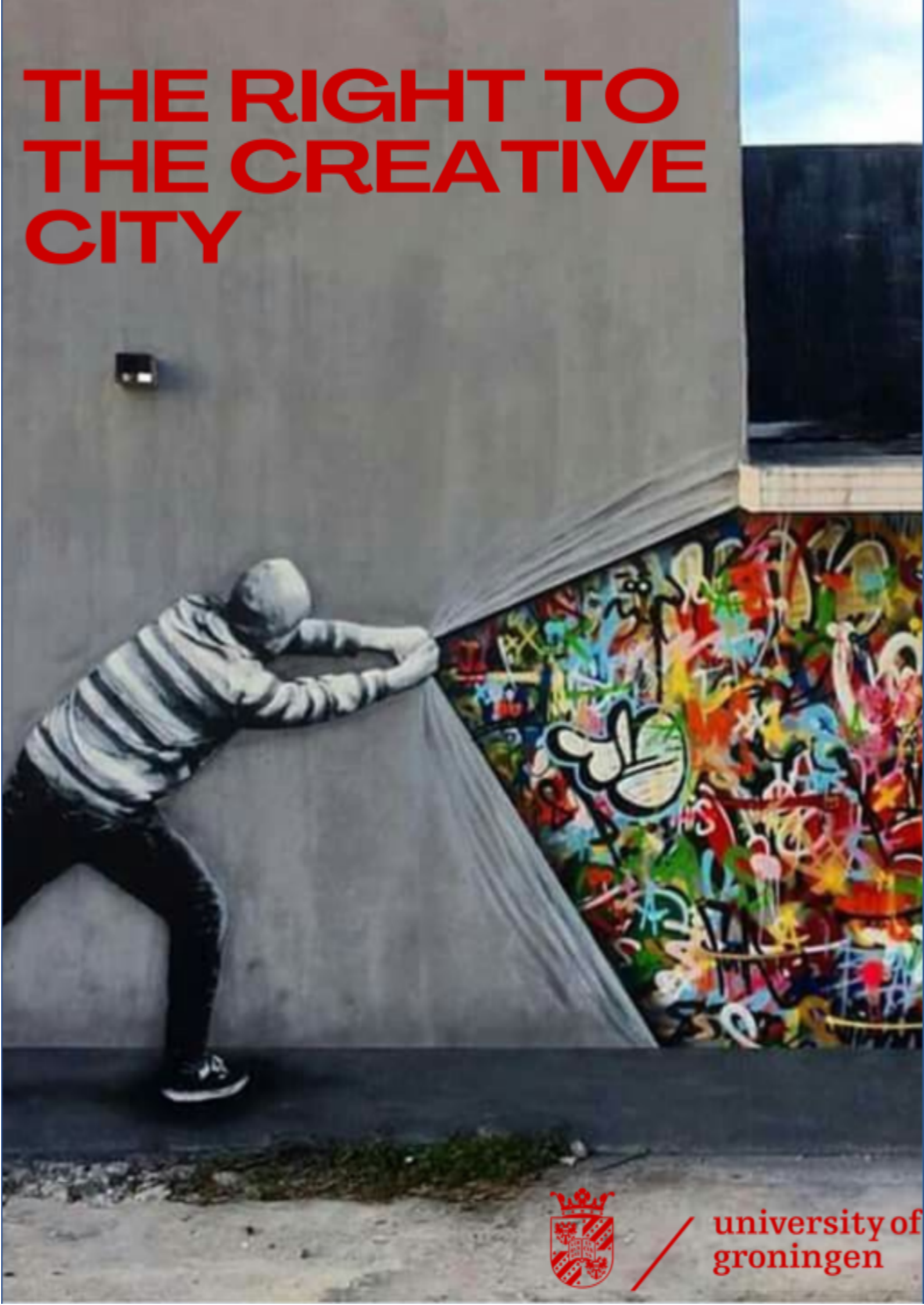
THE RIGHT TO THE CREATIVE CITY



university of groningen

Colophon

Student	Bart Popken
Title	The Right to the Creative City: A comparative case study between the cities Groningen & Ghent
Student number	S3246892
Email	b.f.popken@student.rug.nl
Supervisors	Dr. Christian Lamker & Dr. Ethemcan Turhan
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Foreword

The MA thesis writing process has been a rocky road with ups and downs. This is part of the academic process which I have embraced during my time at the University of Groningen from 2020 to 2023. Throughout the writing process of this thesis, I have encountered myself various times which made it not only contribute to the development of my academic personality but also my development as a human being. This MA thesis would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of a number of people whom I want to thank deeply.

First, I want to thank my family and girlfriend for their ongoing support and love. During times of setbacks, they were always there to motivate me and encourage me to push through. The rejection of my PhD application in May hit me harder than expected. They made me bounce back and encouraged me to embrace this project as a chance to showcase my resilience and perseverance. Special thanks to my brother, who always provided a sympathetic ear.

Second, I want to thank my supervisors Christian Lamker and Ethemcan Turhan who have professionally and personally guided me throughout the whole thesis. As ironic as it might sound, their supervision successfully pushed me to fully explore my own creative boundaries. The scope of my thesis has changed a lot over the past six months but because of their shared enthusiasm for my topic they have motivated me to keep on refining parts of my thesis. I am very happy that both supervisors allowed me to stick to the critical theory paradigm as this greatly interests me. Moreover, their approval of comparing two creative cities rather than solely focusing on Groningen, greatly motivated me as well.

Third, I want to thank all the participants that I have walked and talked with in Groningen and Ghent. All the participants eagerly grasped the opportunity to show me around their favorite cultural spots in the city and shared personal experiences that are so dear to them. This gave me a warm glow after every interview but also uncovered hidden realities that I would otherwise never have encountered myself. Their enthusiasm stimulated me to delve deeper into the subcultural scenes of both cities and necessitated me to represent their worldviews as accurately as possible. I hope I succeeded in doing so.

With this piece of work, I am officially finishing my journey as a student in the Research Master Spatial Sciences. It has been two wonderful years where I have been privileged to meet new people, develop my personal interests and to learn from established experts in the academic field of Spatial Planning. I am eager to further develop my academic interests in a later stadium of my life.

Yours sincerely,

Bart Popken

'Perhaps it is here that the space can be opened up to forge a collective resistance to this neo liberal expansion, to the endless proliferation of banalities and the homogenising effects of globalisation. Here in the burnt out shopping arcades, the boarded up precincts, the lost citadels of consumerism one might find the truth, new territories might be opened, there might be a rupturing of this collective amnesia.'

(Fisher, 2014: p. 264)

Abstract

Street art and graffiti have long been rebellious forms of resistance but with the emergence of the creative city they have been subsumed by local authorities. Creative placemaking became a dominant strategy pushed by city authorities to transform urban environments. Critical voices raised concerns about the fuzziness of such strategies and the potential exploitation of underground art practices and artists as it often remains unclear who benefits from these processes. Therefore, this study has aimed to clarify these tensions by comparing two creative cities: Groningen and Ghent. Through 22 participant-led walking interviews with urban artists and planners, participants directed attention to the importance of creativity in the redevelopment of the Oude Dokken (Old Docks) harbour neighbourhood in Ghent and the Damsterdiep-Eemskanaal industrial area in Groningen. What became clear from my study is that street art is embraced by local municipalities and deeply embedded into creative city policies. In Ghent, the Sorry Not Sorry street art festival at Oude Dokken illustrated that street art has been used as a tool for urban renewal to attract investors to the plan area. In Groningen, the Aletta Jacobs mural project clarified that street art can be an important tool to brand cultural and historical assets. Both cases appeared to be part of a longer lineage of endorsements of creative cities to attract creative classes by sanitizing neglected areas. In Ghent, this resulted in an exodus of impacted residents, making the city transform into a place exclusively for the wealthy. However, I found that there is active resistance of sidelined artists in Groningen that are negatively impacted by creative city policies. The Betonbos (Concrete Jungle) is an autonomous zone occupied by artists living together in a common space at the Damsterdiep-Eemskanaal area. The political mobilizations of such ‘artistic commons’ show that there is a culture of resistance emerging where urban creatives question neoliberal trajectories and struggle for their Right to the Creative City.

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1: Introduction

The last two decades are characterized by polarized debates on the creative city. There is either an cheerful obsession with the economic growth implications that it brings, yet others focus on the negative implications that it has on society. Most positive claims pay attention to post-industrial discourses on creative industries and creative classes as the main drivers of urban development or strategies of regeneration. The negative claims primarily relate to the socioeconomic and spatial inequalities of urban development by supporting certain types of people, places and industries while leaving others behind (Kozina et al., 2021). Creativity is embedded in these processes of socio-spatial restructuring in many ways. Pratt (2008) addresses that creative cities have one common feature: they all rely on instrumental policies that attempt to use culture and creativity to achieve non-cultural ends which are mostly economic. This one-sided emphasis seems to mask rather than reduce urban inequalities and often replicate the same problems across different places (Gerhard et al., 2016; Kozina et al., 2021). Placemaking and city branding have increasingly become common forms of policy intervention in creative cities to attract creative classes to the city. These strategies are often presented as a one size fits all solution that can be adapted by all places regardless of size, location, and historical context. Despite this, small and medium-sized towns (SMSTs) face specific challenges because they are more vulnerable to population shrinkage and economic shocks. Therefore, placemaking is often embraced by local governments of SMSTs as a tool to improve their future prosperity (Van Hoose et al., 2021; Vanolo, 2017).

With the importance of creativity to the post-industrial economy, local governments started to integrate art, culture, and creativity into urban development strategies of places and communities. Creative placemaking involves the power of culture and arts to shape the social and physical character of neighbourhoods (Markusen & Nikodemus, 2014). Creative placemaking recognizes the potential that artistic and cultural activities must transform spaces and stimulate economic growth. Projects that rely on creative placemaking can involve various forms such as cultural festivals, public art installations, performances, and urban revitalization efforts (Campos & Barbio, 2021). In the end, creative placemaking promises to enhance the social, economic, and cultural fabric of cities (Hussler et al., 2022). While creative placemaking has increasingly gained popularity in post-industrial cities, it is not without its critiques. Critical voices have been raised against the elitism that these projects bring about. One of the main concerns is that creative placemaking can contribute to gentrification and displacement of affected communities (Polson, 2022). As cultural activities in certain places increase, it can attract more affluent people to the area which could lead to increased cost of living and property values. This makes it difficult for the existing low-income residents to afford to stay in the area designated for revitalization. Closely related to this is the critique of creative placemaking as a superficial and commodified approach to the arts and culture. This process has often been defined as ‘city branding’ where branding-driven creative placemaking initiatives tend to prioritize aesthetics and marketability over deeper engagement with local communities (Andron, 2018). The focus on economic growth can lead to the displacement of existing communities. Therefore, many of the creative placemaking branding projects cater to affluent and educated residents while exacerbating the marginalized positions of those who do not have the necessary resources or cultural capital to participate (Zitcer, 2020). Subsequently, the extent to which creative placemaking succeeds in developing an inclusive creative city depends on the level of equity and democracy embedded in such processes (Salzman & Yerace, 2018).

This study aims to compare two SMSTs: the city of Groningen and Ghent. Although both towns have not explicitly adopted any creative city policies, many of their placemaking strategies are oriented towards embracing creativity through the lens of social and technological innovations. Ghent officially joined the UNESCO Creative City Network in 2009. About six years later, Groningen developed the ‘City of Talent’ policy. Both developments show the eagerness of both cities to engender a post-industrial transition and develop a strong creative economy. Creative placemaking has been regarded as a central strategy for both cities to accomplish this. Since the economy of Groningen and Ghent used to depend on industrial production, the deindustrialization of both cities led to a huge stock

of underutilized and abandoned industrial spaces. Through the integration of arts, culture and creativity into formal industrial areas, creative placemaking often succeeds in breathing new life into these spaces (Kozina et al., 2021). Therefore, attention has been directed to two of such areas: the Oude Dokken (Old docks) neighbourhood in Ghent and the Damsterdiep-Eemskanaal area in Groningen. Both areas attract urban artists and are subject to urban transformation processes.

According to Mould (2015), the creative city often draws on already existing forms of creativity which is why this study will explore the creative practice of urban art. The power of urban art to transform spaces in creative placemaking projects makes city governments increasingly support and implement such initiatives. Yet, with the pressing critiques concerning the elitism and exclusionary outcomes of such practices, issues have been raised regarding who benefits from these processes. Moran & Beraby (2021) address that most of these issues are in essence spatial issues, mainly because neoliberal policies prioritize individualism and competitiveness which leads to the privatization and fragmentation of urban spaces. Berfelde (2021) adds that this results in an undermining of social cohesion and community bonds which limits the realization of 'the right to the creative city'. This is why Salzman & Yerace (2018) emphasize that more research needs to be conducted on creative placemaking policies in creative cities and Moran & Berbary (2021) stress the need for more research on the implications that it has on local communities. Therefore, this research aims to address the following research question:

"How do the policies and practices of creative placemaking in Ghent and Groningen contribute to the formation of a creative city identity and the transformation of urban spaces, and how does this impact local communities and their right to the creative city?"

In Chapter 2, I will provide the theoretical backdrop to this study based on the literature on the creative city and urban art. The main themes discussed in the literature review are the production of space, creative placemaking and the right to the creative city. Thereafter, in Chapter 3 I will touch upon the methodological underpinnings of this research. This section contains the research design, research questions, the adopted qualitative methods, ethical considerations, and data analysis. Chapter 4 describes the results and mainly elaborates on the role of urban art in urban transformation processes. The perceptions of urban artists and planners are at the base of the results. In the following discussion chapter, the experiences of participants are positioned into a wider discussion on the transformation of urban space and the right to the creative city. Additionally, Chapter 6 will conclude with the main findings, theoretical contributions, recommendations for future research and a reflection on the research process. Chapter 8 is the bibliography and chapter 9 are the appendices.

2: Literature review

The work by Cohendet et al (2010), is often used to analyze the production of space in the creative city. It dissects the creative city into three interrelated layers: the Upperground, the Middleground and the Underground. The Uppergroud can be envisaged as the institutional layer where most power is concentrated in large institutions. The promotion and branding of a city involve policies, strategic planning, and the cultivation of specific urban images. Upperground actors must find their source of inspiration in the soil of the creative city itself. Therefore, underground and upperground actors meet in the middle where they work together in processes of creative placemaking. However, the underground scene is constituted by creative people who are not immediately linked to the commercial world of the upperground. This often results in tensions between both layers, making the middleground a contested and conflictual space. In what follows, I seek to explore this uncanny tension between these three layers.

2.1 The Production of Space and Urban Creativity in the Upperground

Deindustrialization necessitated Western countries to invest in cultural assets if they wanted to maintain their global hegemony (Mould, 2015). The potential for selling culture has been grasped

eagerly by urban decision-makers after periods of uncertainty arising from an expanding urban population against a background of urban deindustrialization (Amin & Thrift, 2007). If cities are using culture for urban development, and if cities are to compete globally, then cities need to be *seen* as places of investment (Mould, 2015). Hence, in the post-industrial city 'creativity' and 'culture' have become mobilized assets to stimulate inter-urban competition by creating a positive urban imagery. Neoliberalism emphasizes market-driven economic approaches and the commodification of various elements of city life, including culture. Urban art, particularly graffiti and street art, gained popularity and thus commercial value. This led many post-industrial Western cities to appropriate and incorporate urban art into urban development strategies. The scholarly work on such strategies has focused on the instrumentalization of urban art for the benefit of specific planning and urban development strategies (Campos & Barbio, 2021; Markley & Sharma, 2016; Pavoni, 2019). However, not everything around this issue is seen in a positive light. Critical voices have revealed a different reality in which urban art relates to gentrification, real estate speculation and tourism integrated in a neoliberal urban agenda as part of the creative city mantra (Andron, 2018; Berfelde, 2021; Mould, 2015; Polson, 2022).

Campos & Barbio (2021) define three creative city policy goals for urban art to produce spaces in metropolitan areas. The first goal relates to the strategy of landscape construction and urban reassessment linked to generic improvement in public spaces. The main aim here is the aesthetic enhancement and the creation of areas of cultural interest and touristic/economic development (Ibid.). This resonates with Harvey's (1989) argument that urban entrepreneurialism focuses on the political economy of place and relies upon 'symbolic capital'. Symbolic capital refers to the social value or prestige that individuals or communities acquire through their association with symbols, signs, or cultural practices (Markley & Sharma, 2016). This form of capital is increasingly created through the marketization of urban cultural heritage, local history or 'distinct ways of urban life' that can only be experienced by living in a particular place. Subsequently, neoliberal creative cities capitalize on their cultural-historic resources to attract investment and jobs by bringing attention to their unique cultural assets. They do this by designating historic districts, establishing cultural festivals, promoting urban art and many more strategies (Ibid.). These marks of local distinction can ground claims of uniqueness for a particular place.

Directing attention to a distinct local identity relates to the second policy objective described by Campos & Barbio (2021) namely: city branding or a refashioning of the city image. The most important argument in the discourses around urban art concerns its capacity to improve the image of spaces and subsequently the image of a city (Campos & Barbio, 2021). Andron (2018) focuses on street art walking tours as one example of city branding. She describes how urban art as an object and practice has increasingly become packaged as something to be sold in the form of street art walking tours, street art festivals and so forth. These packages encourage the accumulation of symbolic capital as street art routes are integrated into a long lineage of endorsements for the cultural field of street art to 'sell' certain places as hubs of vibrancy and urban creativity (Andron, 2018). Similarly, street art festivals are increasingly embraced by city authorities as they establish a delivery system for creative city policies (Schacter, 2015). This is described by Campos & Barbio (2021) as the 'festivalization of culture' meaning that creativity, culture, and art are all blended to create ultimate conditions for the outward radiation of creativity to the outside world.

The third public policy goal mentioned by Campos & Barbio (2021) is the strategy for the social promotion of stigmatized territories and communities through urban art. This strategy is deployed mainly to create an urban environment attractive for creative classes. IT workers, architects, writers, entrepreneurs, and other knowledge sector workers are believed to not only be the vendors of culture and coolness but also of economic progress itself (Markley & Sharma, 2016). Creating a competitive identity through symbolic capital accumulation greatly encourages investments in the built landscape. In the background of these events, there are state-initiated efforts that aim to revitalize deteriorated neighbourhoods through gentrification (Campos & Barbio, 2021). Processes of gentrification lead to the transformation of working-class space into spaces for middle- and upper-class commercial consumption. According to Markley & Sharma (2016: p. 386), gentrification is advocated by creative city authorities because:

> “it creates the dual illusions of prosperity and poverty alleviation without disrupting existing property relations, and it complements the broader goals of urban entrepreneurialism and creative city policies.”

This perspective illustrates how gentrification of neighbourhoods is part of a larger urban development scheme encoded through creative city policies. Andron (2018) addresses how street art has gradually evolved to meet the needs of gentrification. She advocates that the discourses going around street art have become more important than the creative practices themselves. Local councils permit paint jams and street art festivals, editors use pictures of street art in their books, marketing bureaus hire street artists for promoting purposes, property developers welcome street artists at their hoardings and so forth. Therefore, street art has become part of a wider urban development model that encourages neoliberal development but directs attention away from inclusion, social justice, and democratic access (Campos, 2021; Polson, 2022). Gentrification takes a full circle of the supposed carriers of the process, such as artists, students, or residents, when they cannot afford the surging rents any longer and become displaced. Berfelde (2021) addresses that real estate actors and urban planners are not the only groups producing spaces in the city but that the production of urban spaces is primarily determined by already existing conditions belonging to a space. Speculative investment strategies such as gentrification should thus be understood as an extractive force that acts upon existing social and cultural wealth produced in a commons (Ibid.). By framing the nexus between gentrification and cultural production, emphasis is placed on how already existing forms of bottom-up cultural production are used for the speculation of real estate and land values. This could accelerate gentrification processes while overlooking forms of subcultural production which was marketed upon in the first place. The Middleground appears as the site where this displacement happens, which I turn to in the next section.

2.2 The Middleground as a ‘space of hope’?

With the birth of the creative city, town governments and urban development agencies started to institutionalize creative practices by using initiatives of counter-cultural actors for their own purposes. Many Western cities launched clear-cut programs that provided creative workers and artists with interim use of vacant space until investors started to develop them further (Colomb, 2012; Mayer, 2015). Dutch cities have been giving a particular twist to this by developing a policy of ‘Breeding Grounds’ to "maintain and recreate the cultural functions previously performed by large squats" (Owens 2008: 54; Mayer, 2015). These policies are developed to benefit the city and the precarious workers because they cannot afford the high costs of central city space. They aim to create ‘spaces of hope’ where emphasis is placed on initiatives, practices and places that embody alternative future visions and possibilities for a more equitable and socially just society (Harvey, 2000). However, spaces of hope are often co-opted for the purpose of urban restructuring and regeneration (Mayer, 2015). The appropriation of such spaces and other insurgent forms of creativity has not only become easily feasible but also a productive force in the neoliberal creative city (Mould, 2014). This makes the middleground a contested space that can facilitate the preconditions for a more equitable creative city (Grandadam et al., 2013; Markusen & Nikodemus, 2014; Webb, 2014) yet also is continuously under threat to become co-opted by commercial players (Moran & Beraby, 2021; Kozina et al., 2021; Verschelden et al., 2012).

Placemaking involves various public actors and stakeholders who work together using short- and long-term techniques to improve public engagement and urban design (Webb, 2014). Therefore, placemaking projects are installed in the middleground to create higher quality places that stimulate the belonging of the local residents to this place. Webb (2014) equates higher quality places and a sense of belonging with more vibrant and liveable communities, businesses, and visitors. There are many forms of placemaking that aim to increase the quality of areas in the city. Among them is creative placemaking which became a central strategy in the middleground of the creative city. Markusen & Nikodemus (2014: p. 35) define it as follows:

> "In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local businesses viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired."

According to Grandadam et al (2013), creative placemaking in the middleground relies on four different mechanisms: places, spaces, events and projects. Places account for physical locations in the city offering stakeholders the opportunity of geographical proximity and allow for planned and unplanned interactions. Spaces are mental platforms that contribute to cognitive proximity. By framing interactions among different kinds of creative stakeholders, those proximities ease knowledge diffusion and co-creation by reducing risks (Lange & Schüßler, 2018). According to Hussler et al (2022), places and spaces only offer the potential for knowledge diffusion if they are activated, which is done via events and projects. Projects are being envisaged as opportunities to share ideas and resources with other creatives mainly to realize a collective output in the form of events. These events provide artists the room to showcase their work to an audience composed of consumers as well as other artists (Hussler et al., 2022). Therefore, events play a configurative role by bringing together creative stakeholders from the upperground and underground (Cohendet et al., 2010; Hussler et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, there are also critical voices raised against creative placemaking processes in the middleground. Mayer (2015) addresses that placemaking strategies often tweak the purpose of participation as they are designed solely to encourage the activation of places rather than focusing on political emancipation. Since there are many stakeholders, creative placemaking has been described as 'fuzzy' and it often remains unclear who actually benefits from these processes (Zitcer, 2020). Moran & Beraby (2021) claim that such processes overemphasize democracy and progress while cloaking systemic injustices. To properly understand this argument, it is important to discuss sanctioned and unsanctioned forms of placemaking. Whereas sanctioned placemaking processes claim novel distributions of power, they do not fully commit to reimagination of power that leads to an actual inclusive representation and redistribution of resources. Sometimes citizens are invited to exert their agency over a space, but placemaking initiatives often ignore such expressions of inclusivity and do very little to address underlying structural inequities. Therefore, citizens engage in unsanctioned placemaking activities to exert influence and agency outside the formalized planning structures (Mayer, 2015; Moran & Berbary, 2021).

According to Moran & Beraby (2021) the 'spaces of hope' that sanctioned placemaking activities promise to create are only myths that maintain a capitalist status quo. An example is provided by Zuma & Rooijackers (2020) who address that sanctioned street art festivals often deliberately exclude local artists because inviting international artists with higher status attracts more tourists to the area. Sanctioned creative placemaking events increase the 'local buzz' (Harvey, 2000), making targeted areas fall prey to investment-hungry forces. Therefore, unsanctioned placemaking efforts increasingly emerge where citizens bundle their forces to actively contest this middleground hypocrisy. Such non-regulated initiatives are often produced by grassroot citizens who work together in broader social movements to transform spaces according to their own needs (Mould, 2014; Mayer, 2015). Their main goal is the creation of 'spaces of hope' that do not conform to sanctioned notions of agency and equity but rather direct attention to the creation of common areas in the city that contest gentrification and emphasize genuine forms of collaboration (Berfelde, 2021; Novy & Colomb, 2013). This has been described by Ostrom (1995) as 'commons' where natural resources are managed by collectives. However, this traditional approach does not take into account the possibilities for political mobilization of the commons. Villamayor-Tomas et al (2021) addresses that commons can break policy status quo's while at the same time produce alternatives for a socially just and ecologically friendly society. In the next section, I will delve deeper into the creation and mobilization of such 'commons' by focusing on commons and social movements and their struggle against the strong commercial interests of the creative city.

2.3 The Struggle for the Right to the Creative City in the Underground

Urban art has a longstanding tradition of challenging dominant narratives, giving voice to disenfranchised citizens and reclaiming urban spaces. Yet, because of the increased regulation and privatization of urban spaces, free-spirited public spaces in the creative city increasingly tend to disappear. Urban areas such as industrial quarters near the city center have become vacant and unused because of deindustrialization. These sites are referred to as transit zones, urban wastelands, brownfields, shadow cities, remnant spaces, ignored spaces or non-spaces (Verschelden et al., 2012). These areas show evidence of a colourful past but remain ignored in the present public use in the city. By appropriating and transforming such places without permission, activists and artists redefine them and therefore challenge the commodification of public spaces (d'Ovidio & Cossu, 2017). The production of 'commons' offers opportunities for encounter, reflection and action between creatives which stimulates the reimagination of how spaces in the creative city could be alternatively produced (Verschelden et al., 2012). In post-industrial cities, a growing number of social movements can be witnessed that occupy urban spaces to claim certain territories under threat of becoming reappropriated by municipalities for gentrification or regeneration purposes.

French philosopher Henri Lefevbre developed the concept of Right to the City (RTC) which describes the fight of residents for a right to a common and autonomous production of space (Berfelde, 2021). He claims that a different spatial production, one that does not rely on top-down capitalist production and reproduction, is possible. Many urban residents are motivated by this worldview and mobilize themselves to actively voice their concerns about capitalist injustices. Contemporary examples of such initiatives are Occupy movements, guerrilla gardening, subcultural graffiti, squatter movements and so forth (Iveson, 2013). All of these practices are driven by the collective belief of citizens that processes of displacement and gentrification destroy the possibility for the collective appropriation of space. It has long been believed that citizens can create meaningful public spaces by expressing their worldviews, declaring their claims, and using it for their own grounds. Yet, Zieleniec (2016) addresses that the right to access public space becomes increasingly influenced by restrictive conditions imposed by a strong neoliberal order. It is important to consider that public spaces are never totally fixed because of the symbiotic relations between the actors that produce them. As Zukin (1995: 10-11) puts it:

> "The right to be in these spaces, to use them in certain ways, to invest them with a sense of ourselves and our communities - to claim them as ours and to be claimed in turn by them - make up a constantly changing public culture […] The question of who can occupy public space, and so define an image of the city, is open-ended."

The merger of neoliberal policies with creative city policies made scholars question the open-ended nature discussed by Zukin (1995). These questions mostly concerned inclusivity, meaning whose voices and interests are prioritized in the production of space in contemporary cities. Critics emphasize that the creative city approach replicated a system of urban development that reinforces existing power relations in the city (Chatterton, 2000; Mould, 2016). The creative city did not create forms of social justice and equity as had been addressed by Florida (2002) and Landry (2012). This led to a new wave of civic activism among artists and other activists who fought together against the injustices that the creative city produced (Sager, 2016). Such coalitions rely on the establishment of 'tolerant identities' amongst heterogeneous groups drawn together under loosely defined concepts such as 'justice', 'equality' and 'democracy' (Novy & Colomb, 2013). This loose nature makes it possible for residents from various backgrounds to bundle their forces and establish a common objective (Ibid.). Most common objectives of social movements are directed towards creating common spaces that provide alternatives to market-driven urban development. The process of struggle that urban residents instigate to realize such objectives has been defined by Novy & Colomb (2013) as 'The Right to the Creative City' (RTCC).

Novy & Colomb (2013) were the first ones to talk about RTCC by contextualizing the struggles of grassroot citizens against the neoliberal production of space in the creative cities of Berlin and

Hamburg. They addressed that the subcultural scenes in both cities have increasingly been marketized to attract creative classes and that urban regeneration processes pressured the affordability of houses in the city. The study shows that artists play an important role in establishing a 'culture of resistance' through their capacity for public representation and communication skills. By occupying the last remaining buildings of the gentrified Gängviertel neighbourhood in Hamburg, artists pressured the city council to revise their regeneration plans. Artists succeeded in garnering support from famous personalities in the local cultural and artistic scene resulting in widespread media attention across the whole of Germany. At the same time, various cultural producers-turned-activists published a manifesto 'Not in our Name!' which contested Hamburg's growth-oriented image. Therefore, RTCC actors accomplished the development of an alternative future development plan for the area that focuses on democracy and inclusivity rather than market-oriented growth (Novy & Colomb, 2013). This is discussed by d'Ovidio & Cossu (2017) who address that grassroots social movements are not only contesting top-down creative city strategies but also offer a potential alternative to them.

Both social movements in the case studies of Novy & Colomb (2013) & d'Ovidio & Cossu (2017) gained a political voice that is being acknowledged at the local level. Through an ongoing struggle for their RTCC, both movements accomplished in getting political recognition. They have shown that resistance can be effective leading to a deliberative political environment where the local municipality and the social movements collectively discuss different uses of vacant lots and alternatives to gentrification. These negotiations should be seen as a step in the right direction when thinking about an inclusive and participatory-based creative city. Notwithstanding, social movements keep on running the risk that cultural production models generate processes of self-exploitation or further increase the possibility of co-optation by commercial or political actors (Uitermark, 2015; d'Ovidio & Cossu, 2017). Therefore, Lees et al (2021) emphasize the importance for anti-gentrification research to continue highlighting the individual and collective actions that resist gentrification and the inclusion of social movements in decision-making processes. Building on these theoretical pillars, in the next section I turn to my conceptual model.

2.4 Conceptual model

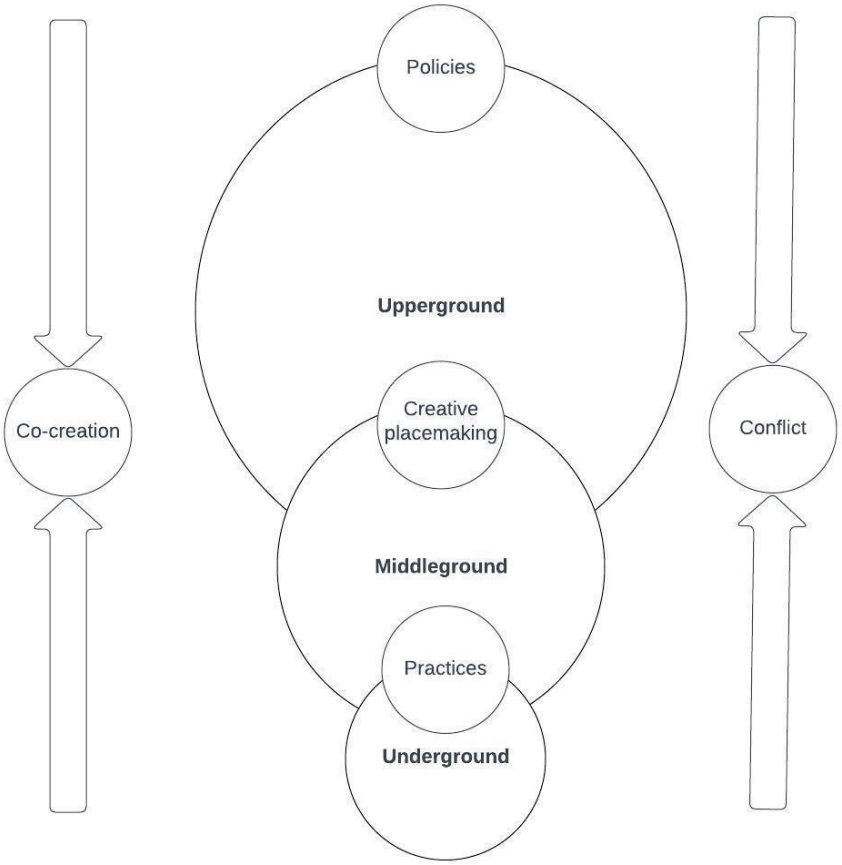

Figure 1 / Conceptual Model / Based on the anatomy framework of Cohendet et al (2010)

This conceptual model has been developed to connect the main theories in the literature review with the goal of answering the main research question. Several sources have been combined to disentangle the complexities of the production of space in the creative city. The anatomy framework of Cohendet et al (2010) is central to this research and dissects the creative city in three layers: the **upperground, middleground and underground**.

Underground culture focuses on explorative practices that are not necessarily driven by commercial logic (Schacter, 2015). Artists and activists are operating in their daily lives in this realm. The upperground of the creative city is characterized by the presence of large institutions that play a crucial role in bringing creative ideas to the market and developing creative city policies (Florida, 2005). To properly address to what extent the creative city upperground includes underground actors in their policies, creative placemaking has been positioned in the middleground. On the one hand, the middleground can encourage the production of spaces by co-creation. Such spaces could thrive through collaborations between various stakeholders to provide opportunities for artists, community groups and policymakers (Harvey, 2000; Hussler et al., 2022). They can foster pathways to an inclusive creative city where through deliberative democracy, alternatives to creative city policies and gentrification can be developed (Novy & Colomb, 2013). When underground actors are politically underrepresented, the middleground can transform into a conflicted arena where social movements challenge dominant power structures and narratives embodied by the upperground (Verschelden et al., 2012). Artists, activists, and cultural workers can use certain spaces to claim their RTCC and highlight social injustices emerging from processes of gentrification and urban regeneration (Berfelde, 2021). The tensions between the different layers will be further explored through a comparative case study. I will explain the methodological foundations of this research in the following section.

3: Methodology

This research follows two social scientific paradigms: the interpretivist paradigm and the critical urban theory paradigm. Within this chapter, the methodological and empirical underpinnings of this research will be substantiated. The different research strategies are logically flowing from the methodologies belonging to the paradigms. I conducted a comparative case study which aims to compare the policies and practices of two creative cities: Ghent and Groningen. As such, my research achieves triangulation by using three qualitative methods: walking interviews, document analysis and site visits. This methodology section comprises five subsections: research design, research methods, participant recruitment, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

3.1 Research design

This research uses a comparative case study design. A comparative research design appears as the most appropriate way to gain in-depth knowledge about a specific topic within a particular context of research (Hennink et. al., 2020). This study aims not to generalize the specific findings, but rather to ensure transferability and analytical generalization (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Additionally, a comparative case study approach is suitable to analyze commonalities and differences across local sites (Yin, 2012). Two sites were investigated in this study: the cities of Ghent and Groningen. Especially in comparative case studies, theoretical concepts are helpful to get to the unit of analysis (Yin, 2012). Previous case studies conducted by Berfelde (2021) & Campos & Barbio (2021) helped me to delineate the main theoretical concepts for this study. Whereas Campos & Barbio (2021) have focused on urban transformation from a top-down governance perspective, Berfelde (2021) adopted a bottom-up approach to the transformation of urban space in the creative city. The most important themes (e.g. RTCC, commons, production of space) addressed in both studies have been transferred and applied to this research context.

The first case study is Ghent, the capital of the province of East Flanders in Belgium. It is also the country's second-largest municipality with a population of 262,219 inhabitants. It is a historic port city situated at the junction of the rivers Lys and Scheldt. Ghent flourished during the Late Middle Ages, as the city was known throughout Europe for its textile industry and the artworks of painters like the ‘van Eyck brothers’. However, economic decline followed in the 16th century due to rebellions and loss of sea access to the French empire. The city experienced a revival in the late 19th century with an industrial boom, becoming a prominent center for textiles and international trade. In recent years, the global financial crisis impacted the city's industries, leading to closures and outsourcing of its industries. As of today, the city is known for its flourishing art scene and academies that produce world-famous street artists. The city uses its creative scene to develop a creative city image and transform unused industrial spaces. This is why Ghent (see Figure 2) has been chosen for a case study concerning the production of space in the creative city. Emphasis has been placed on two specific sites: 1) The Oude Dokken area (the upper circle) in the north-eastern part of the city and 2) Sorry Not Sorry street art festival (the lower circle) in the northern part of the inner city.

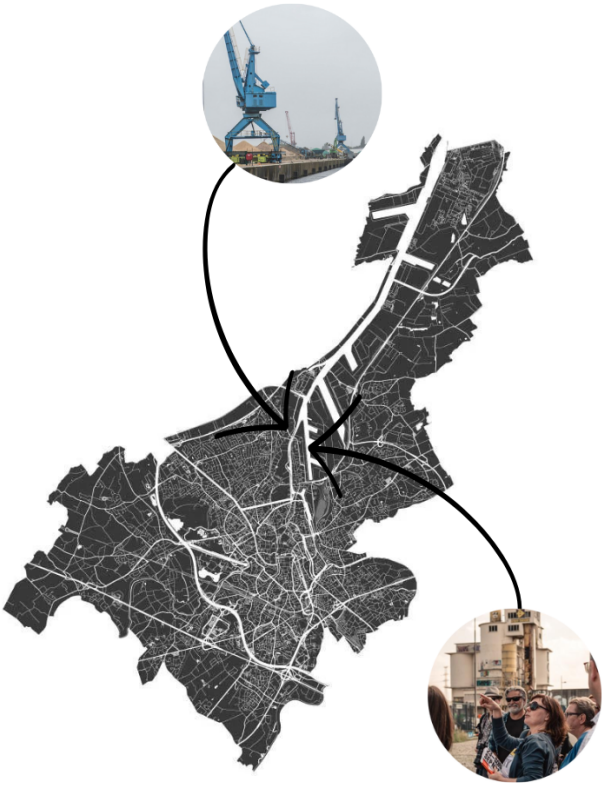

Figure 2: Case studies in Ghent / Made by author

The Oude Dokken neighbourhood is envisaged by urban artists as an important site because the various abandoned factory buildings function as playgrounds to develop their skills. The site is suitable to investigate because tensions develop among artists, activists, and city authorities regarding the future of the site and who gets the right to use this urban space in the near future. The Sorry Not Sorry street art festival in 2019 brought all these different creative city actors together in Oude Dokken. This event attracted a lot of attention from tourists, residents, journalists, and investors making it an interesting space for an analysis of the impact of urban art on urban development.

The second case study is Groningen, the largest city of the Groningen province in the Netherlands. Groningen is also known as the 'capital of the North' and with a population of 235,287 inhabitants, it is the sixth-largest city in the country. Groningen is recognized as a cultural and economic center, because of its status as a university city. The presence of the second oldest university in the Netherlands and a university of applied sciences contributes to a young demographic, with students comprising about 25% of the population. The art scene in Groningen has a history rooted in the avant-garde movement that flourished in the 1920s, with artists' collective 'De Ploeg' playing an important role in challenging limited artistic opportunities in the city at that time. Additionally, the city gained international recognition for its underground graffiti culture that emerged during the 1980s and 90s. The city of Groningen tries to pursue a creative city image by using creative city policies in its urban development strategies. For the city of Groningen, two sites have been selected in this study: 1) The Damsterdiep/Eemskanaal (the lower circle) area in the south-eastern part of the city and 2) The Aletta Jacobs mural (the upper circle) at the heart of the inner city.

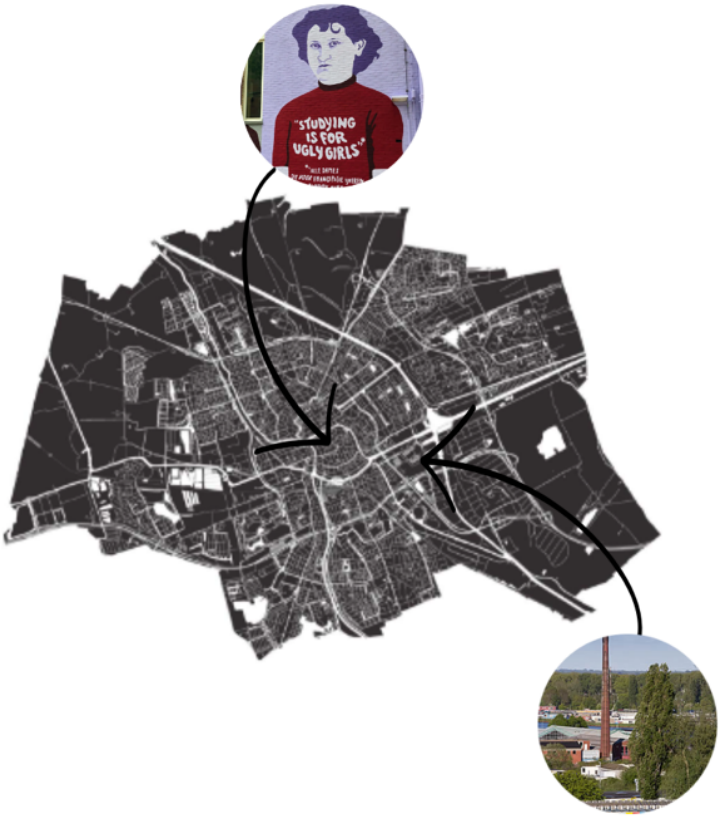

Figure 3: Case studies Groningen / Made by author

Both cases are important to the city for a couple of reasons. The Damsterdiep/Eemskanaal area is an old industrial quarter that is now an experimental space for artists and is currently being squatted by various urban residents. The municipality has developed plans for a complete redevelopment of the area. This leads to tensions among various creative city stakeholders which makes it an interesting case to analyze. The Aletta Jacobs mural has been chosen because it reflects the commercial side of urban art by being part of a wider city branding policy of the municipality. The mural is located at the university store adjacent to one of the busiest squares in the inner city making it an interesting space to investigate.

In this research, I analyzed RTCC claims of urban artists by focusing on their everyday experiences. Hay (2000) acknowledges that reality is constituted and shaped by multiple ontologies and situates the emic perspective through lived experiences of subjects at the forefront. Urban artists are not just one homogenous group but are composed of different groups with different worldviews. Therefore, lived experiences varied among participants making the interpretivist paradigm very suitable to work from. Walking interviews enabled me to delve into the experiences of participants concerning urban transformation in both cities. Through engaging with such lived experiences, this research aims to answer the following research question:

"How do the policies and practices of creative placemaking in Ghent and Groningen contribute to the formation of a creative city identity and the transformation of urban spaces, and how does this impact local communities and their right to the creative city?"

This research question encompasses the main aspects of this research including the historical engagement with urban art, creative city policies, the refashioning of the image of cities and city

branding, the production of space and regeneration plans and the impacts and resistance of impacted groups. Overall, this research question provides a comprehensive framework for my analysis.

Five sub-questions contribute to answering the main research question:

1) How and under which unique conditions did the urban art scene in the cities of Groningen and Ghent develop?
2) How have urban art policies and practices of Ghent and Groningen evolved over time?
3) How do the cities of Ghent and Groningen use urban art projects, such as the Sorry Not Sorry street art festival and the Aletta Jacobs mural project, to promote themselves as creative cities?
4) How does the redevelopment of post-industrial areas impact the relationship between urban art, community engagement, and commercial interests?
5) How do self-authorized artist commons resist the forces of gentrification and what impact does their resistance have on the production of urban space?

3.2 Research methods

This research uses triangulation to ensure scientific rigor and trustworthiness (Hay, 2000). The triangulation of methods is suitable for this research as Thurmond (2001) stresses that triangulation can reveal hidden meanings and provide a clearer understanding of the research problem. Therefore, three qualitative methods have been chosen: walking interviews, document analysis and site visits. These three methods will contribute to a multi-faceted assessment of the research question. How they complement each other is illustrated in Figure 4.

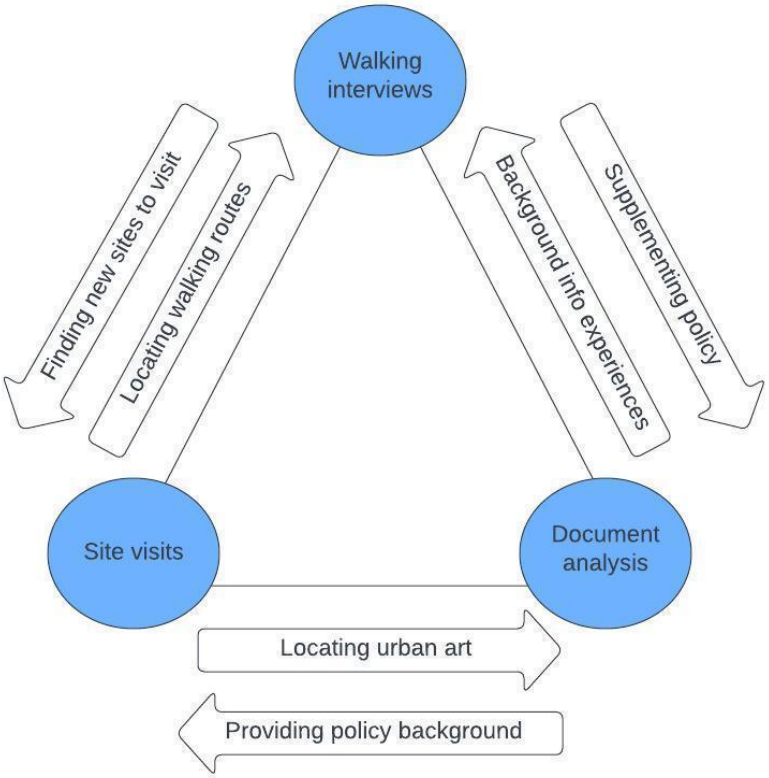

Figure 4: Triangulation / Made by author

Site visits and observations

Site visits were an important part of the research methodology, involving three visits to the city of Ghent, starting at the beginning of March and ending at the beginning of May. These visits served as an effective means to gather data in natural settings and to familiarize myself with the research environment. By observing the activities of street artists, site visits provided valuable primary data.

One of the main benefits of site visits was the identification and mapping of street artworks in both cities. I obtained street art maps from the tourism information desk that visually represented the locations where most street art could be found. By visiting these places, I created a field diary documenting the observed artworks and urban art forms that were not mentioned in the official street art maps. I included the signatures of artists that were written on the wall and noted these in my field diary. Collecting information on approximately 30 artworks per city allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of their spatial distribution. Observing several street art workshops during the site visits provided me with further insights. These workshops began typically with an urban art walking tour, where children were introduced to the purpose of art in public spaces. Relevant themes such as exclusion, racism, discrimination, and societal taboos were discussed in relation to art. The tours, combined with workshops, emphasized the transformative power of street art and its political implications. While the children engaged in creative activities, I had the opportunity to interact with urban artists. This helped me in gaining firsthand knowledge about their everyday experiences and the urban art scene in the city in general. In Ghent, I managed to join a walking tour facilitated by a guide from the platform 'Gentse Gidsen' while in Groningen, I used a self-guided street art map. These tours highlighted specific locations for street art and turned out to be playing a significant role in city branding. My field notes focused on the components of street art walking tours discussed by Andron (2018).

Walking interviews

The second method that this research adopts is the participant-led walking interview. I have been walking with street artists, graffiti writers and municipal officials alongside specific routes in each city. Each interview took about 1.5 hours, excluding the preparation beforehand. In total, 22 walking interviews (details of which are given later in this chapter) have been conducted in a time span of two months. Walking interviews have been proven suitable for this research for a couple of reasons.

The participant-driven aspect of this walk-along method directly contests the street art walking routes that have been developed by the tourism department of the municipality. According to Jones et al (2008), participant-led walking interviews provide agency to participants as they can choose their own routes which empowers them. This has been substantiated by Gröschel (2015) who stresses that walking interviews place participants in a more powerful position as they feel more in control because they can choose their own routes and sites. This stands in direct opposition to sedentary interviews that do not share these benefits. However, there are also limitations to the usage of walk-along methods. Walking interviews become difficult when they are being held in places with restricted access (Gröschel, 2015). Since most walking interviews were in the inner city, various external factors influenced the natural flow of the conversation such as weather conditions and public transit. According to Vannini & Vannini (2017), social researchers should make alternative plans to deal with such disturbances. Therefore, if the weather conditions were very bad, the interview could begin inside a restaurant. Fortunately, this only happened once as there were mostly sunny days when I conducted the interviews.

According to Liamputtong (2019) walking interviews are helpful in another way as they produce different kinds of information compared to stationary interview methods. Research participants are stimulated by the multi-sensory and three-dimensional nature of places. Therefore, walking interviews can create additional insights in comparison to interviews in a rather fixed research environment (Butler & Derrett, 2014). Because this research is centered around the transformation of urban space through urban art, walking with artists alongside multiple spaces elicited rich responses. Just like Degen & Rose (2012), the memories of participants play an important role in this research. While walking with participants through the researched environment, certain artworks or places within the city provoked unique responses tied to their personal experiences. This discourse led to agreements

and disagreements between me and the participants which touches upon the third advantage of the walking interview method: building rapport. According to Gröschel (2015), walking and talking with participants encourage the development of positive social connections through sharing space, time, and experiences collectively. Walking with participants is viewed as a partnership and reduces power imbalances. Moreover, it allows participants to feel more comfortable because it is conducted in a geographical area that they are familiar with (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010).

Document analysis

The third method of this research is document analysis which underpins underlying meanings and power relations in creative policy documents. Document analysis could provide background and context information for a research case study (Bowen, 2009). Four documents provided specific background information to the case studies chosen in this research. All of the documents have been selected on the basis of the recommendation of participants and can be found in Table 1.

Name Document	Location	Substantiation choice
Nieuw Leven in Oude Dokken (2023)	Ghent	Provides in-depth information about the redevelopment of the Oude Dokken harbour area including valuable information about creative city policies and practices.
Concrete Playground (2022)	Ghent	Provides an in-depth account about the rise and fall of an important self-organization creative space for graffiti and street artists at Oude Dokken. Important to understand urban art in deindustrializing cities and the local art scene in Ghent.
Cultuurnota Kunst en Cultuur voor iedereen (2021-2024)	Groningen	Provides a comprehensive overview of the municipal policies and budgets reserved for graffiti and street art in the public space of Groningen. Important to understand the financial side of creative placemaking.
Stadshavens Omgevingsplan (2023)	Groningen	Provides a comprehensive overview of the Stadshavens redevelopment plan including valuable information about the creative city policies and practices.

Table 1 / Document analysis table / Made by author

3.3 Participant recruitment

Participant recruitment is an important aspect in qualitative research and requires careful consideration. Accessing participants for research purposes is often problematic if the sample is seen as vulnerable or the research topic that is being investigated is difficult to access in nature (Browne, 2005). Within this research, graffiti writers and street artists were difficult to reach. Previous studies have already addressed the closed-off nature of street art and graffiti subcultures because of their focus on anonymity (Hughes, 2009). Hence, I had to find creative ways to get access to the participants to reach a sufficient sample size.

The first strategy used in this research is gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is a process in which researchers are permitted access to a research environment under investigation and to the participants in that specific setting (Dempsey et al., 2016). It is important to stress that gatekeeping means more than meeting the right people that can open certain doors. Including gatekeepers can ensure greater influence and hence increase the validity of the research by their acceptance of it (Ibid.). Nevertheless, gatekeeping comes with problems of representativity and bias since gatekeepers may have their own personal reasons for referring or not referring the researcher to participants (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Therefore, gatekeeping strategies in this research have primarily been used as a stepping stone in securing access to urban artists via contacting several creative organizations. In both cities, various organizations served as important intermediaries between me and the artists. I started noticing that long emails did not work as I encountered much nonresponse. Therefore, I developed a poster that

briefly informed the scope and purpose of my research (see Appendix V). The use of this poster benefited the response rate as I have seen an increase in response rates and willingness to cooperate.

The second strategy used to gather participants is snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a method of gathering certain details to access specific groups of people (Naderifar et al., 2017). After every walking interview, I asked urban artists if they knew other artists that would be open to participating in this research. This aligns with the snowball sampling technique where a researcher starts identifying participants based on desired criteria and then asks them to recruit other participants that possess the same criteria (Parker et al., 2019). Therefore, urban artists that have been working together with other artists were forwarded to me. One problematic aspect of this is highlighted by Cohen & Arieli (2011) who stress that relying on referrals could lead to the exclusion of individuals who are not affiliated with the specific theme that is being accessed. I tried to minimize this selection bias by contacting a lot of different artists such as illegal graffiti artists, stencil artists, illegal street artists and so forth. I did this by contacting them via Instagram, a technique that similarly has been used by Heck (2021). In this way, I tried to create a heterogenous sample to increase the representativity and validity of this research.

Pseudonym name	City	Occupation
Edson	Ghent	Legal street artist
Peter	Ghent	Municipal street art guide
Nina	Ghent	Legal graffiti artist
Bram	Ghent	Municipal planner
Chris	Ghent	Creative placemaker
Brian	Ghent	Legal street artist
Emma	Ghent	Legal street artist
John	Ghent	Street art expert
Daniel	Ghent	Legal street artist
Paul	Ghent	Legal street artist
Matthew	Ghent	Museum director
Tom	Groningen	Legal street artist
Marya	Groningen	Legal street artist
Winston	Groningen	Illegal/legal graffiti artist
Hans	Groningen	Legal street artist
Karin	Groningen	Municipal planner
Azra	Groningen	Legal street artist
Remco	Groningen	Illegal graffiti artist
Boris	Groningen	Legal street artist
Koen	Groningen	Graffiti expert
Tonnes	Groningen	Illegal/legal graffiti artist
Bert	Groningen	Legal street artist
Brad	Groningen	Creative placemaker

Table 2: Research participants / Made by the author

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethics pertain to doing the right thing and avoiding harm as much as possible. Harm can be prevented by or reduced through the application of several ethical principles. The protection of human subjects or participants in any research should be imperative (Orb et al., 2001). In this research, there are various ethical considerations that need to be considered.

The abovementioned ethical norms of voluntary participation and minimizing harm have become consolidated by the concept of informed consent (Babbie, 2020: p.63). Informed consent respects the rights and autonomy of participants which allows them to make better decisions about participation in the research. Moreover, emphasizing informed consent throughout the research can help in building rapport between the researcher and participants. This can lead to improved communication, which can result in richer and more valuable data (Clifford et al., 2008). In this research, a letter of informed consent has been developed and consent has been secured according to the principles described by Sin (2005). All participants in this study have been informed about the confidential treatment of the data before the interview took place. Participants have been asked if the purpose and requirements of the interview were clear and if he or she required more information before starting. If the participants were satisfied and felt comfortable enough to proceed, they would fill out the consent form. In addition to the consent form, explicit consent was asked before the interview was going to take place on the audio recorder. Before the interview would take place, the interviewee had been explicitly informed about their rights to stop the interview at any given time and not have to answer certain questions. This has been emphasized because signing a consent form does not include the potentially harmful aspects of qualitative interviewing (Gray, 2020). Thus, by protecting participants against harm via verbal and informed consent the ethical norms of avoiding harm are being respected.

Storing qualitative data on external accounts or clouds may leave the data vulnerable and unprotected. Hence, for storing the data, the chosen approach of my research aligns with Buchanan & Zimmer (2012) who stress that saving the recorded interviews on the researchers' private and secure account of the academic institution enhances participants' confidentiality. The primary data has been recorded via an audio recorder which soon after the interviews has been uploaded to my laptop. By storing the recorded data of the walking interviews on my RUG account, the obtained primary data has been carefully taken care of. Fink (2003) addresses that storing the data on the researchers' computers also brings some limitations. Data risks obsolescence due to a sudden change in software or program versions might lead to a loss of data. Therefore, a backup of the qualitative data has been made on my personal email which is only accessible to me. According to Fink (2003), another way in which harm can be minimized through data management is by storing the transcripts in such a way that all the names and other personal information is left out of the transcripts. To respect the anonymity of the participants, it is, therefore, necessary to leave out personal information or information that could be traced back to the participant (Clifford et al., 2015; Fink, 2003). Many urban artists wished to remain anonymous and were in the first place suspicious of my intentions. I promised that nothing they would say to me could be turned against them and stressed that the research is strictly confidential. To accommodate their needs, personal information shared or information about themselves has been left out of the transcripts.

3.5 Data analysis

The following section focuses on the interpretation of the collected primary data. This data has been obtained from the walking interviews, field notes and document analyses. After several reviewal rounds, the open coding of the data has helped me in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data. After review, I have labelled segments of the data that have been relevant to my research question. This phase consisted of descriptive and interpretive codes that reflected the main idea of this research. Eventually, through thematic coding various overarching themes have been found that embodied the main concepts and contributed in highlighting the main findings of this study.

A deductive coding scheme has been developed that contributed to properly answering the research question (See Figure 5). The threefold structure from Cohendet et al (2010) has also been adopted in the scheme to clarify the relations among actors involved in creative placemaking. The main gist of this coding structure is to see whether experiences in placemaking projects with urban art differ among individuals represented in different layers of the creative city. The code 'Perception of value' has been used to address how various actors envision the role and value of urban art in public space. Additionally, the perception of agency refers to the agency and power relations within placemaking

processes. This relates mostly towards the literature described in critical theory concerning the production of space and the right to the city.

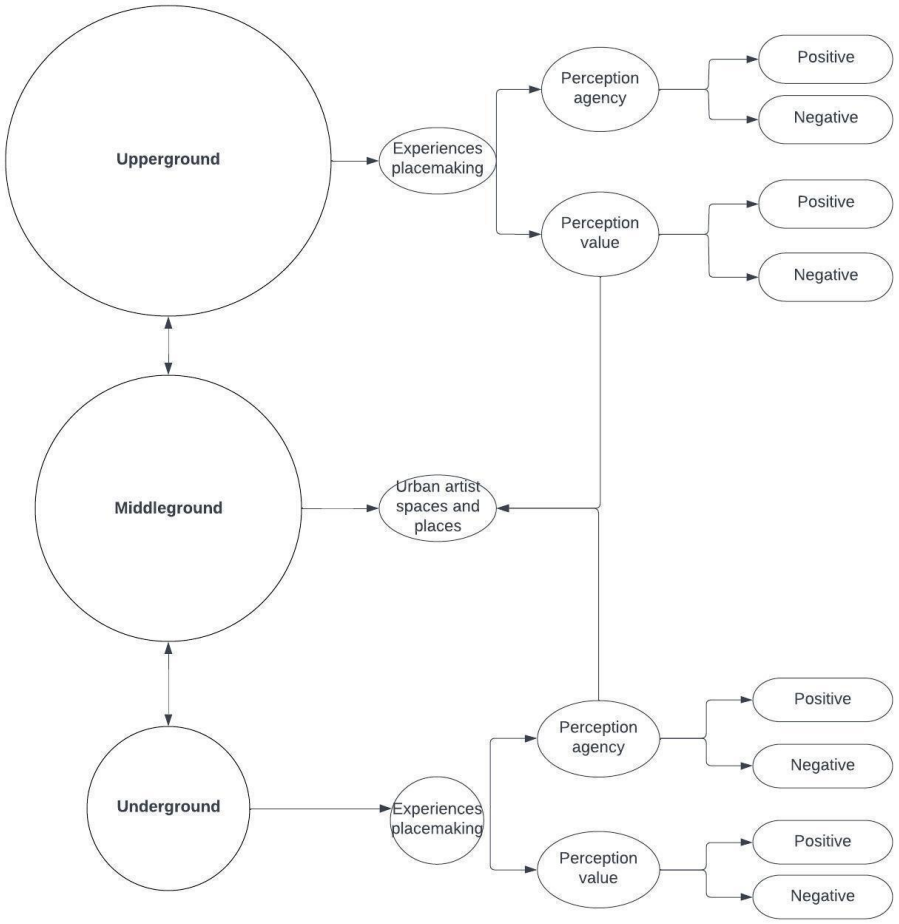

Figure 5: Coding scheme / Made by the author

Additionally, inductive codes emerged after various rounds of revision of the primary data. The most important inductive codes that emerged are Betoncentrale, Oude Dokken, Nieuwe Dokken, Cova Factory, Betonbos, City Nomads, Werregarenstraat, Sorry Not Sorry festival, Aletta Jacobs mural and squatting, inclusive creative city. The participant-led aspect of the walking interviews resulted in the discovery of various creative spaces in both cities. For example, squatting has not been my primary emphasis but many of the interviewees in Groningen addressed their engagement in squatting and other anti-gentrification practices within the contemporary creative city. This is why I included the theme of squatting as an inductive code after reviewing the transcripts.

4: Results

The walking interviews with the participants in this study led me to discover unique stories about urban transformation in both cities. The transition from an industrial city to a post-industrial city has been noticed by many of the urban artists I spoke to. Two areas were constantly referred to by the interviewees. In Ghent, the Concrete Factory, an industrial landmark in the Oude Dokken neighbourhood, has been perceived as the foundation of the urban art scene in the city. At the same time, the participants in Groningen guided me to the COVA factory located in the Damsterdiep-Eemskanaal area. Many urban artists in Groningen painted in this factory and the remaining buildings have been regarded as important cultural and artistic heritage. Currently, both industrial sites are targeted for gentrification and urban renewal which led to immediate concerns

among artists about preservation, affordability, and displacement. The eradication of such common spaces, in which artists could develop a sense of social and spatial solidarity, has been perceived as worrisome. The increased pressure on public and common spaces is part and parcel of the creative city policies which both cities in this study have started to develop. The tensions emerging between the production of common spaces by artists versus the production of commercial spaces by municipalities should be seen as the main gist of this analysis. I will discuss this through the eyes of the artists and urban planners. These stories are backed up by relevant information obtained from the document analysis.

4.1 Urban art in the industrial city: the story of the Concrete Factory in Ghent

The Inter-Beton concrete factory located at the harbour area of Ghent had to cease its operations around the turn of the millennium as part of a wider restructuring program. This was symptomatic of Europe's declining industry and the general shift in Western cities towards the knowledge sector economy. Not long after the company ceased operations, the site had been completely abandoned as the municipality had not been able to develop a destination plan for the site in the years following its closure. Therefore, after a prolonged state of uncertainty, the underground community of Ghent took matters into their own hands and started occupying the area transforming it into an interesting liminal space: a deserted land of possibilities. Around the year 2010, squatters occupied the site and welcomed visitors with a banner stating: *'This is squatted terrain, respect our privacy. So, stay out of our garden. For photos or graffiti, ask the residents first. Go away!'* (Langeraert et al., 2022). Many squatters, punks, gipsies, artists and other subcultural actors lived collectively in and around the factory and therefore it grew out to be a melting pot of creativity and resistance. The site has been known for the active cooperation between a wide variety of people with all kinds of crafts which led to a vibrant place. Nobody was meant to visit the area except for the people occupying the no-man's-land. Figure 6 (left) shows the squatters in the fabric and in Figure 7 (right) you can see the paintings on the factory walls.

Figure 6 & 7: The Concrete Factory in Ghent / Verstraete (z,d.)

The Concrete Factory has been regarded as a creative playground both for local and international artists. These artworks did not always get the same attention as murals located directly in the city center but the creative possibilities of this space were tremendous (Langeraert et al., 2022). This is

mostly because the heterogeneous, large surfaces challenged artists in their work which gave them an extra creative impulse. Urban art was roaming free and the empty silos and crumbling stairwells became an integral part of the atmosphere of the factory site. The beauty of urban decay and other aesthetic qualities hold a similar attraction for urban artists who increasingly started to act as urban explorers by discovering deserted places to paint. For many artists, meeting up with other artists and working in the same space is part of the joy of painting. Inspiration flowed from one artist to the next as part of the spontaneous process of creativity and play. Painting at the Concrete Factory also meant that artists could develop their skills and competencies. Among some of the first local artists painting at the Concrete Factory were Bué The Warrior, ROA, Phase, Sam Scarpulla and Resto who are now seen as pioneers in the urban art scene in Belgium. Street artist ROA started painting on the walls of the factory and became one of the most famous street artists around the world. When asking graffiti artist Chris about the impact of the Concrete Factory on the urban art scene in Ghent he stated the following:

> *"It was a very big thing. It was near the water. On one side you had the concrete plant and on the other side the gravel pits. Gravel was stored there and could then be moved upwards with the crane. This is how concrete could be made. There were two companies located there, traditional port companies. Graffiti was being done instantly. There was nothing there and people had no reason to be there at all. Certainly not on the concrete plant side. So people could paint there constantly. ROA has grown big there. It was actually a kind of tolerance zone. No official tolerance zone but better there than painting in the city." (Interview dated 06/04/2023)*

As Chris elaborated, the location of the site was convenient because it was located far away from the outside world. Since the city of Ghent steadily expanded, many of the harbour activities have been relocated further northwards. This meant that older harbour areas, such as Oude Dokken, started to lose their initial function and therefore became abandoned. These sites of urban decay attracted all kinds of subcultural actors around that time. The paradox is that such places can only exist by the grace of parties who do not see the usefulness of the place at that particular moment. Increased attention is directed towards the management and preservation of industrial heritage all over Flanders (Langeraert et al., 2022). However, the Concrete Factory in Ghent just missed that boat. In September 2020, many of the urban artists got the chance to say their final goodbyes and did this by climbing on top of the factory and enjoying the view over the city for the last time.

Figure 8: Final goodbyes / Source: Staes, 2020

In January 2021, the curtain officially fell for the graffiti paradise located in the Oude Dokken neighbourhood. The demolition provoked many emotional reactions among urban artists in the city. Many could not understand the decision of the municipality and referred to the city of Oostende which spends a fortune every year on expensive street art festivals. The Concrete Factory was not like that in their opinion. It was an accessible and free tourist attraction which attracted many people throughout the year. It has been a victim of a time when the idea of non-regulated creative spaces in the city is increasingly becoming obsolete.

4.2 Urban art in the industrial city: The story of the COVA factory in Groningen

The city of Groningen has seen a lot of industrial activity throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and had various industrial areas that were located on the outskirts of the city. One of the industrial zones is the Damsterdiep-Eemskanaal area with important factories such as Elevator Maatschappij Groningen (EMG), the Oliefabriek and the COVA car tyres factory. This resulted in a large industrial conglomeration alongside the Eemskanaal that significantly contributed to the local and regional economy in the first half of the 20th century. However, the industrial terrain, which used to be on the outskirts of the city, has been overtaken by the same city that is expanding at an increasing pace. After waves of deindustrialization, many of the industries started to leave the area while the fabrics remained. At first glance, these places can feel like deteriorated places that are neglected, dirty and do not add any additional value to the city. Nevertheless, when looking more closely, it are these unregulated and organically produced places where creativity allows it to grow. Graffiti artists in the 1980s and 90s painted in and around this factory on the remaining industrial buildings. Over time, the COVA factory developed into an important place for graffiti artists to paint and practice. Figure 9 shows the paintings on the factory walls.

Figure 9: Graffiti paintings on the COVA factory walls / (Mapio, z,d.)

What this Figure shows is a palimpsest, layers where graffiti writers from different times express themselves creatively. What should be understood is that a wall or a building is not static but rather part of a continuous urban landscape. This directly opposes the art displayed in museums, galleries or exhibition halls which is subject to the limitations of fixed framing. Graffiti pioneers such as Pinox, Pongo and others started their urban art careers in this abandoned factory. Just like the Concrete Factory, the COVA factory gradually evolved into a hotspot for urban artists. During a walk in

Groningen, former graffiti artist Tonnes elaborated on his experiences at the COVA factory. He referred to the COVA factory and EMG silos as 'Hall of Fames' in the city which functioned as a springboard for unknown urban graffiti artists:

> *"One of them was an old factory with silos. It was somewhere near the Damsterdiep, towards the water. Those were two gigantic buildings and I used to go there as a little boy. Dangerous property. Metal stairs without banisters went up to three floors. Then you had a plateau and then you had people who were spraying there. As a 16-year-old boy, that made quite an impact on me." (Interview dated 15/05/2023)*

According to Tonnes, the COVA factory was accessible to anyone in the city that loved to paint. The camaraderie between the various artists in this place marked the beginning of an internationally recognized graffiti scene in Groningen. It served as an artistic commons since people would come there together from all ages to paint and be creative. It is a poster child example of how urban artists claim and reappropriate a place that nobody seems interested in. Just as nature takes over in places where man disappears, so the man takes over its environment when certain parties stay away. As soon as there is money to be made again, these places are dissolved and often are transformed into something new while displacing their original users.

4.3 Marginalization and embrace of urban art in policy and practice

In 2009, the city of Ghent officially joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. This led the municipality to develop a mission to 'harness all creative forces in the city, to increase our opportunities' (Anheier & Isar, 2012 p. 129). This objective has been difficult to realize as the artistic communities in Ghent perceived this as an opportunity for the municipality to gain grant support. This suspicion is grounded in the core values of the subcultural scene in Ghent and their deep roots in the city. The municipality faces problems with how to properly position itself towards the cultural underground scene because of its independent status. Planner Bram addressed that the municipality has a clear policy on graffiti called 'drie sporen beleid' (three-track policy) which is aimed at erasing, preventing, and facilitating (Stad Gent, 2022). The first track revolves around sanctioning graffiti artists and the second around erasing unsanctioned forms of graffiti. The city works with an integrated approach which conjoins the forces of various departments of the municipality. The continuous hunt on graffiti artists led to tensions between the city and the graffiti scene. These tensions accumulated in 2011 when the widely respected graffiti artist Phase got caught by public authorities and had to stand trial for several illegal tags in the inner city. He was sentenced to four months in jail and had to pay a fine of over 4000 euros (Nieuwsblad, 2011). The graffiti scene reacted to the sentencing of Phase by tagging their names on every possible place they could find in the city center. I spoke to Planner Bram who works at the city of Ghent and acknowledged that repressing graffiti practices had not been effective. This is why the municipality started paying more attention to developing policies around the third track. This track focuses on the provision of legal zones for graffiti artists to paint freely. While graffiti remains illegal, the production of such regulated spaces symbolizes how the city of Ghent aims to facilitate spaces where graffiti artists are allowed to paint.

Producing legal zones shows the goodwill of the city to accommodate urban artists. This embrace of graffiti reflects that the city aims at engaging with the cultural subcultures and tries to facilitate spaces accordingly. When talking with planner Bram, he emphasized the third track of the policy:

> *"You should always think about places where people can practice in the city. We try to help upcoming artists by producing legal zones because we want the artistic level in the city to grow. There is always a new stream of artistic talent from our art academies. At the end of the ride, they should be able to exhibit their art." (Interview dated 08/05/2023)*

There is a lot to decipher in this statement of Bram. First and foremost, the municipality shows goodwill in helping the new generations of urban artists by actively thinking about the provision of new spaces. By facilitating certain walls in and around the city, they attempt to create a podium for

beginning artists. There is also a clear statement on quality since the emphasis is placed on the new stream of artistic talent *from the art academies* in Ghent. Whereas Ghent receives a lot of creative influx from the art academies, many graffiti artists articulated their discontent against the general view that art and artists must come from academies. Both legal and illegal artists that I spoke to did not necessarily want to be associated with the art methodologies preached by the teachers working in the academies. Graffiti artist Edson stresses:

> *"My girlfriend comes from the academy and they emphasize that you have to promote yourself much more and incorporate your feelings into it. They work much more on commission and prepare you for them. That's definitely nothing for me." (Interview dated 01/04/2023)*

According to Edson, the academy teaches you how to sell your work and prepares you to satisfy the needs of potential clients. The cultural department of the city works together with upcoming artists from the academy aiming to accommodate them in the beginning of their artistic careers with assignments in which artists can practice working for a client. Bram told me that the municipality has short lines of communication with both art academies: Sint Lukas and Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten (KASK). The annual stream of artists comes from the academy, eager to promote their artwork on the city walls. When it comes to street art, the city works together with various non-profit organizations in the underground founded by artists themselves. The most important organizations in Ghent are: Wallin' and KAPOW. These companies work neatly together with the municipality and academies to encourage the development of street art in public spaces. Yet, whereas street artists who study at the academies get a podium provided by the city, graffiti artists are excluded. This became clear when discussing this issue of graffiti with graffiti artist Chris. He clearly states that there is a lack of knowledge of the municipality when it comes to the provision of legal graffiti spaces in the city:

> *"Yes, a new space has been added. The city has cleared a space on the Afrikalaan.. A good example of how the city tries to think of a solution yet not realizing that it is not really a solution. The gravel pits at the Concrete Factory were quite private. You had to walk in there and those walls made you feel like you were locked up. Compared to the Werregarenstraat legal space.. If you hold two spray cans, there are 20 Japanese tourists taking pictures. Then you have a lot more peace at the gravel pits. And you could paint a much larger work there. That new wall on the Afrikalaan is only two meters high and in the busiest street of Ghent! You're standing there painting and it's just too loud. Everyone passes and looks at you, not ideal." (Interview dated 06/04/2023)*

Embedded in the statement of Chris is a clear nostalgia towards the Concrete Factory. Since the factory was located outside the city center, painting there has been perceived as more pleasant by the artists. The alternatives facilitated by the municipality are not in line with the needs and expectations of the graffiti artists that I spoke to. Many of the spaces facilitated by the municipality are in places where a lot of people can see the graffiti artists at work, something which directly conflicts with the core value of anonymity in the graffiti subculture. This is why most of the graffiti artists went back to the site where the Concrete Factory once stood and used the remaining gravel pits to paint on. Therefore, they transformed three abandoned industrial gravel pits into an urban art practice ground at the site of the demolished Concrete Factory (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Gravel pits near Concrete Factory / Source: PZC, 2022

As can be seen in Figure 10, the gravel pits were particularly popular among urban artists. The pits and cranes that are visible in the picture have been the only remnants of the demolished factory. The gravel pits are particularly convenient for artists because of the large and deep surfaces that make it perfect for painting larger works. As could be seen in the picture, there are not only graffiti artists but also street artists coming together in the same space. These spaces were perceived as important spaces in the community of artists because they succeeded in bringing together different subcultural actors and illustrated the potential of having non-regulated spaces of creativity in the city. They remind urban artists that there are still spaces in the city that are untouched by the market-oriented growth schemes pushed by the municipality. Just like the Concrete Factory, the gravel pits are time capsules where urban artists collectively can escape the commodification of public spaces and the wider art scene.

The city of Groningen developed a clear policy when it comes to graffiti removal. This policy was developed in 2004 and is titled '*het huiskamerproject*' (the living room project) which aims at erasing unwanted graffiti on several streets in the inner city. The municipality acknowledges graffiti as a problem but is slowly initiating a change of approach. The policy document on urban cultural development 'Cultuurnota 2021-2024' defines the short-term policy goals of the city when it comes to art in public space. In the document, a clear emphasis is placed on facilitating urban artists and transforming public space into a podium for artists: 'for the upcoming years we aim to give more attention to other forms of art and culture in public space, for example, poetry on facades and temporary street art and graffiti projects.' (Gemeente Groningen, 2020: p.18). Additionally, more attention is directed towards creating legal zones in the city for graffiti artists (Gemeente Groningen, 2020: p.131).

For the provision of urban art, the municipality works together with the organization Noordstaat Groningen which describes itself on its website as 'artists accelerators'. They promote upcoming artists in the city by connecting urban artists to various podiums and festivals. Out of this cooperation, various legal zones have been established in the city where graffiti artists can work without any legal consequences. There are currently 4 legal zones in Groningen: the bicycle tunnel under the Noordzeebrug, the Reitdiephaven, van Iddekingeweg and the workman's hut of Iederz. Despite the provision of these legal walls, graffiti artists articulated their discontent when it comes to the quality of these areas. When walking and talking with illegal graffiti artist Remco, he emphasized the following:

> *"I would love to see more and nicer legal spots in the city. But, more like what COVA or Ciboga were. Now all the legal spots in Groningen.. You are standing somewhere in the cold under a viaduct, always a little bit loud. COVA was really nice, you had an open space, people*

came there to play. There was way more interaction with people looking at the works. There were a lot of people that loved art and just walked there to talk with artists. And under the fucking viaducts I never have that, people are just honking their cars all the time. Giving extra gas. It is not nice to stand there, it is always cold in the shade." (Interview dated 26-04-2023)

Just like Chris, a similar nostalgia could be felt when walking with Remco. Graffiti artists in Groningen negatively perceived the legal graffiti spots because of their specific location in the city. Remco shares that the spots are mostly in noisy areas. Tucked away under viaducts and bicycle tunnels, graffiti artists feel that they have literally been placed in the shadow of other artforms in the city. On a much larger scale, the municipality of Groningen has developed certain policies in favor of street art in public space. One of these policies is the City of Talent, an accord between the municipality, the Hanzehogeschool and University of Groningen to jointly invest 1.5 billion euros in knowledge sectors and local innovation networks (Beaumont & Yildiz, 2017). This agreement prioritizes three elements: city marketing, cross-pollination between knowledge sector institutions and source points where the municipality offers physical space for entrepreneurship and creative use (Ibid.). The municipality has favoured street art as a tool to beautify public spaces over graffiti but also uses street art for refashioning the image of the city.

4.4 Urban art in the post-industrial city: City branding

Groningen aims to be seen as a 'City of Talent'. Various cultural institutions have been thinking of strategies to sell this image to the wider public. One way in which the municipality has tried to do this is by working in conjunction with the University of Groningen to find ways to express the importance of the scientific community to the city. Since Groningen is a student city, science has been an important cornerstone on which the city has been built. Kunstpunt, a delegation of the cultural department of the municipality, started a commissioning process to search for suitable street artists to produce portraits of important historical scientific Figures in prominent places in the inner city. One of the most important historical Figures was Aletta Jacobs, the first woman that had been accepted to study at a university in the Netherlands. This has been the first mural in a longer sequence of portraits of historically important Figures. The University of Groningen has been the main commissioner of the Aletta Jacobs mural. The female street art duo VAAF had been commissioned to develop the mural because of their well-developed portfolio. By the 23rd of May 2022, the mural on the wall of the University store had been finished and presented to the wider public (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Aletta Jacobs mural in Groningen / Source: The author

In its early days, the mural received a lot of negative attention mostly coming from established professors in academia. One of the most prominent criticisms related to the fact that the quote on Aletta her t-shirt could be perceived as demoralizing for insecure students. Other critics addressed the quote 'Studying is for ugly girls' as a 'misquote' because this never has been said by Aletta herself but by a colleague of hers from the University of Leiden (Ukrant, 2022). Many critics argued that the current quote is not doing justice to the legacy of Aletta Jacobs in the city and stressed that she rather should be remembered via 'a statement worthy of the role model Jacobs is for so many women and girls' (Ukrant, 2022). I have spoken with Marya, who openly talked about the mural and how she perceived the critical opinions that emerged after the realization of the project. In the interview, she states the following:

> *"People started saying: why do you have to put the quote of a reactionary man on her shirt and not a nice quote from Aletta herself? But then I think by myself, you don't understand the point of art. Who is ever going to look at the mural then? And it is weird to put such a flat and empty statement in such a prominent place. I find this quote much more powerful. I want people to realize that this was said to her back then." (Interview dated 21/04/2023)*

Marya addressed the freedom given to her by the university and the municipality in the commissioning process which led to the idea of adding the quote. The main argument of Marya related to the fact that she did not attempt the mural to be a historical record. After all, she is an artist and not a historian. Marya also stated that she wanted the mural to stir up debate concerning female emancipation and social justice. This has definitely succeeded since she garnered local, regional and even national media attention. The public dissensus that emerged reflects the mural's quality to provoke opinions when it comes to refashioning the identity of the city. Highlighting emancipation and social justice stipulates

that the city wants to be seen as a progressive city and this mural helps with radiating this message. The power of art comes to light since the people that disagreed with the message of the mural inevitably had to delve deeper into the local history to substantiate their arguments. This shows that murals could engender a sense of belonging amongst the citizens in Groningen as they all care about the image of the city. The media frenzy after the mural had been produced encouraged many people to actively engage with the site. Marya told me that many women that graduate, take pictures in front of her mural as a sign of pride. Additionally, there is a strong political element that remains because the mural attracts social movements and protest groups who use the site to voice their political concerns through activist slogans. Marya defined this as the 'honeypot effect' (See Figure 12-14).

Figure 12, 13 & 14: Activism and city branding in Groningen / Sources: UKrant, 2022 and the author

The Figures above show the interaction of people that engaged with the mural in public space to voice their political messages. The first picture has been mentioned by Marya and voices a general critique of the quote on the T-shirt of Aletta Jacobs. A similar action can be seen on the second picture, where the activist party '*slimme meiden, domme tijden*' (smart girls, dumb times) crossed the 'ugly' and placed an A4 with the message 'it is time for cultural change' (Ukrant, 2022). The last Figure shows that the mural has been plastered by pictures of Susanne Taüber with the text #AmInext?. Taüber has been a professor at the university who got fired because of addressing the theme of social safety within academic environments. All of the aforementioned accounts carry the underlying notion that branding the city through urban art can be a conflictual process where the political, social and cultural viewpoints on how to refashion the city's image differ among a large number of people.

A suitable example of how the municipality of Ghent works on city branding is by organizing street art festivals. The Sorry Not Sorry (SNS) street art festival is an annually recurring event that is designated to downwards spiralling neighbourhoods in the city. Street art festivals promote urban creativity, social engagement, and cultural expression. The second and third editions of the festival have been held in the neighbourhood Oude Dokken with the aim to revitalize the area by breathing new life into the place. The SNS festival is part of a longer lineage of endorsements for urban art in the city of Ghent. Graffiti jams, cultural workshops, performances, urban sports and art installations are all part of the celebration of culture and urban creativity. One of the ways in which the city tries to promote street art is through the development of a street art map. The 'Sorry Not Sorry street art map' was developed in 2016 and is updated after every street art festival. Hundreds of street artworks are mapped out in the urban environment of Ghent. These street art maps can be obtained from the tourist department or various public libraries in the city. The SNS festivals have been important to the municipality in its trajectory to become a post-industrial, creative city. Planner Bram emphasized during the interview that:

> *"In terms of street art, I felt that we were missing names that could have an impact. This led me to invite a lot of great international artists that could make the impact that was missing. The second edition has been amazing, with beautiful weather and a lot of visitors." (Interview dated 08/05/2023)*

This shows that the cultural department of the municipality cares about the impact of the SNS festivals through safeguarding quality. By inviting international artists, such festivals create a lot of media

attention and through extensive media coverage attract more and more people to visit the neighbourhoods. The symbolic value of such areas tends to increase because the murals attract tourists who make pictures of the beautified environment and the journalists who write about it increase the attention that such districts receive. For the artists, the SNS festivals could possibly function as a springboard for their artistic careers and greatly benefit their reputation. However, there is an increased internationalization of the SNS festivals resulting in the displacement of many artists. What came to light when talking with urban artists in Ghent, is that many of the SNS festivals are targeted to specific neighbourhoods. The Oude Dokken neighbourhood has been under development for quite some time, making it an important place to the municipality. By increasing the symbolic value of the neighbourhood through such events, they can accelerate investment and attract commercial parties to the area. Figure 16 shows a group of tourists during the second edition of the SNS festival in 2019 at the Oude Dokken. In the background of the picture, you can see the Concrete Factory as a remnant of Ghent as an industrial city that did not envisage urban art as a commodity.


Figure 15 & 16: Sorry Not Sorry festival Oude Dokken / Sources: PZC, 2019

Figure 15 shows an urban artist painting on the Concrete Factory walls. Not knowingly, many of these artists contributed to an increased 'local buzz' in the area. In the picture on the right, you can clearly see the enthusiasm among tourists and visitors who visited the festival. I walked through the Oude Dokken area with urban artist Edson. He participated in the second edition of the SNS festival in 2019. When he reflected back on the festival he was mostly positive and he stressed the importance of such events for networking opportunities among different artists. It also brought residents from many different backgrounds together which resulted in a friendly and cohesive atmosphere. However, the ends of the SNS festivals became increasingly clear to the artists and residents over time. The festivals turned out to be part and parcel of a wider urban redevelopment scheme that attracted property developers and other commercial actors to the site. Edson clearly articulated his discontent about these phenomena and the lack of transparency at the basis of such processes. When discussing the role of art in gentrification, he stressed the following:

> *"That's fucked up, really really shit. Then you first have artists and they make it very beautiful. And then come the hipster shops. Before you know it, that whole neighbourhood is more expensive and the local residents are squeezed out.. I really hate it. So I did that. And at that moment, I didn't realize it at all. It was just a festival. It's very complicated. You try to bring some color to the neighbourhood and do something good, and at the same time things happen beyond your control.." (Interview dated 01/04/2023)*

As Edson clearly stipulated during the interview, the SNS festival uses the creativity of artists for beautifying certain areas in the city that have been dilapidated. After a while, it became clear among the residents of Ghent that the Oude Dokken redevelopment plan was not set in place to prioritize their interests. Rather, the temporary nature of such placemaking events made it easier to continuously

pump new creative energy into the deteriorated area. In the next section, I will elaborate on the wider implications of this process for two neighbourhoods in Ghent and Groningen.

4.5 Urban art in the post-industrial city: Gentrification and Resistance

In 2009, the city of Ghent launched an architectural competition for the future of the Oude Dokken. The renowned architectural firm OMA won the competition and started to develop a renewal plan which was finished in 2014. The 'Nieuwe Dokken' (New Docks) had the objective to redevelop the Oude Dokken into an upscale residential neighbourhood. At first, it had been emphasized by urban development agency SoGent that the Concrete Factory would become the 'pounding heart' of the new neighbourhood as it would get renovated and supplemented with new public functions (Van Damme, 2021). Later it became clear that these promises have been empty promises as it turned out that the factory was 'too expensive to conserve or maintain and too difficult to integrate in the newly built neighbourhood' (Van Damme, 2021). Subsequently, SoGent emphasized that the Oude Dokken will be completely redeveloped for the sake of housing, urban greenery and new infrastructure (SoGent, 2020). The Oude Dokken is transformed with room for over 1200 houses and three neighbourhood parks. In Spring 2022, OMA's Nieuwe Dokken plan won the public award of 'best public space in Flanders' (Casteels, 2022). The black circle in Figure 17 shows the site of the former Concrete Factory which will be replaced by a new neighbourhood park.

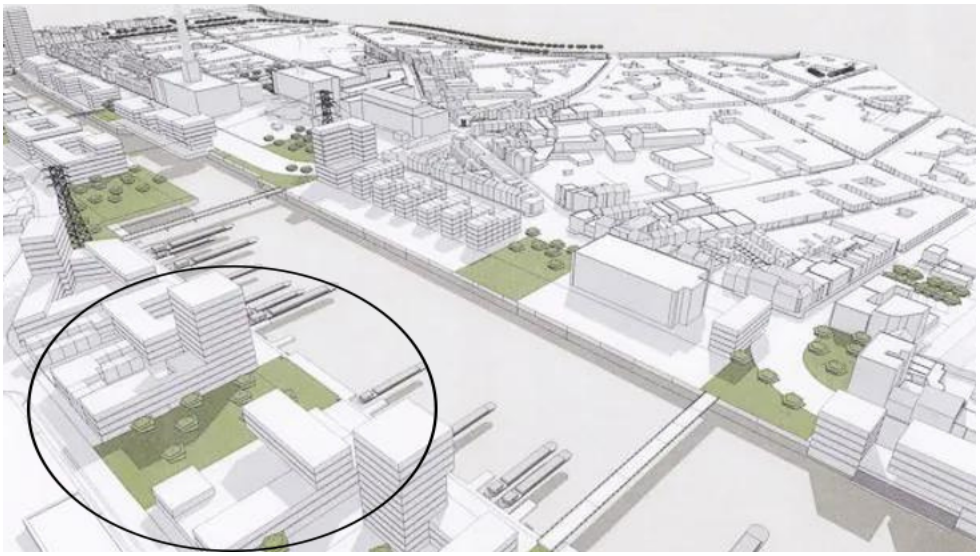

Figure 17: *Concrete Factory replaced by a neighbourhood park in Nieuwe Dokken* / Source: Selfslagh, 2014

The distribution of land ownership between public and private actors explains why the majority of the homes in the old port area are being developed as luxury homes. Another important factor to consider is that SoGent recently became independent from the municipality. Subsequently, they have been accused of many financial scandals and some people have claimed that SoGent started to act like a 'private project developer' rather than a public institution safeguarding democratic principles (De Meester, 2018). Urban artists elaborated on the lack of bottom-up procedures throughout the redevelopment process of Oude Dokken. While talking to them, they stressed that Nieuwe Dokken invited many real estate companies to the area that did not care about the voices of neighbourhood residents that had already been living on the site. These residents wanted to build a neighbourhood center in the form of a houseboat with graffiti paint on it. SoGent immediately rejected their proposition which showed that there is no place for the old residents in the new neighbourhood (Casteels, 2022).

Despite some silent protests of residents and street art enthusiasts, the bulldozers have proven to be ruthless. Various graffiti artists with whom I walked emphasized the importance of the Concrete Factory for the urban art community. The only industrial remains on the site were the gravel pits. This

space has been positively perceived by urban artists because this brought up a lot of good memories. Despite the efforts of the municipality to foresee artists with regulated legal zones, the gravel pits have been appreciated by artists as they stressed the importance of having an authentic space. Many of these self-authorized spaces tend to disappear in the city and make place for top-down produced legal zones. The 'raw' industrial atmosphere surrounding the site made many urban artists value this zone over regulated zones that are located in the inner city. 3 May 2022 marked the end of an era, as the bulldozers entered the terrain of the gravel pits to finish what they had started. The last traces of a flourishing and widely appreciated subcultural space now officially vanished into thin air. I walked with street artist Edson and he perceived the redevelopment in Oude Dokken as follows:

> *"The people are not happy with the municipality looking at a place, saying that certain things are good for it, but people who live there or use it are just dots on that map to them. That is really weird to me. That it doesn't matter how people live or what they like and how to live their day. No, it is more about profit and how can we make it a little bit more commercial so that the project will serve us instead of the people." (Interview dated 01/04/2023)*

According to Edson, the redevelopment of the Oude Dokken is predominantly a top-down process which can be explained by the significant role that real estate developers and SoGent played in shaping the area. Subsequently, many concerns have been raised about the affordability of the redeveloped area and the displacement of the original residents (Casteels, 2022). Whereas the municipality guarantees inclusivity of the new neighbourhood, various real estate websites portray a different story showing astronomical housing prices. Only 20% of the realized housing will become social housing which is moreover seen by the developers as the least prioritized element in the project (Casteels, 2022). The main concern of the urban artists I spoke to, was the prioritization of commercial interests and profit over the preferences and needs of the local community and artists. When walking with street artist Paul alongside the former docks, he emphasized the following:

> *"Creative projects are often brought here, but it turns out afterwards that those projects are only organized once a lot of real estate has been bought. And then someone else with big amounts of capital benefits from it. So it is not done for the neighbourhood but rather for someone who bought a few blocks. Letting the artists paint here costs them much less than launching a full marketing program of years to put a neighbourhood more on the map." (Interview dated 07/05/2023)*

Paul emphasizes how creative projects, such as mural projects, are often deliberately positioned at the Oude Dokken to attract more wealth to the area. This has been substantiated by Bram as he addressed that the previous two editions of the cultural Sorry Not Sorry festival in the city have been taking place in this area. Some of the urban artists that I walked with felt that their creativity has been used by SoGent for the attraction of commercial interest. They expressed discontent by emphasizing that now that the Nieuwe Dokken redevelopment is almost coming to an end, their Concrete Factory gets demolished. This shows that in post-industrial urban development, various actors capitalize on the creativity of urban artists and or that certain creative and cultural heritage from the past is still able to attract capital to the region. Paul further elaborated on the importance of the Concrete Factory as a landmark for the neighbourhood and addressed the strategies of SoGent to cultivate this industrial heritage:

> *"They tore down an old, authentic building that was completely covered in graffiti which became an attraction for the neighbourhood. People came to walk along the water to see the new artworks in the factory. So instead of conserving it, they completely smashed it and imported a crane from somewhere else that they bought. In order to create a kind of accessory for the neighbourhood as an attribute. So they bought something 'fake' to give a 'fake vibe' to the neighbourhood. Couldn't they just leave what was there? I really don't get that." (Interview dated 07/05/2023*

Paul told me that neighbourhood residents would come together and visit the factory or walk alongside the canal to witness the creative outbursts on the fabric walls. He touches upon the important aspect of urban renewal in post-industrial cities, he explains that certain elements of industrial heritage such as factory pipes, old silos and cranes are deliberately conserved while others are demolished. The purposeful conservation of such landmarks and their integration of them into the newly developed environment shows that old industrial buildings are central aesthetic elements to the affluent creative classes. SoGent even went so far that they imported a crane to recreate the industrial atmosphere of the area. Many of the urban artists addressed that they see through such strategies but that they were unable to stop them. The demolition of the gravel pits and the luxurious apartments of Oude Dokken are visualized in Figures 18 & 19.

Figure 18 & 19: Demolition and renewal in Oude Dokken / Source: Selfslagh, 2014; Immoweb, z,d.

The demolition of the Concrete Factory and gravel pits barely faced any resistance despite some silent protests of street art enthusiasts, graffiti artists and neighbourhood residents. A possible explanation for this could be the long time that passed between the announcement by SoGent of demolishing the site, and the actual demolition procedure. Another factor that plays a role in the lack of protests in Ghent is the exclusion of lower socioeconomic groups. I asked street artist Paul what constituted this development and he answered:

> *"Most creatives can't afford anything here, let alone live here permanently because real estate prices have risen dramatically. Over four years, I know people who had to pay three times as much as they did when they just started to live in Ghent. I already know many who have moved to Brussels. It is bigger there and there are always neighbourhoods that have not yet become 'hip' where you can find something for a reasonable price." (Interview dated 07/05/2023)*

Paul emphasizes that due to the pressures of the housing crisis and lack of creative opportunities, many creative residents are forcibly driven out of the city. The Concrete Factory played an important role for the shelter of urban residents that were not able to afford a regular apartment or house. Large squatting groups occupied the factory and by doing so, addressed the importance of having a common space in a neoliberalizing city. As the city of Ghent further matured, many of such commons got eradicated which resulted in widespread exclusion, a symptom of the post-industrial city. This phenomenon can be witnessed in cities that are becoming fixated on urban regeneration but do not consider external social impacts. This suggests a wider discussion about who has the right to live in the creative cities of the future and for answering this question, the story shifts to Groningen.

Just as in Ghent, the spectres of urban renewal are scourging the free-spirited places in the city of Groningen. The municipality of Groningen increasingly started seeing the Damsterdiep-Eemskanaal industrial area as a non-space and for a long time made no efforts to redevelop the area. The liminal nature of the space attracted a trailer park community of approximately 20 people which settled in a small piece of forest. This self-sustainable community is called Betonbos (Concrete Jungle) composed of urban artists and other creatives who have been living on the site for over 14 years. The city drafted

a destination plan in 2013, including the possibilities for the construction of a completely new neighbourhood alongside the Damsterdiep-Eemskanaal area. About six years later, bureau Waardenburg conducted ecological research on the site. Because of the discovery of various threatened species, such as the house sparrows and bats, the regeneration plans were prolonged (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). After the discovery, there have been various mitigating measures to preserve the threatened species in the area. This led the city council to give a green light on the redevelopment plans of the area. The main aim of the city is to transform the derelict site into a green, urban neighbourhood close to the water. In February 2020, the city published the official destination plans of the city and named the project 'Stadshavens' (City harbours). The municipality aims to develop 3.300 houses, 33,000 m² of commercial and social business space and a port park (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). Figure 20 illustrates a future impression sketch of how the new neighbourhood must look in the upcoming years.

Figure 20: Stadshavens project / Source: KCAP, n,d.

Quickly after the publication of the Stadshaven plans, critical arguments emerged concerning the number of affordable dwellings after the promises of the city council of a mixed-use neighbourhood (de Veer, 2023). This suspicion arose after it became clear in the redevelopment plans that only 15% of the dwellings would become social rental dwellings which translates into 360 dwellings in the lowest housing segment (Ibid.). This resulted in widespread concerns among the Betonbos community living on the site because the redevelopment plans imposed an immediate threat on their living situation. The chances that they could return after the realization of the Stadshaven project have turned out to be nil. The whole Betonbos area is planned to be demolished and replaced by 'sustainable greenery' in the form of a neighbourhood park (Pastoor, 2022; Gemeente Groningen, 2022). Figure 21 shows an aerial photograph of the current Betonbos site located alongside the Eemskanaal.

Figure 21: Betonbos at Damsterdiep / Source: Poelman, 2018

Despite the urge of the municipality for the development of the Stadshavens project, the residents showed that they would not be displaced this easily. The Betonbos community turned out to be part of a larger and hidden undercurrent of self-authorized artists contesting the commercial forces in the city. Punkers, anarchists, environmental activists, squatters, and graffiti artists all grouped together under the name 'City Nomads'. This movement consists of around forty people that live in trailers or other alternative housing situations. These communities are scattered over the city and prefer to live in complete freedom detached from the outside world. In Groningen, I walked and talked with three artists that are closely affiliated with this movement and all of them highlighted their concerns about the general commercialization of urban space. Betonbos is a place where people live up to their own norms and values. Because of their autonomous character, alternative cultural and social initiatives often flourish there that could not have arisen in other places. Free-spirited places are areas of experimentation and therefore an important source of alternative cultural forms in a city. It poses a reflection of what an inclusive creative city that is not driven by market-oriented growth might look like. However, the municipality is not keen on preserving such spaces and envisages them as impediments to urban development. The City Nomads I walked with felt overlooked by the municipality. Ultimately, tensions developed between the municipality, the Stadshaven project developers and the Betonbos community over who has the right to the creative city. Due to their marginalized position, the Betonbos struggled and fought to preserve their place in the creative city.

The first milestone of Betonbos was the mobilization of the residents and artists during the winter of 2018 against plans aired by project developer Van Wonen and the municipality. These plans aimed at demolishing the temporary housing to make place for an upscale residential housing neighbourhood. After hearing about these plans, local artists and community members of the Betonbos worked together to build resistance against the proposed redevelopment scheme and raise awareness within the city of Groningen. This resulted in the development of a petition by the Betonbos community with a clear message directed towards the municipality:

> *'This way of living is a valuable addition to the city because we disseminate non-commercial forms of creativity. By not hiding, but being a visible part of the city, we also radiate guts and ambition. The municipality is showing interest in alternative forms of housing, such as tiny houses and residential groups, but mainly focuses on new projects. They do not take into account what already exists. We believe that some things have to happen organically and cannot be planned from a desk' (AVAAZ, 2019).*

This shows the early development of conflicting worldviews between the municipality and the residents from the Betonbos site. More importantly, this statement shows that the municipality of Groningen does take into account alternative forms of housing yet not the forms of housing that already exist. Through political organization by forming coalitions, Betonbos succeeded in gaining political momentum in the city before the redevelopment of the site started. Hence, many local newspapers have been writing about the Betonbos and the architectural platform GRAS made a mini-documentary about the community (GRAS, 2020). Their momentum increased through a petition that has been signed by 4778 people that sided with the Betonbos cry against the demolition of the site. This resulted in a postponement of the initial plan developed by Van Wonen and the municipality. I have been talking with several urban artists that are part of or affiliated with the Betonbos community. While walking through the city with them, they articulated their discontent with the contemporary creative city and especially the social and cultural exclusion. When I mentioned that the municipality aims to organize a street art festival this summer, Betonbos resident Azra stressed:

> *"So they [municipality] are doing the same thing here. I am angry again. I get super sad because I take it personally. Because alone I try to talk to these people and I try. There is just a group of people that are super motivated to develop art in the city. And constantly poke at the municipality, like 'hey, I still want to do this'. But then I hear from other people, it is already going to happen and this is how it is going to be." (Interview dated 25/04/2023)*

Azra shared her negative experiences with the municipality, and she represents the voices of many artists that are not being commissioned for mural projects in Groningen. The tensions between non-commercial forms of creativity and commercial forms such as commissioned mural projects or street art projects kept on recurring throughout the interviews with urban artists. Whereas the municipality started to accept street art as a valuable addition to the city, many creative individuals like Azra do not find their creative needs met. Commissioning processes are perceived to favour already known artists or even international artists because of their reputation resulting in the side-lining of local artists. The cry of Azra for more inclusivity resonates with the general needs of the Betonbos community for a more inclusive city. Despite their success to postpone the initial plans, the eventual destination plan of the Damsterdiep area did not consider the preservation of the Betonbos. The main argument of the municipality is that the residents are illegally squatting in the area which gives them no rights or access to this land (Gemeente Groningen, 2022).

The community was in shock after the publication of the Stadshaven plans in 2021. This heralded the second milestone for the Betonbos which was articulated in resistance strategies arising from discontent. One of the physical manifestations of discontent is the banner that can be seen in Figure 22, stating the political cry of the residents to preserve the Betonbos in the new Stadshaven neighbourhood.

Figure 22 & 23: Betonbos resistance and response municipality / Source: Brouwer, 2021; Pastoor, 2021

Alderman of the Labour Party (PVDA) Roeland van der Schaaf reacted to their cry by stating that there is simply no space for people with trailers or other alternative housing forms in the city (Pastoor, 2022). The municipality has aimed to accommodate the needs of the Betonbos creatives by assigning several locations outside the city. The Aduarderdiepsterweg (Figure 23) close to the village Hoogkerk

has been appointed as a location where all the city nomads can move to once the first bulldozers enter the Damsterdiep terrain. About 40 people can live on the site and by moving the city nomads outside of the city, the municipality hopes to tackle the increased squatting of property within the city. The efforts of the municipality to turn the city nomads into village nomads is not something that the squatters appreciate. Therefore, on the 21st of January 2023, Betonbos reached a third milestone by organizing a peaceful protest at the Ossenmarkt during the Eurosonic Noorderslag festival. The underground community organized a protest march that addressed their concerns about the neoliberal trajectory of the municipality. The protest had been named 'Rollend Goed' (Rolling Good) referring to their nomadic housing status. I joined this protest and talked with the head of the organization about the motivations of the City Nomads.

> *"We, as the City Nomads, are against the wider commercialization of space in the city. We see that the municipality increasingly interferes with creativity by making creative breeding grounds such as in the Biotoop and CiBoga terrain. We think this is alarming because for an open and democratic city you need non-regulated spaces." (Interview dated 21/01/2023)*

He stressed that most people active in the movement are creative people that want to live in alternative ways rather than conforming to conventional modes of living. Moreover, he expressed the increased pressure on open, free, and non-commercial space. Figure 24 & 25 shows the political messages of the City Nomads.

Figure 24 & 25: City nomads protest / Source: The author

The right picture shows the common objective of the nomads 'Free space is the place'. In the picture on the left, the blue bird hidden behind the drums has been painted by urban artist Tom. I have spoken with him and throughout the interview, he told me that he played an important role in organizing the protest. He does not live in the Betonbos but is closely associated with the community. He lives in trailer park De Kring in the southeastern part of the city. When talking about the Rollend Goed protest, he addressed the overlap between graffiti, punk, and squatting:

> *"Squatting is kind of the same feeling for me as graffiti. Anti-establishment. Sometimes those property owners leave their properties empty for two years, you know? Such people are incredible pricks. … In our city, you see advertising and banners everywhere. McDonalds, bus shelters, that's also a kind of terror. And graffiti is not allowed? I also live here. It is also our city. People are becoming afraid so now they are going to hang cameras everywhere and stuff. Therefore, I think it's a community service to make an illegal graffiti piece every now and then." (Interview dated 11/04/2023)*

Tom emphasizes on the intersections between squatting, punk, and graffiti in the sense that they are all raising a counter-sound in a city that doesn't accept any objection. The ideology of the city nomads is clearly reflected in this quote along with broader concerns about the widespread commercialization of Groningen. Graffiti for Tom is a means to articulate discontent about such developments, but also a way to reclaim certain spaces in the city. The Rollend Goed march showed the successful organization of several 'invisible' communities in the city. The great number of people joining the protest march proved that there is a culture of resistance emerging in Groningen. This culture is fighting for free-spirited places guided by values such as camaraderie, solidarity, and mutual respect. Betonbos should be perceived as a time capsule that actively resists the capitalist colonization of space. The Betonbos are living close to nature and actively develop alternative forms of living. This makes the community more than 'just a trailer park' and should therefore be seen as an experimental space which offers future alternatives to the market-oriented creative city.

5: Discussion

This study was conducted to gain insights into how urban art policies and practices of creative placemaking in the cities of Groningen and Ghent contribute to urban transformation and the formation of a creative city identity. In this section, the results will be interpreted in the context of urban art and creative city debates and assessed if they can answer the research questions. The implications and limitations of the results will be discussed.

During the 1980s and 90s, the cities of Groningen and Ghent were composed of a genuine underground scene where various subcultures actively resisted the impacts of neoliberalism by occupying abandoned areas. The COVA and Concrete Factory Halls of Fame have proven to be early incubators of creativity established through forms of unsanctioned placemaking by graffiti artists. As both industrial terrains are located on the outskirts of the city, the locations were ideal for the proliferation of graffiti practices. McAuliffe (2012) addresses the importance of deindustrialization for graffiti as it produced an increasing stock of unused industrial spaces where writers hone their skills and share their art with other artists. The bottom-up production of such common spaces radically challenged the top-down understanding of the city and showcases the possibility of unused empty spaces being transformed into spaces for creativity, experimentation, and play (Kozina et al., 2021). As became evident in the story of the Concrete Factory, the abandoned site attracted not only graffiti artists but also squatters, punks and many other subcultural actors. This aligns with the conclusions of Martin-Iverson (2021), who substantiates that underground communities in Indonesia are enmeshed in the struggle over urban spaces and conjoin their powers to collectively assert their right to the city while producing new forms of spatial politics. The common objective of the subcultural actors occupying the terrains was to make urban spaces more public. Nevertheless, many common spaces started to disappear and a general trend of commodification of urban spaces developed in tandem with the emergence of the post-industrial, creative city.

The objective of both cities to initiate a shift from an industrial city to a post-industrial, creative city has clearly been reflected in their spatial policies and practices. From my interviews, it became clear that both municipalities actively worked on providing legal zones for urban artists in and around the city. Many of these spaces have been produced by the municipalities themselves. The production of such regulated spaces via the zoning of creative practices is what Mould (2015: p.8) defined as the 'hard infrastructural creative city policies'. Yet, he does not delve deeper into examples of how cities operationalize such policies. My study has shown that both municipalities used zoning to marginalize graffiti practices which contributed to framing them as 'out of place' (Hughes, 2009). For both cities, it became clear that the municipality did not see any reason to promote graffiti or give graffiti artists a podium in the post-industrial city. This became clear through the deliberate placement of graffiti outside of the city under viaducts and tunnels. The graffiti artists in my study emphasized that they disliked working in such areas because of the noise and location. On the other hand, they have expressed gratitude that the municipality at least tries to accommodate their needs by creating legal spaces rather than penalizing them as they did before. The wider validation of graffiti practices makes

Mould (2015) stress that this should be seen as part of creative city branding strategies which belong to the 'soft infrastructural creative city policies'. Such policies are instrumentalized in the post-industrial city because they contribute to the city's pursuit of economic gain (Ibid.).

Both creative cities relied on soft infrastructural creative city policies to brand certain areas as 'creative' or 'hip'. According to Grandadam et al (2013), foundational to this is the activation of middleground spaces which is being done via creative projects and events. Two examples have been highlighted by the participants in my study: the Sorry Not Sorry street art festival (event) and the Aletta Jacobs mural (project). Both are unique examples of how municipalities engage with street art to brand themselves as a creative city. In Ghent, the SNS street art festival symbolized the municipal objective to 'harness all creative forces' by celebrating creativity and culture (Anheier & Isar, 2012: p. 192). Various creative subcultures and residents participated in these festivals and the creative image that the city is developing has been celebrated by everyone attending the event. Yet, Campos & Barbio (2021) address that street art festivals could have underlying negative implications as well. By placing labels such as 'hip' or 'creative' on deteriorating neighbourhoods, the stigmatized image of the neighbourhood gradually disappears resulting in a re-evaluation of the area. In Ghent, the SNS festival succeeded in enhancing what Harvey (2000) called the 'local buzz'. Several media frenzies led to an increase of symbolic value resulting in a re-evaluation of the Oude Dokken neighbourhood. This aligns with the study of Polson (2022) who addresses that street art festivals on the short term can be positive for neighbourhoods yet on the long run often are governmental tools for gentrification and displacement. According to Markley & Sharma (2016), another way how creative cities can 'sell' their creative identity is through the marketization of historic cultural assets. The Aletta Jacobs mural illustrates how Groningen relies upon street art to brand its unique historical assets in a wider attempt to refashion the image of the city. The Aletta Jacobs mural stirred up public debate, attracted activists and provoked people to think more critically about social justice and inequality in the city. The Aletta Jacobs case shows that street art can be used to refashion the image of the city. The SNS festival illustrates that street art similarly can be used to combat the downward spiral of neighbourhoods by beautifying them.

Both municipalities have developed comprehensive redevelopment plans that outline their goals for the urban transformation in undervalued areas in the city. Street art has been used to beautify the Oude Dokken in Ghent stimulating gentrification and urban regeneration processes. Therefore, this study confirms the third policy goal addressed by Campos & Barbio (2021): the use of urban art for urban renewal and gentrification. Schacter (2016) addresses that the stark inequalities that emerge from gentrification are being masked by the creative efforts of artists while removing every genuine trace of the impacted community. The demolition of the Halls of Fames substantiates the claims made by Schacter (2016). Moreover, both redevelopment projects show that urban change is increasingly shaped by private actors that radically lack a long-term commitment towards local communities. This became evident because of the small amount of affordable dwellings in the new neighbourhoods and the sidelining of local residents throughout the decision-making process. Tartari et al (2022) explain this by emphasizing that private interests do not concern the preservation of cultural diversity and authenticity making their conception about public space only focused on the pursuit of maximizing real estate values and commercial development. This market-oriented approach towards transforming public space into commercial space radically hampers the potential for alternative visions of public spaces that focus on democracy and equity. The community houseboat proposed by the Oude Dokken residents has been pushed aside because it would not fit the aesthetic qualities of the redeveloped neighbourhood. This shows that uniformity and homogenization of creative cities goes together with an intolerance towards different worldviews, opinions and manners of living that do not match with the designed intentions of market ideologies and urban planners (Zieleniec, 2016).

There were plenty of possible alternatives to the demolition of both Halls of Fames on the redeveloped sites, but they have been purposefully glossed over by upperground actors. Heathcott (2015) addresses that planners and developers should be more compelled to explore such alternatives. For example, the Concrete Factory was promised by SoGent to become the 'pounding heart' of the new neighbourhood as it would be renovated and supplemented with extra functions. By preserving such an important

landmark for the underground, cities can give back to the communities that transformed the Oude Dokken neighbourhood in the first place and do justice to them by respecting their Right to the Creative City. d'Ovidio & Cassu (2017) have shown that with the right intentions, an inclusive creative city can be developed. Possible future foundations of such a city are sketched by Berfelde (2021) who addresses that counter-neoliberal policies could be adopted by local governments. These policies emphasize the provision of infrastructural support that encourages the re-framing of creativity as a collective act and support the equal distribution of creative resources. In my study, it became clear that both creative cities are not striving towards these ends which is articulated in their market-oriented creative city policies and their engagement with urban art for gentrification and branding purposes. In the long run, this has transformed the city of Ghent into a liberal safe haven that increasingly excludes marginalized residents. Artists in my study elaborated on a lack of resistance against the commercialization of space in the city and explained that many impacted residents have fled to other cities in Belgium that still offer affordable housing. The developments in the city of Ghent align with the outcomes of the study by Atkinson & Easthope (2009). They address that the city of Brisbane, in its trajectory to become a creative city, developed housing policies that actively clear away people that are unable to join the knowledge economy and whose presence threatens the new growth model of the creative city.

In Groningen, the occupation of the Betonbos (Concrete Jungle) showed that artists and activists enacted a Right to the Creative City in times where culture is mainly adopted to marketize urban land values. Furthermore, the Betonbos case illustrates that there is an undercurrent in the contemporary creative city that actively resists the capitalist colonization of urban spaces. This undercurrent comprises not only subcultural actors but people from all social classes that do not want to conform to the neoliberal mantra advocated by creative city practitioners. Via the production of a 'commons' in an increasingly commercial urban landscape, this active undercurrent reinstates the political cries of the subcultural communities in the 1980s and 1990s. These cries are directly targeted towards the municipality and the injustices that property-led regeneration projects produce. This study has shown that the artistic commons of the past and present can be an indispensable resource for the most socially deprived as they can share resources, find shelter, and foster networks of collaboration. Whereas Heathcott (2015) includes the concept of 'artistic commons' in the title of his paper, he does not further elaborate on the topic. The squatting of the Concrete Factory in Ghent has shown that artists could live in the city and share the resources necessary to survive. The occupation of the COVA factory emphasizes that artistic commons can similarly be places where artists foster networks of collaboration to paint together and hone their skills.

What also became clear from my study is that commons mobilize themselves politically by forming coalitions under loosely defined ends such as 'justice', 'democracy' or 'freedom' (Novy & Colomb, 2013). This phenomenon has been explained by Villamayor-Tomas et al (2022) who emphasize that commons can serve as a basis of social mobilizations and could become a key frame for social movements. The wider social movement of the City Nomads consisted of multiple commons that were living in autonomous free zones scattered over the city of Groningen. The earliest signs of political resistance from Betonbos coincided with the trajectory of the social movements in the case study of Novy & Colomb (2013). The development of a petition, various political banners, and a city-wide protest against the commercialization of space showcase the 'culture of resistance' that is starting to develop in Groningen. Yet, the final stage of the life cycle of social movements reflected on by Novy & Colomb (2013) did not apply to the Betonbos case. The adoption of social movements into local politics empowers them with a political voice to influence decision-making (Berfelde, 2021; Novy & Colomb, 2013). The Betonbos commons did not accomplish gaining a political voice in local politics and are most likely going to be evicted. A possible explanation for this is provided by d'Ovidio & Cassu (2017) who explain that for including social movements into decision-making processes, a horizontal political system is necessary that allows for marginalized voices to be heard. Therefore, for Groningen and Ghent to become more inclusive, broader structural political changes need to ensure an inclusive political landscape that recognizes the political cries posed by the City Nomads and Betonbos residents.

The main limitations of this study relate to the tension between complexity and oversimplification. My study has attempted to blend multiple phenomena that are very complex in their nature. By doing so, I ran the risk of simplifying the often complex relationships between urban art, gentrification and urban transformation to facilitate comparison. Therefore, this oversimplification could result in glossing over the nuances and complexities of urban art and the transformation of space in the creative city. The study of Heck (2021) is a good example of how focusing on one specific neighbourhood does allow for a more in-depth analysis of urban art and gentrification. Another limitation has been the relatively short time that I have got to spend in Ghent. In total, I only visited the city of Ghent for 3.5 weeks. This shortage in time led to limit the scope of my research which ties in with the first limitation of simplification. With more time, I feel that I would be able to capture the diversity and complexity of the underground more successfully in Ghent.

6: Conclusion

This study has investigated the transformation of urban space through urban art in the creative cities of Groningen and Ghent over a period of 40 years. The main research question that this study aimed to answer is:

"How do the policies and practices of creative placemaking in Ghent and Groningen contribute to the formation of a creative city identity and the transformation of urban spaces, and how does this impact local communities and their right to the creative city?"

The demolition of the Concrete Factory & COVA Factory in Groningen has shown the power of redevelopment schemes to control the narrative of change. Both cases illustrate a fundamental lack of imagination of planners and developers in how to plan according to the needs of artists to create an inclusive creative city. This failure can be explained by the increased adherence to neoliberal, creative city policies. Within both cities, city branding and gentrification became the main policy strategies to engender a transition towards a post-industrial city. Foundational to this was an increased embrace of street art at the expense of graffiti practices. In Groningen, the Aletta Jacobs mural, as part of the City of Talent policy, shows the objectives of the city to sell its historical, unique identity to refashion its image. In Ghent, the SNS festival at Oude Dokken has been used to brand the neighbourhood as creative and hip. The redevelopment of Oude Dokken has been widely criticized by urban artists because of the lack of affordable dwellings and the top-down modus operandi of SoGent. Subsequently, impacted residents have fled to other cities in Belgium, making Ghent a city exclusively for wealthy citizens. Similarly, Stadshavens will become an upscale residential neighbourhood with a substantial lack of affordable dwellings. The developments in both cities show that spaces for wandering make place for privatized urban spaces in the neoliberal creative city. The bulldozers entering the old factory sites uncover another city, a city in the process of being buried by the forces of capital. But my study provides a glimmer of hope in this bleak context. The Betonbos residents are directly impacted by the Stadshaven plans and actively fight for their right to a place in the creative city of the future. This case illustrates that artistic commons are not only an exit strategy to state and corporate control but that through active political mobilization, they have succeeded in making a stand against commodification processes in the creative city. They could not do this alone. Various artistic commons scattered across the city conjoined their forces and organized themselves under the banner of ‘City Nomads’. This social mobilization has shown the emergence of a culture of resistance in Groningen at times when public spaces increasingly become scarce and where it seems that there are no viable alternatives to neoliberalism.

To trace back to my conceptual model, Cohendet et al (2010) dissected the creative city into three interrelated layers: the upperground, middleground and underground. It has become clear that the urban creativity of the underground actors has been exploited by upperground actors through the activation of middleground spaces in the form of street art festivals and mural projects. With the successful merge of the creative city mantra and neoliberalism, underground activities in the creative city have increasingly become subject to processes of mainstreaming by serving the needs of

neoliberal urban transformation (Schacter, 2016; Moran & Berbary, 2021). What my study has shown is that not all urban artists conform to this neoliberal logic and that through the political mobilization of 'artistic commons', a radical political undercurrent can be witnessed in Groningen. Therefore, this study adds to the existing branch of literature by supplementing the framework of Cohendet et al (2010) with an extra layer: the Deepground. Whereas Khalil (2021) defines the Deepground as the resistance of individuals from the past, I want to argue that these individuals are present in the contemporary city. By adding this layer, the updated framework will do justice to the impacted artistic communities that keep on struggling for their Right to the Creative City. Mould (2015) addresses that the paradigm of the creative city is dead but still dominant. Future research could therefore investigate the enacted strategies by local governments that aim to exploit other subcultures and address the extent to which these subcultural actors resist such strategies. Hence, future studies could potentially consolidate my claim that there is a strong undercurrent emerging in Western creative cities that actively resist creative commodification and fight for a wider re-framing of creativity as a collective action with an equal share of resources.

Reflecting on the research process, it has been a bumpy ride. During the first month, I experienced many difficulties with positioning myself in the unfamiliar territory of critical theory. This could be explained by the fact that I decided to write my MA thesis about this topic only two months before the project started. After various wake-up calls provided by my supervisors, I started to demarcate my scope and gradually found my way into the discourses of street art and urban creativity. After finishing my literature review, I have been thinking about ways to operationalize the theories in a real-life context. After a lot of thinking, it became clear to me that I wanted to make a comparative study between Groningen and another middle-sized town. After consulting my supervisors again, I concluded that Ghent was a comparable city to Groningen. Since Ghent is also a student city with approximately the same population and a large art scene, the choice has been easy for me to make. The travels to Ghent have been great because it allowed me to apply my research skills and knowledge to a different cultural context. Ghent has a flourishing cultural and creative scene which intrigued me from the first time I visited the place. The various organizations that I contacted were very friendly and cooperative which motivated me to keep on going. Therefore, I managed to have 22 walking interviews in total which is something I am very proud of. The process of data collection and participant recruitment did not go without its constraints. Urban artists have been quite difficult to recruit, and I faced a lot of non-response in the beginning. However, this did not demoralize me but rather motivated me to think about creative recruitment strategies. Subsequently, I contacted many artists via Instagram via a recruitment poster which worked well in increasing my sample. I want to express my gratitude to the participants because they have been so supportive and open to sharing their unique experiences with me. They have also taken me to spaces in both cities that I would not have considered visiting myself. I am especially satisfied with the addition of the Betonbos community as a form of resistance against the commodified creative city. By including these commons, I have tried to show that artists are not static individuals but can form alliances to voice their political concerns and struggle for an inclusive creative city. Overall, I am happy with the final product and hope that my results can be generalized to other creative city contexts.

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8: Appendixes

Appendix I: Glossary

Term	Operationalization
Street art practices	The extent to which participants participate in ephemeral activities that consist of self-authorized pictures and symbols applied to

	surfaces in the urban space that seek to communicate with a larger circle of people (Blanché, 2015)
Exploitation	The extent to which participants perceive the urge of local governments and enterprises to turn their subcultural practices into profit-making ventures (Borgblad, 2019; Mould, 2015; 2016; Schacter, 2014).
Co-option	The extent to which participants perceive their urban art practices being aligned with broader neoliberal policies of urban governments (Mould, 2016).
Formal practices	The extent to which participants are active in practices concerning *streetartness* which focusses more on the discourses going around street art (Andron, 2018).
Informal practices	The extent to which participants participate in underground culture which lies outside the logic of exploitation and commodification and thus focusses on exploration (Cohendet et al., 2010)
The upperground	The extent to which participants are positioned within the upperground of the Creative City which is characterized by the presence of highly innovative firms as well as powerful institutions (Florida, 2005; Hartley, 2005)
The middleground	The extent to which participants are positioned in the *middleground* as an intermediate level that links the upperground and underground. This scaler level acts as a means to promote exploration as well as exploitation mechanisms that are embedded within Creative Cities (Cohendet et al., 2010).
The underground	The extent to which the participants are positioned in the *underground* which brings together the daily creative, artistic and cultural activities taking place outside the formal institution based on production, exploitation and diffusion. In this layer, individuals share keen interest in their art and culture which defines their identity and lifestyle (Cohendet et al., 2010).
Creative placemaking	Creative placemaking is a process of using arts, culture, and creativity as a catalyst for revitalizing and transforming communities. It involves bringing together a range of partners, including artists, community organizations, local government, and business leaders, to plan and implement projects that enhance the social, economic, and cultural fabric (Markusen & NIkodemus, 2014).
Bottom-up street art practice	When street artists and graffiti writers confiscate the surfaces of the city, they are enacting a different city and assert a different kind of

	authority over space. Street art and graffiti practices emerge on the level of the underground and in this realm could make a potentially important contribution to renegotiating democratic urban politics (Cohendet et al., 2010).

Appendix II: Walking Interview Guide for Street artists

I **Street art and creative placemaking**	
1. Zou u mij wat meer kunnen vertellen over deze muurschildering? (Welk idee wilde u communiceren met het publiek?)	RQ 1, 3
2. Kunt u mij meenemen in het opleveringsproces? (Waren er obstakels waar u tegen aanliep?)	*RQ 3*
3. Welke actoren deden mee in dit proces? Hebben zij ook invloed gehad op het ontwerp dat u voor ogen had?	*RQ 3*
4. Waren er dingen die u wilde doen die uiteindelijk niet gelukt zijn? (Vanwege wat voor redenen?)	*RQ 3*
5. Door wie is uw werk gefinancierd? Wat was de rol van deze actor(en) in het proces?	*RQ 3*
6. Heeft u ook samengewerkt met andere graffiti artiesten in de stad? (Zo ja, op welke vlakken werkt u dan met deze mensen samen?)	*RQ 3*
7. Hoe verschilt uw werkwijze van andere graffiti-artiesten?	*RQ 3*

II **Wider role of street art in the city**	
Ik wil nu met u gaan praten over de rol van street art en graffiti in het algemeen in de stad Groningen/Gent.. 8. Ziet u een duidelijk verschil tussen de rol van graffiti en street art in de stad? (Kunt u uw antwoord verder uitleggen?)	RQ 1, 3
9. Wat denkt u dat de rol is van muurschilderingen voor de beeldvorming van de mensen over de stad Gent?	RQ 1, 3
10. Wat is de meerwaarde van muurschilderingen in de openbare ruimte van Groningen/Gent?	RQ 1, 3

Appendix III: Expert Interview Guide for City Authorities

Introductie expert-interview

Heel erg bedankt voor het deelnemen aan dit interview!

Voordat we beginnen, wat informatie over mij. Mijn naam is Bart Popken en ik ben Research Master student aan de Faculteit Ruimtelijke Wetenschappen van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Voor mijn masterscriptie onderzoek ik de rol van straatkunst in creatieve placemaking-processen in de steden Gent en Groningen.

Nog enkele opmerkingen over de procedure. Nadat ik u een vraag heb gesteld, neem dan gerust even de tijd om te antwoorden, er is geen haast bij. Onthoud dat er geen goede of foute antwoorden zijn. Het gaat om uw beleving en uw mening. Als u zich op een bepaald moment ongemakkelijk voelt of het interview wilt beëindigen, laat het me dan weten. Uw welzijn is mijn belangrijkste zorg.

Als u vragen heeft tijdens het interview of niet weet wat ik ergens mee bedoel, laat het me dan gerust weten.

Voordat we beginnen, wil ik nog een keer bevestigen of u het goed vindt als ik dit interview opneem.

Oké, perfect, laten we er meteen in duiken! 😊

I **Street art in public space**	
1. Wat is het beleid van de gemeente ten aanzien van street art in de openbare ruimte? 2. Hoe zou u uw eigen rol binnen de stad beschrijven wat betreft de ontwikkeling van street art in de openbare ruimte? 3. Welke middelen worden door de stad ter beschikking gesteld voor de ontwikkeling van street art projecten? 4. Hoe beoordeelt de gemeente de kwaliteit van street art in de openbare ruimte en welke criteria worden hiervoor gebruikt? 5. Wordt er samengewerkt met lokale artiesten of kunstorganisaties om street art in de openbare ruimte te bevorderen? (Op welke manier?)	*This section answers sub-question 3*
II **Street art projects + policy**	
6. Kunt u mij wat meer vertellen over dit project? (Wie heeft het geïnitieerd?) 7. Is er ondersteuning beschikbaar vanuit de gemeente voor organisatoren van street art festivals? (Wat houdt deze ondersteuning in?) 8. Hoe beoordeelt de gemeente de impact van street art festivals op de lokale gemeenschap? 9. Hoe worden kunstenaars en organisatoren van street art festivals betrokken bij de ontwikkeling van gemeentelijk beleid met betrekking tot street art en openbare kunst? 10. Zijn er mogelijkheden voor lokale gemeenschappen om mee te denken over de plaatsing van street art in hun buurt? (Zo ja, hoe kunnen zij betrokken worden in dit proces?)	*This section answers sub-question 4a & 4b*
III **Reflections + Future projects**	
11. Zijn er plannen om het huidige beleid ten aanzien van street art in de openbare ruimte aan te passen? (Zo ja, hoe?) 12. Hoe ziet u uw eigen rol hierin?	*This section answers sub-question 3 & 4*

13. Met de kennis die u nu heeft, wat zou u in het vervolg anders willen doen bij het aankomende street art festival?	

Appendix IV: Letter of informed consent

Consent Form

University of Groningen

Participation in Semi-Structured Walking Interview

Title of Project:	The Right to the City walls: A comparative case study concerning creative placemaking through urban art in the inner cities of Ghent and Groningen.
Date:	x
Time:	x
Location:	Ghent and Groningen
Researcher Name:	Bart Popken
Email:	b.f.popken@student.rug.nl
Phone number:	+31614554168

Purpose of this Research

This interview is a part of the Master Thesis: *The Right to the City walls: A comparative case study concerning placemaking through urban art in the inner cities of Groningen and Ghent.* The purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of how street art and graffiti artists shape the urban environment by working in conjunction with city authorities.

Procedures

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured walking interview. This interview will last a minimum of 40 minutes and will take place while walking through the inner city of Ghent or Groningen. The audio of the interview will be recorded with your explicit permission. During the interview the participant is asked to take pictures of physical indicators in the environment with the phone of the interviewer. At no time will there be pictures taken of the participant or other people.

Risk and Benefits

The Data collected during the interview is to gain insights and to collect residents' views and opinions as well as their perception. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcript, confirm the information you have provided, clarify any statements if necessary and remove any information you do not want to have included in the study.

Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

By taking part in this research, you agree to give your views and opinions in your name. Audio recordings will be kept until the completion of the dissertation and can be reviewed by the interviewer and University of Groningen supervisor. At no time will the researcher release any information to anyone other than individuals or institutions working on the project without your written consent. During the data process, your name will be anonymized. In addition, the final report will be published in a database at the University of Groningen.

Compensation

A coffee or another beverage of your choosing ☺.

Freedom to Withdraw

Please note that you may withdraw at any moment. If you wish to do so, send an email to the email address stated above, or contact the provided phone number of the interviewer.

Question or Concerns

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. Should any questions or concerns come up once after the completion of the interview, feel free to contact the researcher directly via email or phone.

Participant Consent

I have read the consent form, have had the nature of the study explained to me, I agree with the consent and agree to participate in the research.

Interviewer's Name:

Interviewer's Signature:

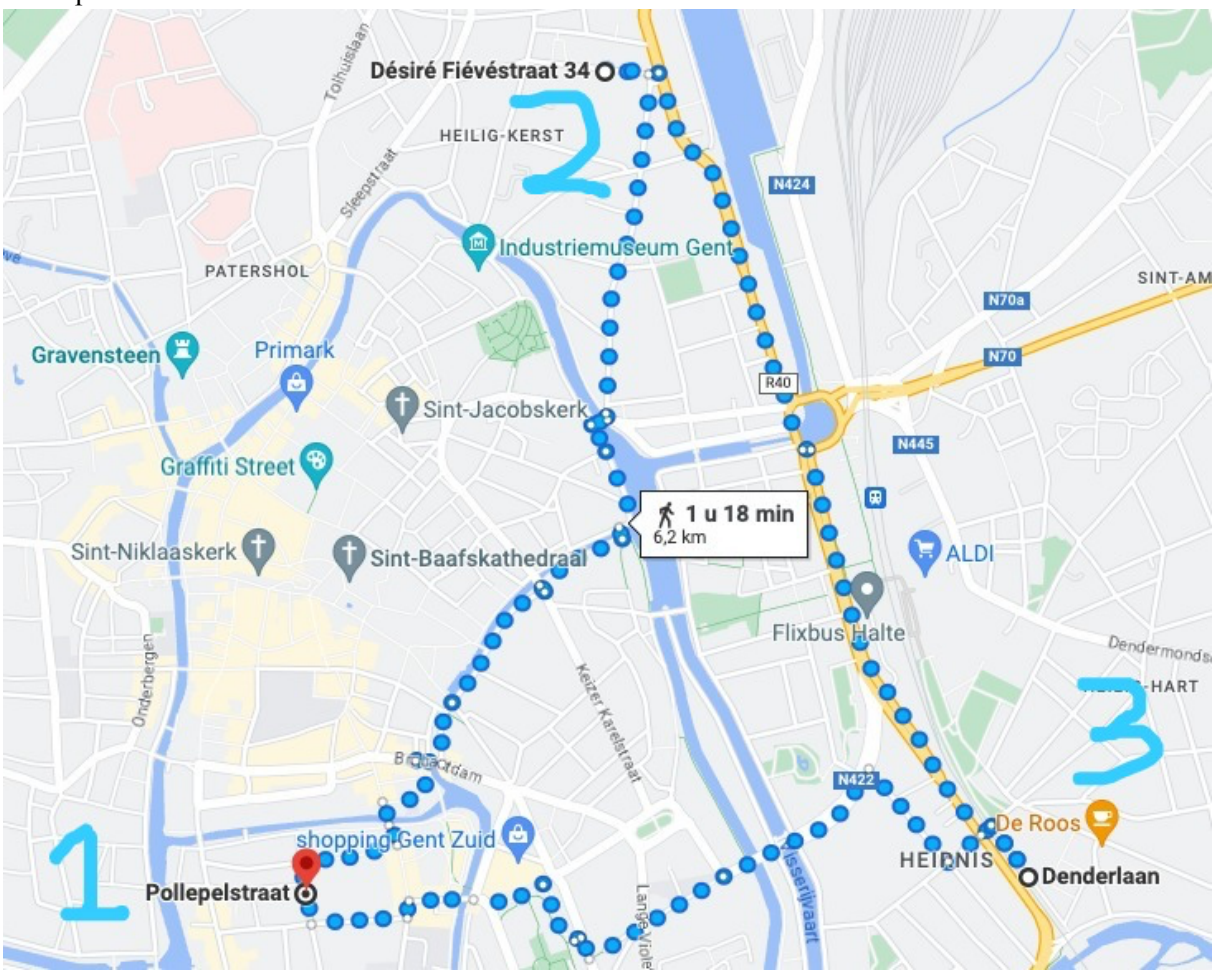
Participant's Name:

Participant's Signature:

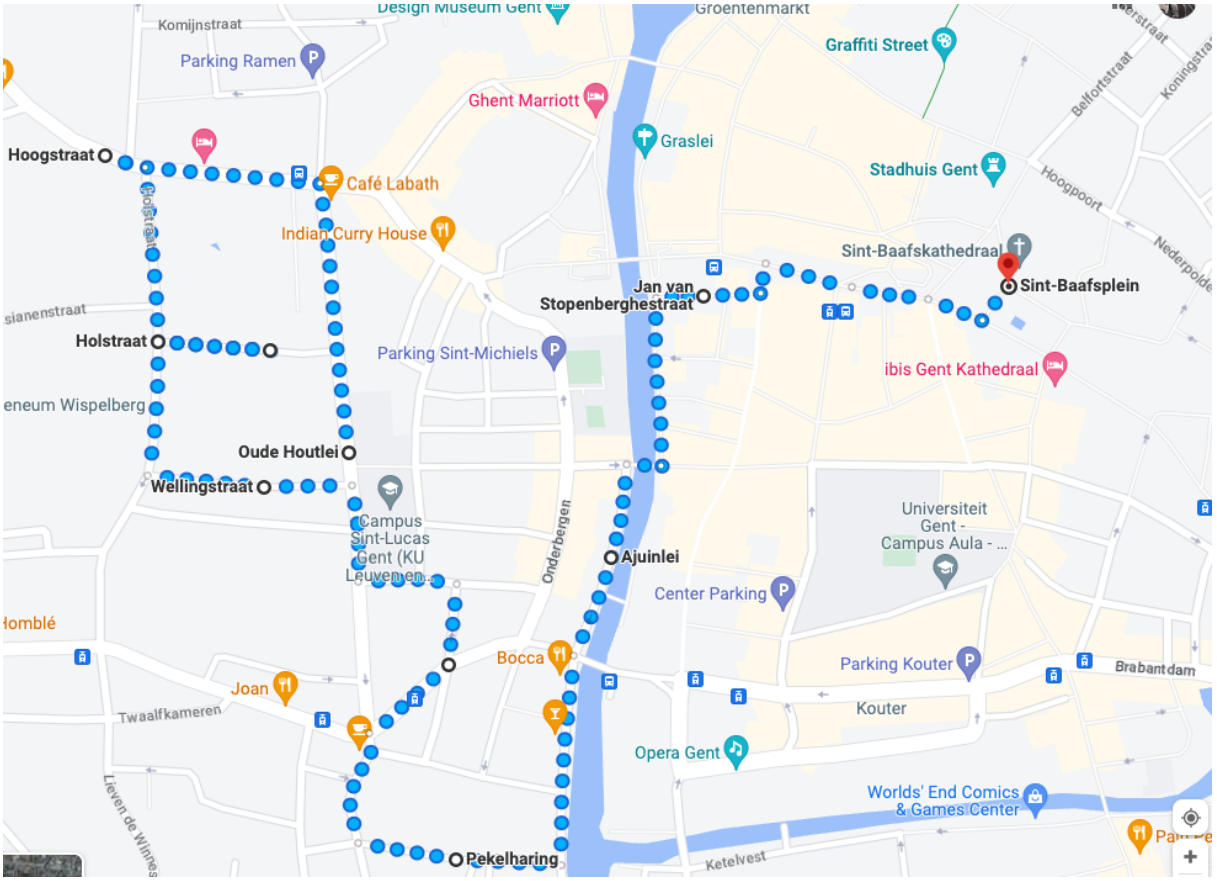
Date:

Appendix V: Participant-led walking routes

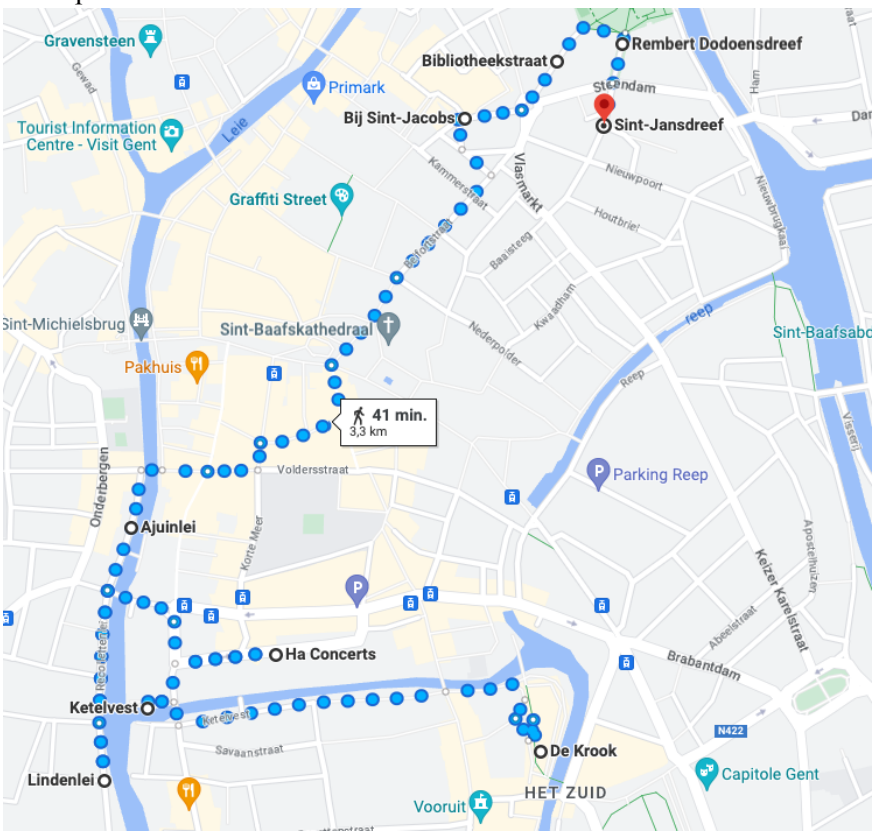
Participant 1: Edson



Participant 2: Mark



Participant 3: Peter



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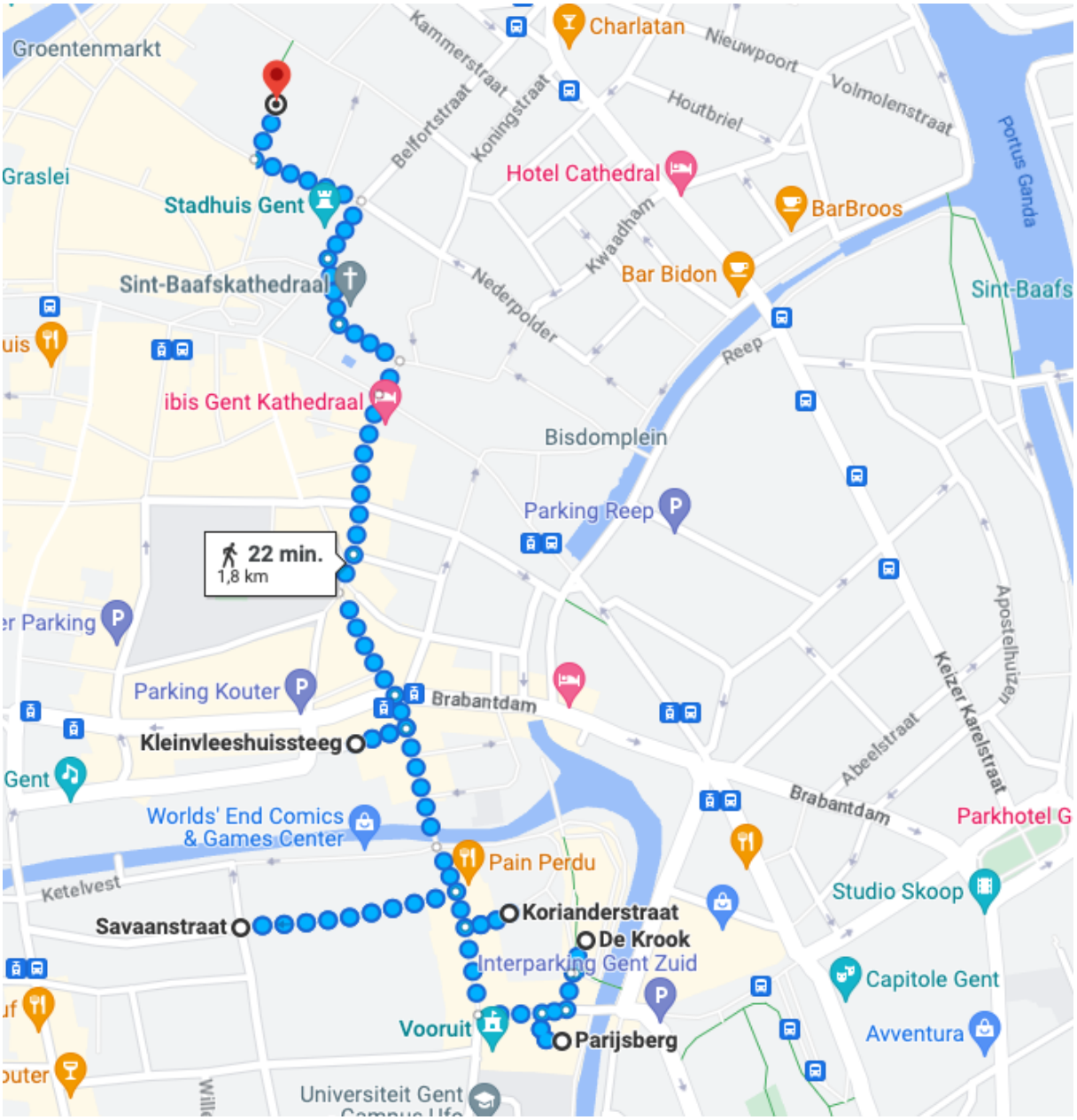
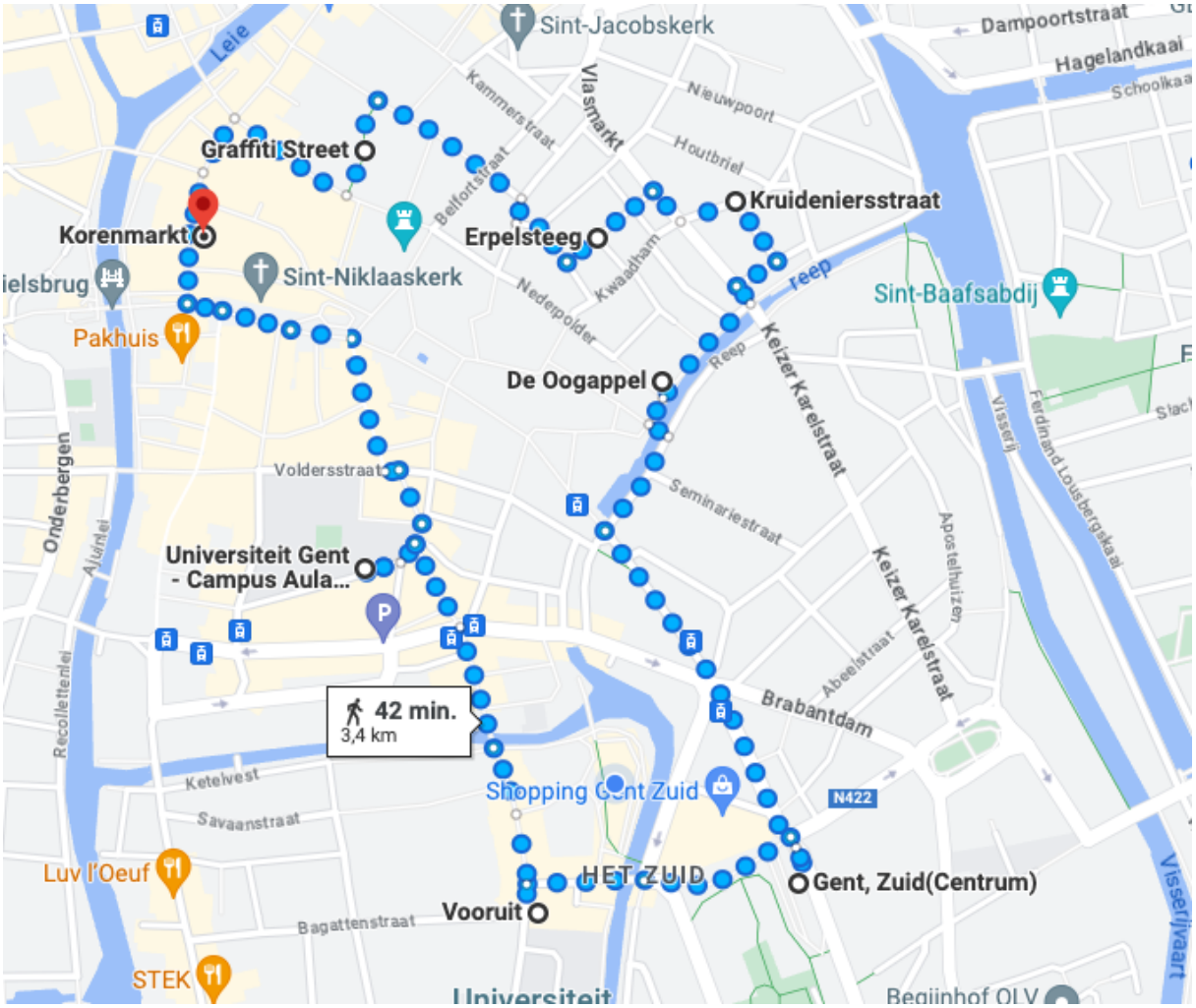
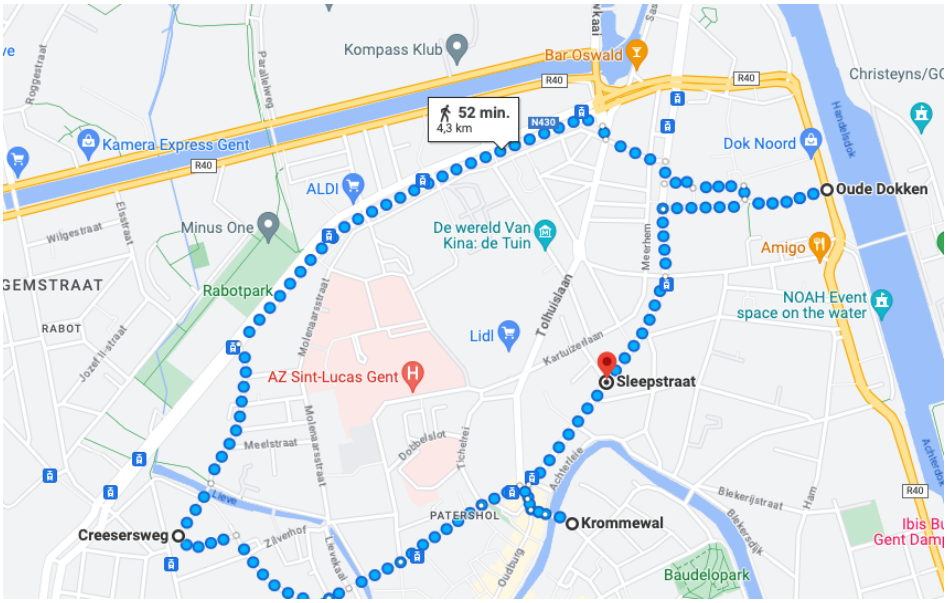


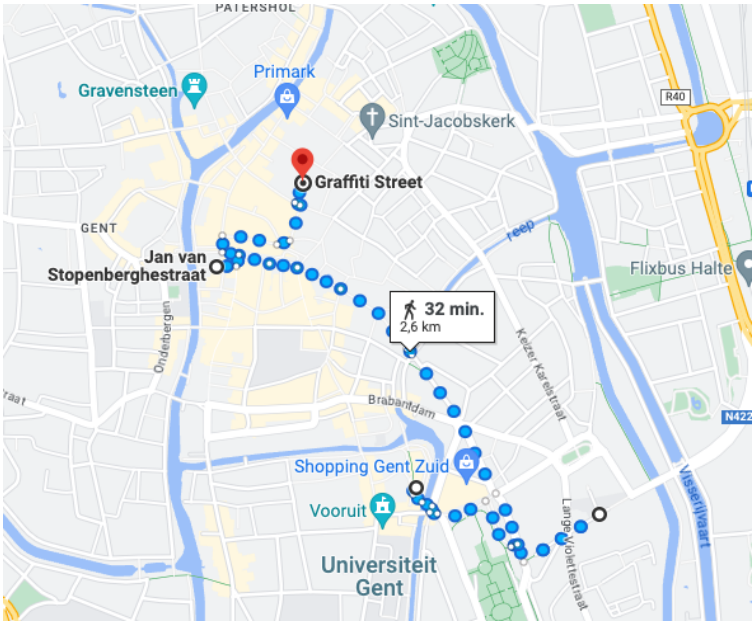
Participant 5: Emma



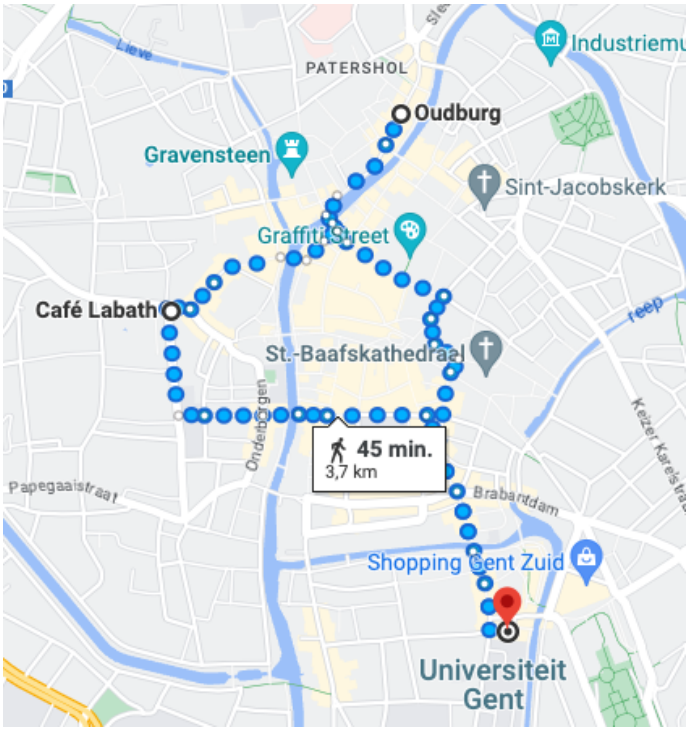
Participant 6: Paul



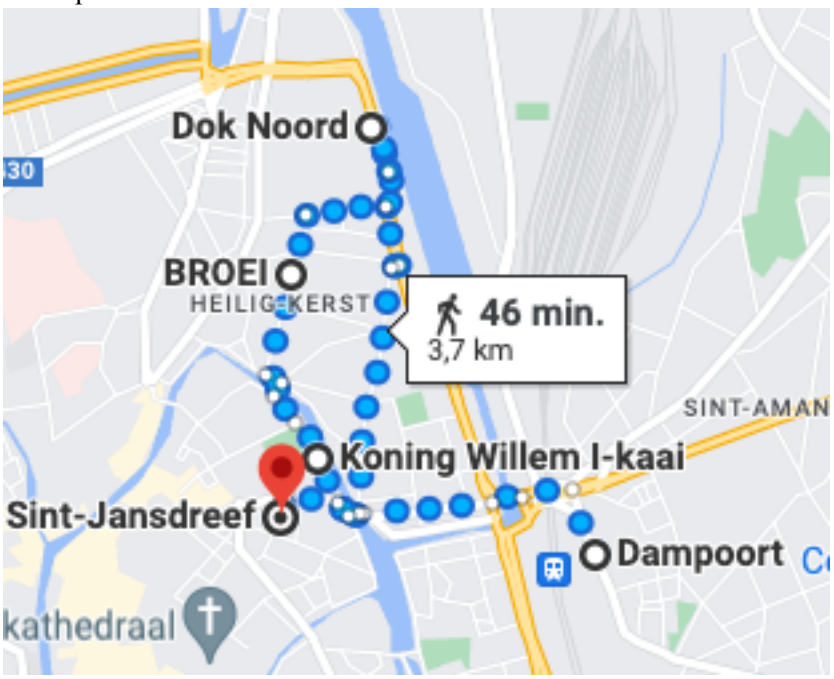
Participant 7: Brian



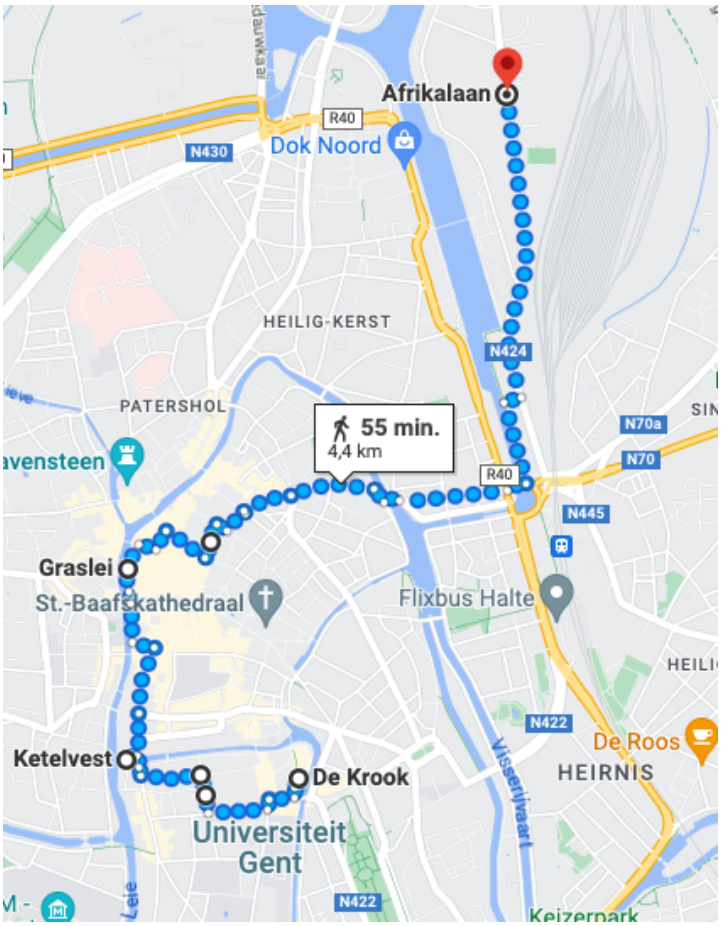
Participant 8: Daniel



Participant 9: Nina

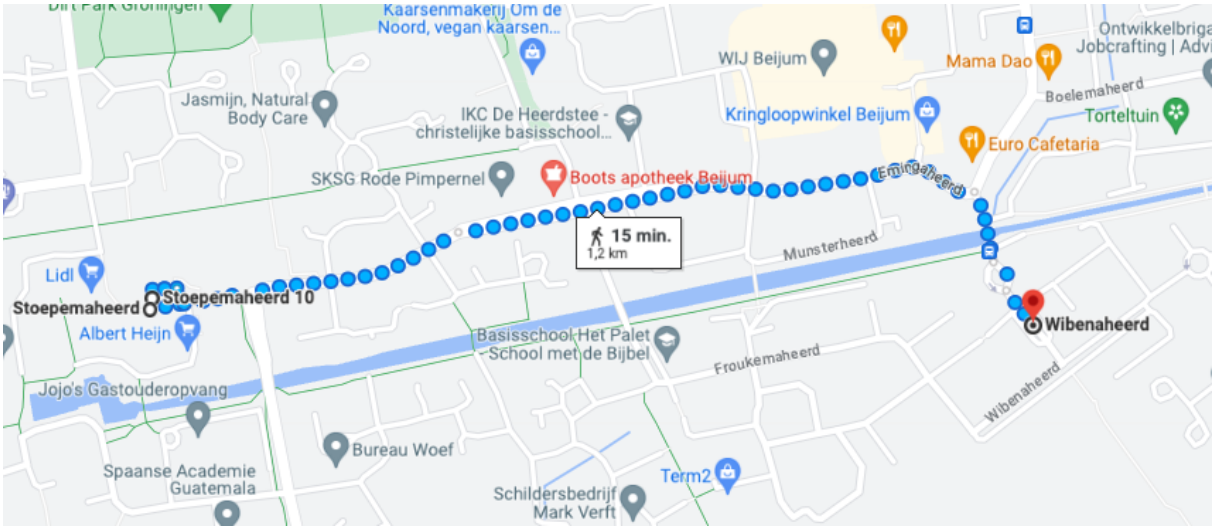


Participant 10: Chris

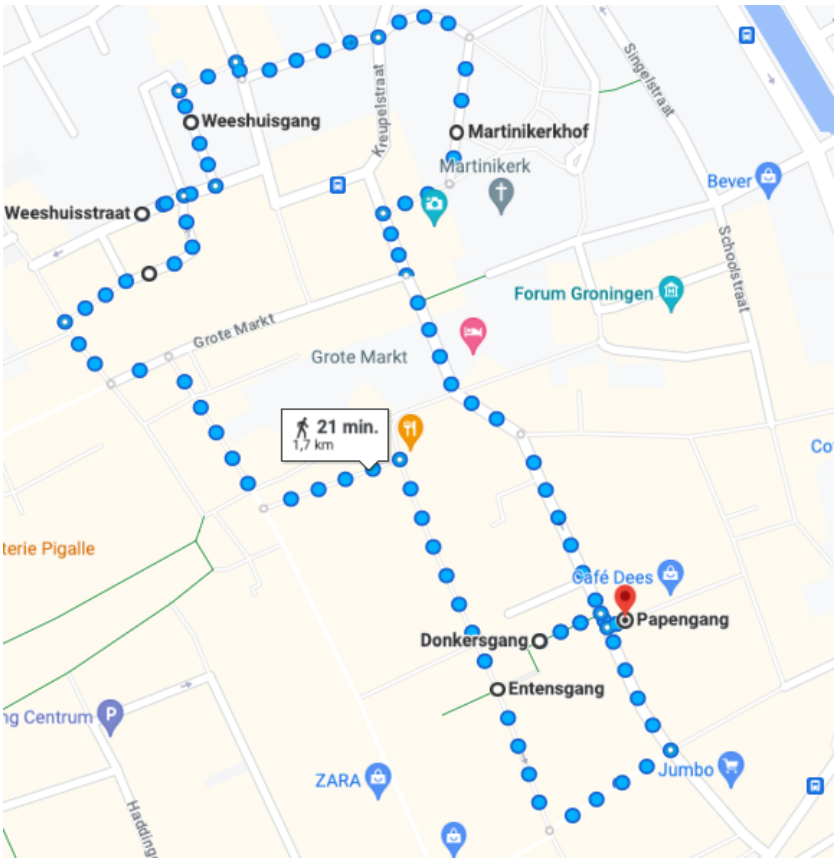


Groningen

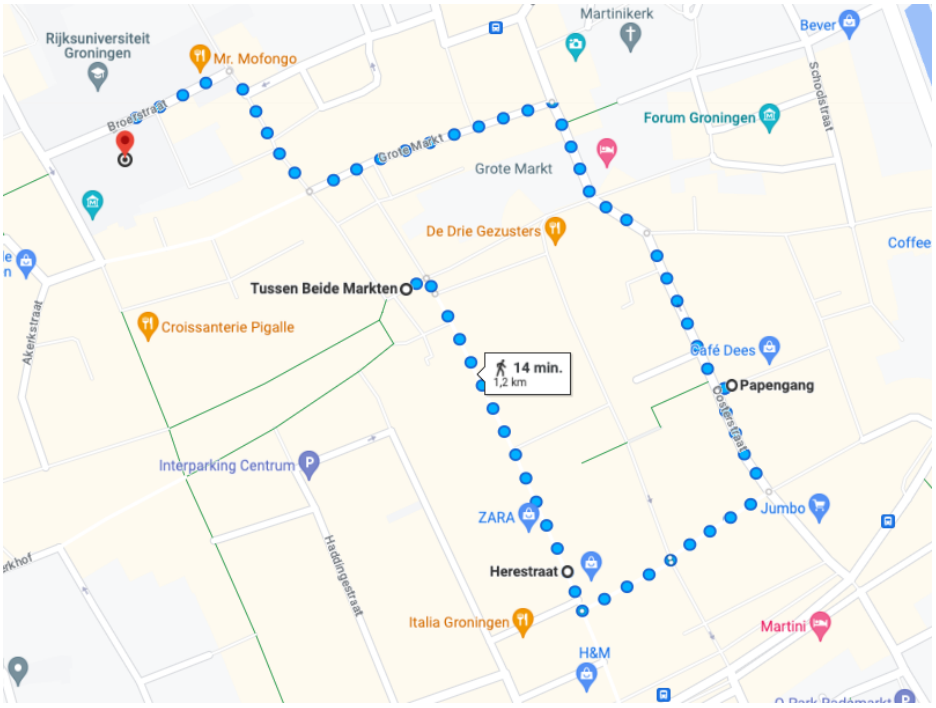
Participant 1: Tom



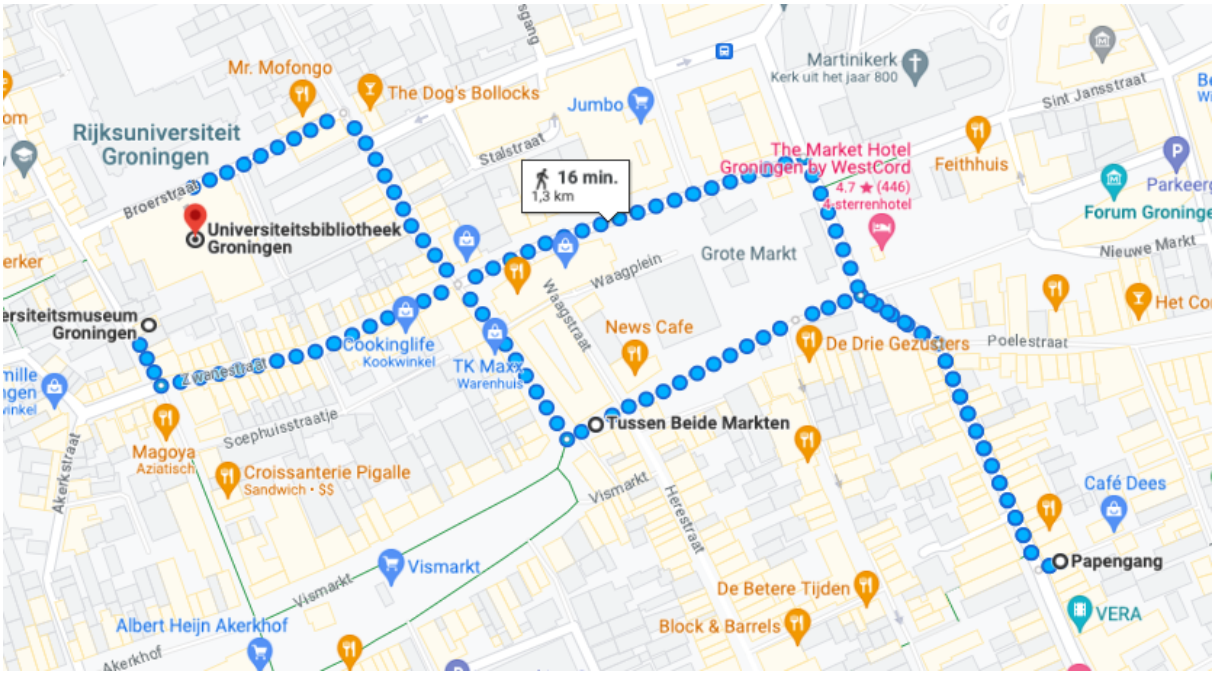
Participant 2: Winston



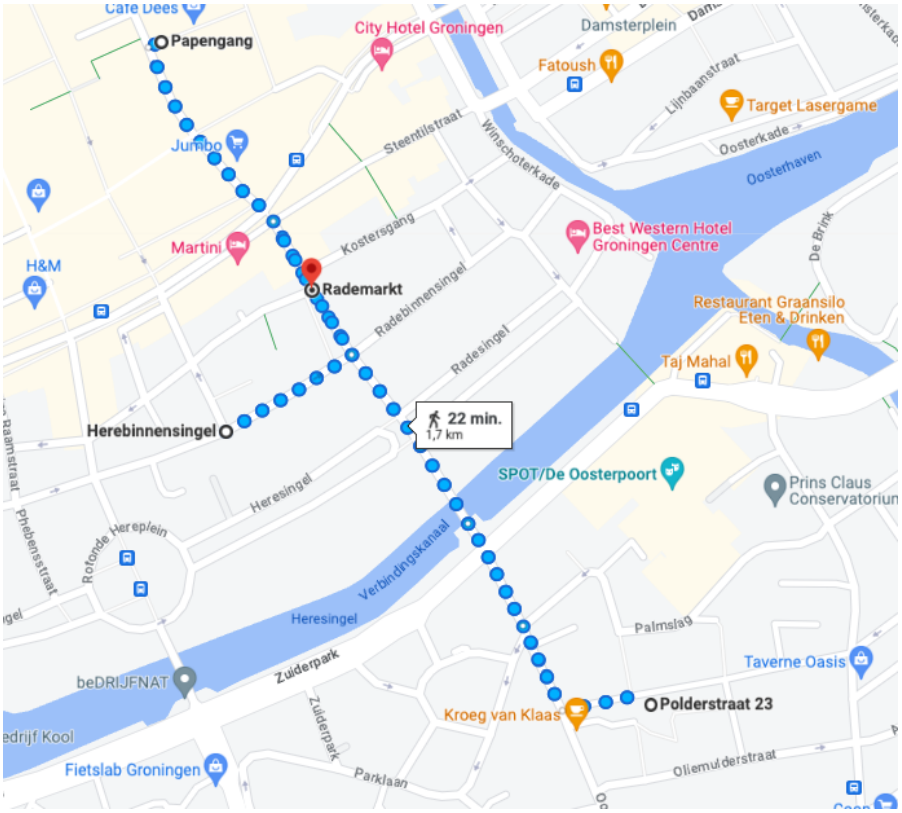
Participant 3: Marya



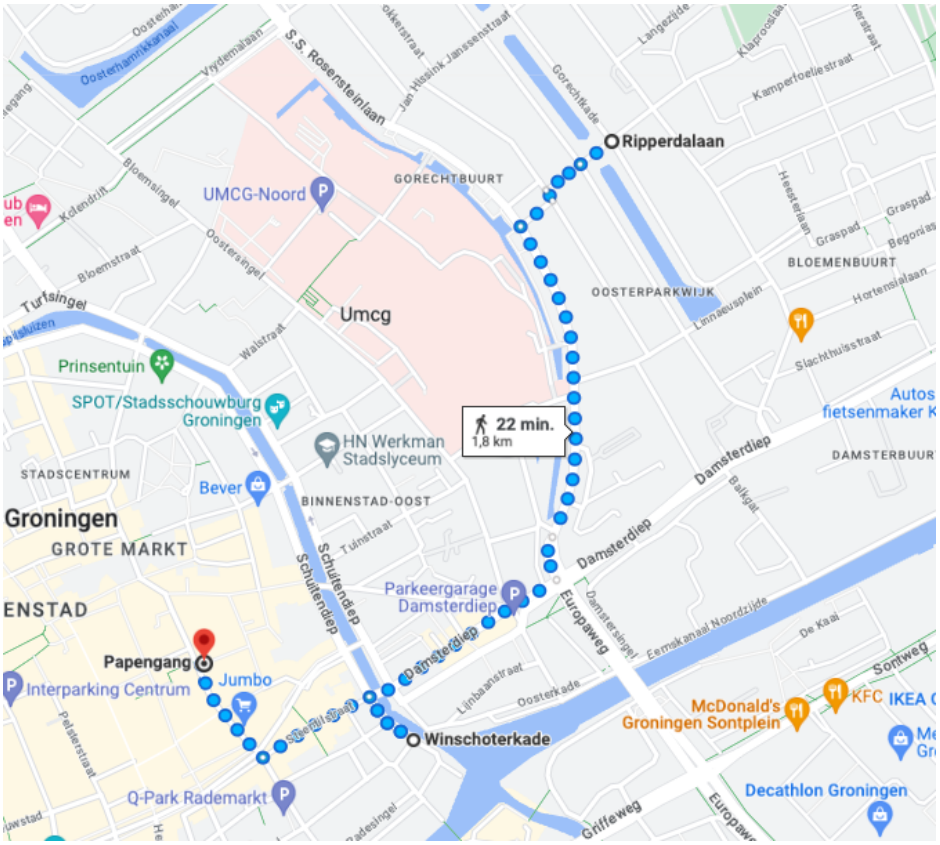
Participant 4: Boris



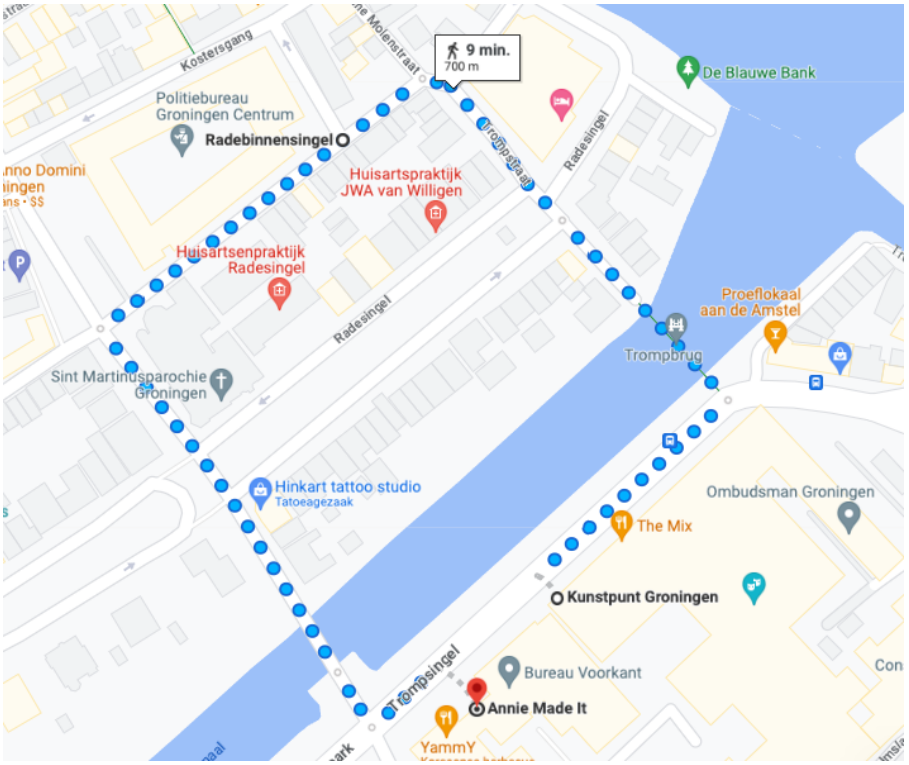
Participant 5: Hans



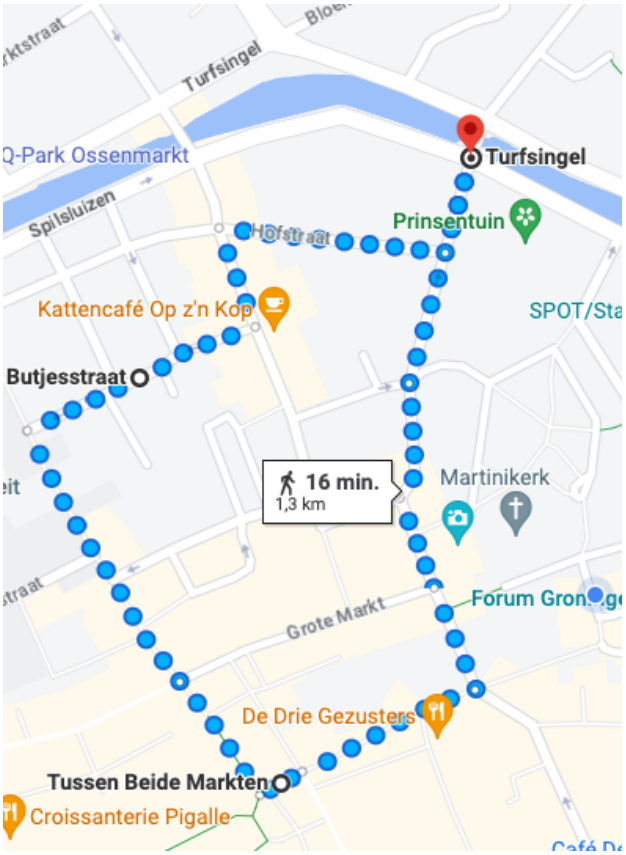
Participant 6: Bert



Participant 7: Karin

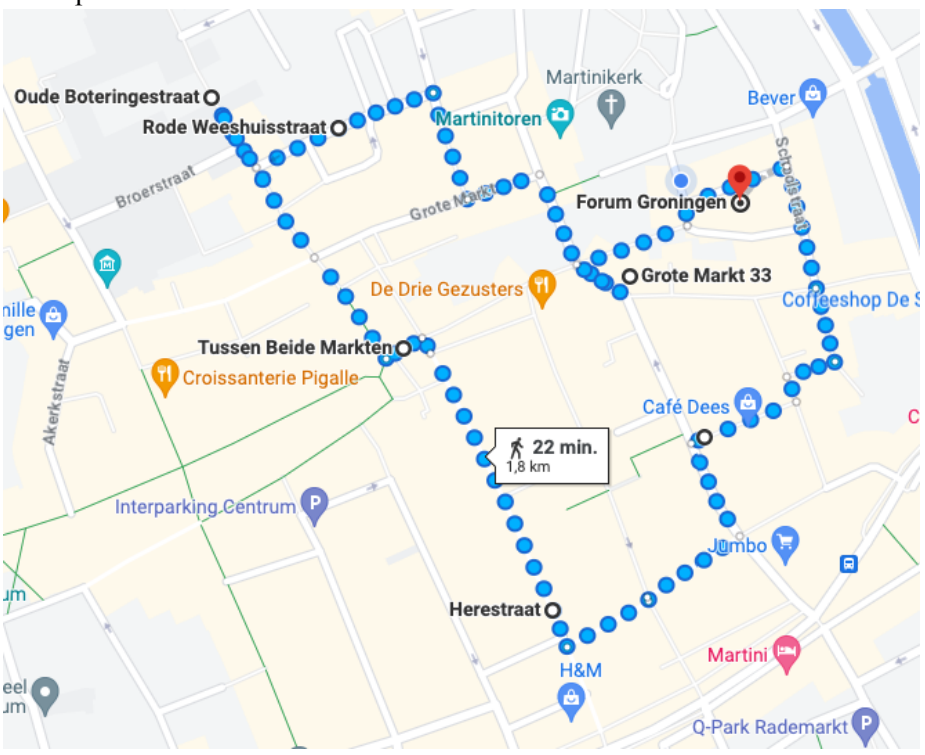


Participant 8: Azra



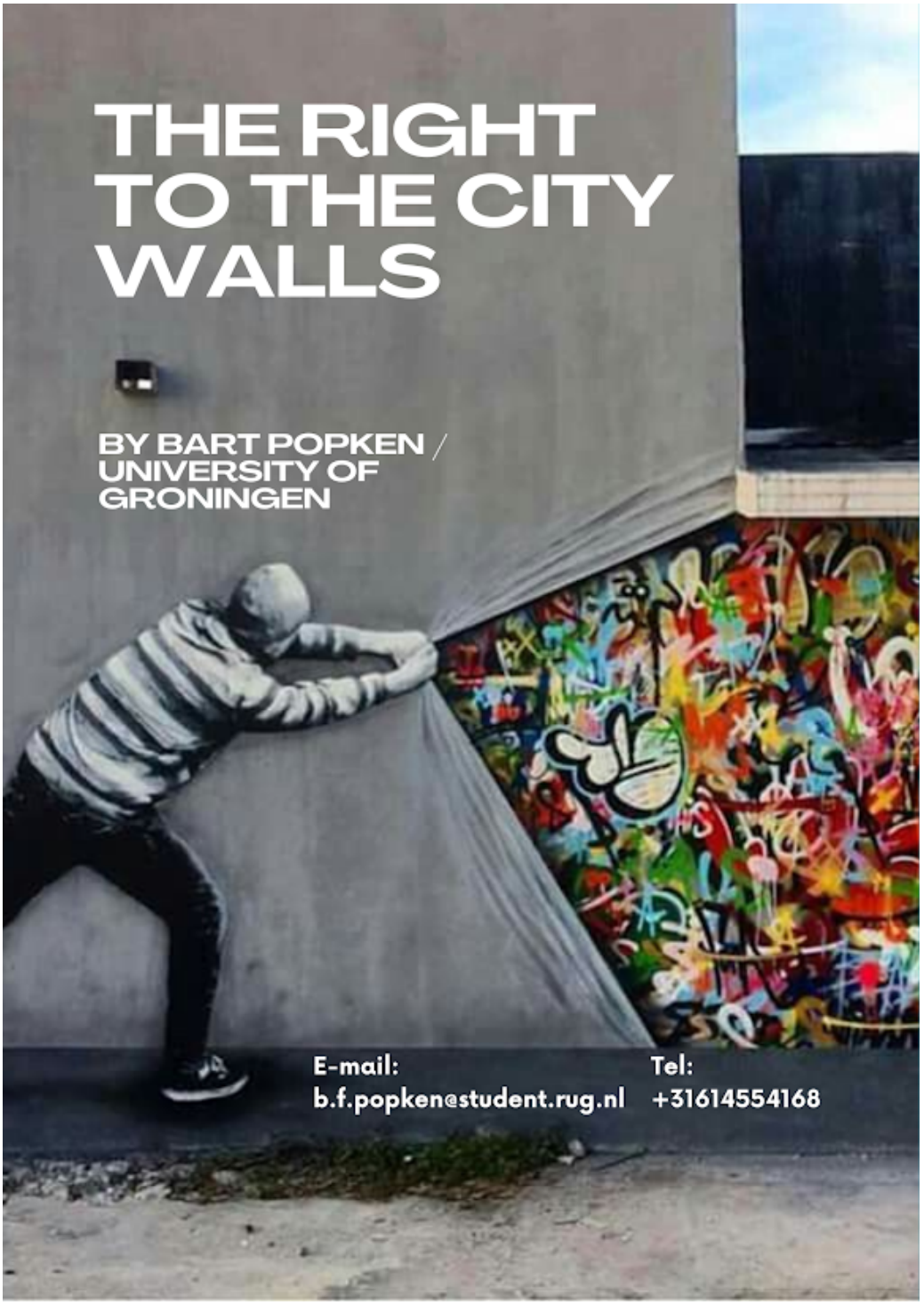
Participant 9: Koen

Participant 10: Tonnes



Appendix VI: Recruitment Posters

Recruitment poster experts



THE RIGHT TO THE CITY WALLS

What?

The purpose of my research is to gain a better understanding of how street artists and municipal planners in the cities of Groningen and Ghent shape places together in the urban environment.

Who?

Municipal planners, creative placemakers, street artists and other city authorities in the cities of Groningen and Ghent.

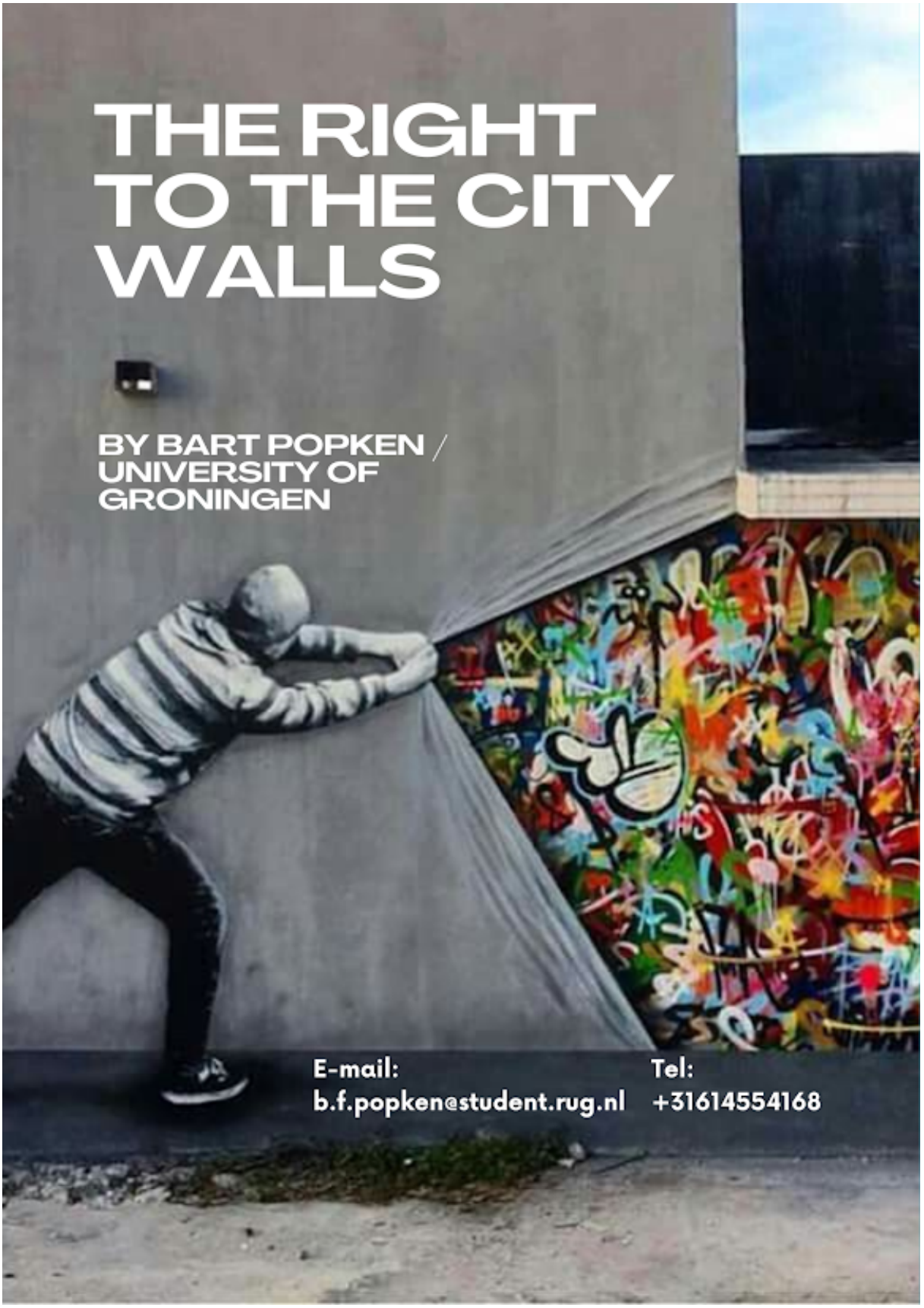
How?

You are asked to participate in an interview which will last +/- 40 minutes. I would like to know more about how the city adopts street art and graffiti in cultural urban development and how who gets to do what in these processes.

Note

At no time will the researcher release any information to anyone other than individuals or institutions working on the project without your written consent. During the data process, your name will be anonymized.

Recruitment poster urban artists


THE RIGHT TO THE CITY WALLS
BY BART POPKEN / UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN
E-mail:
b.f.popken@student.rug.nl
Tel:
+31614554168

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY WALLS

What?

The purpose of my research is to gain a better understanding of how street artists and graffiti writers in the cities of Groningen and Ghent shape places in the urban environment by working together in creative networks.

Who?

Street artists and graffiti writers in the city of Groningen and Ghent.

How?

You are invited to participate in a walking interview. This interview will last +/- 40 minutes and will take place in the inner city of Ghent or Groningen. The purpose of the interview is to walk alongside street artworks, murals and graffiti pieces and discuss the role of them in the urban environment. You can also decide your own walking route if there are specific artworks in the inner city that you appreciate or worked on yourself!

Note

At no time will the researcher release any information to anyone other than individuals or institutions working on the project without your written consent. During the data process, your name will be anonymized.