PLANNING FOR THE NIGHT

EXPLORING PERCEIVED SAFETY INURBAN NIGHTLIFE ENVIRONMENTSIN GRONINGEN

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Abstract

This research explores the topic of perceived safety in nightlife within the city of Groningen, focusing on how spatial planning can enhance perceived safety in the city's nightlife scene. The study employs semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data from various stakeholders, including municipal authorities, the night council, public health services, and other key actors involved in the nightlife environment. On top of that, a focus group was conducted. The focus group consisted of students who described their surroundings during a tour of the nightlife district. They were asked how safe they felt in these places during a night out to determine if their surroundings influenced their experiences. Additionally, a literature review examines known methods and interventions for improving perceived safety in nightlife settings. Through a theoretical framework grounded in spatial planning, the study investigates how design interventions and planning strategies influence individuals' feelings of safety during nighttime.

The main findings reveal diverse perspectives on planning interventions, highlighting existing practices and experimental approaches to improve perceived safety. The research concludes that spatial planning in Groningen's nightlife can enhance perceived safety through physical and social interventions, with collaboration between various institutions being critical and creating safer environments for nightlife visitors. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of balancing safety with the social and cultural vibrancy that characterises nightlife districts. The study contributes significantly to spatial planning by offering a framework for understanding and addressing the complex dynamics of perceived safety and nightlife, with implications for future research focused on enhancing safety and inclusivity in nightlife.

Key words: Perceived safety, urban nightlife, spatial planning, nighttime economies, public space.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This study focuses on perceived safety within the nightlife district of Groningen, a city generally considered safe and whose nightlife is enjoyed by many. Groningen's city centre is a vibrant hub of activity, home to 826 hospitality venues and employing 6,812 people within the sector (Gemeente Groningen, 2022), making it the largest sector within the city centre. The atmosphere created by its bars, restaurants, terraces, and music is highly influential in shaping visitors' experiences, with current surveys rating the city's ambience around 8 out of 10 (ibid.).

However, despite these positive reviews, recent incidents have raised concerns about safety, particularly for marginalised communities. A violent episode at Dorothy's Bar, a well-known drag queen show bar, sparked public debate about the safety of LGBTQI+ individuals in nightlife spaces (NOS, 2023). Additionally, troubling reports of shootings and stabbings (RTV Noord, 2023; Sikkom, 2024), and increasing hostility toward LGBTQI+ individuals, such as the incident at Club OOST (RTV Noord, 2024), contribute to an overall sense of insecurity. These incidents, along with reports of sexual harassment (Sikkom, 2024), highlight the urgency for creating a safer and more inclusive nightlife environment in Groningen.

Balancing safety with vibrancy in public spaces is a challenge faced by modern urban planners, especially in nightlife districts. While nightlife significantly contributes to the social and economic fabric of the city, it also raises concerns about public safety. Urban planning must address these concerns without compromising the dynamic atmosphere that makes these areas attractive.

The growing importance of perceived safety in nightlife is reflected in various campaigns like 'Ben je oké?' (Are you okay?) and 'Ask Angela,' which aim to make bars and clubs safer. However, incidents outside of these venues—particularly those involving the LGBTQI+ community, sexual harassment, and violent clashes—have shifted the focus toward the safety of streets and public spaces. These occurrences raise critical questions about whether people still feel safe during a night out and how their perception of safety can be improved.

Motivated by my own experiences in Groningen's vibrant nightlife, I aim to contribute to the improvement of safety in these spaces. This research will explore how spatial planning interventions can address these concerns and enhance perceived safety for all, ensuring that the nightlife district remains inclusive, enjoyable, and safe for everyone.

1.2 Research Gap and Research Problem

Despite extensive studies on daytime safety and perceived safety, there is a notable gap in the literature explicitly addressing nighttime safety perceptions. The lack of focus on nighttime safety in urban planning creates a significant research gap, as understanding the unique challenges of safety in nightlife environments is essential for developing effective urban strategies. This research aims to fill this gap and offers hope for a safer nightlife. We can make a significant impact by investigating

how different actors perceive safety in nightlife environments and what measures can be proposed to improve it. Experiences from people visiting the nightlife scene of Groningen will be gathered through a focus group, and the negative and positive aspects of perceived safety will be identified by walking through the nightlife district of Groningen. Combining these different perspectives will allow for an assessment of the role of urban planning and discover if planning interventions could impact creating a safer nightlife for all.

1.3 Study Aim

This study explores how spatial planning can enhance perceived safety in areas with clustered nighttime economies. The research focuses on Groningen and seeks to identify effective urban planning strategies to balance safety needs with maintaining a vibrant nightlife. While the study provides insights into safety perceptions during nighttime, it does not cover daytime safety or extend to other cities or regions. The study objectives include assessing the current perceptions of safety among different stakeholders and visitors of nightlife in Groningen's nightlife districts, identifying the spatial factors that influence perceived safety in these areas, and proposing spatial planning interventions to improve safety perceptions without diminishing the vibrant nature of these spaces.

To address these challenges, the central research question guiding this thesis is: *How can spatial planning assist in improving the perceived safety in areas where nighttime economies are clustered, as in the case of Groningen?* This question is crucial for understanding how urban planning strategies can be optimised to enhance perceived safety in nightlife districts without diminishing their appeal. The potential impact of this research is significant, offering hope for a safer and more vibrant nightlife in Groningen and potentially inspiring similar initiatives in other cities.

1.4 Reading Guide

The thesis is structured as follows to answer this research question: First, an initial literature review will be conducted, followed by an explanation of the research methods, which employ expert interviews and a focus group, gathering different perspectives on nightlife. The findings from the interviews and focus groups will then be discussed in the context of existing theories, and the thesis will conclude with remarks and recommendations for policy and future research. The study's findings contribute to planning and perceived safety by offering insights into the dynamics of nightlife and proposing strategies to improve perceived safety.

2. **Theoretical Framework**

2.1 Why are Theories used to conduct this Research?

There is much to discover regarding this topic, with two complex concepts already mentioned in the research question: 'perceived safety' and 'nightlife.' These concepts are complex and heavily dependent on context; thus, understanding them is essential for this research. Using theories provides a structured way to explore and analyse these concepts, aiding in generalisation and application to the relevant context.

Perceived safety is a concept with a broad definition and is widely discussed in different types of sciences. Perceived safety within urban planning is often discussed in the context of public space. While the safety of a place can be assessed through crime rates, grasping the perception of safety proves more challenging. The actual safety level of a place influences people's perception of safety, affecting how liveable the place feels. However, it is essential to acknowledge that other factors can influence perception (Park & Garcia, 2020; Austin et al., 2002). By exploring the literature, we can identify the different influences on perceived safety, crucial for effective urban planning.

Nightlife has played an integral role in shaping cities. Over the years, the position of nightlife within urban areas has evolved, and nightlife itself has transformed cities. Late-night leisure activities have emerged in various locations at different stages and with varying degrees of intensity. Unfortunately, negative perceptions of nightlife have also surfaced, associating it with disorderliness. The extent to which these issues have been addressed or exacerbated varies across different places. Therefore, delving into the literature is necessary to examine how other locations have dealt with, embraced, or mitigated the negative aspects of nightlife.

The relationship between nightlife and perceived safety can be complex, as measures taken to improve safety may sometimes conflict with the attributes that make nightlife appealing. For example, increased security presence, strict regulations, or design features intended to deter criminal activity could detract from the lively, spontaneous atmosphere that draws people to nightlife districts (Hadfield, 2006). Conversely, a lack of adequate safety management in nightlife areas can contribute to perceptions of disorder and make people feel unsafe (Homel & Tomsen, 1993).

The literature highlights how cities have grappled with the balance of appealing nightlife and safety measures, exploring strategies that aim to maintain the vibrancy of nightlife while also addressing legitimate safety concerns. This balance may involve creating opportunities to encourage collaboration among nightlife operators, law enforcement, and community stakeholders to develop customised strategies (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009). It could also mean rethinking the design of public spaces to enhance the enjoyment and the perceived safety of nightlife (Jayne et al., 2008).

Ultimately, understanding these trade-offs and how other cities have navigated them can provide valuable insights for examining the nightlife context in Groningen. The analysis can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the urban dynamics by exploring this nuanced relationship between perceived safety and nightlife. Thus, through the lens of literature, we can gain a deeper

understanding of nightlife, perceived safety, the role of urban planning, and its related concepts. Exploring experiences from other urban areas allows us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Groningen's nightlife. This knowledge can contribute to understanding the nightlife in Groningen and help discover the role of urban planning.

2.2 Perceived Safety

Perceived safety in relation to urban planning is a long-discussed topic, with a rich history of academic research and practical applications. Foundational studies by Newman (1973) and Wilson & Kelling (1982) have informed how urban planning can improve safety through environmental design. These early works laid the groundwork for evidence-based strategies, such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which aim to enhance feelings of safety and deter criminal activity by intentionally shaping the built environment (Cozens et al., 2005).

In this context, perceived safety is defined as the subjective sense of security individuals feel within a particular environment, influenced by physical design, visible signs of disorder, and social interactions. Research shows that well-lit and well-maintained public spaces are critical in fostering feelings of safety, as demonstrated by CPTED principles (Cozens et al., 2005). However, perceived safety is not determined by physical infrastructure alone. Social cohesion and informal social control, as described by Sampson and Raudenbush (1999), also play a pivotal role in reducing fear and enhancing security in communities.

Conversely, disorderly or neglected environments, even in areas with low crime rates, can heighten the fear of crime. Hinkle and Yang (2014) support this by showing that visible signs of decay, such as graffiti or litter, contribute to perceptions of insecurity, aligning with Wilson and Kelling's (1982) "broken windows theory." Despite these findings, critics like Gilling (1997) argue that focusing exclusively on environmental design may neglect deeper social issues such as inequality and poverty, which must also be addressed to improve long-term safety. Additionally, Brown (1999) suggests that the impact of CPTED strategies may be limited in densely populated urban environments, underscoring the need for context-specific interventions.

The Defensible Space Theory

Newman's (1973) "defensible space theory" explains that the physical design of urban environments can foster a sense of ownership and control among residents, thereby enhancing their perceived safety. By creating well-defined spaces, clear boundaries, and natural surveillance opportunities, Newman (ibid.) argued that urban planners could empower communities to take an active role in maintaining the security of their neighbourhoods.

In the book published by Newman in 1973 on Defensible Space, the author highlights the lack of perceived territory of residential spaces by identifying specific characteristics of new building blocks during that era. These characteristics, reminiscent of modernist architecture, contribute to provoking criminal activities. Newman argues that control from the public is crucial in preventing crime, as the spatial features of these new building blocks play a role in facilitating criminal behaviour.

The characteristics identified by Newman (ibid.) are visible in the construction of large, high-rise buildings that accommodate many people. These buildings often feature a ground level that serves as a semi-public space. In addition, there needs to be more differentiation between public and private areas, and the apartments are often built outwards from these semi-public spaces. Thus, the residential blocks constructed in the 1970s tend to isolate residents from the semi-public spaces surrounding their apartments. This isolation leads to reduced social interactions within these spaces and creates blind spots that provoke antisocial behaviour, according to Newman (ibid.).

The Broken Window Theory

Similarly, Wilson and Kelling's (1982) "broken windows theory" suggests that visible signs of disorder and neglect in an area can contribute to a perception of vulnerability and increased crime risk. Their work highlighted the importance of addressing minor issues, such as broken windows or graffiti, to create an environment that feels well-cared for and secure.

The Broken Window Theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982) first appeared in the United States, specifically in New Jersey, during the 1970s. During this time, implementing the 'Safe and Clean Neighbourhoods' program resulted in a shift from police officers patrolling in cars to patrolling on foot. Although the presence of foot patrols did not instantly impact crime rates, it positively affected residents' sense of safety and improved the approachability of police officers.

Traditionally, the fear of disorderliness has not been given much attention when analysing crime rates. However, foot patrol initiatives have demonstrated their effectiveness in reducing street disorder. Through frequent interactions between police officers and community members, often referred to as 'regulars,' an informal system of rules emerged. Both police officers and locals took it upon themselves to adhere to these regulations, contributing to maintaining public order.

In this way, the Broken Window Theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) highlights the importance of addressing disorder and maintaining order in public spaces. While the direct impact on crime rates may be limited, implementing foot patrols fosters a sense of safety among residents and facilitates a more approachable and responsive police force. By acknowledging the significance of disorder in crime prevention strategies, communities can work together to create and sustain an environment conducive to public order (ibid.).

Crime often comes from opportunity (Gök, 2012). If a place feels neglected, it becomes easier for people to litter and damage it. A negative spiral of opportunities for disorder can lead to severe neglect from residents and thus create serious crime issues (ibid.). A neglected street can be visible through, e.g., a broken window (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Neglection is disorderly, and therefore, neglect also advocates disorderly behaviour. Disorderly behaviour leads to fear of crime, which often arises from disorderly behaviour. Thus, neglecting physical elements can lead to fear of crime, and in the worst cases, neglect leads to more crime itself (Gök, 2012).

Humans have failed to keep order; for example, the bystander syndrome is a clear example. Thus, the only solution proposed in the work by Wilson and Kelling (1982) is to enforce control in the form of police officers to keep order. Limited resources, on the other hand, make it hard for police to keep order, and thus, police forces are shifting to law enforcement instead of upholding public order.

Therefore, it is essential to examine this matter and see how planning could solve this issue by creating a sense of ownership and thus preventing the bystander syndrome.

Human Scale and Perceived Safety

While these seminal works were primarily focused on objective safety measures, their concepts have proven to be equally applicable to the realm of perceived safety. Subsequent researchers have built upon these foundations, exploring how factors like lighting, landscaping, and the integration of public spaces can shape individuals' subjective feelings of security within urban environments.

In addition to the influential works of Newman and Wilson & Kelling, Jan Gehl's writings have also significantly contributed to understanding perceived safety in urban planning. Gehl's books, "Cities for People" (2010) and "Life Between Buildings" (2011) emphasise the importance of designing cities and public spaces with the "human scale" in mind. By prioritising the needs and experiences of pedestrians, Gehl's work has demonstrated how thoughtful urban design can foster a sense of comfort, community, and perceived safety.

Overall, the research on perceived safety in urban planning has evolved over the decades, drawing insights from various academic disciplines and practical case studies. The enduring relevance of the theories proposed by Newman (1973), Wilson & Kelling (1982), and Gehl (2010; 2011) underscore the importance of understanding how the physical environment can shape individuals' subjective experiences of security and well-being within urban spaces.

Gehl's design principles, which aim to enhance the liveability of urban spaces, are especially significant for nightlife districts. Research highlights the impact that the design and management of public spaces can have on individuals' feelings of security and comfort, particularly during evening hours. By applying these principles, urban planners and policymakers can enhance natural surveillance, define boundaries, and create a sense of ownership among residents. Designing nightlife areas with a focus on the "human scale" fosters a welcoming atmosphere, encourages social interaction, and deters antisocial behaviour, ultimately creating vibrant and secure environments that feel safe and inviting after dark.

2.3 Nightlife

Newman (1973), Wilson & Kelling (1982), and Gehl (2010; 2011) did not specifically focus on nighttime in their research on perceived safety. However, their findings have inspired researchers to explore how their insights apply to nighttime and nightlife activities within different urban settings. To understand the unique nature of nightlife, it is crucial to consider the distinct social and environmental factors characterising the urban landscape after dark.

Nightlife environments are often characterised by increased social interaction, alcohol consumption, and a heightened sense of anonymity compared to daytime urban settings (Van Liempt et al., 2012). The city's nightlife atmosphere can foster a sense of freedom and release from everyday constraints, attracting locals and visitors seeking entertainment, social connection, and a more vibrant urban experience (ibid.). During the night, social activities thrive in a more relaxed and permissive social atmosphere, fostering a sense of community among individuals who come together to share the night despite not residing in the same place (Nofre, 2023). Nighttime activities

differ from daytime due to the absence of sunlight and, more importantly, our lifestyle preferences. People relate to each other differently at night as the city's flows and pressures ease, creating a more relaxed and permissive social environment. This shared experience and solidarity among nighttime revellers creates a distinct social community within the urban landscape (ibid.).

Trends in Nightlife

The modern concept of nightlife as a distinct social phenomenon began to take shape in the 19th century through the evolution of social spaces like cafes (Haine, 1996). The growth of urban centres and the rise of the working and middle classes in the Western world further fuelled this evolution. As leisure time became more accessible to a broader range of demographics due to labour reforms and increased disposable income, nightlife blossomed into a vibrant aspect of urban culture (ibid.).

By the mid-20th century, nightlife had become integral to city life, encompassing various activities such as dining, theatre, music, and dance. Nightlife districts emerged as entertainment hubs, attracting locals and visitors seeking a lively and engaging urban experience. These districts often featured a concentration of bars, clubs, restaurants, and cultural venues that catered to a wide range of tastes and preferences. Overall, nightlife districts have emerged through a complex interplay of historical, cultural, economic, policy, and social factors, shaping these areas into essential hubs of social interaction, entertainment, and community life (Nofre, 2023).

Recognising the economic and social benefits of thriving nightlife, cities began shaping policies to encourage and manage nighttime activities (Seijas, 2021; Nofre, 2023). Urban planners and policymakers focused on creating safe, attractive, accessible nightlife districts to draw locals and tourists. Initiatives included extending public transportation hours, enhancing street lighting, and increasing police presence to ensure safety (Gwiazdinski, 2006). Additionally, cities implemented noise regulations and zoning laws to balance the interests of nightlife venues with residential areas. They supported cultural and artistic events to foster a diverse and inclusive nightlife scene. As part of these efforts, new governance structures, such as the role of night mayors, were established to manage nighttime activities better (Seijas, 2021). However, balancing the tension between safety and excitement in nightlife districts has been crucial, necessitating a careful approach to surveillance measures while maintaining stimulating environments (Liempt, 2012). Various stakeholders often influence these policies, including property developers and entertainment conglomerates, which raises questions about their impact on older, historical, and alternative forms of nightlife (Chatterton, 2002).

Today, nightlife is a dynamic and essential component of urban economies, reflecting societal shifts towards valuing work-life balance and recreational experiences across all age groups and social strata. Cities that have successfully embraced and nurtured their nightlife scenes have often seen their urban centres revitalised, attracting residents and visitors seeking a vibrant, diverse, and engaging nighttime experience (Seijas, 2021).

The discourse and strategy of the '24-hour city' in the UK emerged as a response to the rise of out-of-town activities fuelled by sub-urbanisation (Van Liempt, 2015). As people withdrew into their private spaces and engaged in home-based activities, city-centre nightlife became dominated by residual groups like youth, prostitutes, and drug addicts. City centres needed to improve their safety

and abandonment, as they primarily served as commercial areas from nine to five. The "24-hour city" concept aimed to counteract this trend by attracting more visitors to the city during evenings and nights. It drew inspiration from successful cultural policies in European continental towns that revitalised urban nightlife and promoted an evening economy (ibid.). By adopting this strategy, cities sought to create a more vibrant, safe, and economically viable urban environment that could thrive around the clock.

This shift towards a more inclusive and vibrant nightlife has significantly impacted cities' social and economic fabric. As nightlife districts have become hubs of entertainment and cultural exchange, they have also played a crucial role in shaping urban identity and fostering a sense of community among residents and visitors alike.

The Vulnerability of the Night

The relaxed nighttime atmosphere can contribute to increased perceptions of risk and vulnerability, particularly for marginalised groups, who may face heightened risks of harassment, assault, and other forms of violence in the urban nighttime environment. This perceived vulnerability stems from the sense of anonymity and reduced social inhibitions that often characterise nightlife settings (Condon et al., 2007). The combination of alcohol consumption, crowded spaces, and reduced visibility can create an environment that feels less secure, particularly for those who may already be marginalised or unsafe in public spaces (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2009).

While the growth of nightlife has brought life, commerce, and cultural vibrancy to cities, it has also attracted criminality and a sense of insecurity that can undermine the inclusive and welcoming atmosphere that cities strive to cultivate. Strategies to address these challenges have often focused on order and policing, such as increased security presence and strict enforcement of laws (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). However, cities also explore innovative policies and initiatives to enhance safety, inclusion, and accessibility within the nighttime urban landscape.

These efforts include improved lighting in public spaces, the creation of designated safe zones or "safe havens" within nightlife districts, and initiatives to promote diversity and community engagement in nightlife activities (Yeo & Heng, 2014). By fostering sustainable and inclusive nightlife environments that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of all urban dwellers, cities can work towards creating a vibrant, safe, and equitable city that thrives around the clock. The distinct social dynamics and cultural significance of nightlife have led cities to increasingly recognise its vital role in shaping urban identity and fostering a strong sense of community among residents and visitors alike, making it a crucial component of the modern urban experience (ibid.). As cities continue to evolve, the role of nightlife in shaping urban identity and community will only grow in importance, underscoring the need for city planners to develop a fitting approach to ensure safe, inclusive, and sustainable nighttime environments.

2.4 The Design of the Physical Environment

The safety and attractiveness of public spaces in urban environments are closely linked to the design qualities and dimensions of the physical environment. Elements such as street lighting, walkability, and urban greenery have been studied as crucial factors that enrich the overall experience and contribute to a sense of security (Su et al., 2023). Among these qualities, the dimensions of imageability, enclosure, human scale, and complexity play indirect yet significant roles in shaping urban safety (Ewing & Handy, 2009). Understanding the interconnectedness of these design principles, as described by Gehl (2010), is essential for creating safer and more inviting urban spaces. Although these principles are primarily focused on ordinary urban life, there are intriguing parallels in their potential application to nighttime economies. By exploring how certain design concepts can be adapted and integrated into commercial nighttime streets, we can foster more secure and vibrant nocturnal experiences while maintaining the focus on enhancing public safety in the urban environment.

Urban design qualities are elements within the physical environment that enrich a place. This term encompasses design qualities such as street lighting, walkability, and urban greenery (Su et al., 2023). These qualities are also applicable to safety. For example, sufficient street lighting allows people to interact with others and see their surroundings well. Urban greenery does not have a direct influence on perceived safety. However, urban greenery could be a reason for others to visit a place, and thus, it creates life on the street. Therefore, Ewing & Handy (2009) rephrased the urban design qualities into dimensions. These dimensions are imageability, enclosure, human scale, and complexity. These dimensions are all based on the physical environment. However, these dimensions enrapture a more indirect way of creating safer spaces by making places more attractive for people to visit.

Imageability refers to how a place stands out from its context, making it easily distinguishable (Ewing & Handy, 2009). An imageable place includes other urban design qualities that make it stand out positively and visually attractive compared to its surroundings. A lively street with lots of activity and beautiful architecture creates a positive image in people's heads, encouraging them to revisit a place (ibid.). An identifiable landmark in the cityscape helps to provide a sense of location and improve navigability (ibid.). Gehl (2010) emphasises the importance of clear structures as a design principle. Clear structures help create navigable spaces and provide a sense of locality. Physical elements such as signs, street patterns, and proper lighting enable easy navigation and make places recognisable, even in the dark. Landmarks also serve as critical physical elements, offering visual contrasts and acting as navigation points within a city (Ewing & Handy, 2009). By adopting the design principle of clear structures, places can become more distinguishable and enhance their imageability, allowing both frequent and new visitors to feel safe and find their way more easily.

Enclosure measures the extent to which the physical environment is visually defined by vertical urban elements, such as buildings, trees, and walls, or a lack of (Ewing & Handy, 2009). Buildings can enclose a space so the outside feels like the inside. Building height, trees, and 'dead space' are essential aspects of this urban design quality (ibid.). A good ratio between the buildings' height and the street's width could make the outside feel denser and 'room-like, which helps create a more pleasant surrounding for the visitor. On the other hand, a bad ratio, with, for example, buildings in a narrow street being high, could be a cause for the space feeling claustrophobic, and dead space,

such as vacant plots and parking lots, can feel alienating due to a lack of human life being visible (ibid.). A design principle described by Gehl (2010) related to enclosure is the soft transitions between private and public spaces. Softer transitions allow for more interaction between the private and public spheres, which could generate more activity and eyes on the street from the private sphere towards the public sphere. Vertical elements, like tall buildings, can feel extended horizontally through shop facades and residential units, becoming a part of the street image (ibid.). Ewing and Handy (2009) also describe softer transitions through the concept of transparency. Transparency benefits the visual richness of a place and makes a place feel livelier through facades of buildings with windows that emit some light onto the streets. Especially in narrower streets with high vertical elements, a horizontal extension could help maintain the human scale. Therefore, the urban design quality of enclosure relates to the urban design quality of the human scale.

The human scale refers to the design of urban elements that match humans, such as proportions of the built environment that fit the size of a human and distances that can be covered by feet (Ewing & Handy, 2009). The human scale invites people to enjoy public space at a walking pace due to distances not being far and by making a place's surroundings visually attractive when experienced at a slower pace (ibid.). Gehl (2010) argued that people's movement would strengthen city safety. Gehl (ibid.) describes slow traffic as non-motorised traffic. The spatial design of a street allows for the movement of slow traffic. A city that invites people to walk must, by definition, have a cohesive structure that offers short walking distances, attractive public spaces, and a variety of urban functions. These elements increase activity, fit within the human scale, and create a feeling of security in and around city spaces. There are more eyes along the street and a greater incentive to follow the events in the city from surrounding housing and buildings (ibid.).

Complexity describes the visual impulses present in a place (Ewing & Handy, 2009). If a place is more visually complex, moving through it at a slower pace will be more enjoyable as it becomes easier to comprehend all its complexities. Visual complexity can be all types of details within the streetscape, such as architectural features on buildings or a diverse colour palette throughout the street. However, at night, most of these features are less noticeable (ibid.). Therefore, playing with different types of street lighting can be a way to make a street visually more complex at night as well. Overall, a more visually rich place invites more people to explore the place at a slower pace, for example, through walking (ibid.).

Gehl (2010) highlights the importance of walkable or slow cities for traffic safety and life on the street. Gehl (ibid.) argues that slow traffic allows for better interaction between people, and thus, it helps to strengthen the perception of safety in general. Walkable distances, attractive public spaces, and a variety of urban functions (mixed-use space) help to *"(...) increase activity and the feeling of security in and around city spaces.*" (p.6 in Gehl, 2010). Walkable distances promote social interaction on the street and more activity non-related to travelling to be seen and witnessed. Necessary activities related to obligations not influenced by external conditions lead to optional activities in a safe, walkable space. An optional activity is an example of life on the streets; necessary activities allow them to happen. Necessary activities allow for optional activities, such as good weather, if the conditions are favourable. Life on the streets creates social bonds and interaction and brings people out of their houses into the street, thus creating more 'eyes on the street'. These interactions are social activities. Social activities come forward from both necessary and optional activities. More activity on the street leads to more social activities. Social activities can be

spontaneous interactions; e.g. even noticing people in the same space would be considered a social activity.

Sensory perceptions and distance could also be tied in with perceptions of safety. Distance influences sensory perception. Humans use their distance towards others in different ways within public spaces. Distance can keep strangers away, initiate conversations, or activate sensory perceptions by getting closer to someone to better understand their behaviour and intentions (Gehl, 2010).

Situational Crime Prevention

Situational crime prevention focuses on reducing the opportunities for crime through strategic urban design and management of the physical environment. In nightlife areas, where social activities extend into late hours, the design and layout of public spaces play a crucial role in influencing perceived safety and actual crime rates.

One critical principle of situational crime prevention is to minimise opportunities for criminal activities. Dakin et al. (2020) state that the physical environment can significantly create crime opportunities. Poorly lit areas, secluded spots, and confusing layouts can all provide potential offenders with the cover and seclusion they need to commit crimes without detection.
Practical urban design qualities can enhance formal and informal surveillance, deterring criminal behaviour. For instance, good lighting, clear sightlines, and open spaces can increase visibility and make monitoring activities easier for law enforcement and the public (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). The presence of natural surveillance through strategic placement of windows, active storefronts, and pedestrian traffic can further reduce the likelihood of crime (Gehl, 2010).

Similarly, the absence of these urban design qualities can create environments conducive to crime. Areas that lack sufficient lighting, have obstructed views, or contain hidden corners can become hotspots for illegal activities. Therefore, the design of the physical environment must prioritise features that promote visibility and accessibility to reduce the risk of crime and enhance the perceived safety of nightlife districts (Wilson & Kelling, 1982).

By addressing the situational factors contributing to crime through thoughtful urban design, cities can create safer, more welcoming nightlife areas. This approach not only improves the actual safety of these environments but also boosts the confidence of residents and visitors, encouraging greater use and enjoyment of urban nightlife spaces.

2.5 Perceived Safety and Social Behaviour in Nightlife Areas

The physical environment not only influences how people experience spaces but also their behaviour, particularly in nightlife areas where perceived safety is heavily influenced by individual behaviour. When people feel a sense of security and comfort, they are more likely to engage in social interactions and move freely through the environment. Conversely, disruptive or antisocial behaviour can create an atmosphere of unease and apprehension, deterring people from thoroughly enjoying the public space. The relationship between perceived safety, the physical environment and social behaviour is cyclical, where positive interactions and a welcoming atmosphere reinforce feelings of security. In contrast, a lack of safety can lead to more guarded and isolated behaviour.

Thus, addressing perceived safety issues in nightlife areas is crucial for cultivating vibrant and inclusive public spaces.

Furthermore, the design of public spaces plays a pivotal role in influencing social behaviour in nightlife areas. By promoting a sense of community and encouraging interactions among people visiting bars and clubs, it is possible to create an environment where everyone feels safe and welcome to participate fully in the social atmosphere. Conversely, the social behaviour in these spaces can also influence or be influenced by planning decisions. This relationship highlights the link between strengthening urban life and providing a secure environment for all to navigate (Gehl, 2010). Ultimately, how individuals interact in nightlife areas is not solely determined by spatial planning; rather, it is shaped by it, providing opportunities to enhance the vibrancy and inclusivity of public spaces.

2.6 Design Principles based on Social Behaviour:

Principles that foster a socially vibrant and inclusive nightlife environment should focus on creating spaces that encourage positive interactions, community building, and a shared sense of safety. Social control is a measure used to control people's behaviour in social situations. However, people are unpredictable, and for social control measurements to be effective, they need to be fluent and adaptable, responding to the dynamic nature of social interactions. Social control can be enforced through the government, police, or similar regulations. However, it can also be achieved by designing the physical environment and encouraging an environment where people enforce social control upon each other. They encourage people to enforce social control upon each other, and specific design principles can be helpful.

A Mix of Functionalities

The most important design principle that allows all other design principles to take place is the mixed use of functionalities. A mixed-use of functionalities allows for life along the street, which creates eyes on the street and, thus, a safer feeling when walking on the street at night. The most predominant mixed-use functionality described in Gehl's work (2010) would be housing. Housing is primarily of importance during evening hours. However, when most residents sleep later during the night, the effects of housing along the street might create less perceived safety. Within a city centre, the amount of housing on the floor level might also be overshadowed by the amount of commercial activity; thus, it is less impacted during nightlife hours. Commercial buildings, on the other hand, can still create soft edges through light emitted from these buildings, or in the case of nighttime-focused commerce, there could be lives within the buildings facing outwards. Hard edges like gated windows, walls, and gates show the opposite, with no eyes facing outwards. Integrating these principles into spatial planning is essential for designing urban areas that support mixed functionalities, which in turn enhance perceived safety by ensuring more active streets, even during the night.

To adapt this principle more towards nighttime economies, a house resident could be compared to a visitor or staff of a nighttime economy. In the end, when soft edges are present, a resident and a visitor or staff of a nighttime economy cause more eyes towards a street. However, a resident feels more territorial about the surroundings than someone present within nighttime economies (Newman, 1973).

In addition to the regular functionalities provided in nightlife settings, we could also consider adding new features specifically aimed at improving safety. Things like on-site counsellors, hotlines, or designated safe spaces would give people who feel threatened or unsafe a clear path to get the help and support they need right away (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2009). These services could assist with filing incident reports, provide emotional support, and connect people to counselling or medical care if necessary (ibid.).

It would also be helpful to build partnerships with local law enforcement, advocacy groups, and community organisations (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2009). They could share information about emerging risks or problem areas, coordinate emergency response protocols, and work together on prevention strategies. This could include training staff and security and running public awareness campaigns to promote a culture of consent and respect (ibid.).

This multi-pronged approach, which provides on-site support, collaborates across sectors and focuses on prevention, would help create a safer and more inclusive nightlife for everyone. It would empower people to get the help they need while addressing the root causes behind their perceived safety.

From a Mix of Functionalities to a Mix of People

A lively city with diverse people is essential for creating a safer and more vibrant urban environment. When a city's landscape is populated with various residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, it encourages a constant flow of activity and human presence on the streets. This "eyes on the street" phenomenon, as described by urban theorist Jane Jacobs (1961), provides a sense of community oversight and surveillance that deters antisocial behaviour and fosters an improved perception of safety. This concept can also be applied to the night, where residential spaces are less common, and commercial and recreational spaces have the upper hand. Through the presence of these commercial and recreational spaces, such as (night)stores, clubs, bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues, there is activity and foot traffic throughout the day and into the evening.

Residential spaces play a crucial role in the 'eyes on the streets' dynamic, as a sense of ownership is high (Gehl, 2010). With fewer of these spaces within nightlife, it is essential that people feel a sense of ownership within these commercial and recreational spaces. The sense of community helps to improve this sense of ownership. Urban planners, through careful planning, can ensure that communities are promoted and supported within nightlife environments, contributing to a safer atmosphere. Urban planners and designers can utilise this principle to create more inclusive and welcoming public spaces that cater to the diverse needs and desires of the community. By fostering a mix of activities, they can create a sense of shared ownership and investment in the urban landscape, resulting in a more vibrant and safer city.

Planners can achieve this through a range of instruments, such as zoning laws that encourage mixed-use development, urban design guidelines that promote 'soft edges'—where buildings interact with public spaces through lighting and transparency—and policies that support community-driven initiatives in nightlife districts. Moreover, the integration of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles ensures that safety measures are incorporated without compromising the vibrancy of nightlife spaces.

Integrating this concept into spatial planning ensures that the interplay between the liveliness of public spaces and the perceived safety of the urban environment creates a positive feedback loop between eyes on the streets and life on the streets, where a safer environment encourages more people to gather, create communities, and engage with nightlife, further reinforcing its vibrancy.

The Underground

'The underground' also plays a pivotal role in adding to the mix of functionalities in the city. The underground refers to certain subcultures, scenes, and venues within the nightlife context. The underground is often characterised by a more intimate and alternative atmosphere than larger, more mainstream clubs. These spaces typically prioritise unique music, diverse crowds, and a sense of community and inclusivity (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2009). People who frequent underground events often seek a different experience from the typical commercial nightclub scene, focusing more on music appreciation, social interaction, and a sense of belonging. The underground scene provides an alternative to the sometimes-risky environments in larger commercial clubs, offering a safer and more welcoming space for individuals to enjoy nightlife activities (ibid.).

On the other hand, the underground is often less visible than the mainstream. The lesser visibility could also make it harder for police control, especially when the underground activities need to be legalised or approved by local legislation (raves, clubs in squatted buildings or outdoor gatherings). However, as described by Kavanaugh and Anderson (2009), due to a sense of community within the underground, a high level of social control is enforced through the people active within that community. Urban planners and designers should recognise the value of these underground spaces and consider ways to integrate and support them within the broader urban landscape, ensuring that they can thrive alongside more conventional forms of entertainment and commercial activity. By factoring these spaces into spatial planning, cities can maintain a balanced and diverse nightlife ecosystem that accommodates both mainstream and alternative forms of social engagement.

2.7 Integrating Theories of Perceived Safety in Nightlife Spatial Planning

To establish a safe nightlife environment, it is essential to recognise the interdependence of physical and social factors. Perceived safety in nightlife settings is influenced by specific physical elements such as lighting, spatial layout, and visibility, as well as social components including crowd density, security presence, and the nature of social interactions among patrons. Understanding how these elements interact is critical for enhancing the perceived safety of a location.

For example, effective lighting not only increases visibility but can give a sense of safety. However, implementing physical design changes, such as enhanced lighting, must be approached carefully to avoid compromising the unique atmosphere that characterises nightlife districts. Overly bright or harsh lighting could detract from the ambience that visitors expect, thus affecting their overall experience. Moreover, achieving changes requires active collaboration among stakeholders, including local businesses, the municipality, and law enforcement. However, this process can be time-consuming and needs ongoing engagement and investment from all parties involved. Initiatives aimed at community building can help cultivate relationships among residents. These relationships create informal social controls that enhance feelings of safety and belonging. Thus, urban planners

must consider both physical design elements and social dynamics when developing strategies to improve nightlife safety.

In summary, a thoughtful integration of physical and social factors is essential in nightlife spatial planning. Even small changes made by urban planners—like improving lighting or enhancing community engagement—can contribute to a more secure and vibrant nightlife environment. By prioritising both the physical layout and social interactions, planners can create spaces that not only feel safe but also promote a lively and inclusive nightlife culture.

2.8 What nuances are there within the Literature reviewed?

The literature reviewed reveals several important nuances regarding perceived safety in nightlife contexts. Research on perceived safety varies significantly across geographical locations, leading to cultural disparities in street interactions and stakeholder collaboration to maintain order and safety within nightlife. The size of nightlife districts and cities also influences how experiences are shaped within these environments. Consequently, it is essential to consider the specific context of Groningen when applying findings from other research.

For instance, foot patrols are a common practice in Groningen, yet Wilson & Kelling (1982) describe them as an innovative approach to policing in the United States. Despite these differences, the insights from Wilson & Kelling (ibid.) remain relevant in Groningen, as foot patrols enhance police approachability and mobility, particularly in narrow urban areas. Additionally, the time of day significantly affects perceptions of safety. Although Gehl (2010, 2011), Newman (1973), and Wilson & Kelling (1982) primarily focus on urban residential areas, their findings can be extrapolated to nightlife settings due to the emphasis on human interaction in their work. For example, the roles that residents play in fostering safety, as discussed in Gehl's research, can be likened to the experiences of visitors and professionals within nightlife districts. This suggests that their insights are valuable for understanding the dynamics of nightlife environments.

The literature also highlights different historical periods, revealing trends and shifts in how perceived safety has been understood and experienced over time. These shifts can significantly impact the interpretation of concepts related to safety in nightlife. Understanding the reasons behind these changes enriches the existing body of knowledge and provides context for current discussions.

By recognising and analysing these contextual nuances, a more comprehensive understanding of perceived safety within nightlife can be achieved. This awareness allows for a nuanced interpretation of the literature, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics present in Groningen's nightlife.

2.9 Conceptual Model

The most important concepts and relationships to be utilised extensively are the physical and social environment elements. Both of these factors are described as influences on perceived safety and are also subject to influence by the realm of planning. Urban planners can utilise their tools to enhance safety within these factors.

Perceived safety is also influenced by non-measurable factors that are primarily beyond the control of urban planning. These factors encompass alcohol and drug use, past experiences, psychological conditions, and other elements outside the realm of planning. Even though the overall perceived safety could be considered reasonable, these non-measurable factors should be considered, as they might individually deter people from visiting a place.
While urban planning may not directly influence these factors, planners should consider them when assessing individual experiences related to a space. This relationship is illustrated schematically in Figure 1.
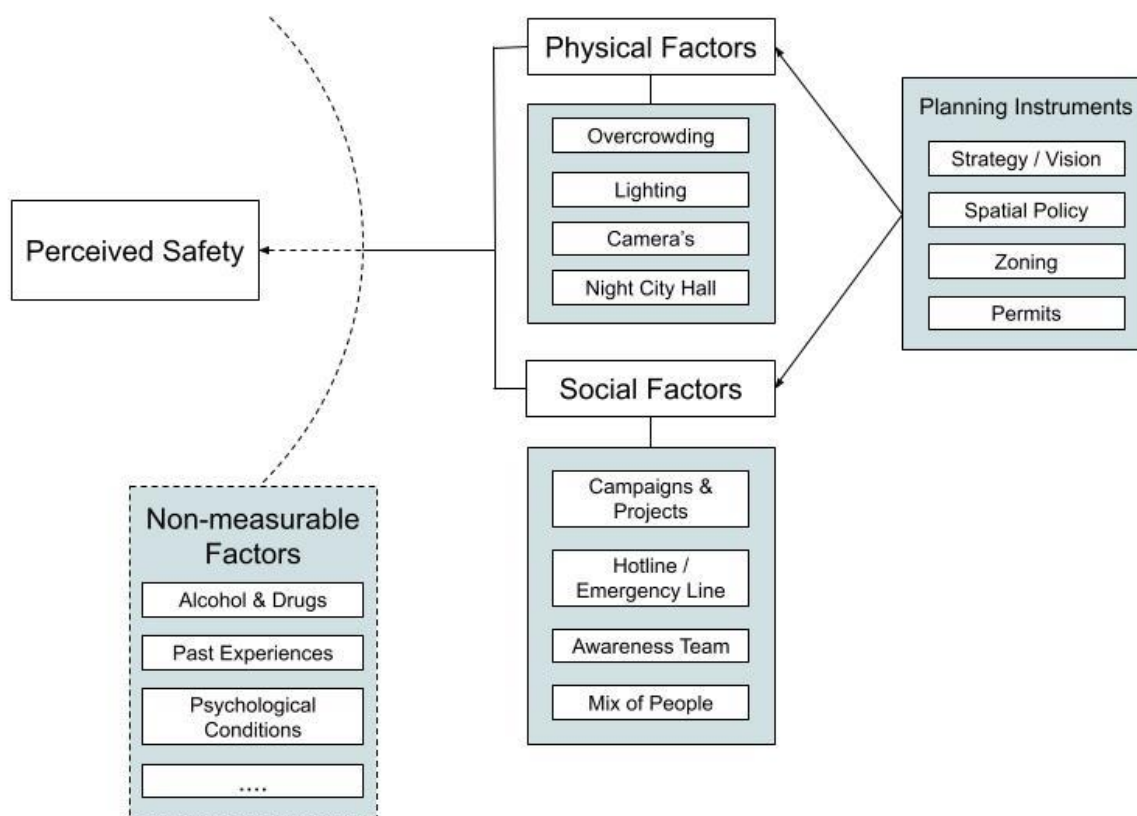

Figure 1: The conceptual model of perceived safety

3. Methodology

Research Question

"*How can spatial planning assist in improving the perceived safety in areas where nighttime economies are clustered, as in the case of Groningen?*"

3.1 What is the Research Worldview?

This research employs a constructivist perspective to thoroughly examine and delve into the multifaceted concept of 'perceived safety.' It delves into the complex realm of subjective perceptions, accepting the absence of a singular reality governing individuals' interpretations of safety. People's perceptions, determined by their norms and values, are inherently subjective (Koskela & Pain, 2000). Consequently, subjectivism emerges as a fitting ontological stance for this research, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between individuals and their perceptions of safety.

However, by utilising a constructivist approach, this research strives to capture and interpret the collective perceptions of the diverse and extensive group of individuals who visit the nightlife of Groningen. Exploring varied perceptions of safety enables the identification of shared thoughts and points of interest for policy making. By transcending the limitations of individual preferences and considering the collective demands, policymakers can work towards establishing an inclusive policy for all.

In summary, through the lens of constructivism, this research attempts to unravel the subjective nature of 'perceived safety' by acknowledging the absence of a singular reality and recognising the subjective and socially constructed aspects of individuals' perceptions. By embracing a constructivist perspective, capturing collective perceptions, and considering diverse influences, it aims to inform policies and practices that promote safety and security for a broader community, transcending individual perspectives and catering to the collective needs of society.

3.2 How can Knowledge about the World Around be acquired?

This research utilises a mixed approach, incorporating elements of both subjective and constructivist epistemology. The methodology employs a subjective approach through focus group discussions and interviews. The interviews are designed to incorporate context relevant to the interviewees, while in the focus groups, participants are asked to share their personal experiences. This subjective approach is crucial because it allows participants to express their perceptions of safety in a conversational setting, offering richer insights into their experiences (Jacobs, 1961). By exploring these personal experiences and considering the context in which they occur, the subjective approach aims to understand how safety is perceived within Groningen's nightlife and what improvements could be made.

However, the ultimate goal is to integrate these subjective perspectives into a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Here, the constructivist epistemology becomes important, as it explains

how knowledge about safety is constructed through the interpretation of multiple subjective viewpoints (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). By analysing recurring themes and patterns across the collected data, the research moves beyond individual perspectives to develop a contextual-based interpretation of safety within Groningen's nightlife. This process of synthesis is essential because it allows the research to construct a shared understanding of safety that reflects the complex, socially constructed nature of the issue (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The knowledge acquired from this approach is instrumental in developing spatial planning interventions tailored to the case study. Understanding subjective experiences of safety is particularly valuable because it highlights concerns that may not be apparent in more objective data, such as crime statistics (Creswell & Poth, 2017). For instance, participants may point out areas they perceive as unsafe that would otherwise be overlooked. These personal experiences can reveal aspects of perceived safety that are crucial for creating effective planning solutions. Collecting various viewpoints through this mixed approach enables the development of more nuanced interventions, ultimately helping planners address specific issues within the nightlife district more effectively.

3.3 How are 'True' Statements achieved?

Achieving "true" statements in the context of safety perceptions is inherently challenging due to the subjective nature of the topic. Participants' experiences of safety are deeply personal and shaped by factors such as past experiences, context, and individual sensitivities. What feels safe to one person might seem threatening to another, making it difficult to establish universally "true" conclusions. In this research, placing participants in experimental situations to objectively test their perception of safety would be impractical and could potentially alter their natural behaviour. Furthermore, the purpose of their visit—participating in a focus group rather than engaging in a typical night out—inevitably influences how they perceive the space.

To account for these factors, participants are encouraged to reflect on past experiences in the nightlife district under more typical circumstances. This reflection helps to ground their statements in lived experiences rather than in the unique conditions of the research setting. While the subjectivity of perceived safety limits the extent to which any statement can be considered universally "true," each participant's perspective remains valid within their own context. Moreover, the physical environment, the time of day, and the nature of the visit all influence safety perceptions, meaning that participants must be in the right place at the right time to arrive at their most accurate reflection of safety. While subjectivity introduces challenges, it also allows for a rich diversity of perspectives, all of which are crucial to understanding the complexity of safety perceptions in this context.

3.4 The Applied Methods

According to Cozens et al. (2019), crime and disorder in nighttime economies are best tackled through a collaborative approach between the responsible authorities and a communicative approach towards the visitors of nighttime economies. Two methods are being used to include both the responsible authorities and the visitors of the nightlife of Groningen.
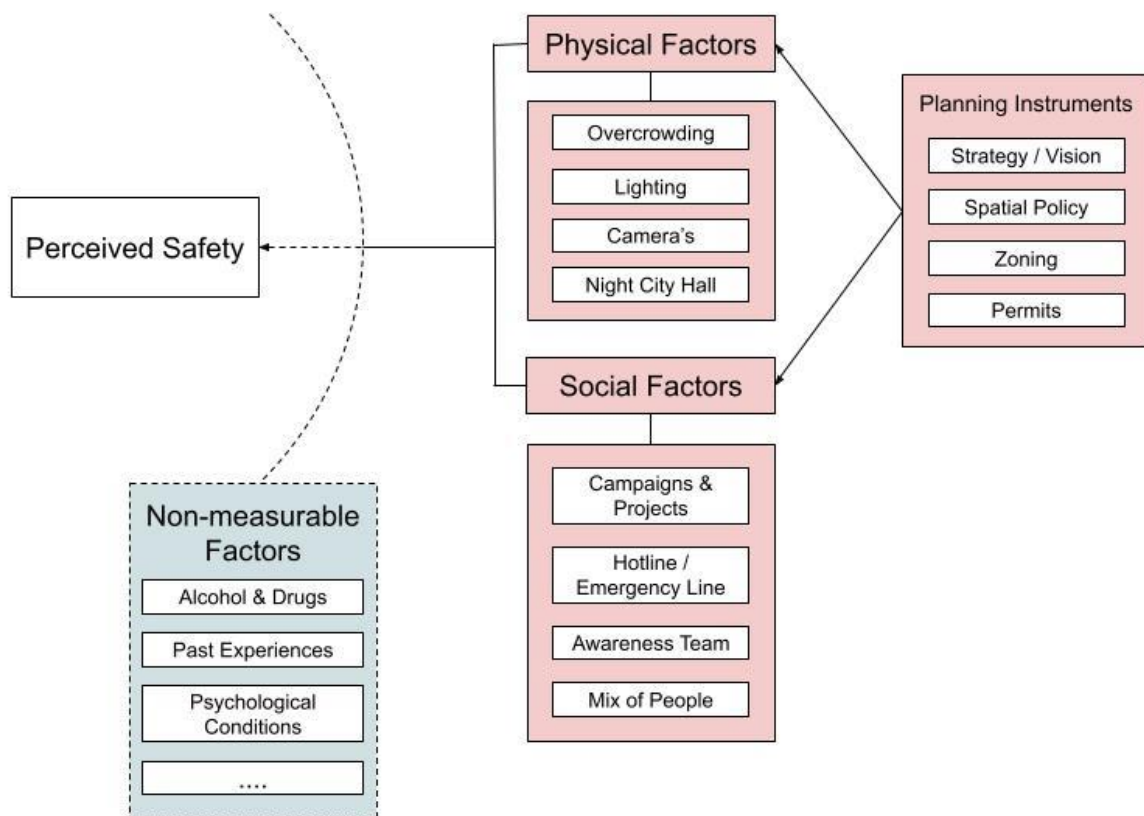
Semi-structured Interviews

Figure 2: Highlighted in red are the topics from the conceptual model the semi-structured interviews discuss

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with responsible authorities and key players involved in Groningen's nightlife district. This method was chosen for its flexibility in allowing participants to share detailed insights while maintaining a focused discussion on safety-related themes. The interviews aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of current actions, identify areas for improvement, and explore how spatial planning can enhance perceived safety.

The municipality holds significant legislative and executive powers through its decision-makers, policymakers, and municipal enforcement. Interviewees will include two policymakers from 'Team Safety,' as well as a project secretary and an urban planner involved with projects taking place within the city centre (Grote Markt, Gelkingestraat and Oosterstraat). These individuals play a crucial role in shaping and implementing safety policies, making their perspectives essential for understanding both the division of responsibilities and the functioning of the nightlife district from a top-down perspective.

Additionally, the night mayor (Merlijn Poolman) of the local night council, a bottom-up initiative that aims to strengthen the nighttime economy and improve visitor safety, will be interviewed. The night council has initiated several initiatives, including the 'Are you okay?' safety campaign and the establishment of a city hall for the night, both of which aim to raise awareness of safety issues in the district. His insights will offer valuable perspectives on how grassroots efforts are contributing to the improvement of nightlife safety and where further support may be needed.

Beyond the municipality and night council, other key institutions will also be interviewed. KEI, the organisation responsible for organising the student introduction week (KEI-week), will provide insights into safety during a period when many new students are unfamiliar with the city's nightlife. KEI's initiatives, including an emergency line and collaboration with the GGD (Dutch health institution), reflect proactive measures aimed at enhancing safety during this high-risk period. The GGD will also be interviewed to discuss its work on the emergency line, sexual assault prevention campaigns, and training for nighttime economy staff. These collaborations aim to create a safer environment for all nightlife visitors, particularly during the student introduction period.

Finally, grassroots initiatives like the awareness team at Club OOST will be explored to understand their contributions to improving social safety in the nightlife district. These bottom-up approaches, which emphasise community engagement and accountability, offer important insights into how policy support from the municipality can complement grassroots efforts to foster a safer nightlife environment.

By gathering information from diverse stakeholders—including municipal authorities, the night council, KEI, GGD, and grassroots initiatives like Club OOST—this research aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of safety efforts in Groningen's nightlife. Specifically, the findings will identify key areas where spatial planning can directly influence improvements in perceived safety and examine the limitations posed by current policies and responsibilities. The semi-structured interviews have several key goals: to uncover what planners can implement to enhance safety, to identify locations deemed unsafe, to compare current policies with focus group feedback, and to understand the rationale behind stakeholders' perspectives. Given the diversity of interviewees, the semi-structured format allows for flexibility. While core questions enable comparability, others are adapted to fit the specific roles and experiences of each stakeholder. This method ensures that each interview provides the most relevant insights while uncovering differing opinions on general safety issues.

Focus Group
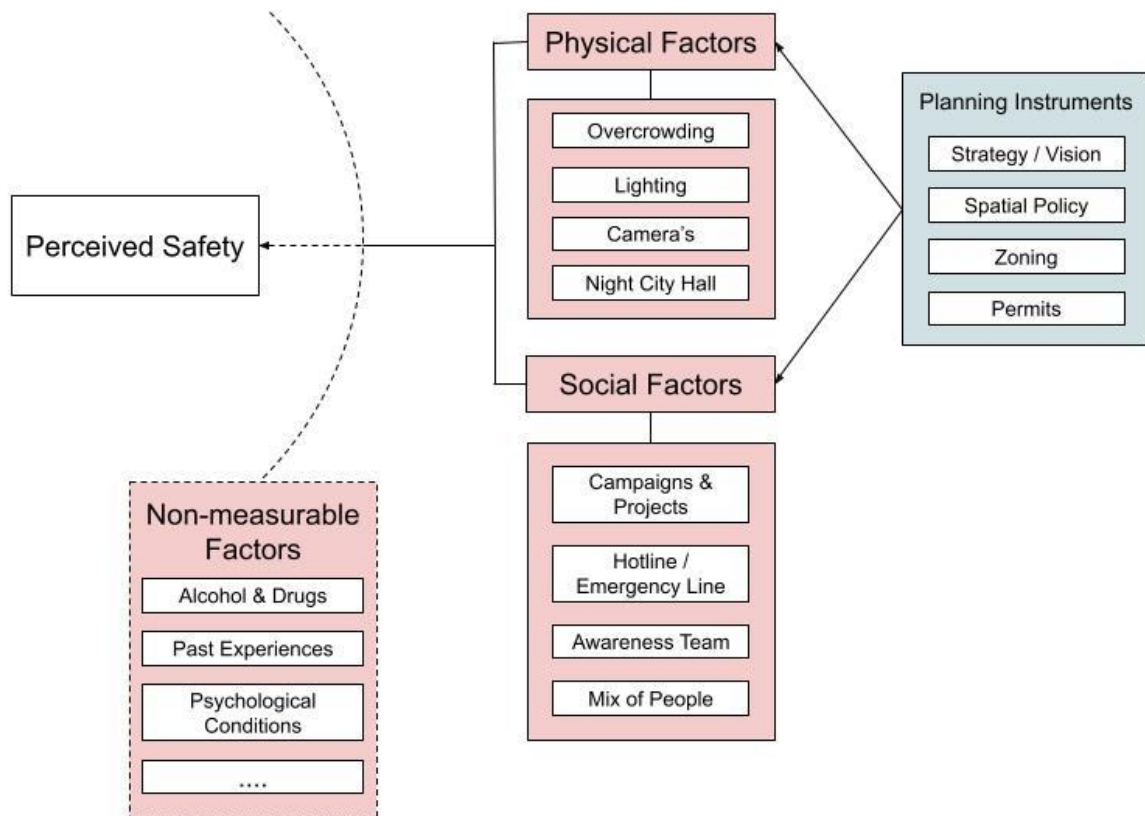
Figure 3: Highlighted in red are the topics from the conceptual model the focus group discusses

The focus group was designed to gather insights on both the physical and social elements of the environment from individuals with varying levels of experience in nightlife settings. Participants included six young adults from Groningen who responded to an open call through social media expressing interest in the research. The demographic characteristics of the group, such as age, gender, and frequency of visiting the nightlife district, are detailed in Table 1. These diverse backgrounds help ensure that a range of perspectives is captured, reflecting both frequent visitors and those who occasionally engage with nighttime economies.

The feedback provided by this focus group is essential for understanding how different groups perceive safety and interact with the nightlife environment. By focusing on their experiences, the study can better identify key factors that influence both positive and negative perceptions of safety. These insights will be used to inform the development of planning interventions aimed at improving the built and social environments within the nightlife district, aligning the findings with the broader research goals.

	Age	Gender	How often do you visit the nightlife district?
Participant 1	24	Female	Every month
Participant 2	26	Male	Every week
Participant 3	23	Female	Every week
Participant 4	24	Male	Every week
Participant 5	25	Male	Every month
Participant 6	21	Female	Multiple times a week

Table 1: Demographic information on the focus group

The goal of the focus group is to understand participants' perceptions of safety within the nightlife district, as well as the reasons behind their feelings of safety or insecurity. To achieve this, participants will be asked introductory questions about their backgrounds and experiences in nightlife, which will help uncover potential biases and factors that influence their perceptions. By allowing participants to elaborate on their safety experiences and discuss both the positive and negative aspects of the nightlife district, the focus group aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the environment.

These insights can either confirm existing findings from the literature and support current policies or offer alternative perspectives that challenge prevailing assumptions. Additionally, participants will be asked to identify physical and social elements in various locations within the district, recording at least three positive and negative aspects of both the built and social environments. These observations will help inform specific planning interventions, as they highlight what elements contribute to or detract from the perception of safety. This process ensures that the participants' direct experiences are incorporated into practical recommendations for improving the safety and atmosphere of the nightlife district.

It is preferred to have directly interview visitors of nighttime economies on-site. Research on-site could cause biased responses and risk for the interviewer. Alcohol and drug consumption could, for example, influence responses due to thinking abilities being altered, and could also pose a risk for the interviewer, as alcohol and drug use can be a cause for unexpected behaviour (Cozens, 2019). Another issue with on-site interviewing is that there could be a lack of respondents who feel unsafe during nightlife as they participate at that moment. Alternatively, if someone feels unsafe, they might avoid being interviewed by someone who is a stranger to them. Therefore, the focus group was conducted during nighttime, but in groups of 3, so the participants were not alone. While this does change their perception of safety at that moment the participants were allowed to incorporate previous experiences in their answers. As previous experiences could be negative experiences the participants did not have to elaborate on them, but give a grade to the street based on how safe it felt.

These two qualitative methods are expected to generate potential spatial solutions for improving perceived safety during nightlife. Furthermore, the findings may inform spatial planning policy recommendations for the local government authority.

3.5 How are Phases and Methods combined?

The data collection is structured in two phases. First, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to gather information from local sources active within the field of safety and nightlife. This information will help identify places of interest for the tour with the focus group. While the semi-structured interviews give exciting insights that are valuable for the findings themselves, they will also be used as a guide along the literature review to create a focus group tour involving all types of relevant places, either good or bad, regarding safety.

3.6 Selecting the Case
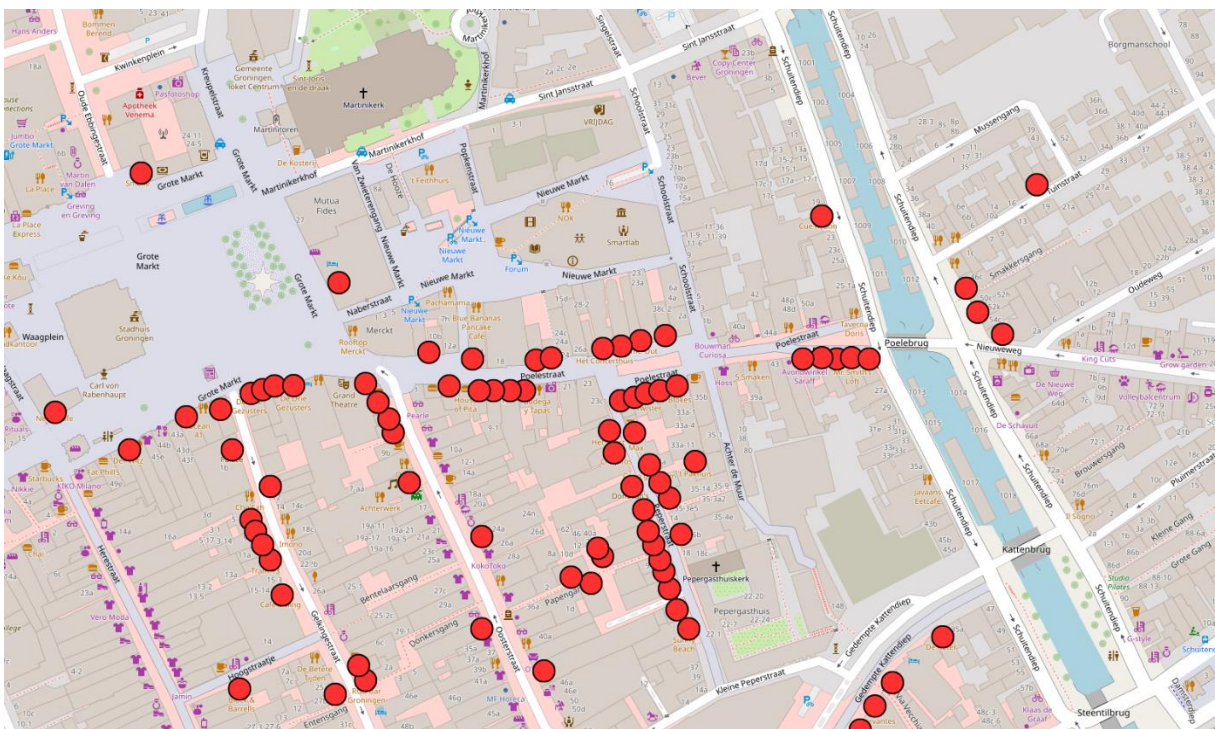
Figure 4: Nighttime activity in the southeastern part of the city centre of Groningen. Every dot resembles an establishment open till at least 00:00 (Opening times retrieved from Google Maps (2024)).

The focus of this research revolves around the city of Groningen, a vibrant student city that is home to both a university and a university of applied sciences. With its large student population, Groningen boasts a dynamic nightlife scene that significantly contributes to the local economy (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). This makes the city an ideal location for investigating safety concerns within nightlife settings (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002). The southeastern part of the city centre sees the highest concentration of nighttime activity (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). Figure 4 highlights these nightlife venues.

Recognising the need for improved safety, a covenant titled "Veilig Uitgaan" (Safe Nightlife) was established, supported by the municipality, local police, and key players in the nighttime economy (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). This agreement reflects the collective intent to address ongoing safety challenges. Despite these efforts, public concerns such as intoxication, noise pollution, sexual

harassment, and violence remain prevalent in Groningen's nightlife, and these issues underline the need for more proactive strategies. While the covenant demonstrates a collective intent to address safety challenges, it remains largely reactive, relying on resident complaints and police reports. This method may not capture the experiences of those who feel unsafe but do not formally report their concerns, which risks overlooking critical issues in public perception of safety.

This research selects the nighttime district in the southeastern part of the city centre as the focal area, drawing upon information provided by the "Team Veiligheid" (Safety Team). A literature review and expert interviews have been conducted to shed light on specific places within the chosen district. The study of the existing literature has shown a set of design principles containing a mix of both physical and social aspects. According to the literature, these locations, to a certain extent, need more specific design principles or execute the design principles well. Within the practice, the principles from the theory are visible within specific contexts that should be considered. By comparing the perspectives obtained from the focus group regarding these areas with the understanding from the literature, this study aims to draw conclusive findings on the relevance of these design principles within the context of Groningen's nighttime safety.

3.7 What Sources of Information are consulted?

According to Cozens et al. (2019), addressing crime and disorder in nighttime economies requires both collaboration among responsible authorities and effective communication with the public. To capture insights from both groups, this research utilises semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and a focus group with visitors to Groningen's nightlife. This ensures a holistic approach by considering perspectives from those who shape policy and those who experience the nighttime economy firsthand.

In order to explore the feasibility of the proposed interventions, they will be evaluated within the context of the current legislative framework in the Netherlands. This includes examining relevant strategies and visions, zoning plans, spatial planning policies, and permits, as well as the 'APV' (Dutch abbreviation for 'Algemene Plaatselijke Verordening'), a legal regulation concerning public order and safety. While the APV falls outside the direct domain of spatial planning, it is often referenced in planning documents, making it a critical component in assessing public safety measures. By understanding the scope of these planning instruments, we can determine the feasibility of the proposed interventions and assess whether planners have the capacity to implement them effectively.

3.8 How the Collected Information is processed.

Data Collection and Documentation

The data collection process will involve both interviews and focus group tours. Interviews will be recorded and temporarily stored on a secure digital platform to ensure that no critical information is missed during the transcription and coding process. Each interviewee will complete a consent form that outlines the research purpose, how the data will be used, and their rights as participants. The consent form includes provisions allowing interviewees to skip questions or stop the interview at any time, ensuring that they feel comfortable and in control during the process. It also provides the

option for participants to remain anonymous, and their data will be handled with strict confidentiality.

During the focus group tours, participants will either take notes or make audio recordings to capture their observations and impressions of the environment. Following the tour, a discussion session will take place, which will also be recorded to assist with the later transcription and coding of the data. This ensures that all insights are accurately documented for analysis. Both the interview and focus group data will be coded and analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and key insights into the participants' perceptions of safety within the nightlife district.

Coding and Analysis

Through the coding process, key categories will emerge deductively and inductively, helping identify the physical and social factors influencing perceived safety. Deductive coding will involve the pre-existing theories to help identify the themes and categories within the interviews. On the other hand, inductive coding will allow themes to emerge organically from the data itself. This involves carefully reviewing transcripts and notes to discover patterns and insights in the participants' responses. Inductive coding is essential due to the interviewee's knowledge of the case and subject. Their responses could include important information not found within the theory. By combining both deductive and inductive approaches, a comprehensive analysis can be done that is theory-driven and grounded in the actual data.

Coding categories

The coding analysis will use specific categories based on the literature: the following concepts will be used as categories.

Descriptive information on the interviewee
- *Demographics*: General information such as gender, age, place of residence, etc.
- *Contextual information:* Information on the interviewee's role in nightlife or related to the case.

Thematic coding
- *Physical environment*: Make a clear distinction between a positive reaction. and a negative reaction towards an aspect of the physical environment
- *Social environment*: Make a clear distinction between a positive reaction and a negative reaction towards an aspect of the social environment
- Perceived safety (definition)
  - When the interviewee describes perceived safety
  - It is also used to highlight the difference between safety and perception. Safety
- Non-measurable factors
- Other influences

Contextual coding
- Context of Groningen
- Anecdotes

Structural coding
- Opening or closing statements, in-between parts from the interviewer.

4. **Results**

4.1 What is Perceived Safety?

Perceived safety is a complex and subjective concept, shaped by individual experiences and external factors (Koskela & Pain, 2000). In the context of Groningen's nightlife, different actors define and address perceived safety in diverse ways, yet all work toward a common goal: making the city's nightlife safer for everyone.

Mika, the coordinator of awareness teams at OOST, describes perceived safety as the ability for people to feel at home and express themselves freely, whether through their clothing, behaviour, or identity. The awareness teams, active at OOST and other events, focus on creating environments where attendees can be themselves without fear of judgment or harassment. Mika's approach emphasises emotional and social safety, highlighting the importance of acceptance and inclusivity in nightlife spaces.

Similarly, Merlijn, Groningen's night mayor and a member of the night council, underscores the importance of addressing gender-based disparities in nightlife safety. He notes that women are generally more vulnerable to harassment, particularly from 'creepy' individuals, which aligns with Kavanaugh and Anderson's (2009) observation that marginalised groups often feel less secure in nightlife settings. As night mayor, Merlijn works with a team of six experts to tackle key safety issues, such as reducing excessive alcohol and drug use, preventing youth addiction, and combating sexual harassment in clubs and on the streets. The night council collaborates closely with local government, businesses, and partygoers to improve safety standards and set an example for other cities. One of their key initiatives involves raising awareness about 'needle spiking,' a rising concern in nightlife. They often work with the Public Health Service (GGD) and initially faced some scepticism from the municipality about setting up a hotline for sexual harassment. Perceived safety is a crucial focus of the night council, as their goal is to make Groningen so safe that even an 18-year-old woman can comfortably bike home alone.

While subjective experiences of safety are crucial, quantitative data also play a vital role in identifying risks. Gerrit Urban and Gert Wobbes, members of 'Team Veiligheid' (Team Safety) in the municipality of Groningen, focus on mapping unsafe areas in the nightlife district through incident reports and other statistical measures. Their team aims to create an inclusive, welcoming environment where residents and visitors can enjoy a safe nightlife experience. They combine data analysis with community feedback to tackle hotspots for incidents and ensure that safety measures are not only reactive but also proactive.

From a different perspective, an urban planner from the municipality considers perceived safety as a largely subconscious feeling, shaped by environmental factors like lighting, visibility, and atmosphere. She notes that even subtle aspects, such as not being able to see clearly ahead or an unusual smell in the air, can create a sense of unease. To improve this, the presence of life and activity within buildings and on the streets is essential. The planner's focus is on creating public spaces that naturally foster a sense of safety through thoughtful design.

Sara, chair of the board of KEI-week, shares another unique perspective. She emphasises that perceived safety is a top priority during KEI-week, the introduction event for first-year students in Groningen. The weeklong event helps students familiarise themselves with the city and its nightlife, but also poses challenges due to its large scale, including crowded areas like markets and a parade through the city centre. Safety measures are meticulously coordinated with external parties and comply with strict regulations to ensure both physical and social safety. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on social safety—particularly for first-year students, who may be more vulnerable to harassment or exploitation in unfamiliar environments. This year, KEI-week's focus has shifted more strongly toward addressing sexual safety, understanding power dynamics, and preventing sexual harassment. The board has expanded its support services, offering first aid and emotional support for those feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable in the new surroundings. Collaboration with organisations such as the GGD and the night council ensures that social safety concerns are met. While past years focused on combating loneliness and promoting social interaction during the pandemic, the current priority is on creating a safe space where students can fully enjoy their introduction to Groningen without fear of harassment or discomfort.

In conclusion, perceived safety refers to an individual's subjective sense of security in their environment, shaped by personal experiences, social interactions, and the physical characteristics of the space. It encompasses both emotional comfort—such as the ability to express oneself freely without fear—and physical protection from threats like harassment or violence. In the context of Groningen's nightlife, perceived safety is approached from multiple angles, with various actors working together to foster a safe and inclusive atmosphere.

4.2 Physical Environment

This section explores how the physical environment impacts perceived safety, based on interviews that highlight both positive and negative factors. Interviewees identified key physical elements such as lighting, visibility, and street activity as crucial in shaping their sense of security. Poorly lit or isolated areas can evoke feelings of unease, while well-lit, open, and active spaces enhance perceived safety.

In this research, we examine how spatial planning instruments can address these factors and improve perceived safety. By focusing on urban design strategies such as improving lighting, creating clear sightlines, and encouraging vibrant public spaces, spatial planning can play a critical role in shaping environments where people feel secure. The aim is to explore practical ways to enhance the physical aspects of Groningen's public spaces, making them safer and more welcoming according to the insights provided by the interviewees.

Overcrowding

Within the physical environment, the theme of overcrowding emerged as a significant risk factor regarding perceived safety. Crowds can be unexpected, and being in a crowd in relatively narrow spaces can create unsafe situations or evoke feelings of unsafety (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2009). According to Sara, the chair of the KEI-week board, tight spaces where everyone has to squeeze through can feel less safe. Overcrowding at events, such as the KEI week, can lead to panic and pressure among people. It is crucial to ensure space for individuals to spread out, even within the nightlife district of Groningen. Sara considers public spaces and indoor areas where overcrowding becomes an issue. Some bars are too cramped and should limit the number of patrons allowed in.

This overcrowdedness can feel uncomfortable and unsafe, especially regarding sexual safety, as people might unintentionally or intentionally touch others.

Gerrit Urban and Gert Wobbes from the municipality highlighted that the concentration of people in specific areas can significantly impact behaviour, often leading to public safety challenges. Crowd management is a crucial tool for addressing unsafe situations caused by overcrowding. Drawing from experiences during KEI Week, where large groups move through the nightlife district, Sara shared positive outcomes from enforcing crowd management strategies. She pointed out that effectively utilising the environment can help guide people through spaces. For example, the use of access gates was noted as a successful method for managing the flow of people, reducing the sense of overcrowding, and providing more personal space.

However, Mika pointed out that access gates are not always feasible, particularly iron gates, which the municipality prohibits. While these gates help bars and clubs manage their entrances, they can disrupt pedestrian overflow on narrow streets, particularly in the tighter areas of the nightlife district. Mika explained that the limited space leads to difficult decisions for the municipality, and when a city-wide policy is implemented, it can have mixed effects, benefiting some areas while negatively impacting others. Additionally, the municipality's urban planner noted that Groningen's city centre, with its old buildings and narrow streets, poses unique challenges for crowd management. While it is considered when introducing new features into a space, the narrowness of most streets means that crowd management often takes a backseat in the overall design of public spaces.

However, the narrow streets and the nightlife district's compact layout also present advantages for crowd management. According to Gerrit Urban and Gert Wobbes, the compact design of Groningen's nightlife district ensures swift police intervention, positively contributing to physical safety. Merlijn also adds that ambulance staff have adapted to the layout, as they now quickly traverse the streets on 'ambulance bikes' to assist in first aid and reduce their reliance on motorised vehicles. An ambulance driving through the nightlife district is slower, making the already tight spaces even tighter, which can lead to unsafe situations. With this solution, navigating the nightlife district becomes more accessible, and there is less of an impact on the atmosphere throughout the street.

There are specific challenges within crowd management, particularly regarding bicycle parking around popular nightlife spots like the Oosterstraat and Schuitendiep. Mika, Gerrit Urban, and Gert Wobbes highlighted how bicycles hinder crowd management. Mika specifically mentioned that there is an issue with an abundance of bikes parked in places where they should not be in the Oosterstraat. While the municipality is busy tackling this problem by evicting bikes from specific locations within the nightlife district, certain areas within the nightlife scene, like the Oosterstraat, experience increased annoyance from bikes now that they are not permitted in other places. Enforcing a stricter bike parking policy for the entire nightlife district and increasing parking facilities would benefit crowd management throughout the nightlife district.

Overcrowding is a critical concern in the physical environment, particularly in compact areas like nightlife districts. The interviews highlighted how crowd management strategies, such as access gates and strategic layout planning, can mitigate the risks associated with overcrowding. However, the layout of specific areas, such as narrow streets, presents challenges that necessitate careful planning to ensure swift emergency responses and effectively manage the flow of people. Thus, the

municipality needs to evaluate which crowd management tools are most suitable, taking into account the width and characteristics of each street.

To further address these challenges, developing a long-term structural vision for nightlife can offer a comprehensive strategy for managing these areas. This vision should encompass key objectives related to safety, accessibility, and community well-being, while integrating input from various stakeholders, including visitors. residents, business owners, and emergency services. Such a structural vision can serve as a guiding framework for redesigning streets and enhancing overall safety. Incorporating crowd management measures into this vision is vital to ensure safe movement during peak times. For instance, implementing shared spaces that prioritise pedestrians over vehicles can significantly enhance safety. This can be achieved through design elements such as wider sidewalks, strategically placed seating, and dedicated bike storage. Additionally, introducing temporary access gates or barriers in high-foot-traffic areas and establishing designated pedestrian zones can effectively control crowd flow. Furthermore, the structural vision should advocate for tailored gate solutions that are suited to the widths of streets and alleys, ensuring they complement the overall design. By considering these tailored solutions, the municipality can enhance safety and significantly enrich the overall nightlife experience in the area.

Lighting

Lighting plays a crucial role in shaping perceived safety in urban spaces, especially in the nightlife district of Groningen. However, perspectives on its effectiveness differ among various stakeholders.

Fetzen de Groot from the GGD (Public Health Service) argues that insufficient lighting, particularly in narrow spaces and isolated corners, can significantly reduce perceived safety. He believes that darker areas make people feel more vulnerable, and improving lighting could address this concern. Sara, from KEI-week, supports this view, emphasising that well-lit spaces, particularly in crowded areas, create a sense of security for participants.

In contrast, Mika believes that Groningen's lighting is already excellent, especially when compared to other cities. He suggests that the current lighting setup effectively balances visibility and atmosphere, especially for nightlife purposes. Mika's argument implies that further increasing lighting could potentially disrupt the unique character of Groningen's nightlife scene.

However, Merlijn presents a more experimental approach, proposing that the city should test different types of lighting to enhance both safety and ambience. Drawing on examples from the Dutch Nighttime Alliance, he highlights how warm, atmospheric lighting can create a welcoming environment, while harsher lights like fluorescent tubes detract from the cosy atmosphere people enjoy during nightlife. While supportive of experiments, Merlijn acknowledges that such initiatives would require collaboration with the municipality and adequate resources.

The urban planner of the municipality adds a technical dimension to the debate, highlighting the complexity of lighting design. According to her, lighting should strike a balance between functional needs—such as ensuring visibility for traffic laws—and atmospheric qualities in pedestrian-dominated areas like the nightlife district. She suggests that more experimental lighting could be used in such spaces. Additionally, lighting on building façades can create familiarity by highlighting structures, and improving orientation and comfort. She also cites emergency lighting on the Grote

Markt, which can be intensified when necessary to aid emergency services, demonstrating the flexibility that lighting can provide in critical situations.

Effective spatial planning that integrates diverse perspectives on lighting can significantly enhance perceived safety in urban areas. Strategically placing lights in 'sketchy' areas and experimenting with different lighting types in nightlife districts allows the city to improve safety without diminishing the vibrant atmosphere. One tool to achieve this, according to the municipality's urban planner, is the visual quality plan, which is part of the design phase. This plan can propose specific lighting solutions tailored to enhance safety while preserving the character of the area. Additionally, the municipality can require certain lighting options within the visual quality plan tied to a proposed zoning plan, ensuring that safety is considered in new developments. Ultimately, the key is to strike a careful balance between visibility, functionality, and the unique ambience of the nightlife scene.

Camera's

Despite some political division, surveillance cameras in Groningen's nightlife areas have proven to be effective tools for real-time monitoring. They enable quick responses to altercations, prevent larger conflicts, and assist in investigating incidents. The municipality's Team Veiligheid (Team Safety) plays a crucial role in identifying and addressing unsafe areas, but newer districts, such as the recently developed Nieuwe Markt, still lack adequate camera coverage. This creates blind spots in the city centre, compromising safety in these emerging spaces. To address this, integrating surveillance into spatial planning from the beginning of new urban developments is critical.

While the mayor holds the authority to demand camera surveillance through the 'Algemene Plaatselijke Verordening' (APV), local regulations governing public order, these decisions lie outside the formal realm of spatial planning. Therefore, while spatial planning can address some safety concerns, decisions regarding camera surveillance must be handled through other regulatory channels.

Night City Hall

Another proposition made by Merlijn, the night mayor, and the rest of the night council was to improve safety on multiple levels by opening a 'night city hall'. The "nachtstadshuis" (night city hall) aims to create a central location in Groningen for preventive and immediate assistance for nighttime issues. This assistance includes providing information on issues often experienced in nightlife or taboos and advice when people feel unsafe or well. People can be referred to professionals, hospitals, or the police if needed. During the KEI week, there will be an experiment with a nachtstadhuis, including a low-sensory space, first aid assistance, and a hotline for sexual harassment. The GDD is also involved in this experiment to assist the KEI organisation in creating the low-sensory space. The GGD would like to see it expand to more large-scale events first and then permanently within the nightlife district.

The night council has applied for a budget for the night city hall pilot. Nonetheless, securing financial prioritisation remains challenging despite widespread appreciation for their efforts. Despite its potential benefits, the municipality, including 'Team Veiligheid', has concerns about its integration with existing services and its effectiveness in encouraging incident reporting and resolution.

The 'night city hall' concept represents an innovative approach to spatial planning, aiming to centralise support services in nightlife districts. This unique concept not only provides immediate assistance for various nighttime issues but also serves as a preventive measure, thereby enhancing safety and support within these environments. While it is an experimental concept that requires significant funding, its potential benefits are substantial. If successful, it could put Groningen on the map as a city with a vibrant nightlife committed to innovative interventions that improve perceived safety.

4.3 Social Environment

In examining the impact of the physical environment on perceived safety, it becomes clear that design and planning instruments are essential. However, perceived safety extends beyond these physical aspects; the social environment plays a pivotal role. Interactions among individuals, community dynamics, and support systems significantly influence how safe people feel in various settings.

While improving physical factors visibly impacts perceived safety, many social factors are embedded in societal norms and require more extensive changes (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2009). These environments are interconnected; the effectiveness of initiatives like the night city hall hinges on community involvement, while positive social interactions can mitigate the challenges posed by the physical environment. Therefore, for interventions in the physical realm to be successful, the social environment must be considered.

Campaigns and Projects

Several campaigns and projects have been initiated by (semi-)governmental institutions to promote societal changes and enhance nightlife safety. The GGD (Municipal Health Service), as the body responsible for implementing health policies, has launched multiple initiatives focused on this goal. One prominent project is the 'Centrum Seksueel Geweld Groningen Drenthe' (Sexual Assault Centre Groningen Drenthe), which organises workshops that train people to recognise sexual harassment and respond appropriately. These workshops are particularly beneficial for professionals in the nightlife industry and play a key role in creating a safer environment. According to Fetzen de Groot, these workshops are currently the GGD's most essential tool for improving nightlife safety.

The workshops, which encourage participants to reflect on past experiences and recognise signs of sexual harassment, have been widely adopted. Many student associations, including the KEI organisation, have already participated in these workshops, and their members have praised their effectiveness. The chair of the KEI organisation noted how helpful the workshops have been. Although the workshops are readily available to everyone, there is a need for more bar personnel to attend. The Night Council has also promoted the workshops, with one of its members even hosting some sessions. The municipality has recognised the success of these workshops and encourages both bar staff and municipal enforcement officers to participate.

In addition to the workshops, the 'Centrum Seksueel Geweld' has contributed to the 'Ben je oké?' ('Are you okay?') campaign, which raises awareness about sexual harassment by encouraging bystanders to check in on others. This simple act of asking, "Are you okay?" can help prevent unsafe situations. The chair of the KEI organisation also acknowledged the value of this campaign, highlighting how small actions can make a significant impact.

Another notable initiative by the GGD is the 'Safe Cities Project,' a national effort aimed at combating violence against girls and women, including sexual violence. The project provides training and focuses on supporting vulnerable groups such as the LGBTQ+ community, migrant women, and people with intellectual disabilities. Its goal is to prevent sexually inappropriate behaviour and street harassment, both in public spaces and nightlife settings.

The Night Council has further contributed to awareness efforts through its "Not Alone in the Dark" campaign. This initiative involved walking through a park at night with council members and other participants to demonstrate how darkness can affect perceived safety, emphasising the need for better public lighting and safer spaces.

These campaigns and workshops all share the common goal of raising awareness and offering practical tools to prevent sexual harassment and violence. Together, they create a more comprehensive safety net for individuals who may encounter unsafe situations during nightlife. Despite this progress, it was not until 2022 that the municipality officially addressed the issue of nightlife safety through policy. The introduction of the 'Veilig Uitgaan' (Safe Night Out) covenant marked a turning point.

In recent years, city development projects have increasingly incorporated safety considerations. The 'Veilig Uitgaan' covenant, a collaborative agreement between the municipality, police, and hospitality sector, aims to improve physical and social safety in nightlife areas. It addresses issues such as street harassment and sexual misconduct through practical measures like enhanced lighting and community involvement. Regular assessments are conducted to identify and address problematic spots, based on input from citizens, police, and local businesses. This comprehensive approach ensures that nightlife safety remains a priority in Groningen's public spaces.

Hotline / Emergency Line

Merlijn and the night council emphasise the need for a central reporting point during nightlife, which would serve as a low-barrier resource that directs people to specialised services such as the Sexual Assault Centre or the police. This central point would streamline help-seeking and ensure that people in need are quickly connected to appropriate resources.

The night council has already taken steps in this direction by launching a hotline for reporting incidents anonymously during nightlife. According to the night council, this hotline not only supports individuals but also informs campaigns against sexual harassment and provides valuable insights for advising the municipality on nightlife safety. Reports from the hotline have been used to shape more targeted interventions and raise awareness about these issues.

During KEI week, another experiment will take place with the launch of the "KEI phone," a collaboration between the GGD and the KEI organisation. This service will be accessible via QR codes in the bathrooms of bars and clubs, allowing students to quickly reach out for support through chat or phone calls. The "KEI phone" is intended to offer a low-threshold, approachable alternative for those who may not feel comfortable calling 1-1-2. It will be tested at major city events, offering a more casual option for students to seek help when they feel unsafe.

However, Fetzen de Groot warns of potential challenges in having multiple hotlines or emergency lines in operation. To avoid confusion and ensure effective service, these efforts must be coordinated with existing organisations, such as the Sexual Assault Centre and the police. This

concern is shared by Gerrit Urban and Gert Wobbes from 'Team Veiligheid,' who caution that an abundance of separate hotlines could confuse the public and hinder the effectiveness of any individual service.

While still in the experimental phase, these initiatives reflect important progress toward creating a safer nightlife environment. By working together and streamlining resources, these services have the potential to offer vital support to individuals and help reduce incidents of harassment and violence during nightlife.

Awareness Teams

The interviewee Mika has been coordinating awareness teams in the Groningen event scene, particularly at the club OOST. The awareness team (so called 'floor angels') at OOST consists of individuals who move throughout the club or event space to enhance visitors' well-being. Their goal is to make everyone feel comfortable and free to express themselves. This role requires both active and passive engagement as a point of contact for attendees.

Securing additional funding is crucial to further professionalise the awareness team, which currently operates on a volunteer basis with limited financial support from the city and nightlife businesses. Mika is actively working to enhance the team's professionalism through workshops and by exploring ways to broaden its role. The positive impact of these teams is already clear, particularly at OOST, but to expand this success, forming partnerships with semi-governmental organisations like the GGD or securing government funding for grassroots initiatives would be essential.

Mika believes that the concept of awareness teams can be just as effective in public spaces as it is within clubs. By extending their responsibilities to include first aid and emergency response, they could offer valuable support to emergency services. These teams complement club security, or, in public spaces, the police, by providing a more inclusive and approachable alternative, especially for minorities. With the right support, awareness teams could contribute significantly to creating safer nightlife environments, acting as safe havens on the streets and enhancing public safety.

Fetzen de Groot supports the concept of awareness teams to a certain extent. He cited the example of Amsterdam's 'sfeerbeheerders' (atmosphere keepers), who combine security and awareness functions. According to de Groot, their presence in Amsterdam has had a positive impact, and it would be interesting to see how a similar approach could work in Groningen.

Merlijn suggests that having approachable and empathetic police officers in nightlife areas is important, as they better understand and connect with the nightlife crowd. Sara adds that awareness teams could take on roles similar to those of First Aid services. For example, during Keiweek, First Aid workers provide a listening ear to new students feeling overwhelmed in a new city. While this service is beneficial during events, Sara believes there is a need for approachable help services on a regular basis in nightlife areas.

Mix of People

Merlijn argues that a diverse range of nighttime activities is essential for creating a vibrant nightlife district. He suggests that municipalities should actively promote cultural diversity in venues by offering financial incentives, such as reduced programming costs or lower fixed expenses. This would reduce financial risks for entrepreneurs, leading to a richer variety of music, audiences, and

subcultures. According to Merlijn, this mix would not only enhance the city's atmosphere but also attract a broader spectrum of people, encouraging greater inclusivity in nightlife.

Supporting this, the municipality's project secretary and urban planner contend that a variety of day and night businesses strengthens community bonds. They argue that combining residential, commercial, and cultural spaces fosters street-level engagement, encouraging people to feel a sense of ownership over their surroundings. This sense of responsibility, they claim, reduces antisocial behaviour like graffiti or vandalism. When people are invested in the well-being of their neighbourhood, they are more likely to safeguard it.

However, Gerrit Urban and Gert Wobbes present a counterargument, pointing out that the concentration of nightlife in specific areas, such as student-dominated bars and clubs, is driven by economic forces. They argue that while a broader mix of venues could theoretically promote social cohesion and reduce safety concerns, market dynamics favour high-turnover establishments that cater to the student population. They do note that concentrated crowds in central nightlife hubs can exacerbate public safety issues, making crowd management more challenging. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that the municipality retains some regulatory power, as it can impose stricter rules on venues in response to safety incidents.

In contrast, Merlijn and the urban planners stress that cultural diversity should not be viewed solely through an economic lens. They argue that promoting different kinds of venues isn't just about profitability but about enhancing the overall quality of urban life. By creating spaces for varied subcultures, cities can foster a sense of belonging that transcends monetary gain. Moreover, financial incentives provided by the municipality could offset the economic risks that deter non-mainstream venues, ensuring a balance between profitability and diversity.

The issue of urban planning also adds complexity to this debate. The project secretary explains that because of the flexibility of the zoning laws in the city centre, there are limited tools available to planners for directly shaping the mix of functionalities. The secretary believes that only in larger projects or redevelopment projects urban planners have the opportunity to push for more diverse uses of space. This implies that without intervention, the current market dynamics may continue to favour a limited range of nighttime activities.

Ultimately, fostering a mix of residential, commercial, and cultural establishments is seen by many as a way to keep city streets lively and safe. Merlijn and the municipal planner and project secretary advocate for the "eyes on the street" effect, which they believe can significantly improve public safety through constant activity and diverse participation. They argue that financial incentives and careful zoning could nurture a broader array of nightlife options, drawing a more varied audience and enhancing social cohesion. Gerrit Urban and Gert Wobbes, however, maintain that without economic sustainability, even the most culturally enriching venues will struggle to survive.

4.4 Other Influences:

In addition to physical and social factors, other influences on perceived safety in nightlife environments were highlighted by the interviewees, particularly the consumption of alcohol and drugs. While alcohol and drug use are often seen as integral parts of nightlife culture, many

interviewees emphasised the risks these substances pose to individual safety. Rather than framing them solely as social phenomena, most described their impact in terms of how users experience them and how this affects their sense of safety.

Fetzen de Groot (GGD) describes drug use as normalised within the nightlife scene. Within the context of sexual harassment, this is a cause for concern, as drugs might affect judgment in dodgy situations. Sara shares a similar argument on how alcohol and other substances can cause a feeling of unsafety due to not being in control of your body and mind.

Beyond substance use, Fetzen de Groot also mentions the lingering psychological effects of street harassment. For victims, the trauma of a past incident can shape how they perceive safety in environments that might otherwise be considered safe. Even in areas where no immediate physical threats are present, prior experiences can lead individuals to feel unsafe, illustrating how emotional and psychological influences can persist long after the initial event.

While the consumption of alcohol and drugs, as well as the lingering effects of past incidents, present challenges to perceived safety in nightlife environments, planners must understand that these factors exist outside the realm of direct intervention. Nevertheless, being mindful of how these influences affect individual experiences can provide valuable context for improving urban environments. By integrating this awareness into planning efforts, for example, through asking advice from the GGD for new policy or zoning plans, urban designers can focus on creating spaces that enhance perceived safety through thoughtful design, fostering vibrant public areas that reduce risky behaviours and help counterbalance these external influences.

Now that the broader influences on perceived safety are examined, we can turn our attention to specific locations within Groningen's nightlife district. These squares, streets, and alleys, with their distinct characteristics, will provide valuable insights into how the physical and social environments interact to shape perceived safety within the city.

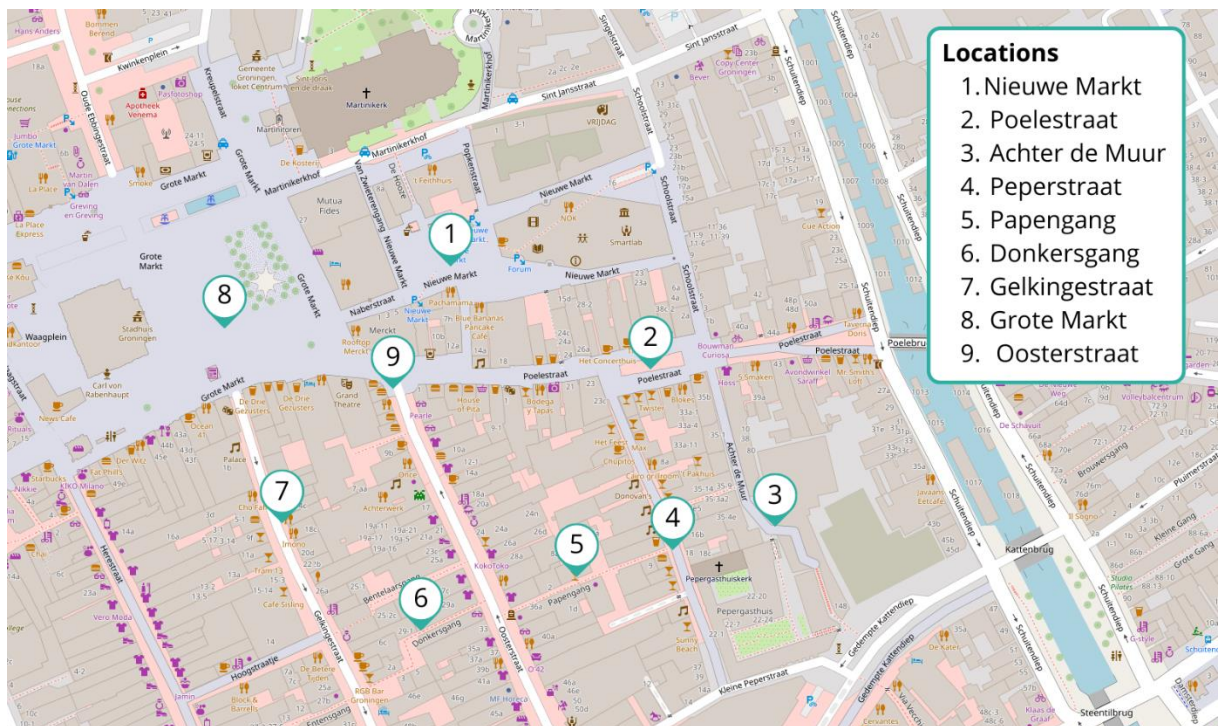## 4.5 The Squares, Streets, and Alleys of Groningen's Nightlife District

Figure 5: The locations discussed within the focus group

Based on the interview with the municipality's 'Team Veiligheid, ' specific locations were chosen for the focus group. These locations, including squares, streets, and alleys, are in the nightlife district and have the highest concentration of nighttime businesses. The alleys connecting these streets were also considered because they host nighttime businesses or are commonly used as passages between busier streets. These locations were thoroughly discussed in interviews and visited with the focus group. As a result of these discussions, these places will be rated on a scale of 1 to 10 based on their perceived safety. Additionally, direct interventions can be proposed to improve their safety score.

Squares

The Grote Markt is the city's central square, where most people pass through on their way to the nightlife district. It received the highest rating of how safe it felt, 8.83 out of 10. The market is spacious, and there is always activity. The participants also highlighted the presence of police, who often station themselves at the market. With the redevelopment finished, the market has become even more of a central hub for the city.

Figure 6: Bike parking facility on the Nieuwe Markt (Picture by author, 2024).

The Nieuwe Markt (Figure 6) is a recently developed market near the Forum building and hosts a large bicycle parking facility, often used by people visiting the nightlife district. The bicycle parking is guarded 24/7, so there are always people around. Overall, the square is rated quite highly at 7.3 out of 10. However, the direct surroundings, such as a homeless shelter around the corner and other small alleys, make the entrances towards the square feel sketchy, according to the participants. 'Team Veiligheid' from the municipality also mentioned a lack of camera surveillance on the square compared to other places in the nightlife district, making it harder for police officers to act on potentially unsafe scenarios.

Overall, the squares have high ratings, primarily due to their openness and activity, which makes them feel safer. New developments like the Nieuwe Markt lack camera surveillance; while this is a political issue, adding these cameras would benefit safety for all.

Streets

The streets of the nightlife district host the most nighttime economies. These places are bustling with activity during a night out and are frequently crowded.

Figure 7: Poelestraat in the evening, with terraces in front and bars in the back (Picture by author, 2024)

The Poelestraat (Figure 7) is a lively and safe street with a 7.5 out of 10 and various student bars, night shops, and terraces. The combination of some unique shops, the full terraces during the day and evening and busy bars during the night creates a lively atmosphere throughout the day. However, connecting alleys and places further from the Poeleplein, where most bars are, attracts people the focus group considers dodgy.

The Peperstraat is another active street, also rated a 7.5. This street is packed with student bars, which creates a large crowd. This is described as the main risk, as the combination of drunk people, different types of crowds, and a large number of people could result in some violent incidents. However, most participants do not necessarily feel unsafe due to the number of bystanders, police, and security guards on this street.

The Oosterstraat and its corner towards the Grote Markt are described as a good meeting place and received a 7.5 out of 10 from the participants. There is a lot of activity here. However, while taxis can still pass through, they sometimes cause unsafe situations. This issue has become less significant with the redevelopment of the Grote Markt. Like other bustling streets, there is always tension regarding violence. Nonetheless, there is also a significant police presence, such as in Poelestraat and Peperstraat.

The Gelkingestraat boasts a variety of bars. While some participants expressed their distaste for certain establishments, most favoured a bar on the same street. Having their preferred bar in close proximity fosters a sense of ownership and familiarity with the staff and security personnel (Newman, 1973). This familiarity gives the street a slight advantage, resulting in a rating of 7.83 out of 10.

The majority of the streets are generally safe, although they all face a similar risk of violence. However, the high number of people and the presence of security and police officers help reduce this risk. Despite some elements of the physical environment that might be considered unsafe, such as poor lighting, dark corners, and alleyways, the social environment effectively mitigates these risks through social control and a sense of ownership. It is important to maintain these social qualities on these streets to ensure their safety. Improving these social qualities by encouraging a mix of people and providing safe gathering places, such as a city hall at night, could make these places even safer.

Alleys

The alleys of the nightlife district offer fewer nighttime economies but still see enough activity during a night out because they are quick routes between the major streets.

'Achter de muur' is rated the lowest by a considerable margin, with a 4.3 out of 10. The buildings are in bad shape, pretty dark overall, and there is an abundance of graffiti. According to multiple participants, the people present in this street are primarily individuals with addictions. Even though the alley is in the middle of the nightlife district, it has a limited number of nightlife crowds walking through it, as most people would want to avoid it. The Donkersgang is another alley that scores relatively low, with a rating of 5 out of 10. It is often used as a shortcut to the bars in Gelkingestraat. However, the narrowness of the alley and the people hanging out in it make it feel less safe. The alley has a small square in the middle, which has the potential for more activity. Since the focus group happened, a new hostel has opened its doors in the Oosterstraat, with its bar/sitting area overlooking the small square. According to the municipality's urban planner, small changes like this can already make a large difference in how a place can be perceived.
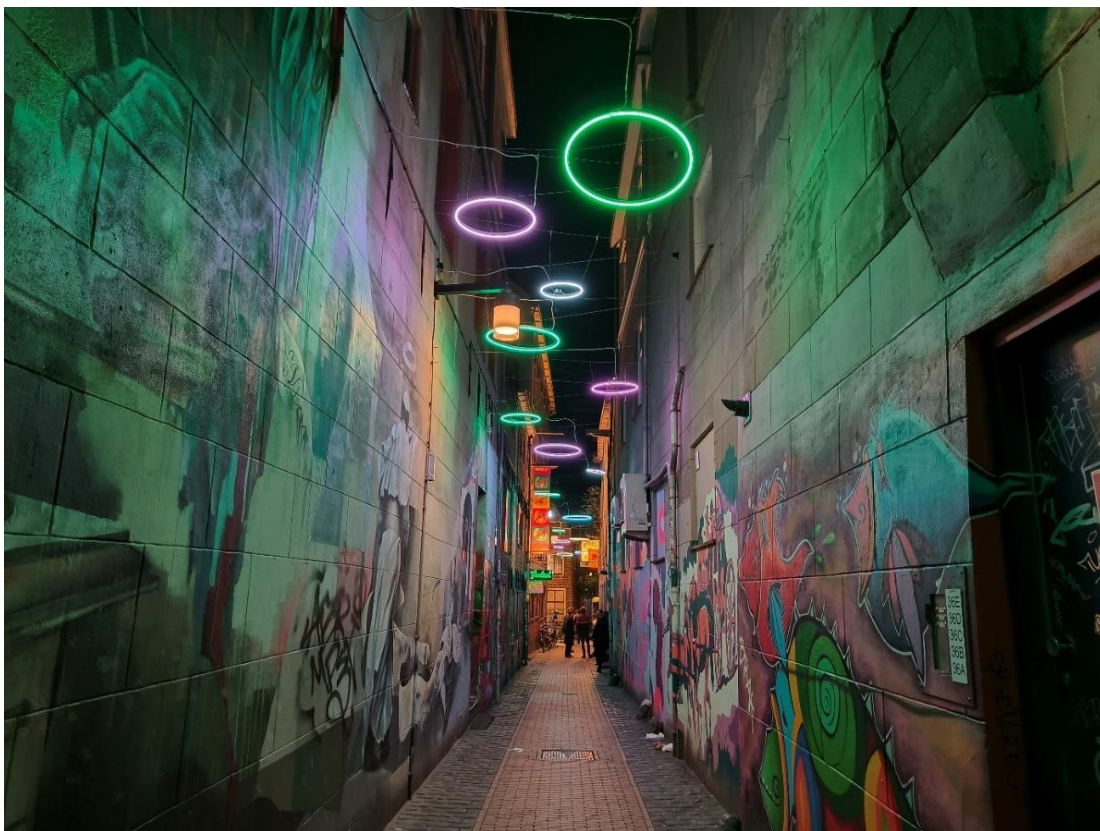

Figure 8, Papengang at night after the installation of the new lights and street art (Picture by author, 2024)

The Papengang scores relatively high compared to the other alleys, with a 7.3 out of 10, even though it is as narrow as the other alleys mentioned. This alley offers a range of nighttime economies and has recently been redeveloped. The redevelopment experimented with lighting, as proposed by Merlijn. Wall art has also been implemented, and, according to the participants, the alley has a more creative feel and, thus, a better vibe nowadays.

The municipality has also noticed that these places are often considered unsafe. A recent council motion initiated a project focused on improving safety in Groningen's alleys in the nightlife areas, involving collaboration with city development and addressing concerns. An example could be made of the Papengang, which scores almost as high as the main streets. According to the participants and the night mayor Merlijn, this is mostly due to the redevelopment of the alley. These places have the highest potential to be improved through physical changes. Like the Papengang, a more experimental approach could be used. However, improving lighting and camera surveillance in these places will already go a long way. If these places are improved, it could also result in more activity, as their proximity to the other bars could make them attractive places for nighttime economies. Therefore, it is crucial to improve the physical environment to change the perception of the alleys.

5. Conclusion

The central question guiding this research was: "How can spatial planning assist in improving perceived safety in areas where nighttime economies are clustered, in the case of Groningen?" Through a combination of theoretical exploration, interviews with key stakeholders, and insights gathered from a focus group, the study concluded that spatial planning plays a critical role in enhancing perceived safety by addressing both physical and social environmental factors. This analysis focused on identifying effective strategies for urban planners to improve safety in nightlife districts while preserving the vibrant character of these areas.

While planning interventions are essential for improving safety and reducing crime, they must strike a balance between regulation and maintaining the vibrancy that defines nightlife areas. Overregulation can reduce the appeal of these districts, while under-regulation can result in unsafe conditions, negatively affecting both the social and economic vitality of the area.

The Role of Spatial Planning

Spatial planning holds significant potential to shape urban environments in ways that improve perceptions of safety. Key aspects such as lighting, crowd management, and street activity are crucial to fostering a safer nightlife environment. Strategic design, such as improving lighting in underlit areas, helps reduce fear and increase visibility, while crowd management can alleviate crowding, particularly during peak nightlife hours.

However, while spatial interventions are critical, the way in which unsafe spaces are identified and addressed remains too little. Current methods rely heavily on reactive approaches, such as responding to incidents and complaints, which are often underreported or not reflective of real issues. Many visitors may not feel comfortable or empowered to formally report incidents, resulting in important safety concerns going unaddressed. The existing complaint systems, typically managed

by the municipality, need improvement to ensure they are accessible, transparent, and responsive to the needs of nightlife participants. This gap in communication limits the ability to identify problem areas in real time, leaving many unsafe spaces unaddressed.

To address this, a more proactive system for identifying unsafe areas should be implemented. In addition to better complaint mechanisms, spatial planning tools should be used to regularly assess public spaces, ensuring that they meet safety standards. This could involve routinely examining places within the nightlife district or community consultations that encourage visitors to provide feedback more easily, highlighting unsafe spaces before they escalate into larger issues.

One forward-thinking solution is the development of a long-term structural vision (*structuurvisie*) for nightlife. This vision builds upon the 'Veilig Uitgaan' covenant, which laid the groundwork for collaboration among the municipality, police, and nightlife stakeholders. However, a structural vision should go further by offering a comprehensive framework that not only includes spatial interventions but also incorporates improved methods for gathering real-time feedback and identifying problem areas. Such a vision would ensure that urban design improvements are complemented by a responsive system for handling complaints and ensuring ongoing safety.

Proposed Interventions and Planning Instruments

Several planning interventions were identified to enhance perceived safety in Groningen's nightlife districts. These include:

Crowd Management

The interviews reveal that overcrowding is a significant concern, particularly in compact areas where narrow streets pose challenges. Effective crowd management strategies, such as pedestrianised streets, access gates, and barriers, can help regulate crowd flow, especially during peak hours. These strategies create more personal space, reducing the risk of panic and enhancing overall safety. However, municipalities must carefully select crowd management tools that suit each area's physical characteristics, ensuring that emergency responses remain swift and effective, and tailoring solutions to the specific context of a place.

Improved Lighting

Well-lit areas, especially in poorly illuminated spots, reduce fear and improve visibility. *Visual quality plans (Beeldkwaliteitsplan)* should be used to guide lighting installations in a way that promotes safety and discourages criminal behaviour. The municipality could, for example, introduce the improvement of poorly illuminated spots within the visual quality plans for new developments.

Installation of Cameras

Surveillance cameras should be strategically placed to cover security blind spots, as regulated by the *General Local Ordinance (APV)* to ensure comprehensive public safety in nightlife districts. In redevelopment projects within the inner city, cameras should be considered for areas that may be prone to security risks. Additionally, a more proactive feedback system, gathering insights from the community and authorities, would allow planners to identify existing unsafe spots and select more tactical locations for camera installation. This approach ensures that cameras are placed where they are most needed, enhancing their effectiveness in preventing crime and increasing safety.

A mix of Functionalities

Encouraging a broader range of functionalities within the nightlife scene attracts a more diverse audience, enhancing safety through inclusivity and ensuring a constant presence of diverse "eyes on the street." A more varied mix of activities can create a safer environment by fostering a sense of community and belonging for different groups.

A structural vision of nightlife can promote the need for greater cultural diversity in nightlife, creating spaces that cater to everyone. However, the flexibility of zoning laws in the city centre provides limited direct tools for urban planners to shape this mix of functionalities. Opportunities for planners to influence the use of space generally arise only in large-scale or redevelopment projects. Without proactive intervention, market forces may continue to favour a narrow range of nighttime activities. Therefore, a structural vision must emphasise the importance of functional diversity, giving urban planners stronger support to advocate for more varied and inclusive uses of space in both new and existing developments.

Final Remarks

In conclusion, spatial planning is a powerful tool for enhancing perceived safety in Groningen's nightlife districts. By utilising planning instruments such as a structural vision, zoning plans, and visual quality plans, urban planners can create safer, more inclusive environments while preserving the vibrant energy that defines these areas. However, as this research reveals, spatial planning alone cannot guarantee a safe and inclusive nightlife. While urban design can address the physical aspects of safety, deeper societal changes are necessary to address the social dynamics that contribute to feelings of insecurity.

Collaboration across disciplines is critical, particularly for implementing social interventions that lie outside the direct scope of spatial planning. For example, awareness teams provide crucial, in-person support in nightlife venues and public spaces, offering assistance and first aid to those in need. Although no planning tool directly governs their deployment, partnerships with organisations like the GGD (Municipal Health Services) and local government can expand their presence. By doing so, nightlife areas can feel safer and more inclusive. These teams play an essential role in bridging the gap between spatial design and personal security, but their success could be expanded with the support of public health and social services.

Similarly, establishing a hotline or emergency line offers immediate access to support during nightlife hours. This low-threshold service would enable rapid responses to incidents, helping prevent unsafe situations from escalating. Though spatial planning does not control the creation of such services, integrating them with municipal operations and police networks would significantly enhance safety. A responsive system like this is vital for fostering a culture of care and protection but requires coordination beyond the realm of traditional urban planning.

The concept of a night city hall, a central hub for coordinating nightlife safety, adds another dimension of support. Such a hub would provide real-time guidance and assistance to visitors, centralising efforts to manage safety during nightlife activities. While spatial planning cannot directly establish such a facility, collaboration between local governance, city planners, and community organisations could bring it to life. A night city hall would strengthen the social infrastructure that supports safer nightlife environments.

Importantly, these interventions are only possible if there is sufficient political backing. Without strong political will and support from local government, the resources and commitment necessary to implement these solutions may not materialise. Political endorsement is crucial for advancing spatial planning interventions, as well as projects like awareness teams, hotlines, and centralised safety hubs. It empowers planners and stakeholders to push forward with initiatives that foster perceived safety.

In short, while spatial planning can create safer physical spaces, these complementary social interventions are essential for fostering a true sense of security. A holistic approach, one that integrates physical design with strategic social, will be necessary to build a secure, thriving, and inclusive nightlife environment. Achieving this vision requires a commitment to broader societal change, strong political support, and enhanced collaboration between urban planners, public health agencies, local governments, and community organisations. Only through these interdisciplinary efforts can Groningen effectively address the complexities of improving perceived safety in nightlife.

5.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

The research is noteworthy for its methodological approach and comprehensive empirical analysis. The research offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics of safety and nightlife by employing mixed methods that combine quantitative data with qualitative insights. Consequently, the findings are well-supported and provide a solid basis for theoretical exploration and practical application.

A significant strength is the inclusion of diverse perspectives on perceived safety in nightlife. By gathering views from various stakeholders, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of the issue within the context of Groningen. The exploratory interviews reveal various initiatives aimed at improving safety, highlighting the experiences and strategies employed by different actors. This approach effectively captures the complexity of perceived safety and sheds light on practical measures being implemented.

The research has limitations, particularly concerning how well the findings can be applied to other situations. This is because there is not much information specifically about how safe people feel during nightlife instead of during the day. Most existing research on this topic is based on individual cases, which may give only some of the picture. The experts involved in the research may not represent the general nightlife population, leading them to have an outsider's perspective or focus too much on minority viewpoints. Additionally, the local government, funding, and socio-economic conditions can significantly influence how effective safety measures are in nightlife areas. Therefore, we should interpret the results cautiously, and more research is needed to understand these factors better.

Furthermore, the participants for the focus group could apply for the focus group through an open call on social media. Using an open call on social media to recruit participants for a focus group presents several limitations. First, it introduces selection bias, as individuals who are active on social media or who happen to see the call may not be representative of the target population. This can lead to skewed data, as the sample may over-represent younger, tech-savvy individuals or those

who align with specific social media demographics. Second, self-selection bias may arise, as people who choose to participate might have particular interests or motivations related to the research topic, leading to less diversity in viewpoints. Additionally, social media outreach might limit accessibility for individuals who don't use these platforms or have limited internet access, further affecting the sample's representativeness and the generalisability of the findings.

Another limitation is that the data is based on what people report about themselves, which may be influenced by things like wanting to fit in socially or not remembering things accurately. To ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings, it is crucial to use different sources and methods in future research. Furthermore, the variety of actors involved in the nighttime economy presents a challenge. Nighttime economies are broad and plentiful. Therefore, it is only possible to interview some actors involved in the nightlife. These limitations highlight the need for broader and more inclusive research to understand and fully address perceived safety in nightlife settings.

5.2 Contribution to the Field of Urban Planning

This research makes a significant contribution to urban planning by providing a framework for addressing the relationship between spatial planning, safety, and nightlife. It offers practical recommendations for urban planners and policymakers, advocating for a balanced approach that integrates safety measures with the need to preserve vibrant and inclusive nightlife spaces. In many cities, there is growing tension between enhancing public safety and maintaining the cultural diversity and dynamism of urban nightlife. The research proposes that safety and leisure can coexist harmoniously in well-planned urban environments, challenging the traditional view that these goals are in conflict. It suggests that rather than being opposing forces, safety and vibrancy can complement and reinforce one another when thoughtfully integrated into urban planning.

The study also addresses a gap in the literature by combining theoretical analysis with real-world data to explore urban safety in nightlife settings. It adapts the concepts of "defensible space" and "broken windows" to the nightlife context, offering a nuanced theoretical lens to understand the complexities of safety in these areas. By bridging this gap, the research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the social and physical factors that contribute to perceived safety in nightlife districts. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of considering social dynamics, alongside physical safety measures, an aspect often overlooked in traditional urban planning approaches. This broader perspective is crucial for creating public spaces that are not only safe but also socially and culturally vibrant.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Building on this research, several areas warrant further exploration to enhance the understanding of safety in nightlife districts. First, future studies should examine the long-term effects of safety interventions to assess their sustainability and lasting impact. This would provide valuable insights into which measures are most effective over time, enabling urban planners to implement strategies that yield enduring benefits for society.

Secondly, future research could explore the role of demographic factors, such as age, gender, and socio-economic status, in shaping perceptions of safety in nightlife districts. Understanding how different groups experience and perceive safety can inform more targeted and inclusive urban

planning strategies. These studies could shed light on the experiences of marginalised groups in nightlife. By encompassing a broad range of perspectives and experiences, researchers can develop more innovative and effective interventions tailored to the diverse social needs of different groups of people.

Third, further investigation is needed on the role of technology in enhancing safety in nightlife. The research discussed the use of surveillance cameras and experimental lighting. However, more research is needed to understand these tools' potential benefits and challenges, particularly in terms of privacy and sustainability. It would be interesting to explore some of the more experimental solutions suggested by interviewees, such as experimenting with various lighting designs, setting up street-level awareness teams, or establishing a 'night city hall'.

Finally, future research could examine the role of community engagement in enhancing perceived safety within nightlife. This research found that community involvement is crucial for the success of safety interventions. However, more research is needed to explore the most effective ways to engage diverse communities in the planning process and to create a sense of ownership. Such research could provide valuable information for urban planners seeking to create more participatory urban environments.

In conclusion, delving deeper into these topics will enhance our understanding of how urban design and social initiatives can improve perceived safety within nightlife. By adding these insights into planning and policy-making, cities can create more inclusive, welcoming, and safer night-outs for all.

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Appendix 1: Information Form

Information form

For the Master Thesis Project by M Doldersum

This information form gives the participant an overview of the research being conducted

Title of the Master Thesis Project

"Feeling safe: A case study of the perceptions on safety in the nightlife of Groningen."

Abstract

This research discovers perceived safety from the perspective of people visiting the nightlife of Groningen. The goal of this research is to highlight streets, alleys or areas within the city centre of Groningen, or more specifically, the nightlife district of the city, that are considered by participants to feel 'unsafe'. More importantly, is to find out what the reasoning is for a feeling of unsafety in a specific place. It is important to make a distinction between safety and a perception of safety, as a place might be completely safe in regards to no past incidents happening here. However, a safe place can still cause a feeling of distress or fear, which in this research is referred to as 'perceived safety'. From the literature, it has become clear that urban planning has some influence on the physical and social environment. However, there are more influences on feelings of unsafety according to the literature. It could be that urban planning is limited in improving the perception of safety in certain places. The results of this study should give a better understanding of where the influence of urban planning stops, and what other disciplines could assist in creating safer places.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach is being used. First, a literature review has been conducted to find out which past theories and case studies in different cities could support the findings of the qualitative research. Within the literature review, physical elements of the street design and social elements of streetlife have come forward as reasonings for an unsafe perception of public spaces at night. However, there can be 'unmeasurable' reasoning that causes a feeling of unsafety as well, which could be based on past experiences or psychological elements. Secondly, qualitative methods will be used to interview experts in the field of safety in public spaces to find out how current policy tries to tackle feelings of unsafety and to what extent certain stakeholders are able to create safer public spaces. Lastly, a focus group of randomly selected participants who have visited the nightlife district of Groningen before will be asked to take notes in public spaces within the nightlife district to describe their feelings, which will be later discussed during a discussion session with the focus group. After this qualitative research is conducted, an overview of public spaces that to a certain extent feel unsafe should be created, and to what extent urban planning is able to influence these public spaces through changing the physical and social environment of a place, or if there are underlying influences out of the sphere of urban planning causing feelings of unsafety.

For further information, or if there are any questions, feel free to contact me through the following email address:

m.d.j.doldersum@student.rug.nl

Or ask in person, e.g. when being handed this information form.

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Consent form

For the Master Thesis Project by M Doldersum

This consent form adds validity to the data collected and causes a more equal relationship between the researcher and the participant.

I have been **informed** about the research project by the researcher, I was able to **ask questions** and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I had enough time to decide whether or not I wanted to participate in this research project.

My participation in this research project is entirely **voluntary**, I can withdraw from the research at any time, without having to give a reason for my withdrawal.

Collected data for this research will be stored no longer than the final submission date of the research report. For this research, this will be...

Please ==highlight== the answer that applies to you:
I give my permission for audio recording during the interview: YES/NO

Participants will remain anonymous when mentioned in the
research report, please indicate whether you agree with this or not: YES/NO

I give my permission for using the interview data for the following purposes:

- *Scientific presentation and/or Educational purposes.*

I agree to participate in this interview:

Name and signature of the research participant.   *Date.*
:   :

- -

I declare that I have informed the research participant about the research. I will notify the participant about matters that could influence his/her participation in the research.

Name and signature of the researcher.   *Date.*
: M Derk Jan Doldersum   :

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

In Dutch, due to the interviewees being Dutch

Uitleg over het onderzoek

Korte uitleg over consent en toestemming voor opname vragen

Introductie vragen:
- Kunt u zichzelf kort introduceren?
- Wat is uw rol binnen het nachtleven en wat is uw achtergrond?
- Wat is uw relatie met de stad Groningen?

Interviewer afhankelijke vragen

De rol van planogie
- Fysieke elementen
    - In hoeverre denkt u dat de fysieke inrichting van de openbare ruimte invloed kan hebben op het gevoel van veiligheid?
    - Wat zijn negatieve fysieke elementen die niet passen bij een veilig uitgaansgebied?
    - Wat zijn daarentegen juist positieve fysieke elementen waaraan gewerkt word?
- Sociale elementen
    - In hoeverre denkt u dat een mix van faciliteiten binnen het nachtleven mogelijk is?
    - Is het mogelijk vanuit de gemeente om te streven voor een gemixte horeca?
    - Denkt u dat de huidige handhaving aanspreekbaar is voor iedereen?
        - Hoe zou dit aangepast kunnen worden?
    - Wat is uw mening over een plek als bijvoorbeeld een nachtstadhuis?
    - In hoeverre denkt u dat planologie een invloed kan hebben op de sociale mix van bezoekers in een uitgaansgebied?
- Andere elementen
    - Denkt u dat er nog andere zaken zijn die van belang zijn binnen het nachtleven om een veiligere situatie te creëren
    - In hoeverre kan planologie bijdragen aan een veiliger straatbeeld, en in hoeverre moeten we kijken naar andere disciplines? En welke?

Afronding
- Zijn er nog opmerking of aanvullingen die u wilt maken?