, *policymakers* have the power to change much more fundamental conditions. Policymaking affects the positionality of different groups in society, affecting their access to green spaces in the city. Politics hardly achieves anything to enhance that position. The interviewed Green's politician is one of the few in the city council to address homelessness and drug addiction (Interview #1, 11.5.22). There is a clear left-right division in the political landscape for the recognition of

marginalised groups (Interview #5, 16.5.22). While more right-wing parties would rather not have people from the drug scene visible in the public sphere, the Greens and Left aim to tackle the underlying social problems (Interview #5, 16.5.22). While some members of the drug scene appreciate the social services available, others criticise the current system for criminalising drug consumption and thus being responsible for their disadvantaged position in society.

The streetworker pointed out the drawbacks drug-dependent people often face in relation to the state. The inflexibility of the bureaucratic system hinders acting fast when the "golden moment" of drug addicted people arrives and they want to start detox (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Intersecting problems make some of the drug users unable to fulfil the necessary conditions for the right support (Interview #1, 11.5.22). Further, the possibility to meet the conditions for receiving social services is limited by the low accessibility of employees and communication options (Interview #2, 12.5.22). To respond to these challenges, the streetworker built up substructures through his network (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Social services in Germany provide accommodation for everyone in need. While beds are available, psychological support is not always easy to access, and the dog can be the most important social partner of the affected person (Interview #2, 12.5.22). The Drobs is offering such help but has a high threshold for those who want to overcome their addiction (Interview #2, 12.5.22). There, the streetworker's role as an intermediary with direct and trust-based contact to the drug scene is critical (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

With these conditions, *power relations* work in favour of the citizens vulnerable to crime over those vulnerable to stigmatisation. However, recognition of both is necessary for a just society and general well-being. One drug user expressed the inability to raise a voice, claiming "Who is listening to a few junkies?". One of the most empowering things is the knowledge of one's own legal position. Knowing the rights and possibilities to access social services and public support strongly improves the current situation. Currently, most of them rely on the good will of authorities (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Without the company of a social worker to claim their needs, they will often be treated much worse (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Their lobby is so weak because hardly anyone understands illicit drug addiction (Interview #2, 12.5.22). There, the networks between authorities and social workers are necessary to build a better lobby for the stigmatised groups. Today, the streetworker gets invited to round tables affecting the drug and homeless scene, but he also organises educational events about the topic (Interview #2, 12.5.22). The Mind Foundation is a good practice example of organisational lobbying for a different approach to drugs and street-medication (Interview #2, 12.5.22). For women experiencing sexual violence framed as prostitution, the NGO Hydra e.V. provides support and a lobby to escape abusive structures and be empowered in self-employed sex work (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

A key underlying issue behind the accessibility and use of the Clamart-Park is the *public discourse*, with a leading narrative of being a conflicted area with drug-dependent and homeless people frequently using it (Interview #3, 13.5.22; Interview #7, 21.5.22). These groups are often demonised, both by citizens and public authorities (Interview #2, 12.5.22). This leads to its bad reputation of being the "dealer park" (Interview #8, 2.6.22). During an interview, a young mother says, "I don’t know where this reputation comes from or if it's true" (Interview #8, 2.6.22). An elderly man from

Lüneburg adds that it has always been this way. Most of the stigma is based on what 'has been heard somewhere', which is then easily connected to previous assumptions of similar potentially dangerous groups (Interview #8, 2.6.22).

Even a group of tourists expressed their knowledge of the drug dealing narrative because a friend from Lüneburg directly told them about it when they planned to visit the art fair in the Clamart-Park. Although this narrative can have a function of social control for citizens vulnerable to crime, stigmatising the drug scene as being violent leads to fear without facts (Interview #1, 11.5.22). Women feel especially threatened by these groups, but women affected by addiction and homelessness are hardly recognised (Interview #1, 11.5.22). Constantly being pushed to the edge of society can result in a "passive resentment," which can result in unforeseeable consequences and should thus be improved (Interview #5, 16.5.22). This discourse is hardly actively reflected upon; only one interviewee claimed to have discussed the "phenomenon" Clamart-Park with some friends (Interview #7, 21.5.22). To create adequate regulatory measures, it is necessary to analyse the underlying social problems, such as long-term unemployment (Interview #5, 16.5.22).

# 6. Discussion

The findings in section 5 can be condensed to one fundamental issue: the underestimated value of public parks; not seeing, accessing, and evaluating the crucial role of these spaces for marginalised and otherwise vulnerable groups in their intertwined relationship with the non-human environment. These people, who may be the most frequent users of public parks, are the ones experiencing the biggest drawbacks from an uneven power distribution, limiting their accessibility. This issue manifests in different ways, which will be reflected and discussed upon based on the three dimensions of UEJ. The variables to assess the three dimensions of urban environmental justice impacting the accessibility of green spaces are based on Coolsaet (2020) and Menton et al. (2020). It needs to be emphasised that the three dimensions are a conceptualisation of a complex reality, which leads to overlaps between them.

Following up, this part discusses strategies to overcome these injustices by means of commoning. Using an FPE approach, different identities and careful considerations of their perspectives play a leading role.

## 6.1 Addressing urban environmental injustice issues in both parks

### 6.1.1 Distributive Injustice

Distributive injustice is the most visible manifestation of urban environmental injustice in public parks. It resembles the exclusionary patterns of green spaces due to both their physical and social characteristics. To capture the experiences of different groups in the park, this section will discuss who is addressed and excluded in the two parks. There is an unequal distribution of harm and benefits in the Kurpark and the Clamart-Park, resembling deeper issues of urban environmental injustice. On a broader scale, the limits of accessibility showed underlying urban issues of lacking

public spaces, attractive green areas, flexible and sufficient social services, and recognition of marginalised groups in general.

First, the *Kurpark* addresses the needs of people vulnerable to crime, while people vulnerable to stigmatisation are explicitly excluded. The reason groups vulnerable to crime use the park is rooted in its large caring capacities based on different structures and the safe spaces provided in the park. It shows how the historically developed recreational functions of the Kurpark for middle-class citizens and its representative role for the city have shaped its use until today (Birge-Liberman, 2010; Unknown, 1983). Previously, more elite-oriented decision-making thus did not necessarily consider the needs of marginalised groups (Birge-Liberman, 2010). It aligns with the development of the neighbourhood "Rotes Feld" in the 1920s, where today mostly middle-class residents live with the social privilege of using the nearby Kurpark, possibly inducing green gentrification of the area (Jo Black & Richards, 2020; Loughran, 2020; Lüneburger Stadtarchiv, 2022). The lack of public spaces that are as family friendly as the Kurpark emphasises the park's importance for mothers and families. Its diverse structures benefit that use. However, the current use creates more benefits for a larger range of citizens than originally anticipated. The newer social housing developments on the other side of the park encourage more mixed use, making the Kurpark more accessible to a broader range of citizens. Especially for families and queer people, the liveliness and stronger regulation make the Kurpark preferable. It allows an "emotional connection and care" with friends and strangers sharing their concerns (Harcourt et al., 2022, p. 13). These groups who otherwise face drawbacks in using public space can relax here, creating spaces of interaction and civil engagement, visible through the Climate Camp (Heynen, 2014; Interview #4, 15.5.22).

People vulnerable to stigmatisation have a limited access to the park, as its setting only addresses People vulnerable to stigmatisation have limited access to the park, as its setting only addresses non-stigmatised users. Compared to the Clamart-Park, the Kurpark is more remote, and the strict regulation through the statute and social control of the Kurpark through many different users makes it difficult for the drug scene to fulfil their needs (Interview #1, 11.5.22; Interview #2, 12.5.22). This exclusion makes fewer ecosystem services available to reduce stress and increase well-being (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). The lower quality of the Clamart-Park is connected to its neglected environment and the limited integration into the surrounding neighbourhood (Devy et al., 2009). Although the municipal green space planner has ideas to improve its biodiversity, the park's free lawn also functions as an event location, limiting the flexibility to add structures (Interview #3, 13.5.22).

Second, the *Clamart-Park* does not explicitly provide a space for stigmatised users, but it is not exclusive and thus an alternative public space. As a result, it benefits the otherwise socio-spatially sanctioned drug scene as well as homeless people (Von Mahs, 2013). It is a practicable meeting spot for them, as the availability of services and shops around the Clamart-Park responds more to the needs of drug users and homeless people than the setting of the Kurpark does.

For people vulnerable to crime, the Clamart-Park is less accessible. First, this has practical reasons, as the park has a less family-friendly design. The transition from a green space to a public park without clear incentives to use makes them feel less invited to stay (Interview #7, 21.5.22; Interview #8, 2.6.22). Second, most predominantly, their association with the Clamart-Park is based on a negative narrative, reinforcing the perceived harm of the space. As such, it does not provide a safe space as the Kurpark does, especially for queer people. The situation shows how the clash between different users' needs requires negotiation in using the public space but instead induces and manifests conflicts, as reflected in the narrative. The stigmatisation and criminalisation of homeless people and drug users have their roots in the internalised history of the park as a spot for urban subcultures and drug consumption (Becker & Kunstmann, 2001). This perception is strengthened by newspaper articles predominantly mentioning the Clamart-Park in that context (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; LZ-Archiv, 2022).

As feeling safe is crucial to making people use a park, it is necessary to confront this narrative to overcome the current conflicts (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; Pérez-Tejera et al., 2022). There is an objective element to the fear people vulnerable to crime experience in the Clamart-Park, as illicit drug consumption happens there, and the police are more visible than in the Kurpark, although violence seldomly addresses users outside the drug scene (Interview #1, 11.5.22). Predominantly, the subjective perception and interpretation of this phenomenon reinforces the public discourse of the Clamart-Park as a space of fear (Polko & Kimic, 2022). It is this dimension which limits its accessibility for women and elderly people. Emotionally, the criminalisation of the drug scene and the socialisation of women as potentially being exposed to sexualisation and harassment increase their awareness within these surroundings (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021). It also makes them more likely to avoid the park and stigmatise its users. There, the gathering of people with an unfamiliar behaviour and reality strengthens feelings of threat through the drug scene as an already othered precarious identity (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; Interview #8, 2.6.22). This perception is strengthened by the lack of social control, due to less people in and around the park in general, and the bushes isolating the park, potentially inviting crime (Interview #5, 16.5.22; Jacobs, 1961; Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021).

Naturally, it is vital to ensure the safety of all citizens in urban public spaces. However, the focus on the subjectively induced narrative and the unwillingness to confront the situation of the drug and homeless scene falls back heavily on them. The connection of the scene's presence to an undesired image of the city constantly reinforces their socio-spatial exclusion, leaving the more abandoned and neglected Clamart-Park to stay (Jacobs, 1961). Restrictions and the inability to meet the requirements for essential services limit their ability to overcome their marginalised and precarious social position (Beckett & Godoy, 2010; Interview #1, 11.5.22). As drug consumption is illegal, there is a pressing need to create safe spaces for its users without further promoting drug use as such (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Such approaches might resolve the tension more than cutting the vegetation for more safety, which further reduces the species protection as well (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Non-human species already lack diverse structures for their habitats, and missing opportunities to improve further impacts urban biodiversity.

### 6.1.2 Recognitional Injustice

The distributive injustices of the two parks share the underlying issue of recognitional injustice and decisions made based on the simplified assumption of a homogenous society. This image leaves out some of its social groups and reinforces unequal power relations by further sanctioning marginalised groups while empowering dominant middle-class citizens (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; Grimwood, 2017). However, UEJ means recognising the values and meanings different groups add to each park. There, injustice limits certain social groups' access to claiming the public space they need, for example, because public discourse reinforces stigmatisation in the Clamart-Park. This is deeply interlinked with the type and history of social interactions it enables.

First, the *Kurpark* emphasises the social benefits of interaction and recreation, building on its original purpose of improving citizens' health and well-being (Kabisch & Haase, 2014; Unknown, 1983). As the city park, its value is also recognised by the government, leading to political decisions that ensure the maintenance and improvement of the Kurpark (Birge-Liberman, 2010; Interview #3, 13.5.22). The perceived aesthetics and diverse landscape features of the Kurpark make the interactions there more intuitive than in the Clamart-Park. Some interviewees mention the important everyday meaning of the Kurpark, creating a strong personal connection to its environmental and social functions (Interview #4, 15.5.22; Interview #5, 16.5.22; Rademacher, 2015). The high quality of the park in cleanliness, safety, and environmental features supports the relaxation of the park's users and thus the willingness to interact (Interview #4, 15.5.22; Rigolon, 2016). There, the Kurpark offers more incentives for children to play in a well-maintained and structurally diverse environment (Grimwood, 2017; Heynen, 2018; Interview #8, 2.6.22).

Especially for queer people, this safe space is crucial in the urban sphere (Interview #7, 21.5.22). Thus, maintenance and provision for vulnerable groups increase the benefits for these users. However, hardly any interaction happens between park users, unless they actively gather for public or private events (Interview #4, 15.5.22). On the one hand, it shows the need for privacy in parks; on the other hand, it challenges the understanding of each other's needs and differences. There is a potential for building bridges in the role of drug-dependent users as dog owners, as they regularly interact with other dog owners in the Kurpark.

Second, the original purpose of the *Clamart-Park* is less obvious, and its meaning differs across users. For people vulnerable to crime, it generally has a lower value to just cross it, or occasionally take a break (Kabisch & Haase, 2014). Otherwise, it is more connected to political discussions about the memorials or through demonstrations. The meaning of the Clamart-Park is mostly connected to its use by people vulnerable to stigmatisation. Self-organised and highly valued by the drug scene as a regular meeting space, it makes other people identify the place with the scene in public discourse (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; Interview #2, 12.5.22). A lack of recognition also happens within the marginalised groups, regarding the intersecting identities of people in the scene being women or queer.

Neglecting the perspectives of vulnerable groups intensifies existing tensions and can lead to conflicts between them. The clash between different users' needs and association requires compromises in using the comparably small public space, but instead induces and manifests conflicts, leading to a strong negative narrative of the Clamart-Park. These conflicts affect the accessibility of the park for residents and women or families who do not wish to stay there (Verheij & Corrêa Nunes, 2021). The ambivalent interaction between the drug scene and passers-by shows their lack of recognition in public spaces. While some residents recognise and greet them, others openly communicate their dislike. Despite that, interaction is avoided by many users. However, interaction with other citizens is generally perceived as positive by the drug scene if it happens with mutual respect.

Third, the lack of gender-neutral toilets *in both parks* reveals a recognitional injustice, raising the question of whether trans- and non-binary people have a recognised space in society (Interview #7, 21.5.22). Despite that, the general lack of public toilets affects especially women and elderly people, but also the drug scene and homeless people, who use public space more frequently than many other social groups. There, the conflict of the adult education centre shows the problem of not recognising the drug scene. The centre is not responsible for providing their toilets for the drug scene, but its presence still puts them in the difficult situation of 'tolerating' illicit drug use. However, there is hardly an alternative place from which the stigmatised social groups are not displaced, leading to the use of the bushes behind the Pietà, which again causes conflict with the nearby public school (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Neglecting these issues in political debates leads to a deterioration of the Clamart-Park (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021; Birge-Liberman, 2010).

Furthermore, non-human actors as a vulnerable group are much neglected and are hardly recognised in larger discourses. Current insect laws and the work of the new municipal green space planner increase their position, although this is still reflected most in the Kurpark. However, birds still lack recognition for extra care by park users during their breeding season. In general, species-friendly surroundings are still perceived as unusual and a 'lack of control', which needs to be overcome through a stronger socio-natural connection (Interview #3, 13.5.22; Rademacher, 2015).

### 6.1.3 Procedural Injustice

The lack of recognition is rooted in and is reinforced by unequal power relations. They manifest in procedural injustices in decision-making processes regarding the parks. The stronger green voice in the government benefits procedural justice for people vulnerable to crime. However, opportunities to participate and raise their voice are still mostly reserved for middle-class citizens, leaving marginalised groups in a low power position, reinforcing their limited accessibility to the parks. There, lobby work through networks and informal agreements between the streetworker, social workers and local authorities strengthens the position of people vulnerable to stigmatisation. The ability to influence the accessibility of the two parks can be described on three levels.

First, most power lies with the *policymakers*, as they can directly change existing structures and regulations. Only politicians can assess this problem on a larger scale, but they hardly recognise the affected groups, who themselves often lack the capacity to raise their voice. Currently, the changing political landscape towards the social-oriented Greens gives these groups more chances to be heard, both through their programmes and representatives (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2021; Elmhirst, 2015; Interview #1, 11.5.22). However, the Green Party still needs the support of centre parties like the Christian or Social Democrats to pass their inquiries. Citizens vulnerable to crime have the potential to be heard more, as mothers, families, queer, and precarious people are more recognised in the Greens' elective programme (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2021). The left party adds a focus on the perspective of urban youth. On the contrary, homeless people and drug addicts are rarely discussed in the city council. As the interviewed Green politician described, she would be the only one tackling that issue, and although other council members would agree, they would not explicitly put it on the agenda. However, policies directly responding to the clientele's needs would enable them to use more capacities, depending on their psychological condition.

Second, different *authorities* can impact the use and value of public parks. During the interviews, the municipal planner, the police officer, and the streetworker described their intermediate position between the city council or decision-making committees and the citizens who use the parks they work within. As all the interviewees, including the two politicians, are part of the middle-class themselves, it resembles the picture of most representatives and authorities being most aware of the needs of the middle-class population, interfering in the lives of the more precarious groups (Anguelovski, 2016; Campbell & Laheij, 2021). Although round tables happen with different authorities, the scene's needs for public spaces for meeting up are much underrated and often misunderstood as a public disturbance, leading to constant sanctions and confrontations with the police (Interview #6, 18.5.22). In the social department, sometimes the streetworker or the drug scene is invited, but this mainly happens on a small scale (Interview #2, 12.5.22). In terms of species protection and the human-nature relationship as a mutual recreation, the Kurpark has a much higher priority in the public and political discourse (Interview #3, 13.5.22; Rademacher, 2015). With the focus on species and nature conservation by the new municipal green space planner, guidelines and directives towards a more climate-resilient city win power, and the non-human environment has a lobby in the political sphere (Interview #3, 13.5.22).

Third, this affects the more *vulnerable groups*, who have limited self-efficacy and capacity to raise their voice and influence policy-making processes. Procedural justice can only be achieved if all user groups and stakeholders are recognised and involved in decision-making processes (Coolsaet, 2020). Today, middle-class actors get involved in the participation process more frequently because they are easier to address and reach (Birge-Liberman, 2010). Thus, they are advantaged in having their concerns addressed by local policies (Loftus, 2020). Homogenising society pushes marginalised groups more to the edge (Verheij & Corrêa Nunes, 2021; Villamayor-Tomas & García-López, 2021). Their ability to raise their voice depends on their capacity to do so, which is based on their perceived self-efficacy. For mothers and families, there are only a few capacities to participate in policymaking

processes about the park, as daily life requires a lot of organisational struggles, next to work, study, childcare, and family time (Interview #8, 2.6.22).

While people vulnerable to crime are more represented within and by the government, the ones vulnerable to stigmatisation lack a lobby to represent them. There, the drug scene and homeless people have fewer opportunities but also less willingness to influence policymaking. Their socio-spatial exclusion from the city scape to the Clamart-Park reinforces disadvantaging power structures and their "alienation" in society (Grimwood, 2017, p. 506; Rademacher, 2015). "People should just listen more," one drug-dependent user explains. The feeling of not being heard or represented, even if the rhetorically best people approach authorities to adapt their policies, diminishes their trust in social services and policies that improve their situation (Becker & Kunstmann, 2001; Interview #2, 12.5.22; Von Mahs, 2013). Bad experiences with authorities, like the difficulties of one member of the drug scene getting back his phone, further describe and enhance this position.

Having access to a lobby can be a crucial tool to improve procedural justice. The marginalised groups vulnerable to stigmatisation gain a lobby through the substructures built up by the local streetworker. The network of social workers and round tables, including regulatory and policymaking authorities, strengthens the group's political position. However, an active confrontation and direct dialogue with the clientele rarely happens. Previously, the streetworker organised events for educational purposes to increase recognition. Much work is yet to be done there.

## 6.2 Commoning to overcome injustices

Different steps are needed to make both parks accessible and attractive for all user groups, overcoming stigmatisation and fear (Fig. 15). Therefore, it is necessary to understand and assess the proposed changes by the different social groups. Commoning can be a long-term goal to overcome the challenges of injustice and mistrust. This requires time, patience, and commitment to achieve the final goals and achieve urban environmental justice. Based on the FPE perspective, it enables to leave the Western subject-oriented approach to urban commons and instead grasp the socio-natural relationality within the materiality of the two parks towards their more just and sustainable use (García-López et al., 2021).

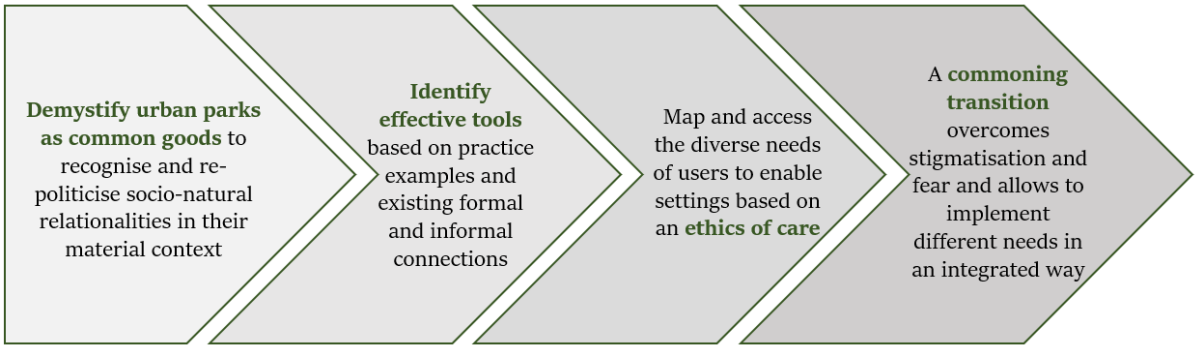


*Fig. 15: Roadmap to reach a commoning transition and overcome urban environmental injustice.*

### 6.2.1 Demystify public goods

First, the *demystification of urban green* as a public good is necessary. Often, citizens take it for granted, which leads to a lack of active involvement and puts these spaces at risk (Samanani, 2017). A re-politicisation of urban commons requires unwrapping the socio-natural sphere of the park (García-López et al., 2021). This involves the recognition of all users and the identification of conflicting groups, involving authorities, policymakers, and vulnerable groups, both to stigmatisation and to crime. Thereby, the findings can be a basis to assess what each park provides in terms of its materiality (production), which social practices and relations they enable for both human and non-human users (utilisation), and how the commons are maintained and governed (regulation). Following that, the aim should be to foster interaction and dialogue through changes in the park's development. Such processes allow to reconnect the intertwined materiality and relationality of the two parks, understanding them more systemically (García-López et al., 2021). The FPE approach emphasises the need to go beyond understandings of a homogenous community to understand the different relations of social groups to the parks, with exclusion and inclusion shaping the current commons (García-López et al., 2021). A conscious confrontation can be a first step to making people aware of different realities and discussing issues of fear, stigmatisation, and drug addiction. It allows them to develop creative solutions to improve their quality while overcoming the stigma and negative association of only drug users and youngsters using the park (Interview #5, 16.5.22).

Women are disproportionately dependent on commons and their care, which makes it necessary to recognise and address their vulnerability (García-López et al., 2021). For example, looking at objective facts about the materiality of the Clamart-Park, it is not as dangerous, with a mixed surrounding that could provide social control, and many passers-by who could step in if something happened. However, during the night, the socialisation of women not to use public parks, the discourse surrounding this specific place, and the availability of bright and safe surrounding streets make it both desirable and easy to avoid. This shows that the roots of discomfort surrounding the Clamart-Park is much deeper than its characteristics suggest, but it is also merely concentrated on its small area. It emphasises the necessity to create a sense of safety so its mixed use can be more normalised during the daytime. For the drug users, not needing to consume drugs behind the Pietà would help ease that tension (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

### 6.2.2 Effective Tools

Second, it is necessary to identify *effective tools* by assessing current authority and social regulations, for example by using an equity index (Cooke, 2020). It is also possible to look at positive examples from places like Bogotá, where marginalised groups were able to formulate creative solutions themselves (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). In Europe, Zürich in Switzerland chose a pro-active approach to deal with the drug scene in the city, implementing needle dump containers in the local toilets (Interview #2, 12.5.22). The Swiss liberal drug policies involve four main pillars of prevention, repression, survival support, and therapy, which are copied by many other countries (Stadt Zürich, 2022). Among people involved with drug addiction, Portugal and the Netherlands count as best

practice examples for legalising drugs. A legalisation would help to overcome the dangers of an unsafe and unstable black market, which usually hits the precarious drug scene the hardest. Involving their perspectives and ideas in dealing with the contested commons can be a great advantage in overcoming current conflicts. Thereby, the New Leipzig-Charta (2020) provides guidelines for sustainable urban development as a multi-level agreement. In Lüneburg, there are already different assets available to promote dialogue and creative solutions to implement these guidelines:

1. Round tables between the administrative social department and the streetworker lobbying for the drug scene,
2. Policymakers who receive crime data and analysis by the local police,
3. The co-operation between the newspaper and drug scene for the children's festival,
4. Round tables between the municipal green space planner and regulative authorities,
5. Informal agreements during Covid-19 between the police and the drug scene,
6. The network of social workers and the streetworker as substructures to build upon, which helps to ease conflicts towards more respectful and engaged communities (Beckett & Godoy, 2010; Cooke, 2020).

These current assets can be opportunities for developing new priorities in policymaking based on mutual understanding, especially for previously marginalised groups. A holistic view of the current situation can benefit from new crossovers between different parties and groups vulnerable to crime. The media impacts the public perception of the Clamart-Park, risking to reinforce the stigmatisation of its users (Lang & Mell, 2020). The local newspaper can have a positive impact in overcoming simplified depictions of the drug scene and instead communicating a more differentiated picture of their realities (Campbell & Laheij, 2021; Interview #1, 11.5.22). Besides these more institutionalised assets, it is necessary to discover where commoning is already practiced (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020). Self-organised informal institutions like the connection between dog owners, despite the social positionalities, can be an inspiration to induce similar encounters that allow otherwise vulnerable users to perform different roles (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). Furthermore, the centralised drug scene in the Clamart-Park or the meetings of the queer community in the Kurpark count as examples of care-based commoning practice.

### 6.2.3 Ethics of Care

Third, feminist *ethics of care* moves from an increasingly individualised society to a more pluralistic view of urban communities. To pave the way for a common transition, awareness and commitment to care are required. It is an iterative process of encountering, recognising, caring, and "doing" commons together, including aspects of "emotion, affect, care, and subjectivity" (García-López et al., 2021, p. 1202). In that sense, it is helpful to map the needs of each group observed during the field research.

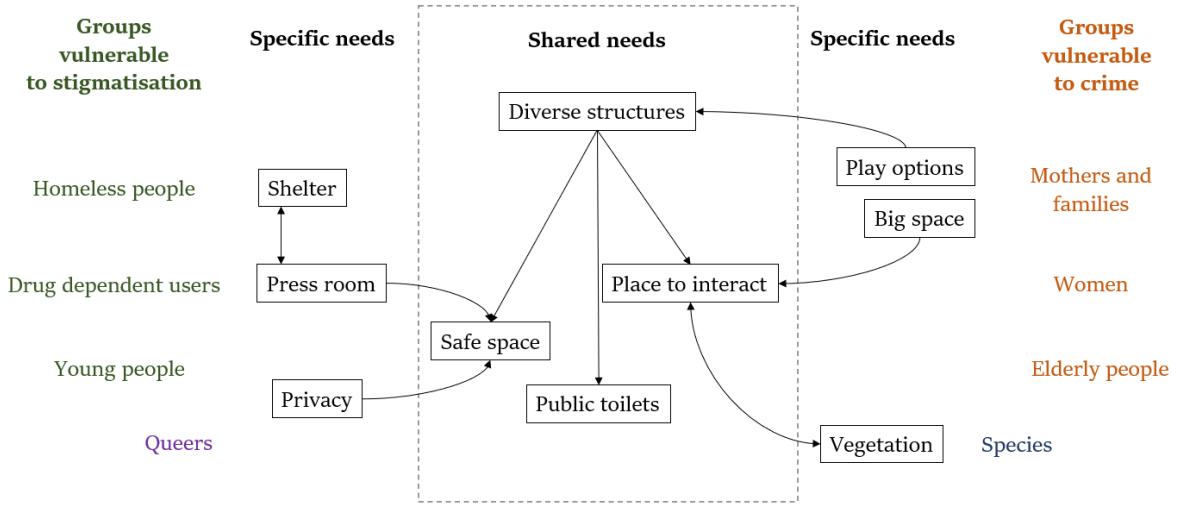


*Fig. 16: Map of the vulnerable users' specific and shared needs in the use of public parks.*

The map of the different users' needs shows a common need for diverse structures providing both safe spaces for privacy and more open interactions (Fig. 16). While women, families, and elderly people prefer a safe space in an open sphere that provides social control; drug users, homeless people, young people, and queer people also need more intimate places. Privacy spots are more plentiful in the Kurpark, which is less accessible to the drug scene. The benches in the Clamart-Park, which usually provide a space to talk more intimately, are so close to the path that it might create a discomfort of entering someone's private sphere when just crossing them (Interview #3, 13.5.22). The need for safe spaces that allow private encounters is also communicated by queer citizens, for whom public space is more connected to vulnerability to both stigmatisation and crime, related to intersecting identities (Angeles & Roberton, 2020; Interview #7, 21.5.22). Previous green spaces coded as "sex environments" for queer people do thus still matter to provide a space for intimacy, to talk, and to feel safe (Nowak & Roynesdal, 2021, p. 1). Just as well, it benefits young people to have a safe space outside of authority surveillance (Interview #5, 16.5.22; Kotlaja et al., 2018).

Safety increases with liveability, based on more incentives for interaction and use of the parks (Anguelovski & Connolly, 2021; Interview #7, 21.5.22). The Left politician suggested designing pathways or creative items that invite people to experience the park in a more relaxed and sociable way (Interview #5, 16.5.22). Furthermore, more attention can be drawn to an active confrontation with the park's history and remembrance culture of the memorials (Interview #5, 16.5.22). New items like sports goods could create a new social control already changing the atmosphere and behaviour in the park (Interview #3, 13.5.22). A lesbian couple living next to the Clamart-Park mentioned ideas for opening a café there, which could attract more potential users but also bears the risk of gentrification

Public toilets are lacking in both parks and for all vulnerable groups. Adding needle dump containers there, as proposed by the local streetworker, would lower the risk of heroin users getting an overdose. There, care means recognising the meaning of the Clamart-Park for the drug scene when improving it for people vulnerable to crime. The groups should be able to shape it together without

fear of displacement. Drug users from outside Lüneburg usually perceive its scene as quieter and more relaxed, which shows the good preconditions to improve their situation in that sense and build up on this value (Interview #2, 12.5.22).

While the drug scene proposed a pavilion to have shelter from rain and a safer place to stay, the streetworker suggested a nearby press room, as already existing in bigger cities like Hamburg (Interview #2, 12.5.22). This would reduce infections and overdoses as well as the danger of stepping into needles (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Additionally, it would recognise drug users as a relevant social group (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Next to the park, this could provide a welcoming inside space (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Their weak lobby makes the implementation of a pressroom challenging. There, close cooperation between Drobs and the psychiatric clinic is necessary (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Although there are concerns from the social department, the proximity of Hamburg makes "drug tourism" unlikely (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Forms of collaboration, case-based solutions, and "medical outreach services" can help to achieve this positive change (Becker & Kunstmann, 2001, p. 71; Von Mahs, 2013). Collaborations with the Johanneum can be beneficial to ease conflicts as well.

All of this should be provided in a space with supportive vegetation for both human and non-human use. While certain shrubs are beneficial for insects and creating spaces of privacy, keeping visible open green spaces is also necessary for vulnerable groups to feel safe (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Besides, the free lawn in the Clamart-Park is regulated as a public space for events (Interview #3, 13.5.22). Such mixed surroundings have the power to enable the natural dynamics of "life and use" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 132). Thus, a mixed use recognising different social relations in the park's material surroundings and natural environment can enable the becoming of a safe space (Özkan & Baykal Büyüksarac, 2020).

Thereby, the Green's politician expressed her aims of a "housing first" policy, providing housing without repressing conditions from the state to keep it (Interview #1, 11.5.22). The current accommodation does not have enough capacity, which causes conflicts and increases police operations (Interview #1, 11.5.22). Such enabling policies may relieve stress in affected groups and allow them to express and actively discuss their ideas on the commons, with a focus on public parks and safe spaces. Care can already mean improving the accessibility of consulting possibilities for drug addicts, without being connected to the fear of being criminalised and excluded, especially about reintegrating them into the job market (Interview #5, 16.5.22). Based on the resources available, supportive policies are needed to increase the capacities of vulnerable groups who usually do not access participation processes. Understanding and enabling them to raise their voice and share ideas for change on this small scale can create connections that create new structures and strategies to deal with these issues on a larger scale as well.

### 6.2.4 Commoning

Forth, injustice can be overcome by a *commoning transition*, implementing the diverse needs of park users and their proposed changes in an integrated way. It can be understood as an experiment of

creativity, improvisation, and dynamics in “more-than-human assemblages”, creating new relationalities of care (García-López et al., 2021, p. 1202).

Commoning happens all the time in informal contexts. Queer (-friendly) communities use care ethics to create a safe space in the public courtyard, as they frequently host a variety of identities and vulnerabilities. Through care and high sensibility, but also by sharing the same core values, they create a safe space for people that often feel misplaced in other contexts. Accessing this care work can be a great opportunity to find strategies in other diverse contexts as well. The Kurpark further enables dog owners to connect through their role of caring for their dog in the park, beyond their socio-economic position or specific vulnerability. In addition, the self-organised meetings of the drug scene in the Clamart-Park use care as a protection from becoming a victim of bad substances or criminality. Thereby, commoning can enable different groups to use their "emancipatory and oppressive potentials" in doing the commons together beyond stigmatisation (García-López et al., 2021, p. 1209).

Based on different users’ ideas, some propositions, like a press room for drug users, benefit one group more specifically, while others, like public toilets, could be implemented in a way that responds to the needs of all. Local newspaper campaigns and articles about drug users, homeless people, and queer people could help to overcome stigma (Interview #1, 11.5.22). This could attract more social groups to use the park and let the drug scene blend in more with the general scene (Interview #7, 21.5.22). Currently, the complaints of primarily middle- and upper-income people paint an incomplete picture of the location (Interview #3, 13.5.22; Interview #5, 16.5.22). Direct conversations with streetworkers and other intermediaries may help to reduce tensions if conducted in a sensible and respectful manner (Interview #2, 12.5.22). Specific awareness training informing about various perspectives can also be beneficial (Beckett & Godoy, 2010). Hamburg and Ljubljana show examples of city tours done by homeless or previously homeless people, recognising their unique knowledge of public spaces (Hinz&Kunzt, 2022; Ljubljana.info, 2022).

From an FPE perspective, these relationalities and perceptions of "being and belonging" need to be constantly negotiated between different parties (García-López et al., 2021, p. 1202). UEJ thus needs to go beyond social welfare and recognise species and interdependent human-nature relations as well. Non-human actors need to be considered, as they are unable to represent themselves. A shared belonging to the city of Lüneburg can thereby provide a basis for understanding each other’s meaning of the specific parks and how they came to be. This means for people vulnerable to crime to recognise that public space for stigmatised groups is scarce and reflects deeper societal issues, but also for stigmatised groups to understand patterns of fear. As they are very marginalised, politicians and public authorities need to respond to these mutual efforts and foster and acknowledge such processes in a flexible manner, considering intersecting identities as well. In this context, the creative potential and diverse use of the two parks allow great opportunities to improve the city’s urban living quality. Through commoning these commons, these strategies to reach UEJ are embraced within the perspectives of the heterogeneous society the parks aim to serve.

# 7. Conclusion

The two parks in Lüneburg show a reflection of the citizens' needs to use public space. However, this research has shown that not all parks are equally accessible for all people. The characteristics of each park determine their popularity in society. Differences between Kurpark and Clamart-Park reflect urban environmental injustices affecting particularly vulnerable groups. Based on feminist methodology, I differentiated between the most vulnerable users of the parks as (1) women, families, and elderly people vulnerable to crime; (2) queer people facing both vulnerability to crime and stigmatisation; and (3) the drug scene and homeless citizens as stigmatised user groups. Observations, transect walks, and expert interviews focusing on their experiences in the park enabled a holistic yet differentiated picture of the issue at hand.

To identify the underlying issues, I evaluated the parks in terms of their production, utilisation, and regulation from a past and current perspective. While the Kurpark was designed as a city park for recreational purposes, the smaller Clamart-Park has for the longest time been a green space 'decorated' with just two memorials. The neighbourhood surrounding both parks is mixed in both parks, but the design of the Kurpark offers more diverse structures for a larger set of activities and needs. It is used for species protection and social gatherings, especially for groups vulnerable to crime, whereas the Clamart-Park remains rather abandoned. Regulation in the Kurpark happens through a strict statute and social control between different users, while in the Clamart-Park it is less controlled and more regulated through informal arrangements with stigmatised groups. While this allows a place for the otherwise excluded drug scene to meet, it also induces narratives of fear, hindering groups vulnerable to crime from using the park.

Based on these characteristics, urban environmental injustice could be identified in three dimensions. In the distributive dimension, the narrative of fear surrounding the Clamart-Park reinforces stigmatisation of its users, which limits access for people vulnerable to crime. Meanwhile, more stigmatised groups feel less welcome in the Kurpark, as the strict regulations limit their ability to fulfil their needs. This is based on the recognitional injustices of pushing these groups to the edge of society, hardly giving them a chance to raise their voice. The recognition of different needs and embodied experiences by social groups related to each park could be improved. Current meanings of the parks can be developed by improving procedural justice, as current politics hardly discusses the realities of vulnerable groups. The public discourse and uneven power relations further deepen these issues and reinforce the vulnerability of the affected groups.

A commoning transition based on existing and new assets can help to overcome injustices. This requires first demystifying and re-politicising the use of the parks as urban commons involving all social groups. Next, the recognition of effective tools already doing commoning, including best practice examples, existing networks, and agreements, is a valuable foundation to implement new ideas. Round tables and collaborations between authorities and policymakers showed successful outcomes. There, existing informal agreements between users and, if applicable, authorities have much potential. These assets can be further developed using an ethics of care, mapping the plurality

of the citizens' needs. Diverse structures offering places to interact next to safe spaces and public toilets showed the most benefits for vulnerable groups. Constant negotiations and sensibility are necessary to acknowledge and fulfil both common and more specific needs in a way that improves the quality of life for everybody. Although species are often neglected in such processes, current policies increasingly support their protection. This can be a strong mean to improve the socio-natural relationality in parks. Based on this knowledge, looking at the transition towards commoning as a conscious process allows to implement creative solutions and proposed changes by different groups in an integrative and iterative way.

These findings lead to the understanding that popularity limits access to neighbourhood parks based on the very specific, long-grown meanings and characteristics of each park, strongly influenced by public discourse. The FPE perspective enabled an analysis of the experience of the most affected vulnerable groups, unfolding issues of urban environmental injustice. It reveals that although popular, the Kurpark can be exclusionary to otherwise marginalised groups, reinforcing stigmata and uneven power relations. The public discourse has a significant impact on reinforcing the narrative, resulting in the Clamart-Park becoming an undesirable green space. To enable a positive development of the parks' accessibility for all groups, it is necessary to bring the different perspectives together within a commoning transition. Although there may be capacity and regulatory framework challenges, the goal can already allow for many significant changes to occur to make parks more just spaces for all.

# 8. Reflection

Reflecting on the research process, the broad theoretical framework was both helpful and challenging for the research. Accessing UEJ through a FPE lens was a meaningful choice to answer the research question. Connecting the research to factors of popularity was helpful during the process of data collection and analysis. However, there were challenges in linking the different dots in the discussion. Additionally, time and resource limits made it impossible to assess all groups and positionalities in their full depth. While this paper allows a holistic picture of the situation in the two parks, it is not representative of each user group. My qualitative data is only a depiction of a complex reality. Further groups include disabled citizens and pupils, who are outside of this study's scope due to limited capacities and sources. Their perspectives could be reflected upon more in further research. I chose to not particularly look at groups often framed as' ethnic minorities'. After reflecting on the term, I believe it is inapplicable and discriminatory to those with intersecting identities who may only be distinguished by appearance from a larger group of people. Although this paper outlined the homogenous image of society often drawn by policymakers, my aim was to break this view by focusing on identities based on needs, experience, and behaviour in their park use. Embodied experiences of, for example, people of colour or Muslim communities in public spaces could be further researched.

Regarding the context of the research, the situation in Lüneburg is not generalisable. Depending on the very local context of public parks, the outcomes might differ. As a resourceful, smaller city in

Germany, the preconditions for improving the situation are rather positive, as the conflicts based on criminality or scarcity of public green spaces in general could be much more severe. This emphasises once more how important it could be for the city to take the chance and use its potential in commoning processes. There, it depends on the willingness of the new green-centre city council to improve the situation or on the citizens to (re-)claim their space.

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