BUILDING CARING NEIGHBOURHOODS
EXPLORING UNEXPECTED CONNECTIONS THROUGH CO-CREATIVE RESEARCH

OCTAVIA KINT

PROMOTORS:
PROF. DR. LIESBETH DE DONDER &
PROF. DR. AN-SOFIE SMETCOREN

Faculty of Psychology & Educational Sciences
Department of Adult Educational Sciences

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Octavia Kint

Promotors
Prof. dr. Liesbeth De Donder
Prof. dr. An-Sofie Smetcoren

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Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)
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Dissertation Committee

Prof. dr. Koen Lombaerts – Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences – Chair

Prof. dr. Liesbeth De Donder – Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences – Promotor

Prof. dr. An-Sofie Smetcoren – Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences – Promotor

Prof. dr. Geert Vandermeersche – Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences – Doctoral and Exam Committee

Dr. Adriana Moreno Cely – Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences – Exam Committee

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Boodschap van algemeen nut

Als er geen danser meer was

die de wereld een draai geeft

met pirouettes

Geen speler die de rollen keert

geen schilder die het licht

uit de schaduw trekt

Muzikant die stemmen kan verbinden

en nooit voorbijgaat aan een rust

Als er alleen nog de dichter was

Om zo'n leegte te beschrijven

hij zou de woorden niet vinden

- Maud Vanhauwaert -

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1. Introduction

This chapter presents the general introduction to the dissertation. **Section one** provides an overview of the concept of caring neighbourhoods, its current definition, policy background and practices where three important features of caring neighbourhoods will be highlighted. **Section two** focuses on the MaN'Aige project as a current practice of caring neighbourhoods in Brussels. First the adopted approach, a co-creative research approach, is introduced by presenting its main principles, followed by its implementation in MaN'Aige. Third, the context of the two neighbourhoods where MaN'Aige was developed is discussed. Finally, **section 3** elaborates on the research aim and dissertation outline.

1. Caring neighbourhoods

1.1. A "new" organisational model for care

"Caring neighbourhoods" refers to an organisational model for care on the local level, developed in Flanders and Brussel. Originally situated in the domain of care for older people and the 'ageing in place' movement, a caring neighbourhood aims for a coherent and neighbourhood-oriented approach to housing, care and well-being that allows older people to continue to live in their familiar surroundings or neighbourhood, regardless of care needs. In the evolution of the policy and funding of caring neighbourhoods, its definitions and understandings broadened. In early definitions, caring neighbourhoods aimed to meet care needs and provide continuity in support and care particularly for "*older people, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems and other vulnerable groups with support or care needs*" (Bekaert et al., 2016, p.9). Recent definitions, however, concern everyone who may need support and care at a certain moment in the life span. In the last decade, the concept is being promoted in Flemish health care policy and is currently defined as follows:

> *In a caring neighbourhood, conditions are met so that people, regardless of age and large or small support needs in multiple life domains, can (continue to) live comfortably in their home or familiar neighbourhood. It is a neighbourhood where young and old live together, where people feel good and safe, where quality of life is central, where residents know and help each other, where people and families with large and small support needs receive support and where services and facilities are accessible and available.* (Flemish Government Care Department, 2023)

Although Caring Neighbourhoods is a quite recent concept (i.e. first experiments date from 2013), it builds on previous influencing concepts such as person-centred care (Sharma et al., 2015), integrated care (Uribe et al., 2023), balanced care (Thornicroft & Tansella, 2013), developed in different domains, e.g. mental health care, dementia care, palliative and end-of-life care, as an approach to health

and social care access and provision (Burke et al., 2021). In addition, the neighbourhood as an important level of care and support is taken into account in different policy trends such as community care (Means et al., 2008), integrated community care (Vandensande, 2020) and community-based health promotion (Nickel & von dem Knesebeck, 2020). Other related concepts also gain importance, for example compassionate communities, aiming to give a place to dying, chronic illness and loss in society (D'Eer et al., 2022).

1.2. Background: Flemish care policy

1.2.1. From de-institutionalized to 'community' care

The development of caring neighbourhoods in policy needs to be placed within the broader context of promoting community care in Belgium. Two crucial movements are at the basis: deinstitutionalizing and promoting informal care (Schrooten et al., 2019). First, the 1980s marked a shift from institutionalised formal care to de-institutionalised care (De Dijn, 2012; De Rick et al., 2003). This entailed that care for older adults, disability and psychiatric care was increasingly provided outside the walls of institutions. Focus shifted from residential care to professional care within society, such as home care or home nursing. In this way, care was better aligned with the living situation of the care recipient. An important condition was that actors in care and health cooperated with each other at the local level, across sectoral boundaries.

In the second movement since the beginning of the 2000s, policy focused not only on care *'in'* society, but also on care provided *'by'* society. Policy texts, decrees, political vision papers increasingly focused on societal responsibility and 'activating' local social networks and community organisations, but also informal care providers such as volunteers, family carers, neighbours and self-care (Beke, n.d.; Vandeurzen, 2013, 2018). In policy, care is thus no longer perceived as solely a responsibility of the state, government-funded institutions and professionals, but also a responsibility assigned to society and individual people (Koops & Kwekkeboom, 2005; Kwekkeboom, 2004). This trend arose in Belgium between 2000 and 2010 but lives on to this day in different funding agencies, policy notes and recommendations. Internationally, for example in health geography literature, this trend is named as the 'community turn' in care (Milligan & Wiles, 2010).

1.2.2. Criticism on the 'community turn' in care: austerity measures and unequal access to care in the formal care system

Although promoted by policy, criticism on the community care movement is also raised. Since the early 1980s, feminist scholars warn for the increase in gender imbalances and the lack of support

systems towards unpaid care that is mostly taken up by women (Barry & Jennings, 2021; Finch, 1983). The trend towards community care is also inevitably linked with formal care services facing limited financial resources and austerity measures in welfare reforms (Raap et al., 2022).

In international policy, however, universal access to care, reducing sociocultural, organisational, economic, geographical and gender-related barriers to care, has become a major issue promoted by international organisations (Fret et al., 2019). Since 1948 'health for all' is officially regarded as a human right (United Nations, 1948). Universal Health Coverage has become an important goal in the World Health Organization policy and in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the United Nations (Fret et al., 2019). Universal health coverage aims to ensure that "*all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship*" (World Health Organization, 2018). In practice, formal care systems do not complete this ideal and inequities in health remain an important issue (WHO Commision on Social Determinants of Health, 2008). In the Belgian context, although health care is both a responsibility of federal authorities and federated entities (regions and communities) and care policy is based on a compulsory insurance, access to qualitative and well-tailored care and support is not always guaranteed (Fret et al., 2019). Especially different so-called vulnerable groups, people with low income, undocumented persons, but also community-dwelling older people, face inequalities in their access to health care for example due to financial costs, physical distance or long waiting lists (Fret et al., 2019). While governments encourage more informal care, for example to support older adults at home, the access to health care of precisely these 'vulnerable' groups and individuals has become more precarious (Broese van Groenou & De Boer, 2016; Raap et al., 2022).

Although it is sometimes presented as a possible alternative answer to the lack in formal health care and as a paradigm shift towards more accessible and low-threshold forms of care provision at a local level (Lambotte, 2018), we cannot understand caring neighbourhoods without taking into account these criticisms.

1.2.3. History of caring neighbourhoods in Flemish policy until today

Against this background of organising care outside institutions and promoting informal care, welfare and care policy has increasingly focused on a neighbourhood-oriented and integrated approach to care. Caring neighbourhoods tended to respond to two movements: 1) the cooperation between actors in welfare and care at the local level, and 2) the involvement of neighbourhood residents and organisations.

In 2013, the Flemish government funded 6 Care Living Labs, conceived as experimental spaces for innovation in care for older people (Pless et al., 2019). The aim was to test new products, services or processes for three years that could improve support for older people living at home. One of the selected Living Labs was the 'Active Caring Neighbourhood' (2013-2016) that was developed in two Brussels and one Antwerp neighbourhood. Different public and private care actors joined forces and experimented around the central question: 'what makes the difference for older people in vulnerable neighbourhoods between living longer at home or moving to a residential care centre?' The answer laid at three levels: 1) strengthening local informal networks of neighbours, volunteers and informal carers, 2) attention to quality of housing and housing adaptation to changing (care) needs, and 3) importance of professional case management for more complex housing and care issues (De Donder et al., 2017; Smetcoren et al., 2018). Together, the project partners developed a model of neighbourhood-oriented care organisation in a metropolitan context: the Active Caring Neigbhourhood.

In 2015, several Flemish and Brussels partners in the care and welfare sector drafted a vision note 'Neighbourhood-oriented care: the Actively Caring Neighbourhood as a future model for Flanders and Brussels' that was published in 2016 (Bekaert et al., 2016). The concept of caring neighbourhoods which was experimented in Brussels and Antwerp also resonated more widely within various local authorities and organisations in Flanders and Brussels and was further advanced in the policy of then minister Jo Vandeurzen (2018). The concept was further developed in the following years, which included thinking about stakeholders, direction, financing and regulation.

Since the first Active Caring Neighbourhood-project ended in 2016, more and more initiatives have emerged under the umbrella term of caring neighbourhoods in Flanders and Brussels. For instance, there was the 'Minder mazen, meer net' [Less loopholes, less slipping through the net] project of SAAMO Limburg and SAAMO West Flanders, from 2018 to 2021 (Bloemen et al., 2022). In this project, SAAMO developed methodologies for local governments that wanted to create caring neighbourhoods. The methodologies were tested in four rural municipalities, with a focus on residents in vulnerable situations or in hidden poverty.

In 2019 and 2020, 35 caring neighbourhood practices were supported in Flanders and Brussels by the Dr. Daniël De Coninck Fund from the King Baudouin Foundation. The 35 different projects each focused on a different topic, yet all aimed to enable local cooperation in caring neighbourhoods. They created meeting places, neighbourhood help networks, connecting figures, that contributed to more quality of life and well-being. However, projects also presented a number of limitations such as too little attention to housing, heavy care demands, policy influence and the political and structural impact of these practices (De Donder et al., 2021).

And importantly, in 2022, 132 "Caring Neighbourhoods" projects in Flanders and Brussels started with financial support from the Flemish government for a period of two years (Flemish Government Care Department, 2023)

Apart from these top-down initiatives, funded by large charity organisations or Flemish policy, similar initiatives arise bottom-up. Informal care movements where informal players are operating in the margins of or in parallel to the formal care and welfare system, in so-called health *bricolage* practices, are increasing, shifting the traditional distinction between formal and informal in care and welfare (Schrooten et al., 2019).

1.3. Caring neighbourhoods in practice: different models and a wide range of practices

A caring neighbourhood is not a fixed model or ready-made recipe to be implemented in neighbourhoods (Bloemen et al., 2022; De Donder et al., 2021). In its practical implementation, the concept of caring neighbourhood can cover a wide range of practices. Despite the divergent practices, we identified several building blocks, or essential principles which are of particular interest for this PhD: (1) a holistic approach to care and support (2) care on a neighbourhood level (3) a social and relational vision on care.

1.3.1. Holistic approach to care and support

Following the definition of the World Health Organization's Constitution, health concerns not only physical, but also mental, emotional and social well-being (World Health Organization, 2020). The concept of caring neighbourhoods therefore puts forward a broad and holistic understanding of care. Neighbourhood-oriented care is more than medical, physical or psychological health care, but concerns different domains of social life: social relations, housing, public space, education, mobility, safety,… (De Donder et al., 2017, 2021).

This is clearly illustrated by the Sombrero model developed by the Flemish Knowledge Centre Welzijn Wonen Zorg [Well-being, Housing, Care], a non-profit expertise centre that offers information, support to its partner organisations and does policy work on these topics. In this model, quality care for older people focuses on three dimensions that are interconnected: well-being, housing and health care (De Donder et al., 2021). Well-being concerns embeddedness in social networks, psychological well-being, but also safe surroundings and accessible services. On the level of housing a continuum exists between living at home and in residential care units. On the level of health care, different types of care exist between self-care and intensive health care for example in a care facility. The model shows the different degrees in care needs and in housing situations, but also the central role that well-being and social relations play in the organisation of adequate professional care for the person with care and support needs (De Donder et al., 2021). Different actors are involved in these domains on different levels: federal, regional, supralocal, local, to neighbourhood zones and health care hubs.
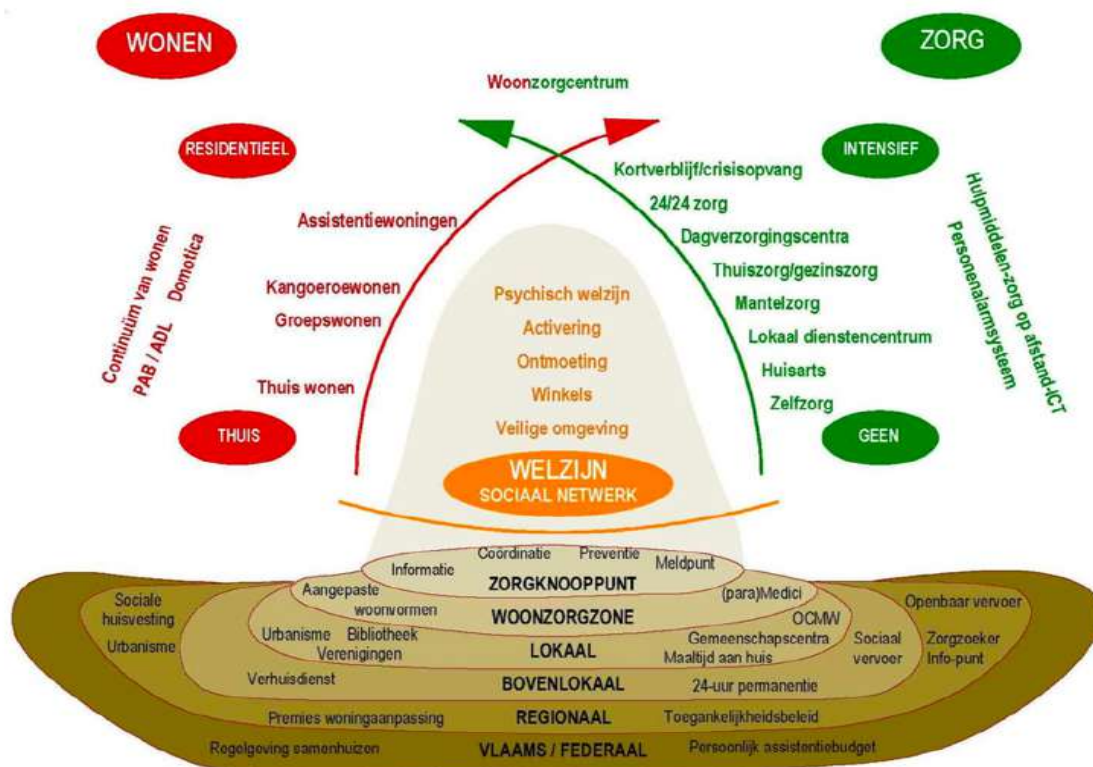
'Sombrero'model Knowledge centre for Well-being, Housing and Care (Vanmechelen & Vermeulen, 2019)

1.3.2. Care on a neighbourhood level

Second, the concept of caring neighbourhoods allows to view care in relation to the neighbourhood space. In the last decade, Ageing-in-place has become an important concept, and a key element in international health care policy, for example through the 'Age-Friendly Cities' program promoted by the World Health Organization that also addresses innovative housing for older people, urban facilities and active participation of older people, so-called 'active ageing' (Gabauer, Glaser, et al., 2022; van Hoof et al., 2018).

Ageing-in-place relates to allowing the older person to stay as long as possible at home, in familiar surroundings or in the community, although it is also considered by some researchers as an ideal that should rather be ageing in the right place (Smetcoren, 2016; van Hoof et al., 2018). In a recent scoping review on 'Ageing in Place' literature, Pani-Harreman et al. (2021) identified that place and social networks are two of the key themes in research, including attention to the neighbourhood, place attachment and the social and physical environment in ageing.

Neighbourhoods and local networks are important physical and social spaces for care and well-being on different levels (Buffel et al., 2013; Gabauer, Glaser, et al., 2022). Research focuses on the relation between neighbourhoods and health, for example the impact and benefits of green space,

accessible transportation, social contact or feelings of safety on health (Gardner, 2011), but also on the "*less tangible, rather emotional and experience-based aspects*" (Pani-Harreman et al., 2021, p.2051) of the relation to place, such as emotional attachments and meanings (van Hees et al., 2017; Wiles et al., 2012). Different concepts like place attachment or sense of place evoke this relation to space and investigate the meanings individuals and groups attach to place, but also the symbolic and emotional connection with place (Sebastien, 2020). Furthermore, scholars consider care as a spatial practice (Gabauer et al., 2022). Focusing on the spatiality of care would allow to introduce an 'urban lens' on care practices and a 'care lens' to urban transformations, questioning our "*being-in-common*" in cities:

> *Care sits in places, flows through spatial networks, extends across territorial borders, and maps itself onto the ethnicized, racialized, classed, gendered, and sexual divisions of contemporary cities (see Atkinson et al. 2011). At the intersections of city and space, this perspective contributes to a deep understanding of what is distinctly 'urban' in caring practices and how a perspective of care can enable just, productive, and ethical engagement with urban transformations.*(Gabauer, Knierbein, et al., 2022, p.12)

1.3.3. Relational and social vision of care: different actors, different roles

Third, caring neighbourhoods start from a relational and social vision of care. Care relations are interdependent and not unilinear from one care giver to one care receiver. In the convoy of care model, for example, a person receiving care is placed within a broad network. Kemp et al. (2013, p.18) define care convoys as:

> "*the evolving collection of individuals who may or may not have close personal connections to the recipient or to one another, but who provide care, including help with activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), socio-emotional care, skilled health care, monitoring and advocacy*".

Care networks are complex and dynamic and include different formal and informal care actors who are interdependent and may hold different roles (Lambotte et al., 2019). Interdependency suggests that care and support relations are complex and reciprocal, as the person receiving care can also be the one providing care, and should be better understood in the frame of 'relational autonomy', including both the persons' own capacities and dependence on others (De Donder et al., 2019).

Caring neighbourhoods enlarge this network-vision and in their practical implementation focus on building social relations and connectedness as a base for caring relations. Social connections are a very broad topic and can be theorised in different ways. Developed in a Western context, the large body of work on social capital (Bourdieu, 1980; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993) emphasises that social relations and networks are valuable on an individual as well as a collective level (Note et al., 2020). Sociologist Granovetter (1973) studies for example the distinct functions of strong and weak ties. Weak ties, which are less close and deep than strong ties, are important for bridging different people and networks. Strong and weak ties are also related to two functions of social capital, which highlight the

use and value of social relations: *bonding* and *bridging* – here we do not take into account the third function of linking (Buffel et al., 2009; Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Bonding social capital refers to the trusting and enduring social relationships between people who see themselves as similar in terms of a shared characteristic or social identity. This form of social capital is important for the social well-being, social support and embedding of individuals and groups. Bridging social capital refers to relationships of respect and reciprocity between people who see themselves as different in socio-demographic terms (e.g. age, education, income, migration background and ethnicity) or based on social identity. Bridging relationships have the potential to connect different groups. Caring neighbourhoods can capitalise on both, but Wegleitner & Schuchter (2018) point to potentially negative effects of bonding social capital when developing caring neighbourhoods:

> such as social exclusion or disadvantages resulting from all too tightly-knit communities with alleged unity. Thus, the challenge and "art" of being a good neighbour includes strengthening the qualities of bridging in the community, which means in particular, showing openness for the unknown, the stranger, who lives next door or in the next street. (p.95-96).

The author highlights that building caring neighbourhoods always happens in a diverse context, as neighbourhoods are crossed by different individuals and social and cultural contexts. Therefore, caring neighbourhoods need to commit to bridging different individuals, groups, (care) services... and an open attitude towards the other. In the analysis of 35 funded projects in Belgium, caring neighbourhood practices mainly focus on building connections, but on different levels: (1) connecting residents and neighbours among each other and building social cohesion between people, which concerns both bonding and bridging social capital and (2) connecting people to professional care and support services (De Donder et al., 2021).

In addition to strong and weak ties as described in detail by Granovetter, there was also an undiscussed footnote on so-called absent ties. Soenen (2006) highlights the importance of these ephemeral or 'absent' ties, such as the chat people have at the checkout of the shop or exchanging a glance in public transport. These "moments of community" have the potential of creating a sense of belonging and togetherness, while allowing distance (Note et al., 2020; Soenen, 2003, 2006). Considering moments of community in caring neighbourhoods can offer a new way of comprehending community, where the *co* is created between people in interaction (Note et al., 2020). Enabling these moments of community, first requires to recognize these moments, working towards a shared ideal but also assuring openness and taking guard for rigidifying meanings (Note et al., 2020).

1.4. Gaps in current caring neighbourhood practices

Two gaps in current practices of and literature on caring neighbourhoods can be identified.

First, although participation and empowerment are described as key principles in caring neighbourhood practices (Wegleitner & Schuchter, 2018), it often remains unclear how people are involved. Also, it remains ambiguous to what extent initiatives contribute to the actual empowerment and implication of the groups and individuals they aimed to include.

Second, as mentioned above, caring neighbourhood initiatives mainly focus on social relations between residents and connection to volunteer, informal and professional care services, but do not include other types of neighbourhood users. While some projects involve "non-evident" key figures such as local pharmacists or pedicures (Duppen et al., 2019), other types of neighbourhood users - schools, theatres, museums, small businesses, large companies and organisations, as well as individual workers, students and commuters - are rarely addressed. They are however widely present in diverse and highly urbanised contexts and are involved in -unseen- care practices.

2. Building caring neighbourhoods through co-creative research: the MaN'Aige project

This PhD builds on the co-creative research project MaN'Aige (October 2019 - October 2022), funded by the Innoviris Co-create program. I participated as an action researcher during three years in the MaN'Aige project. The fourth year of the PhD-trajectory was dedicated to writing up the gathered knowledge in this manuscript at hand. Given my close involvement in the project, I chose to introduce the I-perspective in this section.

MaN'Aige aimed to explore how to build a caring neighbourhood through co-creative research in two Brussels neighbourhoods by involving "non-evident" neighbourhood users. The MaN'Aige project was initiated by a local service centre, Het Anker, located in inner-city Brussels. The centre organised activities and services for older residents, but in recent years they aimed to reach more older people and residents with care needs from the surrounding neighbourhoods. Furthemore, in recent Flemish health policy, each local service centre is now responsible for a "living-care-zone". Two neighbourhoods next to the ones where the local service centre is located were of particular interest as they had little knowledge of the local care needs in these spaces. The local service centre answered the Innoviris Co-create call for projects for the first time in 2017 and started building a partnership with different organisations: a community health centre, the nursing department of a university-college, a knowledge centre and an academic partner, that eventually also realised the project.

First, I will focus on the co-creative research methodology, which was key in the MaN'Aige project, and likewise also in my PhD. I will provide a theoretical and academic background of "co-

creative research" and discuss the approach of the MaN'Aige project. Second, I will provide some background information on the two neighbourhoods.

2.1. Research on and in caring neighbourhoods: a co-creative approach

The MaN'Aige project was officially accepted in 2019. MaN'Aige was funded by the Co-create program of Innoviris, which is the public organisation that funds and supports research and innovation in the Brussels Capital Region. The Co-create program aims to support social and environmental transitions that improve life and resilience in Brussels through innovative research. It is currently presented within a particular frame:

> *Resilience, social and environmental justice, crises, re-enchantment, rehumanisation, ecological redirection, degrowth, sustainability, sobriety, etc. are all words that describe new paths being explored for social and ecological transitions. The aim of the Co-Creation program is to support projects that aim to explore these new pathways so that, in the long term, we are capable to make the desired transitions.* (Innoviris Co-create, 2023)

In the projects of the Co-create program, the task of research does not lie solely with academic institutions or centres of expertise, but with various actors from the field working together as co-researchers.

2.1.1. What is co-creative research ?

Co-creation is usually defined as a collective process characterized by the active and deep involvement of different stakeholders in tackling a common challenge or issue (Ehlen et al., 2017; Voorberg et al., 2015). The concept of co-creation was originally popularized in the context of business management and marketing as *value co-creation* (Metz et al., 2019) but it appears in different domains such as the arts (e.g. Shaw et al., 2021), social services (e.g. Toros et al., 2022), urban planning (e.g. Mitić-Radulović & Lalović, 2021) and energy transition (e.g. Selvakkumaran & Ahlgren, 2018). Also in academia, the question is raised of how co-creation can improve the results or output of research. As a distinct research approach, it appears in various research domains such as health and care (e.g. Anderson et al., 2016; Greenhalgh et al., 2016), ecology (e.g. Utter et al., 2021), communication (e.g. Simpson & Seibold, 2008) and policymaking (e.g. Nicholas et al., 2019). The concept of co-creation has thus become widespread not only as a method, but also as a distinct 'co-creative research' approach, alongside collaborative or participatory research practices or other concepts related to university-community partnerships like *community-based participatory research* (e.g. Israel et al., 1998), *participatory action research* (e.g. Reason & Bradbury, 2008) *transdisciplinary research* (e.g. Brown et al., 2010), *co-production* (e.g. Turnhout et al., 2020) or *collaborative research* (e.g. Metz et al., 2019).

Due to the similarities between principles of different collaborative or participatory approaches in research, some authors dismiss claims that co-creative research is a distinct category of research (Nicholas et al., 2019). Nicholas et al. (2019) however stress the importance of designating it as a distinctive research approach as this would allow critical reflection on the ethics, legitimacy and quality of the research. To gain a deeper understanding of co-creative research, we discuss some of the key principles that are presented in different studies. We identified three different (theoretical) principles where co-creative research as a distinct research approach is built upon: (1) societal transformation (2) collaboration between academic and non-academic partners and (3) genuine shared ownership and empowerment.

First, co-creation offers an approach to bridging the gap between research and practice, "*moving research out of the ivory towers and closer to the real world*" (Greenhalgh et al., 2016, p.421). The co-creation of knowledge is both an approach and outcome to face complex challenges of society (Utter et al., 2021) that aims for societal change (Nicholas et al., 2019).

Second, co-creative research draws on collaborative and dialogical processes (Calabria, 2022; Gignac et al., 2022; Greenhalgh et al., 2016), where the aim is to arrive at a *common understanding* of problems and to develop possible solutions or insights among different actors involved (Bonney et al., 2009; Simpson & Seibold, 2008). Some studies explicitly distinguish academic and non-academic actors drawing on a collaboration between researchers and end-users, such as patients in health research (Anderson et al., 2016; Gignac et al., 2022), while others emphasise a variety of actors involved (Calabria, 2022; Utter et al., 2021). For example, Utter et al. (2021) explain how in co-creative processes concerning agroecology, different actors can be involved: farmers, community members, individuals from governmental and nongovernmental entities, and researchers.

Third, co-creative research strives for genuine shared ownership "*by co-creators who believe in its purpose and product*" (Simpson & Seibold, 2008, p.266). Some co-creative research draws upon a transdisciplinary paradigm, stressing the active collaboration between different actors integrating their knowledge, which differs from passive ways of merely merging, incorporating or exchanging different types of knowledge (Calabria, 2022; Utter et al., 2021). Others, following a more 'classic' research paradigm, stipulate the active engagement of participants in most or all steps of the research, from drafting the research question and elaborating the research concept to its implementation and finally the interpretation and valorisation of the research (Bonney et al., 2009).

2.1.2. Co-creative research in MaN'Aige

In MaN'Aige we initially followed the model of Bonney et al. (2009), which makes the distinction between contributed, collaborated and co-created projects. In the latter, participants (or the

"public") are involved in almost all stages of the research process: from defining the question to experimenting to formulating and disseminating conclusions and asking new questions (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Models for public participation in scientific research (adapted from Bonney et al., 2009, p.19)

	contributed (contribute to) projects	collaborated (collaborate) projects	co-created (create together) projects
PHASE 1: Co-design of research goal and questions			
Develoment research questions			X
Literature review: collecting literature, studies, reports			X
Literature review: analysis and reporting			X
Developing research design (how to collect data)		(X)	X
PHASE 2: Co-conducting the research			
Experimenting		X	X
Data collection	X	X	X
PHASE 3: Co-interpretation and co-valorisation			
Data analysis	(X)	X	X
Interpretation of results and formulating conclusions		(X)	X
Dissemination of conclusions and translating results into actions	(X)	(X)	X

X = public included in research phase; (X)= public sometimes included in research phase

In MaN'Aige's practice, co-creative research meant adopting an inquisitive attitude, a constant balancing act to align research responding to research questions and concrete actions, as well as exploring creative research methods and techniques. We distinguished five major phases in the research process that were interlocking and cyclical: 1) a neighbourhood analysis to get to know the neighbourhoods through walks, surveys and workshops 2) design of the research and experiments 3) experimentation in six Living Labs focusing on three dimensions: physical space of the neighbourhood (greening and accessibility of the neighbourhood), the involvement of cultural players, large companies and public institutions, and individual care relationships 4) reflection and research using collective discussions and creative methods 5) co-analysis and valorisation: annual research reports, give-back sessions, co-analysis of all material collected in group and dissemination.

In this process, different partners were involved at different stages of the process. A committee of co-researchers met monthly. The group consisted of community workers from the local service centre Het Anker, teachers and staff from Odisee University College, care professionals from the community health centre Maison Médicale Enseignement, researchers from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), policy support staff from the Knowledge Centre WWZ and a resident of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-ter-Sneeuw. Together, we investigated how a caring neighbourhood could take shape (or not) with neighbourhood users, and how 'unexpected' connections with these users could contribute (or not) to a caring neighbourhood. In addition, many neighbourhood users and residents were engaged in shaping the research and participated in the project's Living Labs and co-creation workshops.

2.1.3. Two neighbourhoods in Brussels: a short description

The MaN'Aige project took place in the Martelaars and Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-ter-Sneeuw neighbourhood, both adjacently located in the centre of Brussels. Historically, the two neighbourhoods connect the upper and lower parts of the city. The upper part of the city was a popular working neighbourhood that was completely erased in the 1870s and rebuilt with large public spaces, buildings with ornate facades, facilities such as the Royal Circus, a public bathing house and a theatre dedicated to the entertainment of bourgeois lifestyle (Wijkcomité Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Sneeuw, 2020). The lower neighbourhood, also named 'Bas-fonds', was historically popularand was demolished in the 'modernisation' movement in the second half of the 20th century, for the construction of the North-South railway and the Administrative Centre.

Although the two neighbourhoods are very different, in terms of urban development, infrastructure and the experience of residents and users, the local service centre constructed MaN'Aige based on the following three observations for both neighbourhoods: 1) Access to the local service centre is difficult for care-dependent older residents, as these two adjacent neighbourhoods are crossed by great physical barriers (e.g. arterial roads, stairs and steep roads due to height differences); 2) The two neighbourhoods lack local services and facilities for older or care-dependent residents; 3) There is a large presence of institutions, offices, companies, cultural venues, schools, but also students, commuters and passersby in the neighbourhoods. Throughout the project, these observations were complemented by statistical data and experiences of residents. First, on an urbanistic level, the two neighbourhoods are surrounded and crossed by arterial roads and have a great height difference. Some residents mentioned issues of accessibility of pavements, access to green space, and the negative impact of large real estate projects that privatise public space and densify the urban space. Secondly, there are few nearby services and facilities for residents in the neighbourhood. Local bars, restaurants and shops mainly target neighbourhood users. Especially in the Martelaars' neighbourhood, residents describe their neighbourhood as "*concrete*" and not lively, while also offering a calm and protected feeling in the

centre of the city. Local health workers also mention issues of loneliness and isolation in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, due to the lower population number compared to the rest of the centre, these neighbourhoods are less in the picture in terms of services and facilities. Residents mention they feel "*forgotten*" by local policy. Third, in both neighbourhoods there is an imbalance between residents and neighbourhood users who do not live in the neighbourhood but do use it, such as employees of large institutions and businesses, students, and passersby. Compared to the rest of the centre of Brussels, the two neighbourhoods have a rather low population density and a particularly high office density, about the same amount as in the business district in the North Quarter (Bisa.Brussels, 2018, 2021b). Although the neighbourhoods are in transition and the population number has been increasing in recent years (Bisa.Brussels, 2019), an imbalance remains. To illustrate, around 2.600 people live in the Martelaars neighbourhood (Bisa.Brussels, 2021a), while one of the companies that is located there already employs 2.800 people (Degraeve et al., 2022).

3. Research aim and outline of PhD dissertation

The central aim of this doctoral dissertation is to investigate caring neighbourhoods in an urban context. More specifically, this dissertation investigates how to build caring relations including neighbourhood users in two neighbourhoods in Brussels, adopting a co-creative research approach.

The present doctoral dissertation aims to contribute to the current debates on caring neighbourhoods by focusing on a co-creative approach and the perspective of different types of neighbourhood users in an urban context. Four different studies were conducted to add relevance to our main research question: **How can we build a caring neighbourhood with unexpected neighbourhood users through co-creative research?** This question contained two sub-questions, which were also central in MaN'Aige:

- How can we build connections with these users that contribute to a caring neighbourhood (or not)?
- Which roles can these neighbourhood users (not) take on that contribute to a caring neigbhourhood?

The main research question relates to our two main research goals, which answer the abovementioned gaps in current research. First, genuine accounts of involvement and participation processes in caring neighbourhood practices are lacking. In the context of MaN'Aige, a co-creative research approach was adopted. **Research Goal 1** therefore aims to **understand, experiment and evaluate how to realise co-creative research in practice.** Second, although neighbourhood users are widely present in diverse and highly urbanised contexts and are involved in -unseen- care practices, they are rarely considered in caring neighbourhood practices. MaN'Aige specifically focused on the connections that could be built with these users and the roles they could take up contributing to a caring

neighbourhood. **Research Goal 2** therefore aims to **understand, experiment and evaluate how to build a caring neighbourhood with unexpected neighbourhood users.**

Following the two research aims, this dissertation is divided in two main parts. Part 1 focuses on the co-creative research approach, Part 2 on building caring neighbourhoods with users. The four different studies are divided into these two parts. In-between chapters, four Inter-sections give a practical insight in MaN'Aige. An overview of the studies, referring to the different chapters of this dissertation:

PART I. BUILDING CO-CREATIVE RESEARCH (*Research goal 1*)

The first part of this dissertation focuses on a co-creative research approach. Although participation and/or co-creation are key principles in caring neighbourhoods, implementing these approaches in real-life settings is often accompanied by tensions relating to power imbalances. This section will specifically focus on the tensions faced within practices of co-creative research and consists of three chapters:

Chapter 2. The discomfort of being an academic researcher in co-creative research: research positionality and reflexivity

As researchers it is important to consider our own positionality (Olivier De Sardan, 2000). In this introductory chapter I explain how I entered the MaN'Aige project and this PhD. This chapter allows a first insight into some of the tensions I experienced as an academic doctoral researcher involved in co-creative research. Issues of reflexivity and positionality were key throughout the entire co-creative research of MaN'Aige, and will be further explored in the next chapters.

Chapter 3. How 'co' can you go? A qualitative inquiry on the key principles of co-creative research and their enactment in real-life practices

This chapter focuses on the principles of co-creative research and their enactment in real-life practices from the perspective of professionals and researchers involved in different co-creative research projects in Brussels. This study will particularly focus on challenges related to power relations in co-creative research. The study was based on interviews and a focus group with academic researchers and professionals (n=16) involved in eight co-creative research projects funded by the Brussels Regional Institute for Research and Innovation (Innoviris).

Chapter 4. Doing co-creative research on caring neighbourhoods in Brussels: A reflection on the project journey and overarching challenges

This chapter is a reflection on co-creative research process as a real-life practice, from the experiences within MaN'Aige. Although co-creative and participatory principles and approaches are key in caring neighbourhoods, accounts of real-life practices and experienced tensions from within remain underexposed. Drawing on the experiences of the co-creative research MaN'Aige on two caring neighbourhoods in Brussels, the goal of this study is to 1) describe the project journey undertaken and the different obstacles that affected or reoriented this process, and 2) to reflect on the overarching challenges that were faced in this co-creative research. Based on numerous discussions, focus groups, co-creative workshops and observations throughout the three-year MaN'Aige project, the project journey and main challenges are presented.

PART II. BUILDING CARING NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH 'UNEXPECTED' USERS *(Research goal 2)*

The second part of this dissertation focuses on building caring neighbourhoods with 'unexpected' users, presenting possible building blocks for building connections. After presenting a general overview of caring neighbourhoods, we will delve deeper into one of the building blocks, the role of public and green space in caring neighbourhoods. This section consists of two chapters:

Chapter 5. Building a caring neighbourhood with users in Brussels: exploring 'unexpected' connections in the MaN'Aige project (Original text in Dutch translated into English)

In this chapter we will present the main lessons learned from the experience of MaN'Aige on building a caring neighbourhood with 'unexpected' users. We identified five main building blocks or points of attention for building connections. Like Chapter 3, this chapter is based on numerous discussions, focus groups, co-creative workshops and observations throughout the three-year MaN'Aige project.

Chapter 6. Exploring the Value of Urban Green Space: Perspectives of Residents and Users in Inner-City Brussels

In this chapter, we delve deeper into the role of green and public spaces in care and well-being, identified in Chapter 5 as important building blocks for caring neighbourhoods. In health literature, urban green space is often studied for its benefits on health. However, an environmental justice perspective shows how urban green space can also reinforce exclusion and inequalities in neighbourhoods. This article examines the way urban green space is experienced and valued in two Brussels' neighbourhoods from the perspective of residents and users through 12 walk-along interviews. By comparing three discourses on the value of urban green, we aim to nuance the role of urban green space in fostering connection and care and show tensions from an environmental justice and care perspective.

Chapter	Research Questions or Aims	Research Method	Data	Publication Status
Chapter 3. How 'co' can you go? A qualitative inquiry on the key principles of co-creative research and their enactment in real-life practices	Research questions: How do project coordinators and researchers of co-creative research projects understand and experience co-creative research? 1) How do researchers and professionals understand key principles of co-creative research 2) How do researchers and professionals realise co-creative research practice?	Qualitative research	8 individual interviews and one focus group (n=16) with professionals and researchers	Accepted to International Journal of Social Research Methodology
Chapter 4. Doing co-creative research on caring neighbourhoods in Brussels: A reflection on the project journey and overarching challenges	Research Aim: Describe the experiences of a co-creative research project MaN'Aige on two caring neighbourhoods in Brussels 1) to describe the project journey undertaken and the different obstacles that affected or reoriented this process; 2) to reflect on the overarching challenges that we faced in this co-creative research.	Co-creative research	MaN'Aige project (2019-2022)	/
Chapter 5. Building a caring neighbourhood with users in Brussels: exploring 'unexpected' connections in the MaN'Aige project	How can connections between neighbourhood users and residents contribute to a caring neighbourhood?	Co-creative research	MaN'Aige project (2019-2022)	In the process of submission to journal Brussels Studies (Dutch version)
Chapter 6. Exploring the Value of Urban Green Space: Perspectives from Residents and Users in Inner-City Brussels	How is urban green space valued from the perspectives of residents and users in two neighbourhoods in inner-city Brussels? (1) How do neighbourhood residents and users perceive urban green space in their neighbourhood? (2) How do neighbourhood residents and users perceive the value of urban green space?	Qualitative research	12 walk-along interviews with neighbourhood residents and users	In the process of submission to journal Urban Studies

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PART I. BUILDING CO-CREATIVE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 2. The Discomfort of Being an Academic Researcher in Co-creative Research: Research Positionality and Reflexivity

Throughout my entire research process, issues of positionality and reflexivity were key. Therefore, I dedicate the first chapter of the first part of this dissertation to a discussion of my own position. My dissertation is the result of quite an unusual PhD-research journey. I will start by explaining how I ended up doing this PhD and some events that left their mark on me. This is followed by a reflection on the research paradigm and my own role within the research and writing process, the tensions I experienced in doing this research and in writing this dissertation.

1. My personal background in doing this PhD

The PhD was my first experience in "doing research", besides a small introduction in my master's thesis in Anthropology. To conduct my master's thesis research, I travelled to La Paz, Bolivia without a predetermined plan. I ended up writing about the festivities of fraternities that took place in the city (folklore was a common topic for European researchers). I remember a woman guiding me through the streets where a parade was going on, telling me: "*You should take a picture of this and show it in your home country*". Although I had always been white, born and raised in Western Europe, this is where I became (really) aware of the way it influenced my position and way of looking at and being in the world. Several sociology students at the UMSA (Universidad Mayor de San Andrés) university, whom I am very grateful for teaching me this important life lesson, questioned me about European researchers and students coming to conduct their research or internships for some months and then leaving again. One day, a friend of mine looked outside the window of a *minibus* when travelling through the landscape of El Alto's outskirts, and joked: "*Look there, an Andean mountain, and there Andean rocks*". This is when I realised how little I understood and how much my presence and attitude as a white, female student "doing research" were part of systemic inequalities.

Back in my home city of Brussels, I felt the only place I could do something meaningful was in my own surroundings. After my studies, I was involved professionally and voluntarily, in different initiatives. I worked for example on the organisation of a Citizens' Assembly, where I encountered the same questions and tensions. Being a group of white academics and professionals, we reproduced the same systemic inequalities we were aiming to counter through our project in the first place. At the end of the Assembly that took place in a fancy venue, people asked: 'What will you do with what we discussed?' and 'What is the political impact?'. We promoted participation, but only to a certain extent, while excluding "difficult-to-reach" voices. However, these experiences taught me a lot. Based on my

previous working experiences, I was drawn to the combination of a broad, 'unpractical' view, which allows critical reflection without the need to answer direct predefined objectives, and an embedded, practical view that connects to and engages with people, their contexts and personal experiences. This was my main motivation to apply for the PhD researcher position in the MaN'Aige project. I wanted to be involved in research that did not stay in an ivory tower but that was engaged with local neighbourhoods and that could contribute to a change and new dynamic.

At the start of the project, however, I heard the same statements again from neighbourhood residents as I had heard from the Bolivian students and the participants in the Citizens' Assembly: you arrive from the outside with funding to do your project, and when it is finished, you will leave again. Of course, this statement did not reflect all the developments in the project, nor all the people involved in the project, but was an interesting entry point for me in this dissertation.

Writing this PhD dissertation was a way for me to give a place to the feelings of uneasiness and discomfort that I experienced while being involved in (co-creative research) projects with predefined goals and roles, but also to find a way to hopefully inspire others with insights from this process. My main aim was to reflect on the tension between what is presented in proposals and what is happening inside projects, taking guard of catch-all words like participation and co-creation, but looking at the way these concepts are shaped in real-life projects.

In the following chapters, I will not often use the 'I' perspective, but rather the perspective of 'we'. This 'we' sometimes refers to the group of co-researchers involved in the MaN'Aige project, but sometimes to the group of co-authors, my academic supervisors, colleagues, and myself, who were involved in the writing of this dissertation. In each chapter, this 'we' might be different and will be specified.

2. Tensions regarding the research paradigm

I experienced a lot of difficulties in delineating a firm standpoint of the research paradigm in terms of ontology ("What is reality?"), epistemology ("How is knowledge constructed?" or "How to know reality? ") and methodology ("How to find it out?") throughout the MaN'Aige project and this dissertation. The MaN'Aige project proposal was written from a critical-emancipatory research perspective. Further than understanding or observing social reality, research should aim to bring about change, to enhance the agency of the people involved and their possibility to (re)-construct reality. In the project proposal it was stipulated that "*research is primarily aimed at emancipating and advancing (disadvantaged) groups, research is not an end goal but a means*" (MaN'Aige project proposal, 2019). Furthermore, research should be a means to increasing resilience: *How can we, through research, change and improve the situation, increase resilience in the neighbourhood?* (MaN'Aige project proposal, 2019). This also implied that within the process, people should be involved throughout the research

process and different types of knowledge should be valued. This approach profoundly impacted my role as an academic researcher in the project.

However, when realising this research proposal, reality proved to be different, or at least not that straightforward. The theoretical and philosophical frameworks that underlie the research process became the subject of discussion and tension within the MaN'Aige project.

First, we – i.e. the different MaN'Aige co-researchers - did not necessarily have the same understanding or vision of a co-creative research approach. In addition, our understandings changed throughout the project, but not always in the same direction. The methods we used were often not planned, apart from structural discussions, and were the result of a continuous development process, which often resulted in feelings of "messiness", "being stuck" and "going slow". Additionally, I should note that most of the research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was of course a very difficult context for doing co-creative research on caring neighbourhoods. However, this also allowed us to question our practices and preconceived ideas. It legitimated the development of more spontaneous informal processes, instead of implementing 'the project'.

Second, co-researchers had certain expectations and visions on academic research. Co-researchers consistently inquired: "What do you need for your research?", referring to my doctoral dissertation. I would frenetically answer: "I don't need anything, my research concerns whatever we do". Co-researchers who had a background in medical science interrogated me on the scientific value of what we were doing, stating : "To me, this is not scientific, what we are doing"… or "what are our hypotheses?", "what methodology do we follow?". Their statements reflected the expectations of my role as an academic researcher. Trying to step out of what was expected and take on another role often felt quite discomforting, especially as the critical emancipatory and participatory or co-creative research frame remained unclear to us at the beginning. Furthermore, co-researchers expressed the critique that taking on a critical-emancipatory stance aiming to increase agency, emancipation and resilience in our context could also risk too much focus on individual responsibilities and to enhance inequalities.

Eventually, I ended up being a reporter rather than a changemaker and considered it as my main task to record and write down everything we discussed and experienced. This resulted in a bulging bookcase in my university office: 8 notebooks, countless posters covered in post-its, tons of documents, transcribed interviews, minutes of meetings, PowerPoint presentations, pictures,... After three years of collecting, things got so messy, I was the only one who could manage and use the data. When the end of the project funding neared, I organised co-analysis moments between co-researchers to make sense of all this data, but this presented a real challenge to all of us. We took the time to listen to each other's stories, to read and reflect on what we had gone through and to analyse the documents together.

However, this time was very limited and many actions were going on at the same time. After three years, although the funding ended, the project was not finished. Instead, it felt more like a beginning.

This dissertation is an attempt to present ongoing reflections and is based on the collective work within and beyond MaN'Aige to which many people contributed. Finally, as the aim of this dissertation is to look at how concepts are shaped within real-life projects, throughout this dissertation I aim to take on a maybe less emancipatory, but more critical lens: looking at the way reality is socially constructed and influenced by power relations. It was a deliberate choice to focus on the process and on the issues of co-creation and involvement, as part of the main research aim of MaN'Aige to build caring neighbourhoods with 'unexpected' users in two neighbourhoods in Brussels. Although, it sometimes felt discomforting writing this PhD about a process I was myself involved in and that was meant to be co-creative, I hope a written account of these experiences can inspire others and allow more future reflections.

INTER-SECTION 1. A view on MaN'Aige's neighbourhoods and participants

MaN'Aige focused on two neighbourhoods, **Martelaars and Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Sneeuw**, that are situated in the Brussels' city center. These neighbourhoods count approximately 2600 residents each and have a relatively low population density compared to the rest of the city center. In both neighbourhoods, next to residential housing, there is a large presence of public and private institutions, cultural venues, banks, schools, restaurants, but also commuters, students, passersby,…and parking lots. Both neighbourhoods have their character and are experienced in multiple ways.

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In Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Sneeuw, the central square and surrounding streets host **numerous restaurants and bars** for residents, people working in the neighbourhood and passersby. The Royal Circus, a large concert venue, is sometimes considered as the "*driving force*" of the neighbourhood. Many of the buildings in the neighbourhood, and especially on and around the square are owned publicly by the City of Brussels. The events we organised with MaN'Aige mainly took place on this central square.

The **community health centre** located in one of the streets that is connected to the main square was a key figure in MaN'Aige. The care professionals were a point of contact with the neighbourhood, through their patient visits and the organisation of activities.

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Another important point of connection was the **neighbourhood committee**. It had been active for numerous years, for example in the organisation of events regarding the cultural heritage of the neighbourhood, but also acting against construction projects. An important event that occurred during MaN'Aige was their opposition to the construction project RAC 4 and the cutting down of hundreds of trees.

A **great height difference** exists between the two neighbourhoods, illustrated by the different stairways. Pacheco lane and the Administrative Centre form an in-between space, a barrier, but also a connection between

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this upper and lower part of the city. Some residents refer to this space as a "*no-man's land*". It is a space of friction in urban planning, but also a space where rapid transformations happen. We could already observe the changes during the four years of MaN'Aige.

The Martelaars neighbourhood is situated in the lower part of the city. It is often described as "*grey*" **and** "*abandoned*"**,** however residents also appreciate its peacefulness in contrast to the busy shopping street nearby. It is perceived a convenient and accessible neighbourhood with buildings and pavements accessible to wheelchair users. The neighbourhood hosts numerous public and

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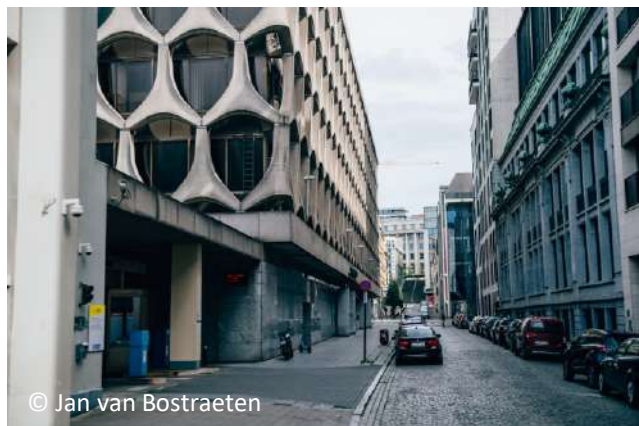
private institutions, companies, governmental institutions, a hospital, schools, museums and theatres. The neighbourhood also hosts a large social housing unit.

Building connections with residents of the Martelaars neighbourhood was not easy. With MaN'Aige we organised events at the Martelaars square, but the vastness of the square made connections difficult. However, being more present revealed many hidden care needs in the neighbourhood, regarding **safety, cleanliness, and the liveability** of urban space.

Throughout the three years of co-creative research and the preceding development phases of the project, many different people were involved in MaN'Aige. Each participated at different levels, some people were involved from the start, others joined in or stepped out during the project. Some were involved as 'official' partners, others voluntarily, each with their reasons and motivations. On the picture we see for example several co-researchers and some residents from Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Sneeuw.

Not all people involved in MaN'Aige were 'participants' or 'co-researchers', but residents or users who wished to share their experiences and knowledge occasionally, for example on the accessibility of the neighbourhood, or to work together in long-term collaborations, for example in the local garden project.

One of the topics that emerged in the Martelaars neighbourhood was the necessity for more green space and a liveable neighbourhood. A group of residents and users (employees at theatres and public institutions) met with local politicians, proposed new ideas for concrete changes based on the current situation in the neighbourhood, and planted the first trees and bushes together with the organisation Bûûmplanters.

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CHAPTER 3. How 'Co' Can you Go? A Qualitative Inquiry on the Key Principles of Co-creative Research and their Enactment in Real-life Practices

Abstract

This paper aims to gain a better understanding of the key principles of co-creative research and their enactment in real-life practices. The study is based on interviews and a focus group with academic researchers and professionals (n=16) involved in eight co-creative research projects funded by the Brussels Regional Institute for Research and Innovation (Innoviris). The study demonstrates the tension between respondents' understanding of the key principles of co-creative research (e.g. a transformative aim, considering the community as actors, shared ownership, valuing experiential knowledge) and the power issues they face related to a 'project-funding' and 'academic research' logic when enacting those key principles in real-life practices. This paper concludes that although dealing with power relations is inherent in co-creative research, power imbalances should be questioned on the level of (1) the linear, limited and inflexible nature of 'project-funding' logics and (2) the exclusive character of research methods, settings and institutions in 'academic research' logics. Finally, introducing a political and emancipatory dimension in co-creative research can contribute to reducing the gap between principles and their enactment in real-life practices.

Key words

Authors

Octavia Kint

Daan Duppen

Geert Vandermeersche

An-Sofie Smetcoren

Liesbeth De Donder

1. Introduction

Co-creation is usually defined as a collective process characterized by the active and deep involvement of different stakeholders tackling a common challenge or issue (Ehlen et al, 2017; Voorberg et al., 2015). The concept of co-creation was originally popularized in the context of business management and marketing as *value co-creation* (Metz, 2019) but it appears in different domains such as the arts (Shaw et al., 2021), social services (e.g. Toros et al., 2022), urban planning (e.g. Mitic-Radulovic & Lalovic, 2021) and energy transition (e.g. Selvakkumaran & Ahlgren, 2018). There are questions about how co—creation practices can improve results or outputs in the given field. For example, how can co-creation dynamics contribute to local public agendas and policies? (Morell & Hidalgo, 2022). Or how can co-creation in teaching be embedded within the curriculum and involve a whole class of students? (Bovill, 2020). Also in academia, the question is raised of how co-creation can improve the results or output of research. Co-creation appears in various research domains such as health and care (e.g. Anderson et al., 2016; Greenhalgh et al., 2016), ecology (e.g. Utter et al., 2021), communication (e.g. Simpson & Seibold, 2008) and policymaking (e.g. Nicholas et al., 2019). The concept of co-creation has thus become widespread not only as a method but also as a distinct 'co-creative research' approach, alongside collaborative or participatory research practices.

With this growing interest, critical concerns about the application of the concept arise. Co-creation has become a buzzword or "*magic concept*" among scholars, practitioners and policymakers (Voorberg et al., 2015, p. 1334). Co-creation as an approach to knowledge production has gained a taken-for-granted positive value and holds a promise for democratic practices, leaving out of account challenges in the power-knowledge relationship (Phillips & Napan, 2016). While literature exists on the difficulties and challenges of participatory research (e.g. Bourke, 2009), experiences and challenges in real-life co-creative research practices are addressed less often. This paper aims to contribute to reducing this research gap by exploring ways of understanding and performing co-creative research and the barriers it gives rise to, from the point of view of researchers and project coordinators involved in eight different co-creative research projects. As the concept of co-creation becomes more widespread in academic and public funding institutions, the goal of this paper is to offer a view on the key principles of co-creative research and the way those principles are enacted in real-life practices. These insights could help create a common ground between different practices and contribute to a critical reflection on the development, implementation, and evaluation of co-creative research.

2. Background

Due to its similarities with other participatory approaches, co-creative research is not always recognized as a distinct category of research. Nicholas et al. (2019), however, stress the importance of designating it as a distinctive research approach as this would allow critical reflection on the ethics, legitimacy and quality of the research. The current paper aims to contribute to this critical reflection by focusing explicitly on the concept of co-creative research, excluding other concepts related to university-community partnerships like *community-based participatory research* (e.g. Israel et al, 1998), *participatory action research* (e.g. Reason & Bradbury, 2008) or *transdisciplinary research* (e.g. Brown et al 2010). To gain a deeper understanding of co-creative research, we discuss some of the key principles that are presented in different studies. We identified three different theoretical principles underlying co-creative research as a distinct research approach: (1) societal transformation (2) collaboration between academic and non-academic partners and (3) genuine shared ownership and empowerment.

2.1. Societal transformation

Through the genuine recognition and valuing of different stakeholders and their different knowledge types, co-creative research aims to generate new knowledge that brings about social change (Nicholas et al., 2019) For Greenhalgh et al. (2016), co-creation offers an approach to bridging the gap between research and practice, "*moving research out of the ivory towers and closer to the real world*" (Greenhalgh et al., 2016, p.421). The co-creation of knowledge is both an approach and outcome to face the complex challenges of society (Utter et al., 2021). Co-creative research aims to arrive at a *common understanding* of problems and to develop possible solutions or insights among the different actors involved (Bonney et al., 2009; Simpson & Seibold, 2008). Through this process of collaboration, insights and solutions are developed that would not be reached independently (Utter et al., 2021). Some authors stress the importance of co-creative approaches in optimizing their research outcomes and their impact on society (Anderson et al., 2016), while others stress the importance of balancing unequal power relations (Calabria, 2022).

2.2. Collaboration between academic and non-academic actors

People are often not included in research that concerns them, beyond a passive role as data subjects (Gignac et al., 2022). Co-creative research therefore draws on collaborative and dialogical processes between different actors (Greenhalgh et al., 2016). Some studies underline the involvement of non-academic partners in the research process (e.g. Bonney, 2009), such as *citizens and lay people* (Gignac et al., 2022) or *end users* and *patients* (Anderson et al., 2016) in health research. Others

emphasise the collaboration between a variety of actors or *stakeholders* (e.g. Nicholas et al., 2019). For example, in agroecology research, Utter et al. (2021) mention the involvement of farmers, community members, individuals from governmental and non-governmental organisations, and researchers.

2.3. Genuine shared ownership and empowerment

Co-creative research differs from more 'classical' forms of research. Non-academic participants are actively involved in most or all steps of the research, from drafting the research question and elaborating the research concept to its implementation or realization, and finally the interpretation and valorisation of the research (Bonney et al., 2009). More than wide dissemination, or merely a collaboration between academic and non-academic partners, co-creative research values genuine shared ownership "*by co-creators who believe in its purpose and product"* (Simpson & Seibold, 2008, p. 266). Nicholas et al. (2019) emphasise the engagement, common understanding and values of different end-users such as "*those likely to be affected by the work, and those who utilise insights from the work"* (Nicholas et al., 2019, p. 354). The active engagement of different actors in collective knowledge-building thus differs from passive ways of merely merging, incorporating or exchanging different types of knowledge (Utter et al., 2021). Co-creation brings sensitivity and reflexivity to the research process and allows the questioning of asymmetries and unequal power distribution in the relationship between different actors in the research process (Calabria, 2022).

The principles we identified in different studies, however, do not give a clear insight into the real-life practice and ways *co-creators* are involved, before, during and after the research. Although literature exists about the benefits and challenges of co-creative research (e.g. Greenhalgh et al., 2016; Nicholas et al., 2019; Simpson & Seibold, 2008), accounts of lived experiences within real-life practices remain scarce in literature. This study therefore aims to answer the research question: how do project coordinators and researchers of co-creative research projects understand and experience co-creative research?

3. Data and methods

The study uses the Consolidated criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) to report on the methods of this study design (Tong et al., 2007).

3.1. Setting

In 2013 the Brussels funding institution for Research and Innovation (i.e. Innoviris) together with the Flemish government's Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology launched a call for projects called 'Innovative Care Brussels' where the aim was to co-create experimental testing environments in living labs. Furthermore, in 2015 Innoviris launched the Co-Create program for innovative research, bringing together communities, local organisations, academic or research institutions and the public sector on the topic of sustainable food. Over the following years, the program expanded to support projects that aim for ecological and social transitions. Through experimentation and innovation, Co-create projects aim to establish new views and dialogues that contribute to increasing the urban resilience of the Brussels Capital Region (Innoviris Co-create, 2021). Until 2022, projects were generally funded for three years after a preceding starting phase of six months to develop the research proposal which was also funded, but the framework has been continuously evolving regarding conditions for application, funding for pre-trajectories, external support and more.

The research presented in this paper is conducted in the context of "MaN'Aige", one of the selected projects in the Innoviris Co-Create program of 2019 on the topic of caring neighbourhoods. At the start of our funding, we wanted to gain insights into the experiences of co-creative research, gaining a deeper understanding of how it was implemented and experienced by the previously selected projects themselves.

3.2. Design

As the goal of this study was to offer a view on the key principles of co-creative research and their enactment in real-life practices, a qualitative approach was employed. Qualitative approaches aim to generate rich and nuanced insights, adhering closely to the accounts of the research participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were conducted using an interview guide with open-ended questions. We based our interview guide on six research topics established in a collaborative way with the non-academic partners of the MaN'Aige project: the meaning of co-creative research, horizontal connections between the different project actors, roles of different project actors, project governance, durability of the project, and politicisation. The interview guide was not pilot tested prior to the interviews.

3.3. Participants

The data presented in this study is collected from eight individual face-to-face interviews and one focus group (n=8) with a different set of people. Participants involved were academic researchers, project coordinators or professionals in eight different projects on diverse topics e.g. housing and care, social service, circular economy, food, water or waste management.

Eight professionals participated in one focus group interview (five women and three men). They had all been involved in a co-creative research project Entour'Age Nord funded by Innoviris through the Brussels Innovative Care program between 2014 and 2016. Professionals from different social organisations that were part of the consortium of the Entour'Age Nord project were invited via e-mail to participate in the focus group which took place after one year and a half of actively working in the project.

Eight professionals and researchers participated in individual interviews (five women and three men). They were recruited from seven projects funded by the Innoviris Co-create program between 2016 and 2019. Inclusion criteria for the interviews were being the main researcher or project coordinator of a co-creative research project funded by the Innoviris Co-Create program that was finished or in the last year of funding. We had a particular interest in neighbourhood-oriented research, social or health related research topics, or the use of specific collaborative methods. The Co-create Support Centre, an organisation that provides support and stimulates exchange between the Innoviris projects through events and workshops, identified and provided us with the contact details of potential participants who met our inclusion criteria. All respondents were contacted by e-mail and agreed to participate in the interview, except for one community worker involved in Project 4 who had a lack of time.

The relationship between participants and interviewers differed in the two types of data collection. As for the focus group, the interviewer already knew several participants from collaborations on other projects. For the individual interviews, the interviewers did not know the participants personally, but they had met two participants in advance at an introductory event of the Co-create Program organised by the Co-create Support Centre.

TABLE 1. Overview of participants

	Function	Innoviris call	Period	Interview	Duration
R1	Coordinator project 1	Co-Create call 2017	2018-2021	individual interview	67min.
R2	Researcher project 1	Co-Create call 2017	2018-2021	individual interview	94min.
R3	Researcher project 2	Co-Create call 2016	2017-2020	individual interview	82min.
R4	Researcher project 3	Co-Create call 2015	2016-2019	individual interview	75min.
R5	Researcher project 4	Co-Create call 2016	2017-2020	individual interview	70min.
R6	Coordinator project 5	Co-Create call 2016	2017-2020	individual interview	93min.
R7	Coordinator/researcher project 6	Co-Create call 2017	2018-2021	Individual interview	49min.
R8	Coordinator project 7	Co-Create call 2016	2017-2020	individual interview	61min.
R9	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.
R10	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.
R11	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.

R12	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.
R13	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.
R14	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.
R15	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.
R16	Professional project 8	Innovative Brussels Care 2014	2015-2017	Focus group	97min.

3.4. Data collection

The focus group was conducted by the last author, a white female senior researcher. The individual interviews were conducted by the first author, a white female PhD researcher involved as co-researcher in the MaN'Aige project. Both interviewers had experience in interviewing groups or individuals. Four interviews were conducted together with the MaN'Aige project coordinator.

The focus group was conducted in September 2015 and the individual interviews were conducted between January and March 2020 at the premises of the organisations (research institutions, NGOs, public institutions), a coffee house or the participants' homes. One interview took place by Zoom, because it was organised at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants understood why the study was carried out. The focus group and individual interviews were conducted in French and Dutch, depending on the mother tongue of the respondents. Field notes and self-reflection notes were made during the focus groups and the individual interviews. The focus group lasted 97 minutes. The individual interviews lasted between 49 and 94 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's permission and transcribed verbatim. The citations used were translated from French and Dutch into English by the authors.

3.5. Data analysis

The first researcher coded all the data. Data were organised with reflexive thematic analysis conducted using MAXQDA (2020), following the six steps as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006; 2021): (1) familiarizing yourself with the data (e.g. repeated and active reading, memos); (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; (6) writing the report. As for step 4 and 5, a preliminary version of these first themes and results were presented to the MaN'Aige academic and non-academic partners. Based on these discussions, we revisited and clustered the themes and identified new ones. It was jointly decided to centre the analysis around (1) key principles that we identified in the respondents' narratives on co-creative research and (2) barriers to enacting key principles in real-life practices. Using this adapted theme structure, step 4 and 5 were repeated and data was re-analysed by the first author. These results were again discussed and refined among the different authors of this paper, and with a broader research team until consensus was reached.

Data saturation was discussed between the first and last author at the point where, after the analysis of the individual interviews, we did not identify new higher level metathemes in the analysis of the focus group. Although in qualitative research data saturation is not clearly defined, we decided that enough data existed to support these metathemes (Guest, 2006). The final results were not discussed with the participants of the interviews but presented to and reflected upon by the non-academic co-researchers in the MaN'Aige project.

3.6. Ethics and reflexivity

The goal of this research was to offer a view on understandings and experiences of co-creative research in real-life practices. Being involved as co-researchers in a project of the Innoviris Co-Create program, our aim gradually evolved into a broader wish to contribute to the collective body of knowledge on the experiences of this type of research.

Ethical approval for this research was not necessary according to the guidelines of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The research did not specifically aim to involve children, minors or vulnerable persons. There was no personal data collected, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, data governance and information on confidentiality. Ethical issues were considered by the authors. A team of researchers, together with the authors, reflected on the process of the research and any potential harm and discomfort arising from it. Before writing the article, we contacted participants again to ask permission and presented them with the first results. At the request of one participant, we removed references to project topics or target groups from the citations.

4. Results

In this section we will discuss our findings in two parts: (1) understanding of the key principles of co-creative research (2) realisation of co-creative research practice. We argue that in realising co-creative research, participants experienced barriers to enacting the key principles in their co-creative research practice related to power issues on two levels: a project-funding logic and an academic research logic.

4.1. Understanding of key principles of co-creative research

Although projects focused on different topics, ranging from water management to the improvement of social services, the accounts of project coordinators and academic researchers presented common principles of co-creative research. These common principles were all centred around the shift of power in co-creative research on different levels: (1) research with a transformative aim, (2)

considering the community as actors instead of subjects, (3) shared ownership of the research process, (4) valuing experiential knowledge.

4.1.1. Research with a transformative aim

First, project coordinators and researchers described the transformative aim of their research. They developed and implemented a research project not only to generate knowledge but also, most importantly, to bring about change in local practices. According to one respondent, the aim was to create a collective discussion among different actors that would allow to re-imagine reality in a 'political' space:

> *Here we work on the imaginary because we imagine things that do not exist in reality and we say to ourselves that we can create elements to transform the imaginary into reality. I call that political because you will have to discuss together (…) You create spaces of discussion where the idea is to transform reality for reasons that you have diagnosed (R6).*

Although this transformative process might take place on an individual level, respondents stated it was important to recognise that their projects aimed to bring about change on a collective level:

> *All the projects say they are aiming for action on an individual scale. We act on the collective level, through individuals. It's not just suddenly five people who are going to feel a little better in their lives and the Brussels Capital Region doesn't care at all. We work on something that can have a broader scope, a dispersion of implications, it is making something collective in the broadest sense. (R4)*

Furthermore, projects created impact not only through the elaboration of practical results, but also through the co-creative process. According to respondents, understanding the impact of this process required valuing small-scale interactions from within:

> *It is so different from what we are used to do in this society where we plan and foresee everything, where we need to have something visual and tangible so that it has weight. Whereas when we are in the human sphere it is sometimes the small exchanges that change everything and that are not necessarily visible to the naked eye but that we must be able to value (R1).*

4.1.2. Considering the community as actors and not as subjects

Second, respondents claimed their project was a response to the exclusion of people in decision-making or solutions that directly concerned them. This was especially the case for people in precarious situations who were already facing multiple exclusions. Solutions presented in 'classical' research projects and policymaking, for example on the access to social services, often fell short as they only included organisations 'representing' people and not directly the people themselves. According to one respondent, doing research in co-creation instead became a means "*to consider the person not as a*

subject of a policy, but as an actor" (R1). In that way, the respondent claimed their practices were "*really going against the current trend*" *(R1)*. As another respondent commented:

> *if we want to co-create solutions then we were going to try to do it with the people directly concerned* (…)*'it's not just a matter of co-creating with the organisations that work with the people but with the people themselves (R4)*.

Respondents mentioned that being part of a co-creative process led to changes in attitudes among partner organisations and researchers who learned to work *with* people instead of *on* them. One respondent (R4) stated for example that the social workers involved in their process learned to "*do things differently*" and considered their "*beneficiaries*" more as partners, which transformed the power-sharing within the organisation's decision-making processes and way of working.

4.1.3. Shared ownership of the research process

A third principle of co-creative research concerned power-sharing and shared ownership at the level of the research process. Even though the 'co' of co-creation was not unified and fixed but rather understood as variable levels of involvement at different stages of the research process, assuring a feeling of ownership for the people involved was essential:

> *For us, the important thing is that they understand why they are doing research (…), that they are the ones who are central in it, that what we write is based on what they say, and that the idea is to be able to perpetuate it for the next people who are going through the same thing as they are (R2).*

One respondent who was an academic researcher explained how this shared ownership was reflected in the use of terms like co-researcher or citizen-researcher, which not only valued the knowledge of participants but also affirmed their fundamental place within the research process and their "*right to re-interrogate the interest of research, to re-interrogate the questions we started out with, to make choices together" (R7)*. In their practice of including non-academic partners throughout the entire research process, they had pushed the aim of shared ownership much further than in other forms of "*so-called open practices of science towards society, like Citizen Science" (R7),* where the respondent stated implication could remain passive or contributory.

4.1.4. Valuing experiential knowledge

Fourth, respondents claimed that through a collective process bringing together different people they wished to co-create shared knowledge based on different perspectives. More specifically, they claimed knowledge from experience should be recognized as being as valuable as academic, technical or professional knowledge. To be able to value experiential knowledge more, projects based their research on a range of creative methods like cartography workshops, collective walks and intervisions

instead of "*extractive methods*" (R2) like face-to-face interviews or focus groups that were used in 'classic' academic research.

> *We organise walks with people, (...) we make collaborative maps and models (...) and then there are scientists who make scientific studies who tell the residents that if we do this, it won't work. Then the residents react: 'yes, but if we do this...'. There's a genuine discussion between the residents and the experts (R6) .*

The same respondent stated that including people with experiential knowledge not only increased the legitimacy of the research, it also increased the overall level of knowledge. A shared knowledge built not only on scientific or technical knowledge but also on experiential knowledge from neighbourhood residents was richer. It could also reach further, for example to make better recommendations and influence political decision-making.

4.2. Barriers to enacting key principles in real-life practices

Project coordinators and researchers accounted for some power issues in realising their co-creative research practice which we identified as barriers to enacting the key principles of co-creative research in real-life practices. We identified these barriers on two levels: (1) on the level of 'project-funding' logic and (2) on the level of 'academic research' logic.

4.2.1. A 'project-funding' logic

Respondents mentioned some of the structural, organisational, and administrative aspects of their practice that presented difficulties when implementing co-creative research: (1) projects were limited in time and resources, (2) participants were not involved in the project design, and (3) parameters had to be fixed from the start such as composition of project consortium and financial distribution.

First, some respondents stated that project-based funding was limited in time and they needed to prove high levels of involvement and ownership in order to 'succeed'. According to one respondent, within the limited time and resources available, co-creation remained an unattainable ideal:

> *The whole co-creation thing is incredibly ambitious, (...) It takes a lot of time, from the participants, but also from the staff. So we were a bit pragmatic about it. I dare say we had real input from our people but we could certainly have gone much further, but then we would have needed more resources and more time (R5).*

However, high levels of involvement and ownership for 'successful' co-creative research were expected from funding institutions and researchers. One respondent mentioned for example they turned to existing groups that were already familiar with the organisation. This however also meant that participants felt a certain obligation to participate to meet the expectations of the researchers. Especially when working with people in precarious situations, the researcher stated this did not correspond with an emancipatory idea of co-creative research *with* or *by* the people directly concerned.

Second, the conditions and demands to obtain funding were fixed in administrative directives, manuals and templates. This implied that in most projects, the people directly concerned, whom the project intended to benefit, did not develop and write the administrative project proposal and were often involved at a later stage. This had an impact on the positions and roles participants could take on. As one respondent stated:

> *In fact, you have to accept that they are not the ones who have submitted a project to Innoviris, they didn't ask for the research in the first place (...). So it's difficult afterwards to propose to them that they take over. But that doesn't mean they don't have an important role (R2).*

Within some projects, for example in the case of project 4, discussions on remuneration were exemplary for this negotiation on roles and positions. The ethical issue raised by the participants became a central result; being paid structurally for their participation in the project was a way to feel valued. In other cases where the development of the research problem was a collaborative work with participants, the fact that the project-funding application was submitted by researchers or professionals was not perceived as a barrier by respondents.

Third, certain parameters such as budget allocation and partnerships had to be fixed between official partners on submission of the project proposal, with limited flexibility throughout the course of the project. One respondent, a researcher working in a neighbourhood context, mentioned for example the difficulty of adapting their initial research questions to the primary needs of residents due to the fixed partnerships and research teams: *"to change the subject, to follow the citizens towards what they really want, meant cutting out half of the team that was funded" (R3).*

4.2.2. An 'academic research' logic

In addition to a 'project-funding' logic, an 'academic research' logic' also limited the realisation of co-creative research key principles. We identified three main barriers on the level of an 'academic research logic': (1) a research-driven approach was not always compatible with an action-driven approach, (2) research modalities were exclusive and not adapted to precarious situations, (3) power imbalances were perpetuated by academic research and funding institutions.

First, a research-driven approach was not always compatible with an action-driven one. Respondents stated that a co-creative research approach was not always clear or considered suitable by individual participants, but also by different partner organisations involved. Respondents mentioned that doing research often felt time-consuming, whereas participants, but also partner organisations were excepting tangible results: '*It's a real challenge for everyone, including the participants, who sometimes say "what the hell are we doing, we spend our time talking, I want something tangible" (R1).*

In one of the projects within the context of a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood, the researcher stated residents' motivation to participate was more action-driven because the initial research problem did not correspond to their primary needs. It was only near the end of the research that residents became interested in their initial research problem:

> *Within the project the question has never been internalized by the citizens because it's a question that comes from outside and that need is not primary to the residents of the neighbourhood. These are neighbourhoods where people are in a fairly precarious situation, and so if the project meets a primary need they will come. Conviviality, a space to meet your neighbour, a particular, tangible need (R3).*

Second, the possibilities to participate in a research remain exclusive. On one hand, people most directly concerned by a research problem and who would benefit the most from solutions remain "*difficult to reach*" because of their precarious situation. As one respondent working on an ecological topic stated:

> *The people who suffer the most from this problem are extremely difficult to reach (...) There are a lot of reasons why these people don't easily enter this kind of project. Not everyone has the capacity to say "I can transform reality" (...) So I'm not saying that you should only work with those, but not all people spontaneously participate in a societal transformation process, it's not the majority and that's not so bad. (R6).*

Although some respondents stated they worked with small groups and therefore did not aim to be representative, other respondents that worked directly with people in a precarious situation stressed the importance of adapting their research modalities. One respondent explained how a research approach demanding a long-term investment could even be a form of "*symbolic violence*":

> *In working with people who (...) are in a very, very precarious situation (...) there is a symbolic violence in wanting to tackle their emergency situation with a proposal for co-research and reflection on the longer term. So we realised that we had to rethink the methods (...) and that sometimes, for example, creating a convivial moment with tea, coffee and croissants allows more people to be included in the reflection (R4).*

It was important to create moments without expectations in regard to 'the research' and establish a safe, accessible context where people dared to "*take their place*" (R13). Involving people in a space that suited them and that was adapted to their situation allowed them to take ownership. One respondent, a professional, stated:

> *Democracy means that everyone has a place, but if no one takes that place, democracy remains formal, it does not exist. There is a difference between giving a voice and taking it. What is important is to create a context where people take that voice, take their place (R13).*

Finally, unequal positions between 'us', academics, and 'them', non-academics, were maintained by academic and funding institutions. Some respondents mentioned that fellow researchers devalued their co-creative approach and, for example, considered the position of a citizen-researcher as

unscientific. Furthermore, academic institutions could maintain power more subtly. This was exemplified in a researchers' statement regarding the university's promotion of the project:

> The [university] said they'd like to write an article on [the project] and when I read the final draft of the article, I said no, that needs to be changed. It's not a [university] project, it's not true, it's not my project (...). The university is a partner in this and has roles in it, very important and necessary roles (...) but it's not their project (...) All these words and postures, the way of reporting and advertising, have a very important impact. (...) Even people who have been deeply involved in it since the beginning and who are essential co-researchers have had difficulties not saying "your project" (R7).

Furthermore, in the case of the funding agency, respondents claimed that a certain inequality in positions was perpetuated through the vocabulary, "*scientific jargon*" (R5), used in the funding program framework and intermediate jury sessions that included mainly academic researchers as jury members.

5. Discussion

Our study aimed to offer insights in key principles of co-creative research and the way they are enacted in real-life practices from the perspective of researchers and professionals who have been running co-creative research projects. We identified a gap between the aspiration of key principles and power issues that are at play in a broader 'project-funding logic' and 'academic research logic' in the realisation of co-creative research in real-life practices.

While new concepts like co-creation gain popularity, the barriers experienced within research related to power issues are not new and already widely discussed in practices of co-production (e.g. Egid, 2021; Oliver et al., 2019), transdisciplinary research (e.g. Lang et al., 2012), collaborative research (e.g. Phillips et al., 2018) and participatory research (e.g. Bourke, 2009). Literature mainly focuses on improving practices rather than questioning why these processes fail to achieve the greater inclusion, equity and justice they promise for and what tensions emerge from it (Egid et al., 2021; Turnhout et al., 2020). We hope to contribute to this discussion by questioning 'project-funding' and 'academic research' logics in co-creative research practices, introducing a political and emancipatory dimension that would allow more genuine and just practices.

5.1. Questioning project-funding logics

At the level of a 'project-funding logic', our findings clearly highlighted the way in which power imbalances were embedded into the research project framework. Our research identified three key issues: a limited project-based time frame, a project design that did not include people directly concerned and parameters like project consortium and financial distribution that had to be fixed at the start. These structural and administrative aspects could risk obligatory and instrumental participation, presenting a barrier to the emancipatory role of co-creative research practices. Although the need for trust-building

and equitable partnerships, which should also allow not participating, is widespread (Blair & Minkler, 2009; Bourke, 2009; Egid et al., 2021; McCarry, 2012), in practice, 'project-funding' logics that prone linear processes, are limited in time and resources with parameters fixed in advance create the necessity to prove results and effectiveness (Turnhout et al., 2020). Although some projects did not face this barrier and emphasized the preceding partnership in constructing the research problem, others expected high levels of involvement to have 'successful' outcomes for the research or meet funding expectation. We argue that funding institutions and programs should question these standardized 'project-funding' logics by allowing more flexibility in financial distribution and partnerships over the course of research processes. Furthermore, program initiators and funders should provide enough time and resources for trust-building and the construction of research problems (Sherriff, 2019), especially because power imbalances that are present from the preliminary phases continue to have a major influence on the further development of co-creative processes (Phillips et al., 2018). Examples exist of how funding programs can adapt 'project-funding' logics. For example, currently the Innoviris Co-Create program is revised and consists of a two-folded open call: one for projects to co-define a research problem and the other to conduct a co-research project.

5.2. Questioning 'academic research' logics

At the level of an 'academic research' logic, our findings showed that power imbalances were reproduced through an incompatibility between action and research driven involvement, exclusive research modalities, and unequal positions maintained by academic and funding institutions. Especially when involving people in precarious situations in long-term reflection, there was a form of "*symbolic violence*", tacit manifestations of power differentials integrated into social structures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), in conducting a research approach. This could lead to research that does not address the primary needs of people concerned or not include the people who would actually benefit most from the research, which does not correspond to the principle of societal transformation aimed by co-creative research. Our results also show different ways in which respondents try to tackle such power imbalances in academic research approaches and reduce the distinction between 'us', academics, and 'them' non-academics. Our respondents valued for example the position of co-researcher, were attentive to the external communication on the project, and adapt research methods and settings to allow people to "*take their place*". On the level of 'small' interactions and postures, co-creative processes can transform established researcher-participant or professional-beneficiary power dynamics. Participants with different knowledge types should, however, be allowed a genuine "*space*", as well physically through a safe and accessible research setting, as symbolically through accessible language and valued positions and roles.

Other power-knowledge imbalances, however, remained underexposed. Issues on reflexivity and positionality were for example lacking in our results. However, academics not only have power and

legitimacy through their institutional affiliation but also embody power and privilege from their class, education, racial/ethnic backgrounds or other identity positions (Muhammad et al., 2015). Furthermore, on the level of academic knowledge production, Utter et al. (2021) warn of the appropriation by academics of local and indigenous knowledge by calling it "new" or "innovative". When participatory or co-creative approaches and methods are implemented without acknowledging these power-knowledge imbalances, participation can instead reinforce exclusion and reproduce dominant colonial schemes (Moreno-Cely et al., 2021). Although power differentials exist and are almost unavoidable in co-creative research, these should be made explicit, exposed and discussed within the process (Greenhalgh et al., 2016) to avoid reproducing systemic inequalities in research with community members (Egid et al., 2021; Muhammad et al., 2015). According to Phillips & Nappan (2016) adopting a critical, reflexive gaze on tensions at play within the process could allow a genuine change of practices. Our findings show the need for funding and academic institutions to value not only research outcomes but also the process as a transformative practice.

5.3. Introducing a political and emancipatory dimension

Our respondents' understanding of key principles mainly corresponds to the principles we encountered in the literature on co-creative research (e.g. Greenhalgh, 2016; Nicholas et al., 2019; Simpson & Seibold, 2008). However, a political and emancipatory dimension was more implicitly and explicitly present in respondents' accounts than in the literature. Our results for example showed the importance of valuing experiential knowledge and considering the person as an actor instead of a subject. In several definitions of co-creative research, the focus lies merely on the development of new (knowledge) products aiming at innovation (e.g. Ehlen, 2017), neglecting the political and emancipatory dimension of these processes. Participatory approaches adopted across disciplines on the other hand, generally do highlight values of democracy, social justice and human rights (Beebeejaun et al., 2015). Participatory Action Research (e.g. Fals-Borda & Ragman, 1991; Kemmis et al., 2014; Reason & Bradbury, 2008) or the Critical Pedagogy movement (Freire, 2000) for example have a long tradition of challenging power relations in knowledge building (Denney, 2018). New knowledge and transformation are a base to construct power or to countervail power relations for excluded and exploited groups (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). These approaches are embedded in social struggle and do not necessarily include the presence of academic researchers or institutions (Denney, 2018). Following these traditions, we argue that to better enact key principles and tackle power imbalances in 'project-funding' and 'academic research' logics, the political and emancipatory dimension of co-creative research practices should be acknowledged and valued (Oliver et al., 2019; Wijsman & Feagan, 2019). We argue that this would enhance the potential of co-creation to create *"spaces of discussion"* that have a political role. Beyond a mere buzzword, co-creation in research could challenge established power structures through

a critical, reflexive gaze and experiencing other ways of doing, for professionals, researchers, and participants, but also the academic and funding institutions involved.

5.4. Limitations and implications for future research

Several limitations of our study warrant further consideration. First, we interviewed projects at different stages of the Co-Create program, while the program was evolving and transforming. This evolving framework, with evolving guidelines, templates and quality criteria might have influenced the perception of respondents of the process, as not all projects have been developed in the same context. In our analysis, we have focused on mutual challenges without taking these contextual differences between individual trajectories thoroughly into account.

A second concern was that we interviewed people involved in projects that were funded by the same program that also funded our MaN'aige project. However, this allowed us an insider position as we were considered as peers by the researchers and professionals we interviewed (Bengry, 2018).

Furthermore, we only interviewed researchers and professionals who were already involved in co-creative research projects, which could cause a 'survivor bias' in our sample. However, we aimed not to focus our study on results, assets or benefits of co-creative research, but instead on understandings and lived experiences. Especially since more and more collaborations between academic and non-academic partners facing major urban problems and challenges in Brussels are government-funded, we considered it important to discuss tensions from within practices.

Another difficulty faced by the authors was the concept of co-creation or co-creative research itself. There is no clear definition and not all research that includes co-creative practices is labelled as "co-creative research". We tried to overcome this challenge by limiting ourselves to the way co-creative research practices, following the funding agencies' terminology, could be understood and experienced by our participants. The aim of this research was not to offer a clear definition or fixed manual, but we hope to have contributed to more openness and discussion about the tensions within co-creative research practices.

5.5. Conclusion

This paper aimed at gaining a better understanding of the key principles of co-creative research and the enactment of these principles in real-life co-creative research practices. The study demonstrates the tension between the key principles of co-creative research (e.g. a transformative aim, considering the community as actors, shared ownership, valuing experiential knowledge) and the power issues they face related to a 'project-funding' and 'academic research' logic when enacting those key principles in real-life practices. This paper concludes that although dealing with power relations is inherent of co-creative research, power imbalances should be questioned on the level of (1) the linear, limited and

inflexible nature of 'project-funding' logics and (2) the exclusive character of research methods, settings and institutions in 'academic research' logics. We suggest that funding and academic institutions should adapt to the time-consuming, non-linear and flexible nature of co-creation and consider the value of the process in itself as a transformative practice where power/knowledge imbalances can be tackled. In conclusion, we argue to introduce a political and emancipatory dimension in co-creative research, to support more meaningful, just and genuine co-creative research and reduce the gap between principles and realisation of co-creative research in real-life practices.

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CHAPTER 4. Doing Co-creative Research on Caring Neighbourhoods in Brussels: A Reflection on the Project Journey and Overarching Challenges

Abstract

Within the broader policy movement towards more community care, communities in Flanders and Brussels have been experimenting with the concept of "caring neighbourhoods", often emphasizing the co-creative nature of developing, implementing and evaluating such neighbourhoods. Descriptions and reflections on practical implementations of such co-creative endeavors remain however underexplored. Drawing on the experiences of the co-creative research project "MaN'Aige" on two caring neighbourhoods in Brussels, the goals of this paper are to 1) describe the project journey undertaken and the different obstacles that affected or reoriented this process, and 2) to reflect on the overarching challenges that we faced in this co-creative research. Based on numerous collective discussions throughout the three-year MaN'Aige project, the authors of this paper have reconstructed the project journey and distilled main challenges experienced. First, we describe the research project journey by dividing the project in six different phases of divergence and convergence that reflect the iterative nature of this type of processes. Second, we identified two overarching challenges experienced on different levels and at different stages of the project: i. Managing a tension between action and research and ii. Dealing with discontinuity. In the discussion we emphasise the importance to acknowledge reflexivity as a transformative research practice when implementing co-creative research. An open description and reflection of our research project can potentially inspire other researchers and communities that want to build up genuine partnerships in co-creative research or other types of collaborative research.

Key words

Authors

Octavia Kint

Kate Meier

Karine Boussart

An-Sofie Smetcoren

Liesbeth De Donder

1. Introduction

1.1. Caring neighbourhoods

Since the 1960s policymakers have gained interest in the concept of community care, but there is no univocal understanding of the concept (Means et al., 2008). In Belgium and the Netherlands, community care is on the rise since 1990 and originally referred to a system of providing health care and social services to older people, people with disabilities and people with mental health issues outside the walls of institutions. Care is provided within local communities by a broad network of home care professionals (e.g. homecarers, home nurses, home help) (De Dijn, 2012; De Rick et al., 2003). A more recent evolution since the beginning of the 21st century concerns a broader involvement of the community in care responsibilities. Governments not only turn to professional home care, but attach greater importance to non-formal care, for example encouraging informal caregivers, including family members, volunteers (e.g. Dury, 2018) and also neighbours to support vulnerable people at home (Broese van Groenou & De Boer, 2016). This increasing importance of the community in care provision is also visible internationally through movements such as "community mental health care" (e.g. Semrau et al., 2011) or "Integrated Community Care" (e.g. Vandenbroeck & Braes, 2020) and is demonstrated in Belgium, especially on the Flemish side and in Dutch-speaking Brussels between 2010 and 2020 in projects using the term "caring communities" or "caring neighbourhoods". These projects are supported by different public and private funding institutions (Bloemen et al., 2022; De Donder et al., 2021), but also appear in policy notes and recommendations of Flemish ministers (e.g. Beke, 2019; Vandeurzen, 2018). In this idea of caring neighbourhoods, initiatives are promoted that include neighbourhood professionals and individual citizens in regard to care and well-being for older people (De Donder et al., 2017). Despite its gained interest, there have been critiques on caring neighbourhoods, such as the underlying political drivers of cost-saving, economic measure in times of budget austerity, replacing absolutely needed professional structures and its public financing (Wegleitner & Schuchter, 2018). Taking into account these critiques, many local organisations consider it a valuable model for community care and keep on experimenting.

The caring neighbourhoods model often refers to a network of residents, informal carers and care professionals. Creating a caring neighbourhood involves a collective effort of people actively engaging in supporting, caring and looking out for one another and requires the involvement of professional home care organisations, community organisations, local government, and residents themselves. In addition, some studies point towards the potential valuable role of so-called "non-care professionals". Professionals such as mailmen, cashiers, hairdressers and local, small-business holders have frequent contact with frail older adults and can be seen as "antenna professionals" given they receive considerable information from their clients or costumers. They detect care needs, listen to their stories, refer to health professionals, or regularly initiate supportive actions themselves such as

delivering groceries (Duppen et al., 2019). While the study of Duppen et al. (2019) focused on local, small-business holders, the role of larger businesses, schools, public services, cultural institutions, but also commuters, students or passersby remains unexplored. In highly urbanised areas these "neighbourhood users" can however occupy a large part of the space and activities, for example in "mixed-use neighbourhoods" (Guinand et al., 2021). The main research goal of the MaN'Aige project was to explore the potential role these 'unexpected' neighbourhood users could play in a caring neighbourhood. 'Unexpected' users were understood as either not locally anchored (i.e. meaning that the scope and activities exceeded the neighbourhood scale), or not health or social care oriented, (i.e. meaning that the main aim was not related to care or well-being). The research setting was two urban neighbourhoods located in the centre of Brussels in which a large part of the neighbourhood activities and built space are dedicated to other purposes than housing i.e. office spaces, cultural venues, shopping centres, local shops and restaurants (Bisa.Brussels, 2018).

1.2. Why co-creative research?

The MaN'Aige project was a three-year co-creative research project supported by the Innoviris Co-create program. Innoviris is the public agency of the Brussels-Capital Region that funds and supports research and innovation. Since 2015 Innoviris has been supporting through its "Co-create program" the exploration, experimentation and production of knowledge in co-creation aiming to support social and ecological transitions in the Brussels Capital Region. The program emerged on the topic of sustainable food (Vankeerberghen & Hermesse, 2020), but expanded over the following years to include all kinds of ecological, social and economic topics. The framework of the Co-create program draws inspiration from different transition and sustainability movements like social innovation (Innoviris Co-create, 2021). The goal of Co-create projects is to establish new views and dialogues on urban problems and social needs, by developing a state of knowledge and identifying new levers to be used, together with different actors of change, the actors involved in or affected by the intended change (Innoviris Co-create, 2023). Through co-creative research, the program wants to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the research process from the very beginning, from the development of the research questions to the testing, approval of the results and valorisation. Over the past years the Innoviris Co-create Program has been continuously evolving: e.g. different conditions for application, funding for preparatory phases, project support, expectations for the research. Anno 2023, the program has been strongly revised and consists of an open call for both projects that aim to construct a research problem and projects that aim to implement a co-creative research.

In this paper, we employ the term co-creative research as this was the term used within the Innoviris Co-create program. It should however be acknowledged that definitions are not univocal and that co-creative research is related to other research approaches such as co-production research (e.g.

Turnhout et al., 2020), collaborative research (e.g. Metz et al., 2019) or community-based research (e.g. Greenhalgh et al., 2016). Based on academic literature, we identified three theoretical principles that underpin co-creative research as a distinct research approach: bringing about societal change, a collaborative process and genuine shared ownership. First, co-creation offers an approach to bridging the gap between research and practice, "*moving research out of the ivory towers and closer to the real world*" (Greenhalgh et al., 2016, p.421). The co-creation of knowledge is both an approach and outcome to face complex challenges of society (Utter et al., 2021) that aims for societal change (Nicholas et al., 2019). Second, co-creative research draws on collaborative and dialogical processes (Calabria, 2022; Gignac et al., 2022; Greenhalgh et al., 2016), where the aim is to arrive at a *common understanding* of problems and to develop possible solutions or insights among different actors involved (Bonney et al., 2009; Simpson & Seibold, 2008). Some studies explicitly distinguish academic and non-academic actors drawing on a collaboration between researchers and end-users, such as patients in health research (Anderson et al., 2016; Gignac et al., 2022), while others emphasise a variety of actors involved (Calabria, 2022; Utter et al., 2021). For example, Utter et al. (2021) explain how in co-creative processes concerning agroecology, different actors can be involved: farmers, community members, individuals from governmental and nongovernmental entities, and researchers. Third, co-creative research strives for genuine shared ownership "*by co-creators who believe in its purpose and product*" (Simpson & Seibold, 2008, p.266). Some co-creative research draws upon a transdisciplinary paradigm, stressing the active collaboration between different actors integrating their knowledge, which differs from passive ways of merely merging, incorporating or exchanging different types of knowledge (Calabria, 2022; Utter et al., 2021). Others, following a more 'classic' research paradigm, stipulate the active engagement of participants in most or all steps of the research, from drafting the research question and elaborating the research concept to its implementation and finally the interpretation and valorisation of the research (Bonney et al., 2009).

1.3. Rationale and scope

Although in literature on different participatory approaches, challenges regarding power are often highlighted (Bourke, 2009; Egid et al., 2021), co-creative processes often are surrounded by optimism and focus on positive impact and results (Metz et al., 2019; Phillips & Napan, 2016). In health research for example, some studies broadcast successes on the level of health outcomes among 'excluded' groups (e.g. Sherriff et al., 2019). Furthermore, and this is also the case for co-production and other participatory modes of knowledge production, studies focus on improving research practices but rarely address a deeper understanding of failures and challenges (Turnhout et al., 2020). According to Turnhout et al. (2020), investigations on the role of power and politics remain underexplored in this type of research, which would allow genuine understandings of why these processes fail to achieve the empowerment and societal change they promise for.

In response, this study aims 1) to describe the co-creative research journey undertaken and the different obstacles that affected or reoriented this process; 2) to reflect on the overarching challenges that were faced in this co-creative research.

2. Data and methods

2.1. Study setting: the co-create project MaN'Aige

The project presented in this paper is called "MaN'Aige", one of the selected projects in the Innoviris Co-create program of 2019 on the topic of caring neighbourhoods. The innovative aim of the project was to build a caring neighbourhood in two specific neighbourhoods which are characterised by a large proportion of 'unexpected' users (such as companies, public institutions, passersby, commuters) compared to its residents. The goal was to explore the potential role of these actors in a caring neighbourhood. The MaN'Aige project was funded for a period of three years (2019-2022). Two preparatory phases of six months each to develop the research application were also funded.

TABLE 1. MaN'Aige participants

	Co-researcher	Steering committee	Participants Living Labs	Participants in neighbourhood events and workshops
1 Community worker at local service centre	X	X	X	X
1 Project coordinator employed by the local service centre	X	X	X	X
2 Community health workers	X	X	X	X
2 Teachers and staff at Nursing Department of university-college	X	X	X	X
1 Junior academic researcher	X	X	X	X
1 Senior academic researcher		X		
1 Coordinator of the local service centre		X		
1 Policy support officer at the Knowledge Centre of well-being, housing, and care		X		
Local neighbourhood residents and users	x		X	X

The **committee of "co-researchers"** co-implemented the project, more particularly setting up the research process, the Living Labs and neighbourhood events and workshops. A monthly co-researcher meeting was organised with the aim to exchange on experiences in the Living Labs and on the knowledge gained regarding our research question. The **steering committee** monitored the project, steered the course of the project and answered budgetary questions. Their role was also to valorise and disseminate results for research and policy. A meeting was organised every two months.

Co-researchers and members of steering committee were all female and aged between 25 and 54. All members, apart from the project coordinator and junior researcher, had either professional experience in care work or were involved in the topic of caring neighbourhoods on a policy and research level. All members were remunerated by the funding agency.

Finally, many **neighbourhood residents and users** were involved in the Living Labs and in neighbourhood events and workshops, each on a different level and at different phases in the project. They shared their experiences and knowledge of the neighbourhood. Several residents participated from the initial project phases, and one resident continued to participate in the monthly co-researcher meetings, but participation was not stable. The participation of neighbourhood residents and users was not remunerated (except for remuneration for specific services, like facilitation or transport).

2.2. Three years of co-creative data collection and analysis

Three years of co-creative research was conducted between November 2019 and October 2022, comprising numerous activities. The goal of the project was to answer our research question on how to build a caring neighbourhood with neighbourhood users. Two sub-research questions were:

- Which connections are constructed with and between neighbourhood users that contribute to a caring neigbhourhood?
- Which roles do these neighbourhood users (not) take on in a caring neigbhourhood?

To answer these research questions, different Living Labs, sites of experimentation, action and encounter in real-life, were set up. A Living Lab "*comprises an experimental environment in which new innovative technologies, services and products can be tested. Such labs benefit from the fact that end users and stakeholders are involved in the development, testing and evaluation of innovative developments in a real-life environment*" (Smetcoren et al., 2018, p.97). The project officially started in 2019 with 11 proposed Living Labs based on particular needs identified in the two preparatory phases. Throughout the project however these Living Labs evolved. The original 11 Living Labs were reduced to six based on factors such as a lack of participants, changing interests and the evolving context and understanding of the project expectations.

TABLE 2. Description Living Labs

Living Lab	Aim	Involvement of 'unexpected' users
Accessibility	Assessment and mapping of the physical accessibility of the neighbourhood and its services	Local shops and restaurants
Collective garden	Developing a neighbourhood parcours of garden boxes	Local neighbourhood associations
Culture	Including cultural players in initiatives to make the neighbourhood more green	Cultural institutions, public institutions and schools
Res'O	Creating a network around the shared neighbourhood space focusing on enjoyable and unenjoyable places in the neighbourhood	Large organisations, companies and institutions
Meeting space	Implementing a fixed or mobile meeting place	Different types of users (passersby, commuters, local organisations, companies, hotels,…)
Caring education	Creating the link between on one hand the university college and its students and on the other the surrounding neighbourhood	Educational institutions and students

These six Living Labs focused on different dimensions of care and involved different 'unexpected' users. In all Living Labs, co-researchers were participating, but also individual residents and members of the neighbourhood committee. In parallel to the data collection within the Living Labs, consisting of informal meetings, discussions, neighbourhood walks, mapping, surveys, literature review,…several collective moments were organised to collect an co-analyse data. Goal of these collective moments was to follow-up the process of the MaN'Aige project, to collect and exchange experiential knowledge regarding our research questions and to stimulate innovation in the Living Labs by sharing ideas and experiences. Each six months, focus groups were organised with all co-researchers and the steering committee which allowed to follow-up the process. All these collective data collection moments have been recorded and transcribed or summarised by the junior researcher.

TABLE 3. Data collection

	Co-researchers	Steering committee	Participants in Living Labs	Interested neighbourhood users and residents
Data collection: tailor-made for each Living Lab				
Depending on the Living Labs (e.g. neighbourhood walks, mapping, surveys)	x		x	x
Collective moments of data collection				
10 Focus groups (each six months)	x	x	(x)	
14 Questions of the month[a]	x			
19 Carnets créatifs sessions[b]	(x)			
4 Neighbourhood events and workshops	x	x	x	x
12 Walk-along interviews			x	x
9 Co-analysis workshops	x			

[a] *Questions of the month were collective discussions where questions were discussed through images or phrases collected by the different participants. The questions concerned the process and were mainly defined by the junior academic researcher.*
[B] *Carnets créatifs were creative workshops facilitated by an artist-painter that allowed us to work on and discuss our main research concepts*
(x) Not all members participated, and some participated only on few occasions due to a lack of interest or limited time available

In the last six months of the project co-researchers collectively analysed the process and the lessons learned regarding the research questions. The junior academic researcher printed all the documents available: reports, minutes of meetings, transcripts of interviews and focus groups, schemes and pictures of the collective data collection moments in addition to the data collected in each Living Lab. The analysis workshops consisted of reading individually through the documents and defining main and sublabels to form a complete label scheme for each research question of the MaN'Aige project. Several key concepts were selected to further elaborate in smaller groups (for example after the session on the main research question on connections, the concepts of power relations, shared interest, networks, neighbourhood awareness and identity among neighbourhood users, a sense of recognition and remunerated participation were selected for further analysis) .

Over the three years of the project, annual research reports were developed grouping lessons learned. The first report (after year 1) was written by the junior academic researcher, co-researchers gave feedback and formulated some conclusions. We organised three 'give-back' sessions with eight neighbourhood participants to present and discuss the results. In the second report (after year 2), each co-researcher formulated the lessons learned from within their Living Lab and the information was synthesised by the academic researcher. The third report (after year 3) combined the lessons learned from the different Living Labs, based on the collective analysis. This report was co-written by the policy support officer from the center of expertise, the project coordinator and the academic researcher, and feedback was given by the committee of co-researchers, steering committee and one resident.

2.3. Data analysis for this paper

This paper aimed to (1) describe the co-creative research journey undertaken and the different obstacles that affected or reoriented this process; 2) to reflect on the overarching challenges that we faced in this co-creative research. The junior and senior academic researchers assembled different steps of the project journey and presented overarching challenges based on the collective discussions in MaN'Aige and the feedback they received from co-researchers. Moreover, digital recordings of the data have been used to a minor extent, when double-checking results from the analysis. The results were presented in two parts. For the first part of the results (i.e. description of the project journey), a timeline was elucidated and six phases of the project journey were identified. For the second part of the results, all the material was analysed to look for recurring themes (i.e. overarching challenges). Next, the themes were condensed and cross-checked. Preliminary results were shared with co-researchers for validation and their feedback was included. Co-researchers who provided feedback were also included as co-authors of the paper. The first and last authors then met and through an iterative process debated themes until a consensus was reached. This way, a coding for two tentative themes occurred: i. Managing a

tension between action and research, ii. Dealing with discontinuity. The authors of this paper deliberately choose to use "we", referring to the junior and senior academic researchers, as a standpoint for the presentation of the results.

3. Results

3.1. Description of the research process

This first section of our results gives insights in the real-life project course, the journey undertaken and different elements that affected or reoriented this process. The initial project design and timing were not realised. Instead, when reflecting on and reconstructing the process in retrospect, we identified six different phases of divergence and convergence: (1) Initial development of the project proposal, (2) Revision of the project proposal, (3) Implementing Living Labs (4) Reflexivity on our own process, (5) Revision of Living Labs (6) Sustaining Living Labs. It is important to note that these phases were not strictly delimited nor exhaustive. They were however based on the multiple discussions, meetings, and focus groups among the committee of co-researchers and steering group.

TABLE 4. Six phases of the MaN'Aige process

	Months	Description
Phase 1: Initial development of the project proposal	M1-M5	Background of the project application
	M6-M11	First preparatory phase : Discover the neighbourhood and development of project application First submission of the project and refusal
	M12 – M17	TIME GAP (awaiting funding decision)
Phase 2: Revision of project proposal	M18 – M23	Second preparatory phase: Elaboration of Living Labs and development of project application
	M24 – M29	Second submission of project proposal
	M30 – M-35	TIME GAP (awaiting funding decision)
Phase 3: Implementing Living Labs	M36-M41	Overarching actions and actions within Living Labs
	M42-M47	Obstacles faced: changing interests, covid-19 pandemic, unclear expectations from co-creative research Development of a research protocol
Phase 4: Revision of Living Labs	M48-M53	Re-conceptualisation: Rediscover our research problem Obstacles faced: no physical presence in neighbourhood
	M54-M59	Revision plan Living Labs
Phase 5: Re-implementing Living Labs	M60-M65	New approach in the Living Labs Closing of the Living Labs
Phase 6: Valorisation	M66-M72	Co-analyzing our own process and answer research questions Valorising lessons learned and networks

Phase 1: Initial development of the project proposal

The MaN'Aige project was initiated by a local service centre, located in the city center of Brussels. The centre already organised activities and services for older residents and had set up caring networks in the surrounding neighbourhood, but in recent years aimed to reach more older people and residents with care needs from two adjacent neighbourhoods that were part of their assigned "care zone". These two neighbourhoods 1) were crossed by great physical barriers (e.g. arterial roads, stairs and steep roads due to geographical elevation differences) which made access to the local service center difficult ; 2) lacked local services and facilities for older or care-dependent residents; 3) were characterised by a high office density and low population density compared to the rest of the city center (Bisa.Brussels, 2018, 2021) and a large presence of institutions, offices, companies, cultural venues, schools…Based on these observations, the local service centre wanted to investigate how a caring neighbourhood could be developed with these 'unexpected' neighbourhood users (e.g. people working in the neighbourhoods' institutions and companies, students, passersby).

The local service centre answered the funding agencies' call for projects the first time in 2017 and brought together partner organisations that eventually also carried out the project (i.e. community health care centre, university-college located in the neighbourhood, centre of expertise, university and a group of residents). The funding agency financed a first six month preparatory phase, that allowed to hire a project coordinator who initiated the first explorations in the neighbourhood. A service design methodology was used, including neighbourhood visits, informal meetings and interviews, design workshops and observations to gain insights in the needs and ideas of neighbourhood users (residents, shopkeepers, restaurant holders,...).

Based on these explorations, a first research and project design was co-creatively developed among partner organisations and submitted in November 2017. Three months later, partner organisations were informed by the funding agency that they would not fund the project but recommended a revision and resubmission: they requested more insights into the type of neighbourhood users that should be involved and the development of a more concrete research problem.

Phase 2: Revision of project proposal

Partner organisations again applied for the funding of a second preparatory phase which was accepted in March 2018. In this second preparatory phase a new project coordinator was brought on board to delve deeper into the involvement of the neighbourhood users and residents. The aim was to revise the initial proposal by developing more tangible concepts for the Living Labs based on local needs and ideas. This second phase commenced in May 2018, nine months after the conclusion of the initial

preparatory phase. The gap in timing and the staff changes caused a lack of presence in the neighbourhood and made forging relationships not easy. Despite these challenges, concrete ideas for Living Labs were developed based on specific needs expressed by neighbourhood residents and users during workshops or from observations made by the project coordinator in the neighbourhood. In the revised project application, a total of 11 Living Labs were presented. Each of these Living Labs was designed to test connections with various neighbourhood users, including students, passersby, office workers, local shops and larger organisations. A governance structure, participant roles and potential partnerships were also clarified, and research questions were fine-tuned, focusing on horizontal connections, co-creation processes, roles within the project, governance methods, politicisation aspects, and sustainability.

After resubmitting the project proposal for a second time in November 2018, the project underwent an oral defense presentation in front of a jury in February 2019. The jury approved the project, acknowledging its innovation in exploring the role of neighbourhood users and a stable partnership. They also valued the support from neighbourhood residents who were present during the defense. However, the jury raised a few noteworthy points. First, there was a need to provide greater clarity regarding the research design, specifically, how the Living Labs would effectively address the research questions. Second, it was emphasised that a co-creative research project should not simply combine actions for community development with research for evaluation; it needed to be a truly integrated process. Third, it was recommended that involvement of neighbourhood users and residents should be more critically questioned. It was recognised that while there might be shared awareness of the problem, it didn't necessarily translate into a shared understanding of the necessity for research to address these issues. These remarks were taken into account by the partner organisations, but re-appeared as struggles throughout the entire project.

Phase 3: Implementing Living Labs

Once the project was accepted, staff members were allocated to the project: a new project coordinator (1 FTE), a junior academic researcher (1 FTE), and 5 other co-researchers (each with a commitment ranging from 0,2 to 0,4 FTE). However, it wasn't until November 2019 until the project and new staff members could officially start. In the meantime, the staff member from the local service had changed again and contact had been lost. The project started by contacting the people that had been involved previously. There was also an attempt to reach new neighbourhood users and residents by hosting neighbourhood meetings, workshops, small-scale activities, individual consultations, and weekly open sessions in the neighbourhood. The objective was to realise the ideas for Living Labs as envisioned during the preparatory stages and recruit participants to carry out the Living Labs.

Quickly however, when attempting to implement the Living Labs, we encountered some obstacles. During the initial neighbourhood meetings where we introduced the concept of the Living Labs, several participants who had been engaged in the initial preparatory phase two years earlier did not recognise their original ideas, while others had lost interest. Conversely, new participants brought forth new needs and issues that had not been foreseen. The activities organised in the Living Labs faced a low turnout of participants or even feelings distrust. This was the case for example for members of the neighbourhood committee or patients at the community health centre that had preexisting relations with co-researchers. Connecting with 'unexpected' users, who were rather absent in preparatory phases, proved to be a challenging task. Neighbourhood users we reached out to were enthusiast but had a passive wait-and-see attitude and did not see immediate interest in being involved. Furthermore due to the COVID-19 pandemic, building connections became even more difficult. This resulted in a lack of ownership, even though the initial vision for the Living Labs was for neighbourhood stakeholders to take the lead and drive the projects forward.

A turning point was the first follow-up committee with the funding agency after 6 months in May 2020, where they critically reviewed the project as too action-driven aiming to offer solutions to local problems and insufficiently research-oriented. In response to this feedback, the funder requested the development of a comprehensive research protocol.: detailing the research design, focusing on research questions and a clear explanation of how the Living Labs were intended to address these research questions, linking research concepts to the state of the art, defining which specific data collection methods would be used, who were the participants and how the data would be analyzed.

In response to this feedback from the project funders, we put the implementation of the Living Labs on pause to focus on developing the requested research protocol. New elements were: 1) an academic literature review on social capital and social connections, 2) templates with guiding questions for each Living Lab to clarify goals, and the connection with the research questions, 3) introducing a "question of the month" to our monthly meetings to reflect more on our process, 4) introducing the "carnets créatifs", creative workshops to increase the reflection on the basic research concepts (e.g. co-creation, caring neighbourhood), which were facilitated by a professional artist, 5) decision to redesign the Living Labs.

Phase 4: Revision of Living Labs

When focusing on conceptual deepening and engaging in subsequent workshops with co-researchers, several challenges came to the forefront. We struggled with bringing together diverse knowledge sources, as academic concepts seemed too limited to understand lived experiences and professional insights in the neighbourhood. Additionally, the translation of concepts between Dutch and

French unveiled distinct interpretations and meanings, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of concepts that had previously been taken for granted, such as 'caring neighbourhoods' and 'neighbourhood users'

This exploration also prompted a critical examination of our positionality. Co-researchers mentioned that our team consisted of white, highly educated women, and this demographic was reflected in our pool of participants. In addition, when redesigning the Living Labs, we rediscovered needs and lived experiences through neighbourhood walks, general workshops and informal conversations with neighbourhood actors that concerned public space. Through group discussions, the focus was again on the original "why" of the project, building a common understanding of the research problem and the necessity for research.

Due to continuing social restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic on one hand and changes in staff on the other, co-researchers had minimal physical presence in the neighbourhood and previous connections with neighbourhood actors that had been made were lost. This resulted in a general sense of disconnection from the neighbourhoods. It became evident that 'doing the project' was less prioritised, even among co-researchers and their organisations. Conditions for participation also changed, as some neighbourhood actors were no longer present in the neighbourhood, for example due to bankruptcy, technical unemployment or tele working.

Based on aforementioned observations it was collectively decided to re-focus the Living Labs and reduce the number of Living Labs. From April 2021, an action plan was developed for each Living Lab defining further steps and the internal structure of each Living Lab. In this phase, each Living Lab started to make connections separately. Different co-researchers were looking for new opportunities to create connections, enhance their visibility and establish a physical presence in the neighbourhood.

Phase 5: Re-implementing Living Labs

Approximately from November 2021, co-researchers shifted their approach. Instead of seeking participants for pre-designed and fixed Living Labs (albeit based on local needs and ideas), they began asking residents and users about their interests and needs, and how they could support or facilitate them. This shift led to a broader range of neighbourhood actors participating in the initiatives, even if they weren't necessarily involved as co-researchers. An example to this shift is the collective garden Living Lab. The care professional working at the community health centre disseminated a call for projects from the Brussels local government about green space by e-mail to neighbourhood residents. A group gradually formed and initiated a collective garden project. Each participant had a distinct role. The care professional played only a facilitating role and while the project was primarily carried out by the residents.

The livings labs became successful, in the sense that neighbourhood actors were more involved and in some cases initiatives took place without the involvement of co-researchers, however the remaining project time became very limited. Whereas initially it was planned to have 2 or 2,5 years of Living Lab experimentation, due to the limitations presented above this was shortened to 6 months, which was perceived as too brief.

In order to allow time for data analysis and a consolidation of networks among local actors, an end date for the experimentations in the Living Labs was set. It was decided upon that the data collection from co-researchers in the Living Labs should end in February 2022, although initiatives could continue. Co-researchers set up a plan of sustainability and valorisation and listed different activities that would allow to valorise the work, including policy recommendations, a neighbourhood exhibition and a project report for the funders and participating organisations.

Phase 6: Valorisation

When approaching the end of the project, it was planned to reassemble the lessons learned related to the initial research questions on how to build a caring neighbourhood with users. As part of the co-creative research process we thus co-analyzed both the processes and data in the last six months of the project. This methodology included nine co-analysis sessions spread over four months to share experiences, analyse all the data collected during the project (e.g. transcripts of focus groups, minutes of co-creation workshops. See table 3) and identify commonalities across the various Living Labs.

Instead of finding common answers, however, new questions arose. It was not easy to make sense of all the different experiences co-researchers had gathered, and it was difficult not to get lost in details. This process also enabled the connection of early project phases with the later developments, providing a holistic perspective on the project – a perspective we hadn't previously achieved. Analyzing the research process together with different people, each with their unique opinions and experiences remained a persistent challenge, but was also an enriching process.

Co-researchers created several deliverables, including an accessible research report (written for project partner organisations, neighbourhood actors and other interested organisations and people), a short project movie, policy recommendations and suggestions for the project funder. A final conference was organised with the aim to share the lessons learned and sustain networks and projects. However, sustainability depended on the project funding and it was difficult to pass on responsibilities to local actors that were not funded in such a short timing. Furthermore, the efforts to influence policymakers had limited impact. New funding opportunities were explored, and some initiatives continued but not at the same scale as the project, but others were not further continued by partner organisations.

3.2. A focus on challenges faced within the process

In the second part of the results, we will describe two challenges that were experienced within the co-creative research: i. Managing a tension between action and research and ii. Dealing with discontinuity.

3.2.1. <u>Managing a tension between action and research</u>

Co-researchers noted an early division between taking practical actions to "build a caring neighbourhood" and conducting research on "how to build a caring neighbourhood." This division was evident in the project plan and governance structure, specifically in the initial allocation of roles between the project coordinator (in charge of implementing the Living Labs) and the academic researcher (responsible for evaluating the process). The academic researchers retained responsibility for research aspects such as formulating research questions, planning data collection, and analysis, while the responsibility for implementing the Living Labs was in hands of co-researchers.

Although the project attempted to be a co-creative research, we faced challenges in embedding action and research into each other. Our group of co-researchers was unfamiliar with the frame of co-creative research. We incorporated several moments for reflection and discussion in the project, such as monthly meetings, a question of the month, and creative sessions like the "carnets créatifs," as well as focus groups. These were considered 'research' moments. On one hand, these discussions remained at a conceptual or general analysis level, primarily discussing concepts or broader neighbourhood analyses. On the other, these moments also served to practically discuss on activities, exchanging contacts and exploring new opportunities for action, with limited reflexivity or attention to why certain decisions were made, who was involved or not, and how different Living Labs interconnected. Also, as the group of co-researchers was rather limited, discussions tended to be "about" the neighbourhood rather than "with" neighbourhood residents and users. Co-researchers stated it was difficult to involve other neighbourhood users and residents in these research activities, due to the administrative burden and time-consuming process:

> *"It's quite a challenge to engage individuals who are neighbourhood stakeholders in our research, especially those outside our consortium. (…) It requires significant effort, and it varies depending on the individual. (…)I believe it's because the research aspect and discussions on these concepts, while intriguing, are not the key drivers of neighbourhood change."*(co-researcher, committee of co-researchers)

Exemplary for this tension between research and action, was the informed consent. Signing the informed consent that was established by the funding agency was a mandatory step with the aim of being clear about the frame of co-creative research were neighbourhood actors would be involved in. When

presenting this document to the members of the neighbourhood committee, however, this was perceived as invasive, obligatory, and written in inaccessible language which caused feelings of distrust for participation in the research.

Furthermore, this tension was visible in the concept of 'Living Lab'. Understood initially as 'sites of experimentation', throughout the research process, the Living Labs became more action-driven and turned more to a diagnose of the local problems faced by different neighbourhood actors. Co-researchers "*went along opportunities*" and built connections. Although following local needs and interests was important to build trust and a genuine connection with the neighbourhood this also caused tensions. Especially near the end of the project funding, co-researchers felt pressure to instigate actions to meet expectations of neighbourhood residents and partner organisations. When looking back, some co-researchers regretted they only had reached limited practical implementations and "doing research" felt more as an administrative and time-consuming burden. Co-researchers however also stated a more research-driven approach would have allowed more in-depth reflections that could lead to more embedded actions and continuous adjustments of the process.

3.2.2. Dealing with discontinuity throughout the project

The co-creative research process was a discontinuous process. Gaps existed on different levels: the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions, the turnover of co-researchers and neighbourhood participants and administrative funding aspects, difficulties in knowledge and information exchange. First, the most prominent element causing discontinuity in the project was the COVID-19 pandemic. On many occasions, co-researchers designated it as a major barrier to making connections and to elaborating the project, as it arrived early in the project (i.e month 5). The pandemic had an important impact on the available time, priorities, and well-being of co-researchers, but also of neighbourhood actors, bringing into question the aim of the project as many 'unexpected' neighbourhood actors were not allowed to be physically present. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light both the benefits and risks of connections, especially when including older people, and the absence of connection between diverse sectors (education, health care, urban planning, ecology,..) that are entirely interrelated in daily lives of people using and living in the neighbourhood.

Discontinuity in participation was also at play on other levels. Long-term engagement was very difficult to establish, as well among (paid) co-researchers as among neighbourhood participants. Structural aspects regarding working conditions of organisations, the time and budget available, the organisation's hierarchies that are not willing to cooperate or not responsive, etc. Although partner organisations remained the same during the entire project and there was a strong feeling of commitment to the project from all the partners, individual staff members changed. Related to the participation of co-researchers, there was a discontinuity on the level of project governance as designed in the project

proposal. Except the coordinator and the academic researcher who were engaged full-time, the other collaborators had only one day a week (0,2 FTE) or less of their time dedicated to the project. Within broader organisational structures, project-based participation thus could become very limited and segmented. This also relates to administrative funding aspects that influence continuity. Especially in the first phases of the project, due to changing staff members, neighbourhood participants were not informed on the practical evolutions of the project (e.g. decline by the jury of the first proposal, introduction of second proposal, acceptance of project, assignment of new staff members), which caused major gaps and distrust among participants.

Finally, this point also refers to lack of knowledge and information exchange in co-creative research. The project counted many different partner organisations and collaborators, which made it difficult to keep a record of ongoing actions. Reading through reports, documents, and accounting on each step taken demanded a lot of time investment from co-researchers that already had little time available. Also, it was difficult to find a timeslot that suited all collaborators, and often not all project collaborators were present at the meetings, which made the exchange of information and ideas difficult. Furthermore, it was difficult to connect ongoing actions to the early stages of the project: ideas that were already present from the beginning could get lost and reappear at the end of the project.

4. Discussion

This paper aimed to provide a genuine account of a co-creative research process in the MaN'Aige project: first giving an insight in the research journey undertaken and second reflecting on challenges that arose during this process. In present discussion, we will answer the two research questions by relating them to the basic principles of co-creative research: bring about societal change, a collaboration between academic and non-academic partners and genuine shared ownership. Finally, when relating these principles to the experiences within the MaN'Aige project, we aim to highlight the importance of reflexivity as a transformative practice.

Although one of the aims of co-creative research is to bring about societal transformations and to bridge the gap between research and practice, a tension existed between action and research. In practice, action-driven expectations could not be fulfilled within the frame of a research that was limited in time and that did not aim clear results or impact. Although the research process was an iterative process where phases of divergence and convergence alternated, it was also a discontinuous one impacted by structural underfinancing of social organisations, administrative and bureaucratic burdens and events like the COVID-19 pandemic. This left co-researchers and participants with unfulfilled expectations to genuine change and impact. Although co-creative research could be defined as a "*social, co-learning process embodying circles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting*" (Benjamin-

Thomas et al., 2018, p.3) that cannot be fixed and planned in advance but requires flexibility and continuous adaptation, in practice, there is a need to take into account the tension between action and research and discontinuity in these processes. In the description of the project journey, we observed that from the preliminary phases, a structural distinction was present between funding body, project partners and neighbourhood actors Although participation and ownership evolved throughout the process, different gaps and moments of discontinuity made genuine shared ownership, in budgetary questions or decision-making processes, difficult or even led to refusal of participation. An emblematic example was the tension that emerged in the signature of the informed consent: it showed how the frame of co-creative research was already decided upon in advance by the project partner organisations and funding institution and left little place to negotiation or questioning by the neighbourhood actors. Power relations were thus structurally present in our co-creative research.

These experienced obstacles questioned what a co-creative research approach should look like. Introducing collective discussions and moments of reflection does not automatically guarantee that research is embedded in action and can contribute to bring about change. Discussions could be too centred on a meta-level (too research-driven and therefore considered as time-consuming for neighbourhood actors) or on practical arrangements (too action-driven and therefore not critically reflecting on the process). Instead, co-researchers argued for more openness in the conception of co-creative research and in what should be considered as 'valid knowledge'. Doing co-research meant moving from an individual perspective, a person's or organisation's own interests, benefits or mission, to a collective perspective. This however required a sense of belonging or 'feeling at home'. Being engaged in the co-creative research process then could lead to adopting a critical and inquiring attitude and reflecting on one's own positionality and actions. Instead of aiming to bring about the change, the process was transformative from within. This relates to the vision of Kemmis et al. (2014) on critical participatory action research, where they state that although in reality stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting often overlap in a less-structured way than what might be presented most importantly is that participants have a sense of development and evolution on the level of their practice, their understanding and the context:

> "*For critical participatory action research, the criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices…*" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p.18-19).

This also required taking into account different types of knowledge that enriched this co-creative process. Co-researchers stated the co-creative research included experiential knowledge (experiences of the neighbourhood), emotional knowledge (meanings and emotional experiences), being present (involvement, engagement and passion), professional knowledge and networks (the networks and connections people bring in the process). These types of knowledge, however, are not always considered

as 'valid' by academics. We argue that instead of holding on to 'classic' academic visions on research processes and knowledge production, reflexivity should be introduced as a transformative practice in co-creative research. Organising continuous collective discussions should allow a continuous follow-up, adaptation and revision of the project, while also building continuity on the level of information and knowledge exchange, connecting the past of projects (from the initial phases of problem construction and building partnerships) to the actions that are ongoing. Stepping away from the linearity of 'classic' research requirements, such as the signature of an informed consent at the beginning of a process, this reflexive practice could allow a continuous monitoring of the expectations of participants in relation to the frame that is proposed. It could also critically consider which voices are listened to or which are silenced, and to reorient practices. Our experience showed the importance of recognising a different view on co-creative research: doing co-creative research was more about adopting a critical and inquiring attitude, from an individual towards a collective standpoint, where each participant could bring different types of knowledge and resources to the table. As different approaches to participatory and/or action research have continuously sought to challenge the relationship between researcher and researched, between theory and practice (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016; Kemmis et al., 2014), we argue that co-creative research approaches should continue this critical and reflexive potential.

4.1. Practical recommendations

The goal of this paper was to give an account of a real-life co-creative research project, on the level of a description of the process and the challenges faced within this process, in the hope to inspire other researchers and communities that want to build up genuine partnerships in co-creative research or other types of collaborative research. From this particular and situated experience we draw some general lessons learned that are important to consider when implementing co-creative or other types of collaborative research. We do not aim here to formulate steps or ingredients for co-creative research, but rather to highlight some elements from our experience that could inspire other researchers, practitioners and funding program coordinators. In order to avoid concepts like co-creation and participation becoming fuzzy buzzwords and all-embracing concepts, it is important to gain insights in the real-life process and to continuously question and critically reflect on our practice within projects, but also to document and disseminate these challenges. Challenges concern the tension between action and research and discontinuity in the process. We argue that reflexivity, when continuously discussed among partners and linked to their own practices, could serve a transformative purpose. 'Classic' research tools such as the informed consent, could be interesting to use as a way to discuss the frame, expectations and aims of participants.

4.2 Limitations and future research

This research presents several limitations. First, the results presented here are assembled by the junior academic researcher after the end of the project and were not co-constructed with the project members, let alone with neighbourhood participants. Second, as a results of its diffuse and messy nature, accounting for this type of research process is very complex. Different issues were at play at different levels, and not all people involved experienced it the same way. It is important to note that the challenge presented here are only a selection.

When relating our experiences to the basic principles and ideals behind co-creative research approaches, we argue that it should be acknowledged that these processes are not linear and less structured then how they might be presented in research proposals or manuals and guidelines on co-creative research. Rather than evaluating projects on completing these different consecutive phases, even if they might be iterative, we state success should be measured on base of a reflexivity on situated practices, developing a sense of transformation from within (Kemmis et al., 2014). By sharing what we have learned from our experience and acknowledging the value of critical reflexivity on our own practices, we hope to inspire other researchers and communities that want to build up genuine partnerships in co-creative research or other types of collaborative research.

4.3. Conclusion

Co-creation approaches to research have become more and more present in different research domains, but also regarding funding programs. Reflections on practical implementations and tensions experienced from within, however, remain underexplored. Especially regarding co-creative or co-productive research processes, studies give little insights in why these processes do not fulfill the principles of engagement, societal transformation and emancipation, they promise for. We draw on the experiences of MaN'Aige (2019-2022) co-creative research on the topic of caring neighbourhoods in Brussels funded by the Innoviris Co-create program. We first described the journey undertaken and different elements that affected or reoriented this process. When reflecting on and reconstructing this project process, we identified six different phases of divergence and convergence that indicate the iterative nature of this type of processes. Second, we discussed two challenges encountered in this process: managing a tension between action and research and dealing with discontinuity. The discussion emphasises the importance of acknowledging reflexivity as a transformative practice. An open description and reflection of our research project can potentially inspire other researchers and communities that want to build up genuine partnerships in co-creative research or other types of collaborative research.

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INTER-SECTION 2. Experimenting with different methods

Doing co-creative research requires experimenting with different methods, that allow one to approach differently a particular question or problem. The method also becomes a way to relate to the people involved, their meanings and motivations.

Throughout MaN'Aige, co-researchers experimented with many different methods and searched for **creative tools to enhance discussions**. In a workshop on the meanings of connections participants could choose different objects from a table that related to their personal story. We also organised events in public space with the Maebar, a bike that unfolds into a terrace or mobile desk, or with a colored 'totem' where people could write down meeting places of the past, the present and the future. These methods served as an occasional collection of ideas, that did not require a long-term engagement. The challenge then consisted of connecting these methods with broader questions and actions.

Different methods were used at different stages of the project, some methods were used only once, while others were adapted, or reused at a later stage. One of the ways to disseminate and to bring together some of the findings was an **exhibition at Pointculture.**

When working in neighbourhoods, maps are an interesting tool that can be used in different ways and serve different purposes. In MaN'Aige we used **mapping techniques and methods** in three different ways.

First, we used maps in combination with walks to collect information. Co-researchers used Framacarte, an open source program to map out the accessibility of pavements and buildings and the presence of green spaces, based on walks with residents and users. These maps were further used in the project.

Second, maps could be used as interactive tools. In the case of the living lab Res'O for example, two co-researchers hung large maps in the entry halls of apartment buildings and businesses. Passersby could mark the places they liked or disliked and the way they experienced these places. Being allowed to hang the posters was already a difficult task. When asking permission to put up the posters in apartment buildings, some referred to the syndicate or the co-ownership board, usually without a response. In the businesses, there was usually no one present due to COVID-19 measures and it was impossible to enter to put up the posters.

Despite the challenges, the posters produced a nice result, with input mainly from residents, and allowed to identify some problem areas in the neighbourhood. In a second step, the co-researchers invited neighbourhood users and residents to discussion tables to reflect on the problems marked on the maps and present possible solutions.

Third, maps could also help to **enhance imaginaries**. Sometimes it is difficult to imagine how things could be different. One of the residents, Tom, used Photoshop to re-imagine the neighbourhood surface,

copy-pasting a part of the Royal Park on the rooftop of a concrete parking lot, and imagining the walls covered in green. These images allowed to enhance a discussion on possible transformations in the neighbourhood, together with local politicians.

PART II. BUILDING CARING NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH 'UNEXPECTED' USERS

CHAPTER 4. Building a Caring Neighbourhood With Users in Brussels: Exploring 'Unexpected' Connections in the MaN'Aige project

Abstract

Caring neighbourhoods is an emerging model for a neighbourhood-oriented and integrated approach to care and well-being in Brussels and Flemish policy. Although current projects mainly focus on connecting neighbours, informal carers and professional care services, many other players are present in a metropolitan context - e.g. companies, schools, theatres - with potential for a caring neighbourhood. The three-year co-creative research MaN'Aige (2019-2022), that took place in two Brussels neighbourhoods, investigated how 'unexpected' connections with these users could contribute to caring neighbourhoods. In the results five building blocks are presented: (1) a broad view of care as *caring* (2) public and green space as an important starting point for connection (3) from one-to-one care relationships to building networks (4) sustainability in networks and rhizome thinking and (5) being mindful of power relations at project and neighbourhood level. The discussion addresses the pitfalls but also the added value of caring neighbourhoods. Caring neighbourhoods offer a broader view of care as a connection and argue for a relational and spatial approach that tackles social exclusion and injustice.

Keywords

Authors

Octavia Kint

Lieselot Degraeve

An-Sofie Smetcoren

Liesbeth De Donder

1. Introduction

A caring neighbourhood aims for a coherent and neighbourhood-oriented approach to housing, care, and well-being so that people can continue to live in their familiar environment, regardless of age or care needs. Although a neighbourhood-oriented conception of care has been around for some time, the term 'caring neighbourhoods' has been on the rise in Brussels and Flanders since 2013. Caring neighbourhood projects often focus on the connection between residents themselves (i.e. creating a 'warm neighbourhood'), or the connection between residents with care needs and professional services (De Donder et al., 2021). The research project MaN'Aige (October 2019 - October 2022), funded by the Innoviris Co-Create programme, investigated how to build a caring neighbourhood in two Brussels neighbourhoods with a specific focus on connections with 'neighbourhood users'. While caring neighbourhoods may engage 'non-evident' key figures, such as local postmen or pedicures (Duppen et al., 2019), other 'types' of neighbourhood users - businesses, schools, theatres, museums, as well as students and commuters - are rarely addressed. However, in a diverse metropolitan context, these actors have a strong presence with space, resources and services that can be a potential in care issues.

MaN'Aige was created on the initiative of local service centre Het Anker, a meeting place for older adults in the Begijnhof neighbourhood since the 1980s. The Flemish government's reformed residential care policy in 2008 divided the Brussels Region into residential care zones and made each local service centre responsible for a particular geographical area (Kenniscentrum Woonzorg Brussel, 2014). Two adjoining neighbourhoods, Martelaars and Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Sneeuw, became part of the residential care zone of Het Anker, but the local service centre barely reached residents there. After experiences with setting up caring neighbourhood projects in the Begijnhof neighbourhood, Het Anker also took a closer look at these two neighbourhoods, in a partnership with Odisee University College, Maison Médicale Enseignement, Knowledge Centre WWZ (abbreviation for Welzijn (Well-being), Wonen (Housing) Zorg (Care)) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). The present article is a reflection on three years of co-creative research in these two neighbourhoods. We hope this reflection can be valuable for new caring neighbourhood projects currently ongoing in Brussels, but also more broadly for individuals and organisations working on care and well-being in urban neighbourhoods.

1.1. Neighbourhood-based approach to care: the idea of caring neighbourhoods

Over the past decade, care and welfare policies have increasingly focused on a neighbourhood-oriented and integrated approach to care. In 2012, the Flemish government launched a call around innovation in care for older adults. The Living Lab project 'Active Caring Community' (2013-2016) in Brussels and Antwerp, focused on developing neighbourhood-oriented informal care, housing

renovation and professional case management for older adults living at home in the Brabant neighbourhood in Schaarbeek and the Jachtwijk in Etterbeek (De Donder et al., 2017; Smetcoren et al., 2018). In 2015, several Flemish and Brussels partners in the care and welfare sector wrote a vision note (Bekaert et al., 2016) and the idea was further advanced in the policy of then minister Jo Vandeurzen (2018). Meanwhile, the concept of Caring Neighbourhood was further developed and defined as follows:

> *In a Caring Neighbourhood, people live comfortably in their homes or familiar neighbourhoods. It is a neighbourhood where young and old know and help each other. In a Caring Neighbourhood, quality of life is central, facilities and services are accessible to everyone. Everyone feels good and is helped, regardless of their support needs.* (Flemish Government Care Department, 2023).

The idea of caring neighbourhoods resonated with various local administrations and organisations, and more and more experiments emerged in Flanders and Brussels in the following years. For example, there was the project 'Minder mazen, meer net' by SAAMO Limburg and West Flanders (Bloemen et al., 2022) and the support of 35 projects in the Dr. Daniël De Coninck fund in Flanders and Brussels (De Donder et al., 2021). In 2022, 132 "Caring Neighbourhoods" started with financial support from the Flemish government for a two-year period, including five in the Brussels Capital Region[1] (VGC, 2023). Apart from these top-down policy developments, the same movement exists from the bottom up, both from citizens' initiatives (Plovie, 2018), and informal players operating at the margins of the formal care and welfare landscape (Schrooten et al., 2019).

1.2. .Caring neighbourhoods in a metropolitan context

The Martelaars and Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-ter-Sneeuw neighbourhoods are located in the city-center but differ in several respects from the rest of the inner-city region. Although the two neighbourhoods are very different between them both in terms of infrastructure and the experience of residents and users, MaN'Aige started from three shared observations for both neighbourhoods. First, there is a large imbalance between residents and neighbourhood users who do not live in these neighbourhoods but do use the facilities that are present, such as shops, businesses, organisations or schools. Compared to the rest of the city-center, the two neighbourhoods have a low population density and a particularly high office density, about the same as the business district in the North Quarter of Brussels (Bisa.Brussels, 2018, 2021b). Although the number of residents has been increasing in recent years (Bisa.Brussels, 2019), the imbalance remains high. To illustrate, around 2,600 people live in each neighbourhood (Bisa.Brussels, 2021a), while one of the businesses in the Martelaarswijk already employs 2,800 people. Secondly, there are few nearby services and facilities for residents in the neighbourhood. Catering establishments and shops mainly cater to users in the neighbourhood such as

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[1] Five selected projects are: Connect Karreveld, Zorg-conciergerie-des Soins, Be *Coming Home*, Chasse Coeur, Zorgzaam Neder-Over-Heembeek and Peterbos Solidaire

lunch shops for commuters and small supermarkets. Moreover, due to the lower population compared to the rest of the inner-city, these neighbourhoods are less in the picture in terms of services and facilities and in local policy. Third, the two neighbourhoods are surrounded and traversed by 'hard' boundaries, such as large boulevards and the inner ring road. Residents from the Martelaars neighbourhood describe parts of their neighbourhood as "*a concrete landscape*" and not very lively, but also describe it as a calm and protected island amidst the busy inner-city.

1.3. Connections as a starting point of caring neighbourhoods and research questions

MaN'Aige advanced the idea that one must first build connections to obtain a caring attitude. Connections can be diverse and are theorised in different ways. Sociologist Granovetter (1973) appoints, for example, the distinction between strong and weak ties that perform very different functions. For instance, weak ties, which are less close and deep than strong ties, are important for bridging different individuals and networks. Anthropologist and social pedagogue Soenen (2006) builds on Granovetter's theory on the importance of relationships and networks for the functioning of contemporary society in a Western context. Besides strong and weak ties, she distinguishes a third type of relationships: volatile ties. Soenen (2006) calls this 'the world of small encounters', such as the small talk people have at the checkout of the shop or exchanging a glance on public transport. These ephemeral relationships can create a sense of *belonging* in the moment, a so-called "*moment of community*", and are of great importance in a metropolitan diverse context (Soenen, 2003, 2006, p.51)

The story of caring neighbourhoods often cites the value of social networks for care and well-being, and more specifically the role of *bonding* and *bridging* in the social fabric. Although the concepts were best known by Putnam (e.g. 2000), Gittell & Vidal (1998) were among the first authors to introduce the terms *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. *Bonding* social capital refers to the trusting and enduring social relationships within a social group or community. This form of social capital is important for the social well-being and social support and embedding of individuals and groups. *Bridging* social capital refers to relationships of respect and reciprocity between groups or individuals who see themselves as different in socio-demographic terms (e.g. differences in age, socio-economic or cultural background) or based on social identity. Bridging relationships have the potential to connect different groups. Caring neighbourhoods can harness both, but Wegleitner & Schuchter (2018) point to potentially negative effects of *bonding* social capital when developing caring neighbourhoods:

> *(...)such as social exclusion or disadvantages resulting from all too tightly-knit communities with alleged unity. Thus, the challenge and "art" of being a good neighbour includes strengthening the qualities of bridging in the community, which means in particular, showing openness for the unknown, the stranger who lives next door or in the next street.* (p.95-96).

Building caring neighbourhoods always happens in a diverse context, neighbourhoods are crossed by different individuals and social and cultural contexts. This is why MaN'Aige wanted to focus on *bridging* different individuals, groups (local residents and neighbourhood users), (care) services and businesses... and an open attitude towards unknown others for the development of caring neighbourhoods.

2. Background

MaN'Aige was funded by the CoCreate programme of the Innoviris, which aims to support social and environmental transitions that improve life and resilience in Brussels through innovative research (Innoviris, 2023). In the projects of the Co-Create programme, the task of research does not lie solely on the shoulders of academic institutions or centres of expertise, but on those of various actors in the field working together as co-researchers. This was also the objective at MaN'Aige. A committee of co-researchers met monthly and consisted mainly of community workers from local service centre Het Anker, teachers and staff members at the Nursing Department at Odisee University College, care professionals from Maison Médicale Enseignement, researchers from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and staff members of Knowledge Centre WWZ. Together, they investigated how connection and caring could be established with neighbourhood users. In addition, many neighbourhood users and residents from the neighbourhoods engaged themselves to shape the research and participate in the project's experiments and co-creation workshops.

There are a lot of theoretical interpretations of co-creative research. We initially followed the model of Bonney et al. (2009) in which, different from contributory and collaborative projects, in co-creative research participants are involved in almost all stages of the research process, from defining the question to experimentation to formulating and disseminating conclusions and asking new questions (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Models for public participation in scientific research (adapted from Bonney et al., 2009, p.19)

	contributed (contribute to) projects	collaborated (collaborate) projects	co-created (create together) projects
PHASE 1: Co-design of research goal and questions			
Develoment research questions			X
Literature review: collecting literature, studies, reports			X
Literature review: analysis and reporting			X
Developing research design (how to collect data)		(X)	X
PHASE 2: Co-conducting the research			
Experimenting		X	X
Data collection	X	X	X
PHASE 3: Co-interpretation and co-valorisation			
Data analysis	(X)	X	X
Interpretation of results and formulating conclusions		(X)	X
Dissemination of conclusions and translating results into actions	(X)	(X)	X

X = public included in research phase; (X)= public sometimes included in research phase

In MaN'Aige's practice, however, co-creative research implied adopting an inquiring attitude, a constant balancing act to align research seeking answers to research questions and concrete actions, as well as exploring creative research methods and techniques. We distinguished five major phases in the research process that were not chronological but cyclical: 1) a neighbourhood analysis to determine the state of the neighbourhoods through walks, surveys and workshops, 2) design of the research and experiments, 3) experimentation in six Living Labs focusing on three dimensions: physical space of the neighbourhood (greening and accessibility of the neighbourhood), the involvement of cultural players, large companies and public institutions, and individual care relationships) 4) reflecting through collective discussions and creative methods, 5) co-analysis and valorisation: annual research reports, give-back sessions and co-analysis of all material collected in group. These analyses for building a caring neighbourhood with neighbourhood users were incorporated into a video and a cahier published by Knowledge Centre WWZ (Degraeve et al., 2022) and also form the basis for the present article.

3. Results

The results of three years of co-creative research answered the question how 'unexpected' connections with neighbourhood users could contribute to a caring neighbourhood. Five main themes emerged : (1) a broad view of care as *caring* (2) public and green space as an important starting point for connection (3) from one-to-one care relationships to building networks (4) sustainability in networks and rhizome thinking and (5) being mindful of power relations at project and neighbourhood level.

3.1. A broad view of care as *caring*

First, the perspective of neighbourhood users in a caring neighbourhood showed the need for a broader view of care than the traditional interpretation. Care is often seen as a one-way individual relationship considered between care provider and care recipient around a particular care need (Fine & Glendinning, 2005). In caring neighbourhoods, the focus is on reciprocal, strong relationships and matching (care) demand with care offer. Also in MaN'Aige,the initial aim was to set up care relationships between neighbourhood users ("care givers") and older, lonely or isolated residents ("care recipients"). For instance, we wanted to start a buddy collaboration between nursing students and older neighbourhood residents experiencing limited mobility. The idea was to match students with a resident for a chat or an activity. In practice, however, this turned out to be very difficult, impossible. For instance, the requirements of a course in terms of time, regulations and (temporary) availability of students did not match the needs and questions of residents. In addition, the older residents experienced a barrier to let a stranger into their home and wanted to offer something themselves to their buddy instead of merely receiving help. Because of this experience, we took a few steps back and revisited our vision of care. Care - with and by neighbourhood users - starts with an **awareness of the neighbourhood** and an **open attitude** towards others. As a result, we have since spoken much more of *caring*, rather than *care*. While recognising the importance of strong individual care relationships that respond to concrete care needs in neighbourhoods, we use the concept of *caring to emphasise* an awareness of 'the other' and the environment as the first step for sustainable connection. In doing so, we go one step further than weak (Granovetter, 1973) or ephemeral ties (Soenen, 2006). Engaging neighbourhood users in a caring neighbourhood starts with creating an awareness of 'the neighbourhood' and the other:

> *Caring means being considerate and that can be in many meanings of the word (...) it can be about looking after a person, the environment, each other's safety,...there are many ways to care or be considerate for someone or something alive. It can even be caring not to engage with something or someone else.*(co-researcher, focus group)

Underlying a caring relationship with neighbourhood users is **listening to the needs of the neighbourhood and its residents**. For example, Marilyn, a care professional at the community health centre, participated in the Living Lab with the vegetable garden project and did so for the liveability of the whole neighbourhood and not just for the well-being of her patients. However, in the traditional way of working, the focus at healthcare organisations is still often on providing care to 'the patient'. This new "lens" focused on the neighbourhood also emerged among other users outside the social or care sector. For example, some neighbourhood theatres were involved in greening initiatives in the neighbourhood:

> *In itself, greening has nothing to do with the primary task of a theatre (...) but instead of having glasses 'these are my customers', they now have glasses, 'this is my neighbourhood'(...). We are going to try to get involved*

in the neighbourhood and listen to what is important to residents. And one of the things that came up is the importance of a greener neighbourhood (co-researcher, focus group).

3.2. Public and green space as an important starting point for connection

In MaN'Aige, the lack of livable and quality public space came up strongly: the negative impact of large-scale construction projects on residents, the lack of green space, children's play areas or seating for students during lunch breaks, as well as the inaccessibility of buildings, pavements and toilets of catering establishments, for example, for wheelchair users. Although the experience of the neighbourhood can vary greatly among wheelchair users, the accessibility of the neighbourhood, or even the street, was very limited for some patients of the community health centre:

My patient [name] and (...) [name] have their age, they have a lot of trouble getting around, they live at their own pace, there is nothing to change that. They are also tired very quickly. Because of their limited mobility, their room to move around the neighbourhood becomes very small. (...) For example, my patient cannot get out of the building with her walker and has to wait until another resident comes along to help her keep the doors open. (co-researcher, written interview)

Although there was a great lack of quality public space, shared, (semi-)public space was also an important lever for connection and caring. Investing in the shared, public space was considered a good way to engage neighbourhood users and a first gateway to address them: residents and neighbourhood users, businesses, theatres, schools, are present together in a neighbourhood, their buildings and actions take their place in the streetscape, they use the pavements, squares and benches. The connection that exists as residents and users share neighbourhood space was thus a starting point rather than a goal. In one of the Living Labs entitled Res'O, we brought 46 residents, organisations and businesses together around a common theme: the liveability of their neighbourhood. It started with a few cards that two co-researchers hung in the entrance hall of a building or the neighbourhood health centre, on which people could indicate pleasant and unpleasant places in the neighbourhood, and grew into discussion moments and information sessions where, for the first time, residents and users sat together at one table as "neighbours". Through work on public space, neighbourhood safety and accessibility and spatial planning "*we want to ensure that residents and users take control of their surroundings. Moreover, we want businesses to become aware that they are neighbours of residents.*" (co-researcher, individual interview)

3.3. From one-to-one care relationships to building networks

Creating an awareness of the neighbourhood among neighbourhood users, and questioning them about shared public space were important gateways, but not sufficient to speak of a 'caring neighbourhood'. As mentioned in 3.1, there were a lot of barriers to establishing one-to-one care

relationships with neighbourhood users. Although we initially had high expectations about the 'innovative' role that neighbourhood users could play in a caring neighbourhood, one-to-one care initiatives often remained short-term, dependent on the *goodwill* of a few individuals and not structurally embedded. The involvement of neighbourhood users was limited by regulations on safety and access, changes in staff, time and financial resources, as well as by external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of this, setting up initiatives did not yet guarantee that they were accessible or usable to residents.

Rather than establishing reciprocal relationships, that consisted of providing and receiving care, between neighbourhood users and residents, caring neighbourhoods were about connecting neighbourhood actors who did not know each other and building networks that could lead to changes in the neighbourhood. This network vision also meant a shift from the way care was envisioned in the initial set-up. As Mia, community worker at het Anker explained:

Innovative does not have to be that you do something new, but that you fill in something existing new. So what already exists, you don't have to reinvent everything, but create an awareness, that is to some extent also innovation (co-researcher, committee of co-researchers).

In practice, however, building networks in the neighbourhood was not evident and required a lot of time and energy. Especially if there is no existing antenna organisation in the neighbourhood,*" a lot of preliminary work is needed before you actually have something on which to base mutual care* (co-researcher, focus group). When we spoke to neighbourhood users about their neighbourhood, we learned that some businesses, merchants and cultural institutions collaborated with social organisations outside the neighbourhood or had already taken actions in the neighbourhood, for example offering discounted tickets, but had little contact and connection with surrounding residents. Conversely, residents did not always see the value of connecting with neighbourhood users who were not anchored. Concrete common needs, however, made the importance of a network clear: lack of green and liveable public space, social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, inaccessible public space,...While networks often arose on the basis of a common interest, they could also emerge very pragmatically and concretely. Thanks to small interventions in public spaces such as the installation of garden boxes, new initiatives emerged, for example a meeting for the maintenance of garden boxes or the collection of seeds and plants. New collaborations also emerged between neighbourhood organisations and residents who previously did not know each other. For example, the care professional working at the community health centre Maison médicale Enseignement explains the growing connection between the community health centre, the homework class and residents:

A resident offered to give training on the vegetable garden in the homework class (...) In her e-mail she added a document entitled 'You are no longer alone'. (...) Something has really taken off, indeed I am no longer alone, there are residents and they are setting up their own initiatives. (co-researcher, focus group)

3.4. Sustainability in networks and rhizome thinking

In caring neighbourhoods, care responsibilities are often regarded on an individual level. However, individual neighbourhood users and residents come and go and participation is not continuous. As Mia, a community worker at Het Anker, explained, in setting up a meeting place:

The hardest part is anchoring. Neighbourhood users were central to our project, but they are not stable. Businesses move away, students leave school, and so on. There is a lot of movement. Moreover, a project like this depends heavily on the people behind it. Even if the mission of your organisation or company is social, everyone interprets it differently. When new people arrive, everything can change. (Degraeve et al., 2022, p.25)

Therefore, it was important to take enough time to build networks and embed them structurally in the neighbourhood, by involving neighbourhood users who have a stable presence in the neighbourhood, not on an individual level but on a structural level within a function (e.g. the function of community worker in a theatre or at the health centre Maison médicale). On top of this, caring neighbourhoods can create impact 'under the radar' that is difficult to measure. Initiatives can take different forms, a seed can be planted, new changes can be set in motion:

In the actions we are going to do, I don't directly see that anyone else is going to take that over. It may inspire or there may be a connection but not so much that the action that happens will be continued. (co-researcher, committee of co-researchers)

Thus, caring neighbourhoods invite to rhizome thinking: caring neighbourhoods are not linear or hierarchical but a continuous process where everything in a neighbourhood is interconnected and in continuous change.

3.5. Being mindful of power relations both at project and neighbourhood level

Although caring neighbourhoods often promote an ideal image, in practice, they are crossed by power relations that are important to recognise. We observed these power relations at both project and neighbourhood levels. At the **project level,** structural, societal inequalities seeped through in the project between partners involved in MaN'Aige. For example, in terms of gender, education, cultural background and socio-economic situation, the group of co-researchers and participants consisted of a homogenous group. Furthermore, the conceptual vagueness of 'caring neighbourhoods' offered a lot of flexibility, but also led to excluding certain groups and realities that remained invisible and *voiceless.* Although vulnerable older people were the initial target group, with the broader focus on public and green spaces, the target audience also shifted. We mainly reached residents who were already engaged and had lived in the neighbourhood for a longer time. Also, the co-researchers group consisted mainly of women, which also raised questions about the responsibility of care. But inequalities were also played

out on other levels. For instance, the project was developed and implemented by paid partners, but participants often remained unpaid, and due to obligations and administrative arrangements in terms of the project grant, the development of the project did not always correspond to the needs of participants. Care initiatives that grew bottom-up, such as the vegetable garden project, were carried out on a voluntary basis by residents and not structurally supported.

Besides the project level, power relations also played out at the **neighbourhood level**. Although questions around power were not initially addressed in building care with neighbourhood users, we ran the risk of being instrumentalised by politicians and private companies, which raised ethical questions about care at the structural level. For example, in the search for a site for the vegetable garden project, participants faced a power struggle between the neighbourhood committee and private developers. On the site where they could potentially develop their vegetable garden, the private developer had previously cut down hundreds of trees, causing strong protests from the neighbourhood committee. The developer later used a conversation about the vegetable garden project to justify the earlier felling of the trees. A resident, a member of the neighbourhood committee explained:

We [members of the neighbourhood committee] had a meeting with [property developer] ostensibly to make contact for the creation of a vegetable garden on their site, but a day later we found out that they had recouped our conversation, and we had supposedly given our agreement for the felled trees. (co-researcher, committee of co-researchers)

While power relations are inevitable in setting up or developing caring neighbourhoods, it was important to acknowledge and actively discuss them. Working on caring neighbourhoods also involves being mindful of structural inequalities and social exclusion in neighbourhoods.

4. Discussion

The MaN'aige project took some steps into the issue of the social role of neighbourhood users, such as companies, socio-cultural and public institutions and workers, in (caring) neighbourhoods. Five themes emerged in building a caring neighbourhood with neighbourhood users: (1) a broad view of care as *caring* (2) public and green space as an important starting point for connection (3) from one-to-one care relationships to building networks (4) sustainability in networks and rhizome thinking and (5) being mindful of power relations at project and neighbourhood level. Our results showed that care had to be considered not in the narrow sense but more broadly as *caring,* an attentive attitude towards others and the neighbourhood, which may even include not being present. The public space that neighbourhood users and residents share is an important starting point for connection: green space and children's play areas (or lack thereof), squares and benches, but also the buildings and real estate projects. Caring relations already exist in neighbourhoods, but caring neighbourhoods can capitalise on this by

connecting people, resources and activities. In doing so, it is important to be mindful of existing power relations, both at the micro level of relationships in the project and at the neighbourhood level. It is important to be mindful of the broader impact of 'caring' actions put in place and ethical dimensions. Therefore, while recognising the value of caring neighbourhoods, it is also important to highlight the limits to a caring neighbourhood with neighbourhood users.

4.1. The limits of care with neighbourhood users

The concept of care becomes more and more present in policy, cultural and public institutions, but also among private companies. Neighbourhood users can also play a role in caring intiatives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social organisations undertook actions in collaboration with Brussels local authorities to meet the needs of people in precarious housing situations (Thys et al., 2020), for example providing temporary shelter in hotels (De Kock et al., 2023; Debruyne et al., 2020). In MaN'Aige, employees of the community health centre, the university college and several theatres, for example, stepped outside their 'traditional' roles and worked together with residents in initiatives that aimed to make the neighbourhood more green.

However, there are limits to this 'care', on the level of type of care and intensity. Many of the initiatives initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic involving 'unexpected' neighbourhood users remained temporary and precarious collaborations that were only initiated in times of 'crisis' and were not structurally supported by governments. In MaN'Aige too, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a wider awareness among neighbourhood users of their surrounding neighbourhood, but their involvement was often limited to instrumental support and the occasional provision of a service or office space. In line with these findings, De Donder et al. (2021) state that although neighbourhood users and residents can, temporarily, respond to concrete care and support needs in the neighbourhood, their involvement does not provide a solution to a failing care system that adopts a savings logic and does not provide the structural support to guarantee health care rights.

4.2. Care in neighbourhoods is inextricably linked to power relations

While long-term co-creative processes and a network vision are essential in caring neighbourhoods, these should not be idealised as these are crossed by tensions (Phillips & Napan, 2016). In the context of neighbourhoods, diverse residents, public institutions, cultural organisations, private companies... each have their own diverse interests and resources and start from different positions of power. Introducing care issues in "new" settings, within the walls of theatres, local policymakers in various domains, as well as large institutions and private companies, raises a lot of ethical questions and critical concerns (Gabauer et al., 2022). For example, in the communication strategy of large

multinationals, a caring image can be instrumentalised and contribute to reinforcing unequal power relations (Shever, 2010). It is therefore important to be mindful of power relations, both at the project level between different individuals and organisations involved in a caring neighbourhood (Who is involved? Who gets paid?) and at the macro level in the neighbourhood (What is the impact of our actions? How are our actions shaped by or shaping structural inequalities?). It starts with an awareness of one's own positionality (Egid et al., 2021), but also an awareness of broader power structures. The emphasis on 'community care', is also accompanied by a general trend of budget cuts and market-logics in the care sector (De Dijn, 2012; De Donder et al., 2022). If power relations are not taken into account, caring neighbourhoods serve more as political window-dressing in which "the neighbourhood" is idealised as a homogeneous group, which can lead to more discrimination and social exclusion in care and an unjust distribution of care responsibilities (Wegleitner & Schuchter, 2018).

4.3. From 'providing care' to a 'caring attitude': a relational and spatial vision

Although care is often viewed on an individual level, for example from the perspective of older adults, our results show that we can also view care from a spatial perspective, as a caring attitude towards the neighbourhood. Care is a socio-material practice connected to and shaped by human and non-human objects, environments, bodies in the city (Power & Williams, 2019). For example, the liveability of the shared public space in neighbourhoods was an important starting point for connection in MaN'Aige. The concept of caring neighbourhoods as promoted in policy and academic research, currently pays little attention to a spatial vision of caring. Involving neighbourhood users, however, if working together under the right conditions and paying attention to existing power relations and positionality, can be an important added value. Whereas betting on individual care between neighbours risks shifting policy responsibility onto individual residents or users, a broader conception of *caring attitude* emphasises a relational view of care and the responsibility of neighbourhood users for the environment in which they find themselves. As a result, caring is not only a matter for health care professionals, but professionals, i.e. architects or urban planners, that influence the spatial aspect in a neighbourhood should also be included and mindful of questions on care.

This also demonstrates the need for a different vision of impact and innovation from policy, funding and academic institutions, which are responsible for funding and supporting caring neighbourhoods. Instead of a linear model, caring neighbourhoods emphasise the relational basis of knowledge building and care, and require attention to the 'unseen' caring practices and connections that exist in neighbourhoods under the radar of formal structures (Raap et al., 2022). Since results or impact are not immediately visible or measurable, it is important to be mindful of these care initiatives on the margins of formal structures, especially with regard to exclusion and injustice (Schrooten et al., 2019). While supporting informal care connections is important, it should not replace long-term structural financial and professional support that is embedded locally. Finally, caring neighbourhoods should,

more than simply aiming to 'provide and receive care' in the neighbourhood, contribute to an open, caring attitude towards others and the environment, bring about more connections between services and organisations working in a fragmented and segmented way, and structurally support local networks.

Acknowledgments

5. References

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INTER-SECTION 3. 'Carnets créatifs': moments of reflexivity beyond words

'Carnets créatifs' was a series of creative workshops hosted by Chantal Wuillaume, a painter who lived close to the local service centre Het Anker whom we met coincidently on a bench. Through a series of working sessions in **individual sketchbooks** and collective discussions, we explored the meanings of

connections. We questioned the meanings of connections in a caring neighbourhood with neighbourhood users, but also within the group of co-researchers. Our reflection started from the three basic concepts of MaN'Aige: care, neighbourhood and neighbourhood user. Through **mind map associations** with other words, we chose three concepts we would take along in our process: open space, proximity/distance and encounter.

After the mindmap session, each participant chose a personal object of their choice: a wheel, a doorbell, an oil lamp ... which formed the thread running through each sketchbook. Chantal taught different creative techniques, such as **collage, charcoal or oilbar,** which were used in different working sessions. Chantal urged the importance of having fun and liberating fixed ways of thinking.

The working sessions were alternated by **collective discussion moments**, where we discussed each other's work. New visions on our research questions emerged and it allowed to reflect critically on our positions and preconceived ideas. A niche in the wall, a shadow side or hidden place, that we do not reach. The neighbourhood as a sea on which different boats sail, big tankers and small sailing boats that need to avoid the big boats. The imprint of a drawing on the other page, the imprint of what we are doing.

In additional **Tarot sessions**, we got to know each other better, each with our visions and motivations for participating in the project.

CHAPTER 5. Exploring the Value of Urban Green Space: Perspectives of Residents and Users in Inner-City Brussels

Abstract

Urban green space has often been studied for its positive impact on health and well-being in the city. However, a critical examination of the provision of and access to these spaces through an environmental justice lens also reveals exclusionary mechanisms that perpetuate inequalities. This article investigates the value ascribed to urban green space from the perspectives of residents and users in two neighbourhoods in inner-city Brussels. Through 12 walk-along interviews, the aim was to delve into the narratives of participants, highlighting their experiences of urban green spaces. A common thread emerged in the narratives, with participants frequently expressing the limits of qualitative green spaces in their neighbourhoods. Concurrently, distinct perceptions were observed in the way they value urban green spaces. We identified three overarching perspectives: green as a source of enjoyment, green as a vital necessity for survival, and green as a policy-driven tool. These divergent perspectives shape understandings of green benefits, influencing the types of green spaces that are valued, permissible activities within them, and their management approaches. Ultimately, this study explores the different values of green space in the light of an environmental justice perspective, highlighting the tensions that emerge between these different perspectives.

Key words

Urban green space, walk-along interviews, environmental justice

Authors

Octavia Kint

Deborah Deseure

Liesbeth De Donder

1. Introduction

Within the large body of academic research on the human relationship to urban green space, we identified two main issues research is centred around. First, research focuses on the health benefits of urban green, examining the positive effects of green on the physical, mental, social and environmental health of its residents (e.g. Groenewegen et al., 2012; Hartig et al., 2014; Khotdee et al., 2012; Konijnendijk et al., 2013). Second, studies focus on inequalities in urban green space, examining issues of access, distribution and equity (e.g. De Haas et al., 2021; Hunter et al., 2019; Kabisch & Haase, 2014). In this body of work, only a small part of studies take on a qualitative approach, and if they do they rely mostly on 'classic' research methods like interviews, focus groups or observations (Kabisch, 2015). Furthermore, the perspective of non-residential actors in neighbourhoods, like commuters and service users in the neighbourhood is not often explicitly included. In response, in this paper, we will examine the way neighbourhood residents and users talk about, use and experience urban green space in their neighbourhoods, based on the participatory research method of walk-along interviews.

1.1. Positive effects of green urban space

Green space in urban contexts is often studied concerning its health benefits. Studies focus not only on positive effects on physical health but also consider mental and social well-being (Khotdee et al., 2012). Different uses of green are studied, from the effect of walking in green to simply viewing nature (Hartig et al., 2003, 2014). According to Groenewegen et al. (2012), in presenting the results of the Vitamin G program on the relationship between living close to green space and health, the most important mechanisms are played out on the level of stress reduction and social cohesion. Green space can contribute to reducing stress and mental fatigue, but can also reinforce social cohesion and promote a sense of community (Groenewegen et al., 2012). Reviews by Jennings & Bamkole (2019) and Wan et al., (2021) show that the relationship between urban green and social cohesion is presented in different ways throughout research, covering multiple dimensions: from the potential of green space to offer meeting places that allow social interaction and inclusion, to reinforcing social support, trust and reciprocity between residents or countering social isolation and loneliness (Jennings & Bamkole, 2019; Wan et al., 2021). At the same time, these reviews express the need for a clearer understanding and differentiation of these effects and nuance the relationship between urban green and different types of social health benefits. Maas et al. (2009) for example state that although green space can be positively related to feelings of loneliness and shortage of social support, it appears more important in strengthening a place attachment and identity than creating actual contacts or networks with neighbours. Next to these health and social benefits, Kabisch et al. (2015) in their systematic review of research on human–environment interactions, add economic and environmental benefits. Economic benefits might refer to the level of real estate value, while environmental benefits concern climate mitigation in urban contexts, such as heat-island effects in cities, sound and air pollution, loss of biodiversity, and flooding (Kabisch et al., 2015).

Although many studies focus on the positive effects of urban green, especially on health and social cohesion, some authors call for nuance to this automatic association, as not all types of green or uses of green seem to have the same effect (Hartig et al., 2014). First, a variety of definitions exist and different understandings of what green space is. Texier et al. (2018) note for example that in some studies green areas need a considerable size in order to be considered as 'genuine' urban green space: on the level of use and types of (physical) activities it allows, but also on the level of ecological qualities and the biodiversity it offers. They also mention the relation between size and the way people can appropriate urban green space and associate different values to it. Konijnendijk et al. (2013), in their systematic review on the benefits of urban parks, also point out this lack of clarity in definitions, making it more difficult to measure what the actual benefits of green space are. In addition, different operationalisations and metrics make it difficult to draw general conclusion, for example measuring the access or distance to green space (Ekkel & de Vries, 2017). Klompmaker et al. (2018) in their study on the associations of green space with being overweight and physical activity, also noted great differences in their results according to the operationalisation of green space. In their study they found that distance to park was not associated with being overweight or the amount of physical activity, while the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (measuring the amount of vegetation in a certain zone) was related (Klompmaker et al., 2018).

These different definitions and measurements not only make it more difficult to compare research, but also have an impact on the policy level, for example in the design of urban green that is beneficial for health and well-being (Ekkel & de Vries, 2017). Schipperijn et al. (2013) add that most studies on the relationship between green space and physical activities are conducted in the USA and Australia and are not always applicable to the European context, as policy recommendations based on structures and configurations of these cities are not automatically valid in European contexts.

1.2. Beyond the benefits: exclusion in and through urban green space

Although urban green spaces are often promoted for their benefits on health and quality of life in neighbourhoods, research also raises questions on who enjoys these benefits and how public and accessible these spaces genuinely are. In the next paragraph we will further elaborate on questions of power, access and distribution in relation to urban green space.

In this paper, we will focus on authors that frame the challenges of urban green space provision within an **environmental justice perspective** (e.g. Kronenberg et al., 2020; Mullenbach, 2022; Rutt & Gulsrud, 2016). In this perspective, environmental justice concerns the fair allocation of and access to benefits for different socio-economic groups (distributive justice), the fair inclusion of concerned groups in decision-making processes (procedural justice) and the recognition of the diverse needs and values of

those concerned (interactional justice) (Kronenberg et al., 2020). These questions, related to climate, spatial and social justice, are also becoming more and more present in international programs, for example UN Habitat and the European Environment Agency EEA (Kronenberg et al., 2020).

The first dimension concerns the **distribution and availability of urban green**. On one hand, not all groups of residents have the same access to green, often measured in terms of distance to green space, and on the other, urban green is unfairly distributed in cities (Mullenbach, 2022). The distribution of urban green space is not in balance with the distribution of the population: in neighbourhoods where many people live, there appear to be fewer green spaces than in an area where fewer people live (Yang et al., 2015). Several authors link the unfair access to green space to socio-economic inequalities in cities (De Haas et al., 2021; Jelks et al., 2021; Łaszkiewicz et al., 2018). In socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods less and lower quality green is available, while qualitative green spaces are more available in high-income neighbourhoods (European Environment Agency, 2022).

Second, the **procedural or participatory dimension** questions the ownership of green space and the involvement of concerned actors in decision-making processes. Although within a Western-European context, citizen participation has become more widespread and even an obligatory part of planning processes (Kronenberg et al., 2020), this does not guarantee genuine involvement and ownership by residents or other people concerned. In the case of brownfield development projects in three European countries for example, Niitamo (2021) stated that from the perspective of municipal planners, citizen participation often becomes subsidiary to other fast-pressing goals, for example providing housing for a quickly growing population. Besides formalized and obligatory participation, residents and communities also take ownership, for example through activism and struggles. In the case of urban commons, for example, urban space can be actively managed by residents regardless of who 'owns' the property (Colding et al., 2013).

The third dimension considers the **interactional level**, meaning the possible uses of urban green space, the interactions between different users and whether the needs of the users are considered (Kronenberg et al., 2020). Urban green spaces often hold conflicts of interest between different users. Above we already considered the conflicting interests between the city, urban developers and real estate companies, but also on the level of interactions within urban green spaces different conflicts exist. In certain cases, urban green space can be perceived negatively and give feelings of unsafety, for example when the space is not well maintained or appropriated and used by certain groups leading to the exclusion of others (Kemperman & Timmermans, 2014). Furthermore, parks are often designed for active adult people and young families, which leaves the needs of other groups, for example, people with a physical disability or older people unanswered (Kronenberg et al., 2020). Also on a psychological level, people do not always 'feel welcome' in urban green spaces.

1.3. Urban green spaces in two central neighbourhoods of Brussels

This study is part of the MaN'Aige research project and is located in two neighbourhoods in the center of Brussels. The goal of the MaN'Aige project was to investigate how caring neighbourhoods could be developed, and which roles neighbourhood users who do not reside in the neighbourhood (e.g. commuters, passersby, shopkeepers) could play. An important insight of this co-creative research was the importance of public space in caring neighbourhoods, and urban green space in particular, in the connection between residents and users (Degraeve et al., 2022). In the two neighbourhoods, the degree of vegetation, i.e. the percentage of the neighbourhoods surface covered by vegetation, appears low, respectively 7% and 12 % (Bisa.Brussels, 2020). This is also the case for other neighbourhoods in the city center. Nevertheless, when regarding the percentage of the population that lives in a distance of less than 300m from a public green space, the two neighbourhoods have a high score, respectively 78 and 100%, compared to other neighbourhoods in the city center (Bisa.Brussels, 2012). According to another measure considering all areas at more than 200 m distance from a green space of less than 1 hectare or more than 400 m from a green space of more than 1 hectare, the two neighbourhoods differ. In one neighbourhood, 49% of the neighbourhood's population is considered deprived from green areas, while in the other this is 0%, as it is located next to a public park (Brussel Leefmilieu, 2021).

Using these different quantitative assessments, conclusions can differ whether there is sufficient green available or not. Furthermore, in an environmental justice perspective, these numbers give little insights into participatory and interactional dimensions of urban green space. In response, this qualitative study aims to consider the perception of local residents and neighbourhood users themselves and the way they can access, experience and value the green space in the two neighbourhoods. The particularity of this study was to include not only local residents, but also people who do not live in the neighbourhood, yet make "use" of it.

2. Data and methods

This study is part of the larger MaN'Aige co-creative research project which explored the roles of neighbourhood users in creating a caring neighbourhood in Brussels. The entire research project has been detailed in (Degraeve et al., 2022).

2.1. Research design

To gain an understanding in the experiences and practices of residents and neighbourhood users regarding green space, qualitative research was conducted using walk-along interviews. Walk-along or go-along is a methodology where interviews are conducted on the go, whilst walking (Thompson &

Reynolds, 2019). Stories, experiences and events are literally and figuratively contextualized but also collaboratively constituted within the process of walking (Garcia et al., 2012). The close involvement of the research context ensures that this methodology is suited for neighbourhood research and investigating health in relation to place (Carpiano, 2009; Thompson & Reynolds, 2019). Relating the personal narratives to place, allows research to construct knowledge in a more collaborative way, challenging *"externally" generated knowledge"* while allowing to "*talk meanings and understandings into existence"* (Anderson, 2004, p.260).

2.2. Participants

Participants were 6 local residents (i.e. people living in the neighbourhood) and 6 neighbourhood users (i.e. people working or spending frequent leisure time in the neighbourhood). The walk-along interviews were conducted in both French and Dutch, depending on the language of preference of the participant. Participants were purposefully selected and contacted by the first author, working as action researcher in the neighbourhood. Inclusion criteria were being a local resident or user in the neighbourhood. Goal was to differentiate according to gender, age and how long the participants lived or used the neighbourhood. Five of the six neighbourhood users worked in a cultural (U12), private (U5) or public (U3, U8, U11) institution located in the neighbourhood. One neighbourhood user (U10) was a volunteer in a local neighbourhood association. Some of the participants we interviewed were already involved in issues on green space or ecology as residents (R1, R4, R7) or within their occupational function (U3, U5), while others were not especially interested or involved in these questions. The aim was to pursue as many diverse views as possible. An overview of the participants can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Overview participants walk-along interviews

Participant	Gender	Language interview	Neighbourhood	Years living/working/ passing in neighbourhood	Age
R1	M	Dutch	1	14	44
R2	F	French	1	21	29
U3	M	French	1	7	47
R4	F	Dutch	1	13	54
U5	M	French	1	16	57
R6	F	French	2	47	69
R7	F	French	2	16	53
U8	M	Dutch	2	25	53
R9	F	French	2	1	69
U10	M	French	2	13	84
U11	M	Dutch	2	26	58
U12	M	French	2	3	36

R: local Resident; U: neighbourhood User / M: Male; F: Female

Participants were suggested through the neighbourhood health centre or by partners of the local MaN'Aige project (i.e. project on creating caring neighbourhoods). Potential participants were first contacted by phone. On the phone, explanations were given about the subject and procedure of the research. An e-mail was then sent with the information letter detailing the course of the interview and informed consent. A reminder was sent by SMS two days before the interview.

2.3. Data collection procedure and measurements

Two researchers conducted the walk-along interviews: a doctoral researcher and a trained master student. Interviews were either conducted together (R1, R2, U5, R6, U8, U10) or separately by the master student (U3, R4, R9) or the doctoral researcher (R7, U11, U12). The walk-along-interviews took place between December 2021 and April 2022 and lasted an average of 65 min (range = 28 to 131 min).

Interviews were conducted individually to probe for personal experiences. On the day of the interview, the course of the interview was briefly reiterated. It was also indicated that the audio recordings served for transcription only and that the data would be pseudonymized. A photo camera was handed over to the participant, such that they could take pictures during the walk to indicate green space in the neighbourhood. It was also specified that the interviewer would take photographs during the walk to illustrate and to locate the narratives for the audio-transcription. After a review of how the walk-along interview would proceed, and of the recording devices used (voice recorder and photo camera), participants provided informed consent through a signed form. All walk-along interviews departed in one of the two neighbourhoods. Participants were informed in advance that they could choose the starting point of the walk and the route themselves. It was not a requirement to stay within the official boundaries of the neighbourhood. Rather, interviews started from the participants' perceptions of the neighbourhood and its boundaries. Likewise, we followed the perception of participants of what they defined themselves by 'green space'. We did not establish a previously fixed definition of what we meant by urban green space.

Each interview started with a warming up question. Introductory texts used in Van Cauwenberg et al. (2012) and Van Hecke et al. (2016) were used for inspiration to draw up the initial question for this study:

"*We are now at place X. During this walk, we would like to understand how you view green space in the neighbourhood and how you use it. Furthermore, we would like to gain insight in what you think might create connections between residents and users. You are the expert in this neighbourhood so you can talk from your perspective, experiences, ideas and feelings. We may ask some additional questions to fully understand your experiences and opinions. Is this ok for you? Is everything clear to you?*"

This initial question was usually communicated to the participants by phone beforehand. This so that they could already think about a possible itinerary. The starting question was repeated before the start of the walk, after the introduction.

An interview guide with main topics and exemplary questions was prepared in advance based on the research goal. This ensured that the same topics were generally covered by all participants. However, at the moment of the interview also (many) unprepared questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of responses. The interview guide comprised four primary questions for the walk-along interview on green space in the neighbourhood. (1) can you indicate which places you consider as green space in the neighbourhood? (2) how do you use this place? (3) what does this place mean to you? (4) how do you think this place contributes (or not) to connections? During the interview, both prepared and ad hoc additional questions were asked. At the end of the walk, participants were asked to indicate together the route walked on a map.

2.4. Analysis procedure

Interviews were audio-recorded with a digital voice recorder and pictures were taken along the walk both by the researcher and the participant and afterwards, researchers mapped out the itinerary together with the participants. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim in March 2022 by the master student, with support and check of the first author. The photographs and maps were added to the transcripts to contextualise the interviews.

The analysis strategy followed was an active, cyclical and iterative process in which the data was compared and adjusted again and again, following different steps inspired by grounded theory (Strauss & Cobin, 1998). Although the aim was not to build a theory grounded in empirical data, this perspective suited the research analysis as the intention was to probe for perceptions of participants in an as open way as possible, taking into account different types of data, not only textual but also pictures and experiences of space (van Staa & Evers, 2010). In the first step of 'open coding', researchers started from participants' experiences and perceptions. This 'open coding' consisted of labelling data inductively, not predetermined or guided by frameworks from literature, and was followed by 'axial' and 'selective' coding (Flick, 2018). In the next step, 'axial coding', the different labels were clustered. In this step, codes were clustered on different topics: type of green, purpose/goal of green, impact of green, how to deal with green, whose interest and by whom. The final step consisted of 'selective coding', where three main discourses on the value of urban green space were identified. Through these different steps, our aim was not to construct a theoretical model based on grounded theory analysis, but to follow an iterative and cyclic process that allowed to go back-and-forth between the data and the analysis. Furthermore, we should acknowledge that we did not have an entirely inductive approach, as

we already had guiding research questions and applied the larger lens of environmental justice to our data at the end of the analysis.

2.5. Research perspective

Throughout the paper, the "we-perspective" is used to designate the group of academic researchers who conducted the analysis and were involved in the writing process of this article.

3. Results

In this result section we explore (1) how neighbourhood residents and users perceive urban green space in their neighbourhood (2) how they perceive the value of urban green space.

3.1. Urban green space: limited and contested

When walking through and talking about their neighbourhood, both neighbourhood residents and users talked about the limited green space in the neighbourhood. In the following example, a user stated 'genuine' green spaces were not available in the immediate surroundings of the workplace:

...As I live in [city outside of Brussels], I arrive at the North Station by train, I come here on foot. No green spaces, nothing. (...) I arrive here and I stay here during the day. I usually eat a sandwich around the corner, so no green spaces. (...) Then I go back home. (U5)

Participants described their surrounding neighbourhood as "*a concrete landscape*" (R4) or "*a stone desert*" (U11). Furthermore, residents described certain places we passed by in our walk in physical or bodily terms related to disease: "*urban cancer*", "*one big open wound*", "*a dead space*" (R4), *abscess* (R1):

This whole neighbourhood is like a kind of tissue in our body where the blood does not circulate well. There is no blood flow, and then it gets an ugly color and then it becomes a kind of negative ... It actually dies off completely (R4).

The same resident mentioned for example the poorly conceived design of a particular playground we passed by in the walk-along. Although participants saw its potential, the available 'green' spaces did not require their needs.

Look at how many squares we've already walked by, with a lot of potential. There are certainly many possibilities, but it takes vision and a bit of courage…(…) You cannot say there isn't enough space, there is plenty of space. But look, in all this space here…that's what the kids get.

(picture taken by participant R4)

The lack of qualitative green spaces was part of a larger feeling that needs in their neighbourhood were forgotten and neglected by the city council. The resident gave the example of the city council's response to their request for more green space:

As a neighbourhood, we asked for greening and this is what we got. I'm going to take a picture of this. That's their idea of green... Just because there's a bit of bush in a concrete container doesn't mean the people are... It must always be qualitative. (R4)

(picture taken by participant R4)

This lack of green space was part of larger urban transformations. Several participants guided us to green spaces that had disappeared, and expressed the changes they perceived in the urban landscape in the last decade as *"really sad"* (R2, R6). One example mentioned by several participants is the Pacheco site, a place that went through numerous historical transformations and where recently as part of a current large construction project, a great number of trees had been cut due to leaks in an underlying parking. This evoked a lot of resistance from residents. Another example mentioned by a neighbourhood user was the impact of renovation and new building projects on the disappearing of green, and more particularly biodiversity loss:

The biggest biotope here are those buildings. And what I do is listen to what's on it. (...) What we used to have here a lot were swifts. (...) They breed in the cracks of buildings. We have lost them because of all the

renovations that have happened here. This whole neighbourhood has been greatly upgraded in the last 10 to 15 years and you see that we have lost those swifts for the largest part. That's a shame. (R11)

While housing and/or offices are taking more and more place in the neighbourhood, this is not accompanied by public infrastructure and space for its residents, for example playgrounds or benches. One neighbourhood resident explained that these urban transformations particularly impacted the residents, and might not be noticed by passersby:

We are more and more enclosed by buildings. We can feel it. When you [the interviewer] walk through the neighbourhood, it's easier to accept it, because you haven't experienced it before. But I feel like I've always lived with more space, and now there are even more buildings all around me… (R2)

3.2. Three discourses on the value of Urban Green Space

Although both residents and users pointed out the importance of urban green space in the neighbourhood and its current lack, green (space) was valued for different reasons. Throughout the narratives we identified three different visions on *why* green was valuable and *how* that caused different perceptions and use. These visions differed on the type of green that was designated, its purposes and impact, the way to deal with it, whose interest it served and who was involved. These three visions concerned: (1) green as a source of enjoyment (2) green as a vital necessity for survival (3) green as a policy-driven image tool. In each vision we identified different perceptions on the role of neighbourhood users related to green space, which will be discussed in the next section. It is important to state that these visions do not relate to the narrative of one participant, but that within participants' narratives, these different visions could be combined.

TABLE 2. Three discourses on the value of urban green space

	Urban green as a source of enjoyment	Urban green as a vital necessity for survival	Urban green as a policy-driven tool
Which type of green is valuable?	Park, pocket park, squares with benches, water fountains, playgrounds…	Not just one type, but all types of green are connected: small initiatives (green façades, collective garden project,…), trees, water,…	Green that is mentioned in policy plans (e.g. policy plan to increase biodiversity by investing in trees or to reduce ecological footprint by recycling)
What is the purpose of green space? type of activities	Green offers space for reading, playing with children, sitting on a bench, meeting others, consuming, drinking or eating	Green offers life: cooling, calm, food, shelter,…	Green allows to meet policy requirements to reduce environmental impact and can increase the image, can serve as an image tool
Why do we need green? ultimate impact	Enhance quality of life	Survival of humans and non-human species in urban space Increase bio-diversity	Receive eco-label Thick the box of policy

How to deal with green space?	Green should be designed in an accessible, safe, "clean" way	Green should be defended, preserved, increased	Green should be labelled (ecolabel, environmental management,…) and regulated
For whose interest?	Neighbourhood residents and users	All types of humans and non-human species are connected in an ecological network	Organisations, companies
By who ?	Investments city Residents should be involved Individual/private initiatives	Everybody should be involved: a moral obligation, not an individual choice Commons	Organisations, companies Environmental management

3.2.1. Urban green as a source of enjoyment

The first idea concerned neighbourhood green space as an open, accessible, inviting place. According to this discourse, the aim of urban green space is to enhance quality of life of neighbourhood residents and users. It should be a space that can be used by different groups. Participants mention for example older people and children, but also commuters and tourists. It should be a place that feels safe, where there is social control. Participants mentioned different activities: playing, relaxing, sitting on a bench, meeting people, eating a sandwich, or merely passing by for pleasure, as illustrated by a commuter:

I commute every day and I just said, I actually wanted to start the walk at the park. That's the place where I always enter the neighbourhood first. Unlike many of my colleagues who come by train, they take the straightest away. That's a herd of officials who... For me it is 3 or 4 minutes longer walking, but so much more pleasant. (U8)

Urban green space could also encompass commercial activities, like bars, restaurants, shops, … and serve to attract customers and tourists. Furthermore, two residents also stated that offering space to relax and enjoy could lower criminality rates and 'tranquilise' people:

That whole precious green plain there, you have to give relaxation to people. Give them space to play, to romp around, to cool off and to walk... whatever, but give them that space. And that's money, too. People are going to eat an ice cream, eat something, drink something... (…). And you create a relaxed atmosphere, people who are calmer. So, I think it's super important.(R4)

Green space should be accessible, safe, clean, and well-designed with an appropriate infrastructure tailored for its users. On the contrary, private green space, green space surrounded by barriers or green space with a lack of benches and playgrounds were not seen by participants as qualitative: *green should be used (U8).* Examples of green were parks, pocket parks, squares with benches, water fountains, playgrounds…

Accessible and inviting green space was not only of interest for residents, but also for users. One neighbourhood user, working for 25 years in the neighbourhood, stated, although users and residents might have a mutual disinterest in each other, they have a mutual interest for the neighbourhood: "*both as a resident and as an employee, you have every interest in it being a pleasant*

neighbourhood". (U8) Green space becomes an important element in well-being for living and working in the neighbourhood.

An accessible and attractive place, however, also implied the exclusion of certain 'unwanted' groups. Some residents associated *"homeless people"* with nuisance and unsafe feelings. Within this discourse, other types of uses of public space, for example as a shelter or sleeping space, by 'others' make green and/or public space less attractive and accessible for residents and users:
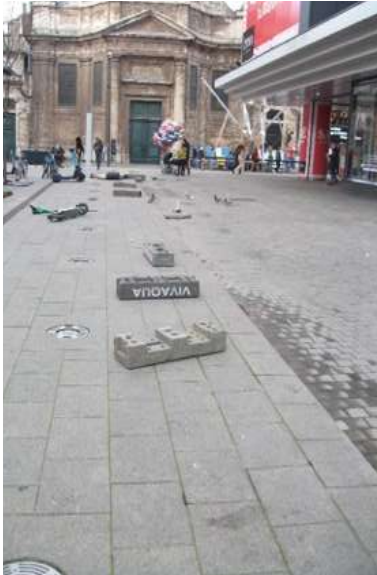
And I'd say take away those stupid canopies. Because before you know it, there are people underneath it, which never attracts much good in a big city with a poverty problem. (...) it gives an unsafe feeling, people start using it as a place to sleep (...) let something green grow against it, that immediately creates a completely different feeling than what it is now, this grey, large, deserted, space. That doesn't attract or invite anyone. (R4)

(Picture taken by participant R4

Who should be involved? Participants mentioned the responsibility of the city council and public services. According to some participants, residents should also be involved in decision-making processes and the design of qualitative public spaces, as they experience the neighbourhood every day:

I don't have a problem with pocket parks, but then I feel like I'm a thief in my own city. Why give crumbs to the people of Brussels? No, give them real parks. Take a piece of public space and give it to them. (R4)

Some residents also mentioned the responsibility of individual neighbourhood users, like schools or large shopping centers, in making the public space more green, attractive and accessible.

3.2.2. <u>Urban green space as a vital necessity for survival</u>

In the second discourse, the aim of urban green space is not to just enhance quality of life, but a necessity for the survival of human and different non-human species in the city. Green space is necessary to tackle current ecological (and associated social and health) problems in urban contexts: air pollution, sound pollution, loss in biodiversity, social isolation of older people, … Green offers life and survival for different species, such as cooling, calm, food, shelter. One resident explained the rationale behind her involvement in a community garden project in the neighbourhood that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic:

It came with Covid. I was truly shocked during that time with everything that was happening. I already had this sensitivity, but I connected the dots between different things that were happening: the loss of biodiversity, the circulation of viruses, the transmission of viruses from animals to humans... all of it, and I thought to myself, 'No, but we're going about it all wrong' (...) I realised that something had to be done. We need to promote biodiversity corridors, add more green spaces, and reduce the amount of concrete. (R7)

Participants expressed that green space should not only be defended and preserved but should also be increased in the urban landscape. This, however, not always corresponds to current policy and decision-making processes:

We feel that we have no say in it, that's clear. Now we react more and more during public inquiries when there are new projects, but (...) it is a classic problem. We don't have enough time, resources, knowledge... I believe that citizens really need to mobilize around the little nature and land still natural to preserve it. I think that the first thing to do, is to preserve. After we can compensate, but it is useless to compensate further in the forest, we live here, we do not live in the forest. (R7)

This discourse takes on not only a human perspective, but also includes other living species in the neighbourhood. One respondent stated non-human species should be granted more rights and space in urban neighourhoods:

You can also give these organisms rights and make it easier for them through small interventions. Just like you can make it easier for certain people by putting benches (...). Plant trees wherever possible (...), create green roofs. (...) This can already provide many organisms with the opportunity to survive. It will always remain an extreme environment. You have to look at it as a kind of stone deser (...). (U11)

Providing more space could begin on a very small scale. One participant observed for example how different species could survive when human intervention was reduced:

(Picture taken by interviewer)

... Look here. The sweeper doesn't come here. He can't get that far. Then those grasses get a chance to grow. (...)and their seeds will then feed sparrows. It makes the difference between life and survival, disappearing and still being able to stay. Those little spots like this one. (U11)

Key in this discourse was a network-perspective. Participants perceived green as a network: spaces, species and activities were all interconnected. Respondents stated it was important to make connections between these different green spaces: *"Even some greenery against a façade… every little bit helps" (R1)*. All types of spaces and activities that allow species to survive were important in this discourse: from cracks in buildings or weeds between the pavement to green rooftops or collective garden projects. Participants valued trees not only for their cooling effect in concrete surroundings, but

trees also had an emotional value. In the example of the Pacheco-site, where numerous trees have been cut down:

This is kind of a dark chapter in urban development. Because this is actually a corridor of biodiversity, stretching from the botanical garden up to the Royal Park. When you think about it, when they tell you "we will cut down 400 trees to repair the leaks in the parking lot below", you can't help but wonder, what is the order of priorities?" (R7)

This network-view also counted for the way green is dealt with and who should be involved. Participants mentioned that different problems were related with each other and should not be dealt with separately. Furthermore, it was important to build collectives: *We must also do it as a collective. For example me alone, it does not work.(R7).* This collective could include the city as a partner, but just as well the corporate responsibility of private companies and organisations. Green should become a common responsibility. Participants stated they could take up a more active role as neighbourhood residents, but they should not be alone responsible for managing and sustaining urban green and should be supported by the city. This need for a network-approach evoked the image of the neighbourhood as an ecosystem, where different entities were connected,co-dependent and worked together.

3.2.3.   Urban green as a policy-driven tool

In the third discourse green was a policy-driven tool that could be managed and measured. Green space was part of an environmental policy, concretized through official ecolabels, organisational policy like corporate responsibility or environmental management within a cost and benefit ratio.

The aim was to meet policy requirements to reduce environmental impact of companies and institutions through *small actions (U3)* like recycling and waste management and investments on the level of their building (U5), or to enhance biodiversity through small initiatives like bird nests or subsidizing trees. Green as a policy-tool can also serve to improve the image. One of the participants, employee at a public institution, explained:

it means that we must have an analysis of our environmental impact. electricity, water, CO2, waste... We recycle almost everything: cigarette butts (...), batteries, caps,...We have a component for each type of energy. (...)We got the Axa Award 'Corporate responsibility' and a nomination to Europe.(...) We didn't win, but it means that it works relatively well. (U3)

Green is quantified and measured and can increase or decrease according to the interests. An employee at a private company explained their growing implication in reducing the environmental impact through earning an ecolabel:

We are the first [type of company] with an ecolabel in Brussels. So we started with little things: sorting trash, removing plastic, buying recycled paper, offering bike rental... Many things were added and then we received an ecolabel and so we made even more effort for the environment. (U5)

Green was related to financial investments and related to a cost-and-benefit ratio. Depending on the initiative of one employee or the decision of the management, when there was no more budget available or other priorities came along, the ecolabel system could be stopped:

Although we stop the system, we will continue with environmental management, but homemade. Not very official, because it's expensive. (U3)

However, not all small-scale initiatives were considered as part of this policy, as some actions could offer a nice image but not contribute to a "real" environmental impact:

We can grow six salads, but it has no impact at the level of what we offer to our customers. There are [type of company] that have beehives on their roofs and some rooftop vegetable gardens, but again, it's more for the image. I'm not saying it's greenwashing, but it's to give a green image. But in terms of proportions, look at the products they use in the kitchen of their gardens, it's not even one percent. It can be to raise awareness too, but it doesn't really have an impact. (U5)

Without a "real" impact, green risks to be used as "*urban furniture*" (R7) that can easily be placed and removed or that can serve as an image presented on plans without actual realisation. It serves a green image which renders the place economically more valuable.

In terms of participation, this was the most distant and passive posture, as green could merely be a financial contribution. Initiatives remained individual and depended on the companies' or institutions' interests and priorities. People involved in green were designated as "*stakeholders*" (U3), although in practice, working together presented a lot of obstacles. One participant stated for example they needed to follow regulations and have the approval of residents of the building owned in co-propriety when trying to implement actions in their biodiversity plan. The respondent stated :

It's not easy, if you want to do environmental work (…) We had several projects blocked because they are not interested. (…) The project (…) was to make neighbourhood compost and the owner did not even vote. They laughed. Although we have a technical service that could maintain this compost, so without any bad smell …. We are limited what we can do. (U3)

According to this participant, their initiatives could go further and be more effective if they did not need to ask permission. Initiatives thus remained individual on the level of the building or the activities of the organisation.

4. Discussion

In this study, we focused on the way residents and neighbourhood users experience and value urban green space in their neighbourhoods. In our results, we first presented the general perception of urban green in these neighbourhoods and second, perceptions on the value of urban green space. We identified three different ways in which green space could be valued: as a source of enjoyment, as a necessity to survival and as a policy-driven tool. These different visions implied different types of green,

types of uses and decision-making processes. In this discussion we present some of the tensions between these different perceptions on the value of urban green when considering our results in a care and an environmental justice perspective.

4.1. Measuring the availability of green quantitatively falls short: green experienced as 'uncaring'

As a starting point, we found that both residents and users lacked urban green space in the neighbourhood. Although statistically, 78% to 100% of the neighbourhood's population lives in a distance of less than 300m from an accessible and public green space (Bisa.Brussels, 2012), the participants described a limited availability of qualitative urban green space in their neighbourhood, using terms of disease (e.g. "concrete cancer", "dead space", "abscess") or the feeling of being more and more enclosed by buildings. This shows that objective assessments do not always reflect subjective experiences of the people concerned. Quantification and measurement of green space as part of policy overshadows the quality of green and the way it is experienced by the first people concerned. This need to listen to residents and how they experience their own environment counts not only for policymakers and urban planners, but also for researchers, as their work has an impact on policymaking and framing what the 'problems' are and how these should be treated.

4.2. Urban green space is an important caring space, but for who?

Although green spaces are often presented as important drivers for inclusion, they are also drivers of exclusion. In the discourse of green as an enjoyment, green is presented as an open, accessible and safe meeting space that contributes to the quality of life of urban dwellers. However, it only serves a certain type of city-users. On one hand, to some users, green space was not accessible and thus not perceived as a relevant question. One of our participants, a service-user with a visual disability stated reaching green spaces was difficult and that our questions would be more relevant to people living in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, our participants mentioned certain users, "*homeless people*", that were not wanted in these places. Koprowska et al. (2020) consider the spatial exclusion of 'unwelcome' groups in their study on the use urban green space from the perspective of people experiencing homelessness. From an environmental justice perspective, green spaces are crucial for fulfilling their basic needs, and therefore, should be equipped with necessary facilities like showers and toilets (Koprowska et al. 2020). Although the discourse of green as enjoyment also promotes well-maintained infrastructure, certain users do not fit the image of the 'urban dweller' that can enjoy green space. Furthermore, enhacing the "quality of life" does not always equal fulfilling basic needs. This questions the type of uses and users urban green space is shaped for and by.

Furthermore, urban greening initiatives can be drivers of gentrification, so-called eco-gentrification or green gentrification, which can on its turn negatively impact the health and well-being of marginalized and excluded groups (Jelks et al., 2021). Displaying green space as an inclusive space through labels and policy can underestimate these negative and exclusionary effects of urban green. Mullenbach (2022), in a study on the discourse of urban park development in the USA, investigated for example how the discourse of 'parks as social healers' is promoted by urban planners with the support of private foundations, downplaying gentrification effects while exaggerating social benefits and its contribution to greater trust and civic engagement. We therefore argue that there should be more attention to equity and justice dimensions of urban green space.

4.3. Urban green space beyond a human-centered benefit: green space as a 'connector'

We identified a tension between the vision of green space as something useful or a tool in policy-driven discourses, and green space as means of survival, with an important emotional dimension. For example in the notion of *ecosystem service* referring to the goods and services provided by ecosystems to humans*,* urban green space is studied as a benefit to citizens (Kabisch, 2015). Based on our findings, more than a benefit to humans, urban green spaces connect various species and spaces that rely on one another in a complex system. In this vision, trees, plants, animals and insects are entirely part of the neighbourhood and should be provided the required space. Therefore, green spaces cannot be seen or treated as mere "*urban furniture*" (R7). Simply adding or replacing them would not suffice as they require a systemic approach that connects diverse species and spaces, and that accommodates diverse needs and uses of residents and users. In this perspective, 'wild' and unmanaged or uncontrolled green spaces should exist, just as well as qualitative and accessible green spaces that can be used by different groups of residents. According to participants, urban green space can only be treated as a connected space, connecting the different spaces with each other. but were also places of connection : the simple fact of sitting on a bench or looking at a tree allowed to share a space and make *bridging* connections.

4.4. Consider urban green space from an environmental justice perspective

Policymakers and planners may focus on increasing greenery in cities without considering potential negative consequences for neighbourhood residents and users. Therefore, we argue to consider the three dimensions of environmental justice as presented in the introduction, not as accessory but as guiding principles. On the distributional level, green should be fairly distributed in the city and should be a qualitative green space. On the procedural level, instead of seeing participation as an obligatory extra or a mere thick-the-box, the engagement and knowledge of residents and local users experiencing the space every day should be acknowledged from the start. Our results show for example how residents perceive urban green as a holistic system, connecting different spaces in the city but also different problems. Third, on the interactional level, it is important to consider the different needs and uses of

humans and non-humans, and to examine the connections that occur within and through urban green spaces.

An environmental justice perspective, however, is not limited to these three dimensions. Our results also showed the emotional dimension of urban green space in the way people in the neighbourhood connect to it, and the way it influences different aspects of health and well-being. Following Anguelovski (2013), environmental justice should also include a vision on holistic community health, taking into account both physical and psychological dimensions of environmental health. The right to urban community environment and health should include a focus on the way residents 'make place' and relate to their environment, addressing issues of trauma and loss in the neighbourhood. Taking into account this perspective of environmental justice, also including the three dimensions, could lead to more sustainable solutions in facing environmental challenges in cities and to more qualitative urban green space.

4.5. Limitations and pathways for future research

Our findings should be considered in light of the following limitations. First, limitations concern the walk-along methodology as such, the conditions and necessary equipment (Carpiano, 2009). Logistically speaking, following an interview guide with questions, audio recording the interview while taking photographs along the way, was a difficult endeavor. Furthermore, while walking, we sometimes crossed other people the person knew, which sometimes changed the course of the interview. As confirmed by Ross et al. (2009), in the audio recording of our interviews, some parts were difficult to hear, overruled by the sounds of the passing cars, construction works or ambulance sirens. This however was, as pointed out by our participants, also an interesting illustration of sound pollution, and thus also part of the data. Another limitation, also confirmed by Van Cauwenberg et al. (2012), was that the study was conducted in winter, the degree to which similar results would emerge in spring or summer is unclear.

Second, limitations concern the participants. Most of our participants were already involved or interested in urban green issues or in the broader MaN'Aige project. Furthermore, we noted that conducting a walk-along interview was not always suitable for the participant. In one case, the person did not want to do a walk-along interview and asked to be accompanied on the way home. In the case of a participant with a visual impairment, the walk was short and we continued the discussion in a local bar. This shows us that the walk-along method can be exclusionary and only include the people that could fit within the frame and topic that we had proposed. Furthermore, our study counted a limited number of participants and data saturation was difficult to establish. According to Farrugia (2019), the number of participants in qualitative research cannot be fixed before the start of the study but if new interviews do not produce new themes, one can talk about saturation. Hennink & Kaiser (2022) in their

systematic review stated that saturation could be reached between nine and 17 in-depth interviews, but that most studies had a relatively homogenous group of participants and narrowly defined objectives. As in this qualitative study, research questions and goals were not clearly set in advance, it was difficult to state whether data saturation was reached. Furthermore, the walk-along method is often combined and completed with other methods (Carpiano, 2009). In the case of this study, the data collection was part of a larger co-creative research in the two neighbourhoods.

Further research using the walk-along method on urban green space issues, especially when the walk-along method is combined with other methods or is part of a broader co-creative or community-based research, would allow to embed research in neighbourhoods and gain better understandings of the way residents and users relate to their environment, to acknowledge the expertise and knowledge that is already present in neighbourhoods, and to take into account urban action and community struggles. Not only a spatial perspective, but also a community health perspective, taking into account how residents relate to their place and 'make space' could enrich the environmental justice debate (Anguelovski, 2013).

4.6. Conclusion

Urban green spaces have often been studied for their positive impacts on health and well-being. However, a critical examination of the provision of and access to these spaces through an environmental justice lens also reveals exclusionary mechanisms that perpetuate inequalities within cities. This article investigated the value ascribed to urban green space from the perspectives of residents and users in two neighbourhoods in inner-city Brussels. A common thread emerged in the narratives, with participants frequently expressing the green spaces in their neighbourhoods as limited and contested spaces. Although valued by our participants, distinct perceptions were observed on the value of urban green spaces. We identify three overarching perspectives: green as a source of enjoyment, green as a vital necessity for survival, and green as a policy-driven tool. These divergent perspectives shape understandings of green's benefits, influencing the types of green spaces that are valued, permissible activities within them, and their management approaches. This study emphasizes the substantial impact of these perspectives on the perception of green's role within neighbourhoods and the shaping of urban green spaces through policy and political discourses. We argue that considering a perspective of environmental justice enriches debates on urban green space, adding a critical reflection on exclusion and inequalities. Furthermore, we argue for the importance of including the perceptions of residents and local users, their knowledge and experiences of the environment in research and policy on urban green.

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INTER-SECTION 4. How to make sense out of a messy process? A collective analysis

Co-creative research is a messy and dispersed journey. It is challenging to make sense of it, but it is important to do it together. The collective analysis of MaN'Aige took place in different sessions, spread over four months. The different sessions each covered a different topic concerning our research: connections that contribute to a caring neighbourhood, the co-creative process, the role of neighbourhood users,…

The collective analysis consisted of different, iterative, steps.

The first step was to **gather all the material**: transcripts from monthly meetings, interviews, pictures, reports, posters, post-its,…

The second step was to allow the space for co-researchers to **explain their experience**. The others listened and asked questions.


The third step was an **iterative process between reading and coding** individually and analysing collectively. Each co-researcher read parts of the material individually and marked 'codes', topics that were recurrent, that struck them, that were significant according to them to answer the research

questions. We then collected the different codes and discussed them together. We sat together in smaller groups to discuss the codes, to make them more 'thick'. This was discussed again in the larger group. Sometimes, this caused us to get lost again in messiness, like in the pictures below.

Based on the discussions, we assembled **a general code list**. We again coded individually to add elements to this list. In the next step, we voted for the most interesting topics and selected some of the codes to work further on, again in smaller groups. Finally we arrived at a certain number of topics in relation to the research question, that formed the basis for the end-report, a cahier published by Kenniscentrum WWZ[2].
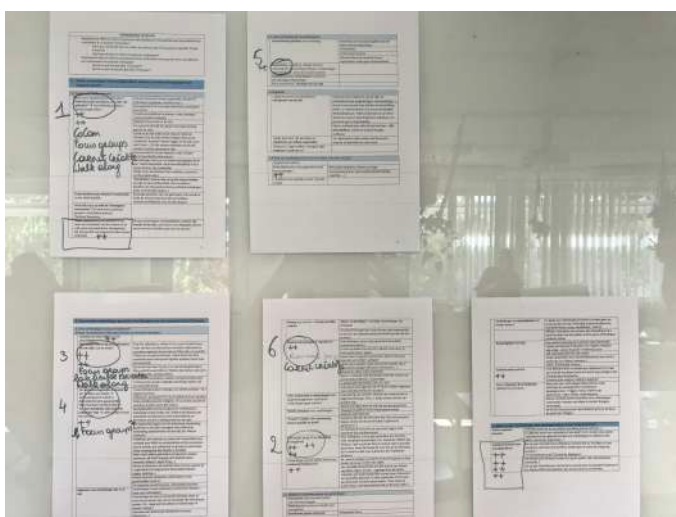
Personally, this collective analysis was an important learning process for me as a researcher. This process taught me the importance of working together and dividing roles, it required trust in co-researchers and letting go of expectations and control over the research outcomes. It also showed the importance of creativity in analysis processes.

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[2] https://www.kenniscentrumwwz.be/cahier-de-verborgen-spelers-een-zorgzame-buurt

DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 7. Discussion

This chapter presents the general discussion of the PhD dissertation. Section 1 will give an overview of the main findings in relation to the two research goals, leading to practical implications and building blocks for policy and practice on caring neighbourhoods and co-creative research. Section 2 will present overarching conclusions that bring the two research goals together and open-ended ideas that invite to further exploration. Section 3 will present several limitations and critical reflections on the PhD process including suggestions for future research. The chapter ends with a general conclusion.

1. Answering Research Goal 1: Understand, experiment, and evaluate how to realise co-creative research in practice

"The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated." – James Baldwin

This section will present the main findings in relation to the first research goal; **understand experiment and evaluate how to realise co-creative research in practice**. This section is mainly based on the findings presented in Chapter 2, 3 and 4, and merge my practice-based knowledge on co-creative research: interrogating other researchers and professionals on their experiences (Chapter 3), accounting for my own experience in being involved in a co-creative research and the reflections on my own positionality as an academic researcher (Chapter 2) and the reflections on our experience in MaN'Aige among the group of co-researchers (Chapter 4).

1.1. Tension between the principles of co-creative research and its practice

1.1.1. The need for an account of lived experiences

When entering the MaN'Aige project, co-creative research was a novel concept for me and my fellow co-researchers. Although the aim of gaining knowledge collectively to bring about change sounded promising, getting started in the neighbourhood was a different story. The Co-create program's framework went through constant changes, starting with an emphasis on urban resilience and 'crisis' response, but later shifting towards social and ecological transitions. The theoretical perspective of a co-creative approach was only introduced at a later stage of the process. Therefore, at the start of MaN'Aige, we wanted to gain a better understanding of the concept and how it was applied in real-life practices from the perspective of those who experienced it. Initially, our interest was driven by practical concerns, gaining insights on what we should be attentive to when starting our own project. However, as we delved

deeper into co-creative research as a lived experience, tensions emerged that became prominent in the project. It increasingly became an issue that I wanted to investigate further in this PhD.

This investigation started from the tension experienced between its principles and practices. Chapter 3 indicated that **co-creation has become a buzzword** among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers (Voorberg et al., 2015). Also as an approach to research, co-creation is promoted for its potential of responding to complex problems and direct inclusion. Three main principles of co-creative research were identified: (1) societal transformation (2) collaboration between academic and non-academic partners and (3) genuine shared ownership and empowerment. In practice, however, scholars and practitioners warn for the common use of the term for initiatives that do not seem to realize co-creative principles. Instead, co-creation as an approach to knowledge production has gained a taken-for-granted positive value and holds a promise for democratic practices, leaving out of account challenges in the power-knowledge relationship (Phillips & Napan, 2016). Although challenges in academic and non-academic power distribution might be discussed, research is mainly focused on improving co-creative practices. A thorough questioning of why these practices fail to realise principles of societal change, deep collaboration and empowerment, is lacking and a view on the tensions at play in these processes remains underexplored (Turnhout et al., 2020).

Therefore, in the first three chapters of this PhD I aimed to offer a practical view on co-creative research as a lived experience, drawing from practices of researchers and professionals involved in different co-creative research projects in Brussels (Chapter 3) and from the experience of co-researchers in MaN'Aige (Chapter 2 and 4). In the next sections, I will first give insights into the challenges related to power imbalances in the implementation of co-creative research and second present possible building blocks for co-creative research.

1.1.2. From describing challenges to analysing power imbalances shaped by logics

Challenges related to power imbalances were experienced on different levels and illustrated a tension between co-creative principles and their enactment in real-life practices.

In Chapter 4 I described two challenges drawn from our own lived experience as co-researchers in MaN'Aige. The first challenge concerned **managing a tension between action and research**, between what we named 'riding along opportunities' and 'going back'. The project journey contained different phases of convergence and divergence that alternated. Weaving together action-oriented goals and a research approach was challenging. A research approach did not always correspond to the expectations of neighbourhood participants and project partners to 'move on', implement concrete changes in the neighbourhood and have a genuine impact. Second, it was challenging to **deal with**

discontinuity. Not only among neighbourhood participants but also among project partners, presence in the neighbourhood was not continuous. There was also a discontinuity in the exchange of information and administrative funding process.

In Chapter 3, I discussed power imbalances experienced from the perspective of researchers and professionals on a project and research level. I defined these as a **project-funding** logics and **academic research** logics that inhibit the realization of co-creative principles. On the level of the project-funding logics, (1) processes are defined by a limited project-based time frame and resources (2) directly concerned people are not involved in the project design, and (3) parameters need to be fixed from the start such as composition of project consortium and financial distribution. On the level of academic research logics, (1) a research-driven approach was not compatible with an action-driven involvement of participants, (2) research modalities were exclusive and not adapted to precarious situations, (3) power imbalances and unequal positions were perpetuated by academic research and funding institutions. On one hand, linear, limited, and inflexible project-funding logics create the necessity for project research coordinators to prove results and effectiveness (Turnhout et al., 2020). The **risk for obligatory and instrumental participation** and to achieve high numbers of "involvement" to meet funding expectations, does not correspond to the emancipatory principle of co-creative research. On the other hand, research methods, settings, and institutions in academic research logics, maintain **unequal positions between academics and other partners**, excluding people in precarious situations that would actually benefit most from the research. These power inequities exist in the interrelationship between academics and participants, but also on the level of knowledge values. On the level of interrelationships, academics not only have power and legitimacy through their institutional affiliation, but also embody power and privilege from their own class, education, racial/ethnic backgrounds, or other identity positions (Muhammad et al., 2015). Power inequities also play out at the level of knowledge production, where academic knowledge is valued higher than other types of knowledge. Utter et al. (2021), for example, warn against the appropriation by academics of local and indigenous knowledge by calling it "new" or "innovative". In Chapter 2, I explained the discomfort I experienced of being involved in co-creative research as an academic researcher dealing with different expectations.

The challenges of combining action-oriented goals and research-driven approaches and dealing with discontinuous participation discussed in Chapter 4, reflected the same incompatibility between co-creative research practices on one hand, and a project-funding and academic research logic on the other. Co-creative practices could lead to exclusions and reproducing power imbalances, instead of countering them. The challenges were also confirmed by the literature, where issues related to unstable participation, trust-building and power relations among academics and non-academic participants in participatory approaches are often described (e.g. Bourke, 2009; Egid et al., 2021; Twalo, 2019). However, instead of formulating a response to these experienced challenges as a 'toolkit' on how to

better conduct or implement co-creative practices, I aimed to present some possible building blocks that would allow to question these challenges.

1.2. Possible building blocks for more genuine co-creative research practices

The challenges encountered in co-creative research are important learning opportunities, and although these were not all experienced in the same way by different people involved and other challenges might have been experienced that were not presented in this dissertation, I consider them as the main focal point of our analysis. Based on the challenges presented in the previous section, in this section I will identify different building blocks that could contribute to more genuine co-creative practices. These building blocks, lessons learned, or points of attention reflect on the tension between the ideals of co-creative research and its practices. Rather than providing a toolkit on how to implement co-creative research, I will present these building blocks as open-ended ideas on what to be attentive to when being involved in co-creative or other similar research practices.

1.2.1. Acknowledge non-linearity: co-creative research is a circular and reflexive process

In literature, the frame for co-creative research is ambiguous and sometimes presented as a linear process following 'classic' academic research steps. In the case of MaN'Aige for example, the research process was initially based on the model for co-creative research by Bonney et al. (2009), presented in the introduction of the dissertation. This model however imagines co-creative research in a linear way: participants are added to a 'classic' academic research process, from constructing a research question to disseminating findings. Instead of following a linear process with different consecutive steps, co-creative research requires **a different kind of process that is circular and diffuse**. Although different models exist, for example the model of Participatory Action Research that proposes cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, linear thinking is still very present in research and funding institutions that support co-creative or participatory research. The non-linear and circular character of co-creative processes should be acknowledged as well on the level of academic research as in project-funding structures.

On the level of academic research, co-creative practices **question the linearity of academic research processes** and call for a different view on research that **embeds reflexivity within the process**. Although needs assessment and the definition of a research problem is often assigned to a first step of a process, we argue that these should be reevaluated and readapted throughout the entire process, as the people involved and their needs change throughout the course of a project. This requires a **continuous reflection that is embedded within the process,** which allows to critically interrogate the course of the project while it is ongoing. As explained in Chapter 4, an illustration of this critical interrogation was

the discussion on the informed consent in MaN'Aige. Although it was intended as a guarantee to protect participants, it instead caused feelings of distrust among neighbourhood participants. They felt 'invaded' by the research, did not feel concerned and were critical of the inaccessible language. Presenting the informed consent as an agreement between researcher and researched at the beginning of the process, is not possible in a co-creative research setting. It instead perpetuates a distinction and implies that the frame is completely decided upon by the researcher. Following philosopher Vinciane Despret, the intention of guaranteeing anonymity can paradoxically withdraw the participant from any control and ownership over the research process and data. It "assigns" participants to a research category, de-possessing them from the research process (Pecqueux et al., 2022). In a co-creative research setting, the informed consent could however be an important instrument for a negotiation of the boundaries, conditions and control of the research between participants throughout the process.

On the level of project-funding structures, in Chapter 3 we suggest that funding institutions and programs should **question the standardized linear, limited and inflexible 'project-funding' logics**. Literature highlights that program initiators and funders should provide enough time and resources for trust-building and the construction of research problems (Sherriff et al., 2019), especially because power imbalances present from the preliminary phases have a major influence on further developments (Phillips et al., 2018). Also, funding agencies could allow more flexibility in financial distribution and partnerships over the course of the research processes. Although too much flexibility in the process could also lead to feelings of "not getting somewhere" experienced by co-researchers, it also required **a different evaluation of processes and of what is considered as a 'successful' outcome.** Even though researchers and academics might want to present co-creative research processes in a structured way, where following the steps of research would be a guarantee for a 'successful' research, there is a need to acknowledge different criteria of success. Kemmis et al. (2014) state for example that:

> "*for critical participatory action research, the criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their **practices**, their **understandings** of their practices, and the **situations** in which they practice.*" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p.18-19).

I will elaborate further on co-creative research as a transformative practice in the next section.

1.2.2. Value 'small' changes: co-creative research is a transformative learning process

Co-creative research aims for societal transformation, but also transforms the individuals and organisations involved. Being involved in co-creative research leads to change in practices, roles and positions. Transformation is not just a goal, but is an essential part of the process.

In Chapter 3, I explained how transformations could emerge by acknowledging tensions within the process. Although power differentials, for example between academics and participants and their respective knowledge, exist and are almost unavoidable in co-creative research, these should be **made explicit, exposed, and discussed** within the process (Greenhalgh et al., 2016). Adding reflexivity, questioning positions and legitimacy could avoid reproducing systemic inequities in research with community members (Egid et al., 2021; Janes, 2016; Muhammad et al., 2015). According to Phillips & Napan (2016), adopting a critical, **reflexive gaze on tensions** at play within the process could allow a genuine change of practices. Our findings also show the need for funding and academic institutions to **value not only research outcomes, but also the process as a transformative practice**. On the level of 'small' interactions and postures, co-creative processes can transform established researcher-participant or professional-beneficiary power dynamics, which allowed to "*act on the collective level, through individuals*". Our results showed that understanding the impact of the co-creative research process itself required valuing small-scale interactions:

> *It is so different from what we are used to do in this society where we plan and foresee everything, where we need to have something visual and tangible so that it has weight. Whereas when we are in the human sphere it is sometimes the small exchanges that change everything and that are not necessarily visible to the naked eye but that we must be able to value.*

But how can we value **other ways of 'doing research" than usual**?

In MaN'Aige, doing co-creative research was more about **adopting a critical and inquiring attitude and moving from an individual to a collective concern**. It was important to value the contribution of different knowledge types, such as an emotional connection to the neighbourhood, a feeling of engagement or a network. As explained in Chapter 4, we drew upon different participatory methods. We experimented with '**carnet créatifs'**, creative sessions using individual sketchbooks and collective discussions. Working in these sessions not only reinforced connections among participants, gaining insights in personal motivations to be part of this project, but going beyond words also deepened our understanding of research concepts. Furthermore, we experimented with **walk-along methods**, in Chapter 6, which allowed us to interact and connect with the neighbourhood space through the process of walking. Stories, experiences and events were literally and figuratively contextualized but also collaboratively constituted through the process of walking (Garcia et al., 2012). However, more than discussing the benefits of a particular method, I wish to emphasize why rethinking and experimenting different methods was important. In Chapter 3, I explained the importace of creating a context that allows participants with different knowledge types to **"take place"**, physically through a safe and accessible research setting, and symbolically by using accessible language and valuing participation (e.g. through remuneration or social recognition). This, however, requires first to be genuinely listened to. In the next section, I will further elaborate on the importance of being present and listening before considering participation or involvement.

1.2.3. <u>Before participation: being present and listening</u>

Although in its principles co-creative processes require long-term collaborations, in practice these processes are characterized by disruptions and discontinuity. Chapter 4 highlighted different gaps and moments of discontinuity in the MaN'Aige project journey and a structural distinction between funding body, project partners and neighbourhood actors from the preliminary phases. This made genuine shared ownership, in budgetary questions or decision-making processes, difficult or even led to refusal of participation.

In the MaN'Aige practice, however, even before talking about 'reaching' or 'involving' participants, it was important to consider our own position and our ability to be present. As one of the co-researchers explained, she shifted attitude from asking 'do you want to participate?' towards 'how can we support you?'. Instead of considering participation as an individual responsibility of participants, we aimed to view it on a structural level, taking into account the **conditions that (did not) allow us to be present**. Not only external circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic, but also project-funding and academic research logics made it difficult to be genuinely present and listen to local needs in the neighbourhood. Paid co-researchers in our project had only limited time available and could not be present continuously. Furthermore, preconceived expectations of the research process led to the fact that some local needs remained unheard.

This refers to the idea of voice and the difference between speaking and listening in feminist approaches to care and care ethics. Gilligan (1993) in her work 'In a Different Voice' states that: "*speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act*" (Gilligan 1993 : XVI). If certain voices are not heard, this is not an individual responsibility. It means that these **voices are structurally silenced** (Tronto, 2023). Participatory approaches to research should therefore advance a listening-based dialogue (Moreno-Cely et al., 2021). This implies that trust and relationship-building should be embedded in the structural frame of partner organisations of co-creative research, and enough space, time and financial resources should be available for collaborators to be able to listen. In the case of MaN'Aige this meant a physical presence (in person or through objects or activities in the neighbourhood), to be able to attend neighbourhood meetings outside of the opening hours of the organisation or standard working hours, to be aware of what happened before our arrival and to build on further on connections that already exist. This counts for academic researchers, but also local collaborators in social and health organisations or policymakers that can be involved in this type of research.

1.2.4. Challenging the status quo: a political and emancipatory dimension of co-creative research

When looking back at the principles of co-creative research identified in Chapter 3, the political and emancipatory aim of co-creative research is to expose, discuss and change existing power relations. However, when realized in practice, instead of countering power relations, co-creative processes can enhance exclusion and inequalities. Although this type of research aims to challenge power imbalances between researcher and researched by putting ownership of knowledge in the hands of communities (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008), it is all **too often taken for granted that participation would automatically lead to empowerment** (Bourke, 2009). As explained in Chapter 4, in MaN'Aige the focus shifted from an initial target group of older vulnerable people towards 'all' neighbourhood actors. Although we got interesting insights in relation to our research question, this also led to a diffuse and all-embracing project. We involved mainly long-term residents that were already engaged in neighbourhood initiatives, excluding other groups and individuals that might have benefited the most from the research.

Chapter 3 shows the need to (re-)introduce a political and emancipatory dimension in co-creative research. Literature on co-creation in research is ambiguous and dispersed. The term emerged in business and management studies, where co-creation is often defined as a process of developing new (knowledge) products aiming innovation (e.g. Ehlen et al., 2017). In our findings, however, **a political and emancipatory dimension** was more explicitly and implicitly present in the accounts of researchers and professionals involved in co-creative research projects. By engaging in co-creative research, some respondents actively aimed to question the 'established' order. As one respondent of the individual interviews explained, doing co-creative research became a means "*to consider the person not as a subject of a policy, but as an actor*". That way, the respondent claimed their practices were "*really going against the current trend*" comparing it to current political debates and policymaking. This corresponds to other participatory approaches adopted across disciplines that highlight values of democracy, social justice and human rights (Beebeejaun et al., 2015). Participatory Action Research (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Reason & Bradbury, 2008) or the Critical Pedagogy movement (Freire, 1970) for example have a long tradition of challenging power relations in knowledge building (Denney et al., 2018). These approaches are embedded in social struggle and do not necessarily include the presence of academic researchers or institutions (Denney et al., 2018).

In line with these traditions, co-creative research practices, have the political potential to **challenge established power structures by adopting a critical, reflexive gaze and experiencing other ways of doing** (Oliver et al., 2019; Wijsman & Feagan, 2019). As mentioned in 1.2.2, co-creative research is a transformative learning process that involves professionals, researchers and participants, but also policy, academic and funding institutions. In Chapter 2, I discussed for example the ambiguous

role of academic institutions and researchers in co-creative research, which also allowed to question the "usual" roles of academic researchers (Bourke, 2009). If the goal is to challenge power relations, this also implies that doing co-creative research requiring a long-term and deep investment is not always adequate. In Chapter 4, I show that in MaN'Aige, co-researchers questioned whether 'doing research' was the way to bring about societal transformation. As one of the co-researchers stated: *(...) this research dimension and these discussions on all these concepts, it's interesting, but in the end, that's not what makes the neighbourhood change.* (co-researcher, discussion question of the month, 10 August 2021)

Although the conditions might not have be right for co-creative research, being involved in the process allowed to **adopt a critical and reflexive attitude**. In MaN'Aige, the critical reflection mainly concerned questioning our own 'usual' way of working and our own assumptions on caring neighbourhoods, introducing precisely this critical, political dimension in our process. However, this should have been more present from the start: "*if Participatory Research is to be emancipatory, participants must view their role as emancipatory and want to genuinely engage in a critical reflection about the decisions that they make.*" (Bourke, 2009, p.468)

2. Answering Research Goal 2: Understand, experiment and evaluate how to build a caring neighbourhood with 'unexpected' neighbourhood users

In this section I will present the main findings in relation to the second research goal, **to understand experiment and evaluate how to build a caring neighbourhood with neighbourhood users**. This second research goal is based on our own experiment of implementing caring neighbourhoods in the centre of Brussels, with a particular attention to building connection witg 'unexpected' connections with users. I will present first the tension between the ideal and practice of caring neighbourhood and second some possible building block, drawing on the results presented in Chapter 5 and 6. In Chapter 5 we aimed to answer our main research question on how to build connections with 'unexpected' users that contributed to a caring neighbourhood in MaN'Aige. In Chapter 6 we specifically focus on the role of public and green space in these connections, as an important dimension of caring neighbourhoods in an urban context. This allowed to introduce the question of power more clearly in the idea and implementation of caring neighbourhoods. In both chapters, we wished to give insights in the tensions that emerge when we put the idea of caring neighbourhoods into practice in real-life contexts, but also possible building blocks.

2.1. Tension between the ideal of caring neighbourhoods and its practices

As explained in the introduction, in policy and research about care the past years there has been a growing interest in the role of local communities and neighbourhoods care (Buffel et al., 2013; Gardner, 2011; Pani-Harreman et al., 2021). Although caring neighbourhoods become more and more widespread in policy in Flanders and Brussels, local practices are dispersed and can cover different aspects of care, from working on social cohesion among residents, to connecting them with professional care services (De Donder et al., 2021). In Chapter 5 and 6 we discussed the numerous challenges from our experience in implementing caring neighbourhoods with users, that show the tension between the idea of caring neighbourhoods and its practice.

2.1.1. Limits to care realised by neighbourhoods users

In Chapter 5 we explained that although caring neighbourhoods should aim to answer local care needs, in practice, these needs are not always met. Involving neighbourhood users in caring neighbourhoods has its limits, on the level of type and intensity of care. Neighbourhood users can be involved in the neighbourhood's public and green space, for example putting their office space at disposal for meetings or offering services and administrative support, but often this implication remains instrumental and temporary. Furthermore, caring neighbourhood initiatives, including 'unexpected' users, **cannot fill in the gaps of structural inequalities in health care system** that fails to meet local care needs (De Donder et al., 2022). This questions the level to which users can genuinely contribute to a caring neighbourhood.

2.1.2. Limits to the neighbourhood scale

Not only the concept of 'caring' has its limits, there also is a limit to considering 'the neighbourhood'. Results in Chapter 5 showed the **limits of a neighbourhood perspective**. Urban neighbourhoods are not fixed entities but very diverse and diffuse contexts. Different actors consider 'the neighbourhood' differently. Residents' perception of the neighbourhood could sometimes be restricted to a street or an apartment block. On the other hand, for some neighbourhood users and residents, their activities exceeded the neighbourhood scale and they did not feel a connection to 'the neighbourhood'.

Also, in the context of neighbourhoods, various residents, public institutions, cultural organisations, private companies... each have their own diverse interests, resources and power positions. Although MaN'Aige initially aimed at connecting neighbourhood residents and users, we observed they have different rhythms, time schedules, and did not always have an interest in this connection. Some

users we interviewed in the walk-along interviews presented in Chapter 6 said to "*feel no connection at all with the neighbourhood*" (R11), although there was a certain interest through the fact they wished to participate in an interview. The statement of another participant, working in the same public institution located in the neighbourhood, confirms the need for nuancing 'neighbourhood' perspectives:

> *Participant: very few colleagues are really interested in the neighbourhood. For them, it is the place where they work and where they don't really want to have anything to do with the rest. (...)*
>
> *Interviewer: And would you find it important or interesting to have contact with people who live here or other people who work here?*
>
> *Participant: Mmm yes... Pff... Mmm... That should grow spontaneously. It shouldn't be artificial, that doesn't work either. I think, like everywhere, it is something that grows organically. If you live somewhere in a neighbourhood, you don't have contact with everyone in the neighbourhood. Certain people you do and other people you don't. You can facilitate that by organising neighbourhood events, for example, but with that you're not going to attract the people who work there. (...) I also don't know whether the people who live here feel the need to necessarily have contact with those commuters. Look... I think it's difficult.(R8)*

Instead of promoting neighbourhoods as homogenous spaces, in Chapter 5, we stated that in a diverse urban context, caring neighbourhoods could however contribute to bridging different individuals, groups, (care) services that do not know each other or usually would not collaborate.

2.2. Building blocks for caring neighbourhoods with users

In the previous section I considered the limits to the type and intensity of care with neighbourhood users and to the scale of a 'neighbourhood' that is understood differently by each actor involved. In this section, I will present several building blocks that are important for building caring neighbourhoods that were identified when adding the question of 'unexpected' users to the 'classic' idea of caring neighbourhood.

2.2.1. Value small changes

Working on caring neighbourhoods requires noticing and valuing small changes. In Chapter 5 results indicated that small interventions in public space, such as placing vegetable garden boxes, were an important lever for building further connection and networks in the neighbourhood. In addition, bringing together neighbourhood residents and users on the topic of shared, public space created new connections. For the first time, different actors were brought together as **'neighbours' located in the same space and concerned by a common issue**: the liveability of neighbourhood space. Residents, employees of a university college, a cultural venue, or a large hotel, sat together with urban planners and architects. Rather than 'reinventing the wheel', caring neighbourhoods should work on connecting different needs, people, organisations,... and have a *bridging* function.

2.2.2.<u>Care is relational: from an individual to a relational vision on care</u>

Results of Chapter 5 emphasized that an individualistic vision on care falls short and argued for the **need to consider care as a network in a relational paradigm**. Understanding care as relational practice requires a paradigm shift from an individual vision on care, that we can still find in current definitions and models of care. For example, in the definition of care convoys presented in the introduction, care is centred around an individual. In this model, the network surrounding the individual is considered to be taken up care responsibilities. Presenting the care network as concentric circles around one individual however blurs the reciprocal and relational character of care. Instead, care means being linked, it implies creating a relation and is collective. This vision draws upon a feminist ethics of care approach, "*that radically unravels the idea of independence and autonomy as the nature of human life*" (Gabauer, Glaser, et al., 2022, p.179). At the base of care lies the idea of interdependence between humans, relating to concepts of reciprocity, vulnerability, and empowerment (Gabauer, Knierbein, et al., 2022).

In Chapter 5 we advanced the idea that building connections and networks are an important base for care in neighbourhoods. In MaN'Aige, while aiming to build a caring neighbourhood with users, a first step was to create a sense of togetherness and to acknowledge an interdependence, a **sense of awareness and responsibility of the environment and each other**. Neighbourhood residents, but also local organisations, cultural institutions, companies that are present in the neighbourhood enlarged their vision beyond individual or organisational benefits, missions or interests, towards a common concern for neighbourhood. This does not mean that interests can differ, but emphasizes that care can only start from a connection. This is confirmed by other experiences of caring neighbourhoods, for example the projects financed by the King Boudouin Foundation, that focus on the important role of connecting figures, places and activities (De Donder et al., 2021). In MaN'Aige we observed that setting up initiatives could be an entrance for building connection, but that **building networks required a lot of time and energy** which required structural support. Co-researchers of MaN'Aige took on the role of connecting-figures but this role was limited due to project-based time and financing. Instead, the function of a connecting-figure or bridge-builder should be structurally embedded (and funded) within local organisations, which could be the community health center or the local service centre.

Our results also showed how **caring neighbourhoods aimed to find points of connection and focus on building networks within difference**. Building networks should respond to local concerns, and we observed that including 'unexpected' users in these networks could be an added value. However, caring neighbourhoods could also promote idealized 'positive' values of connection and communities as homogenic entities, while neglecting difference and conflict. Instead we should consider that

neighbourhoods are complex, diverse contexts, crossed by competing interests. When considering these points of 'friction', some common concerns of neighbourhood residents and users on the level of care emerged, e.g. the importance, and lack of, accessible and liveable space and the importance, and lack of, social connectedness during the COVID-19 pandemic. In MaN'Aige, public space became an important topic for caring neighbourhoods, starting from the fact that connections already existed by the mere fact of being present in urban space. In the next section I will further develop on the role of public space in caring neighbourhoods with 'unexpected' users.

2.2.3. <u>Care is spatial: consider public and green space as important spaces of care</u>

Applying an urban lens on care allows to analyse care as a spatial and material practice, considering how caring or uncaring spaces, material conditions and environments can allow care to exist (Gabauer, Knierbein, et al., 2022). In Chapter 5 we discussed how in urban contexts, public space is the first (and sometimes only) place where residents, users, passersby, meet each other. As public and green space are important for health and well-being in urban neighbourhoods, but also places that can be lacking, conflicted and crossed by tensions, this was an important entry point for considering care in urban neighbourhoods. Although Living Labs initially aimed to build individual care relations, for example between older residents and students, gradually the focused shifted on public space: a collective garden, mapping the accessibility of the neighbourhood and the analysis of pleasant and unpleasant spaces. We thus argued for the need to analyze **care needs and practices in a broader spatial way** that includes the relation to the neighbourhood space. Chapter 5 shows that although little attention is paid to public and green space in 'classic' caring neighbourhood initiatives, in MaN'Aige the lack of livable and qualitative public space became evident. This concerned the negative impact of large-scale construction projects on residents, the lack of green space, play areas for children or seating for students during lunch breaks, as well as the inaccessibility of pavements and toilets of local establishments for wheelchair users. In Chapter 6 we further analyzed how residents and users express the lack of qualitative public and green space in the neighbourhood. Our results showed how residents perceive the impact of recent urban transformations, but also feel neglected by local city policies. As one participant explained:

> We are more and more enclosed by buildings. We can feel it. When you walk through the neighbourhood it's easier to accept it, because you haven't experienced it before. But I feel like I've always lived with more space, and now there are even more buildings all around me… (R2).

In that way, instead of analyzing care only between individuals, we found **that care was also related to the neighbourhood space** itself. The neighbourhood could be perceived as 'uncaring', refering to issues of safety, cleanliness, or real estate projects that impact the urban environment.

However public space could also be one of opportunities and new connections, for example in the construction of a neighbourhood garden.

When analyzing more profoundly the relation of residents and users to public and green space in our study in Chapter 6, we showed that urban green space was valued in different ways. In our study, we identified values of green space for enjoyment, survival, or for policy. These different perceptions implied very different actions and ways to treat public space and showed the need to go even a step further in our vision on care as a spatial practice. Urban green space as a means to survival in urban areas for different species beyond humans points out the importance of **caring with and for the neighbourhood space** and the different entities that live in it. Care is a socio-material practice connected to and shaped by human and non-human objects, environments, bodies in the city (Power & Williams, 2019).

As mentioned above, in a diverse neighbourhood context, instead of promoting idealized ideas of community and care, caring neighbourhoods could enhance '**moments of *co*mmunity'**, ephemeral relations that allow to share a moment (Note et al., 2020). Instead of a romanticized and idealized idea of green as 'social healers', **green space can be an important connector and space for bridging in neighbourhoods,** allowing connection through the simple fact of sharing a pavement, a public bench, a view or access to a parc, but also building connections with different species and between different domains of urban life.

This requires making more visible the invisible work of neighbourhood residents and users in caring for their surrounding space, without rigidifying it by inducing rules or expectations. According to Note et al. (2020), the possibility for moments of community to exist depends on the context, and they can be enhanced by openness or blocked by rigidity. Not only researchers, but also urban planners and policymakers should genuinely listen to people living and using the neighbourhood, recognize their knowledge and experience, and support where needed the "shadow work" that is informally taken up by all types of "users" in taking care of the urban space.

2.2.4. Care is political: consider inequalities and exclusion

Caring neighbourhoods cannot be studied without considering power. Care is political, and considering care as labor allow to reflect on what type of work is whose responsibility (Tronto, 2015). This includes investigating the structural mechanisms of power that influence caring practices. A "universal" vision on caring neighbourhoods, presented as care for all on all domains of life, blurs inequalities, and exclusion of certain groups or individuals. We analyzed these **structural mechanisms of power on the level of the project, but also on the level of the neighbourhood**.

In Chapter 5 we described the importance of being mindful of power relations in building caring neighbourhoods on different levels. On one hand, on the project-level, there were power relations between project partners, residents, and users of the neighbourhood. The group of co-researchers was rather homogenous and the needs particular groups and realities, for example older people or people in a precarious housing situation, remained voiceless. But inequalities were also played out on other levels. For instance, the project was elaborated and implemented by paid partners, but participants often remained unpaid, and due to obligations and administrative arrangements in terms of the project grant, the elaboration of the project did not always correspond to the needs of participants. Care initiatives that developed bottom-up, such as the vegetable garden project, were carried out on a voluntary basis by residents and not structurally supported.

On the other, power relations also exist on the neighbourhood level. In Chapter 5 we discussed how initiatives could be instrumentalized by policymakers or private real estate companies. In Chapter 6 we focused on power relations in relation to urban green space. Instead of only considering the benefits of green space on physical, social, environmental and mental health from a health perspective, we argued for an **environmental justice perspective** that considered the negative impact of green spaces on residents through mechanisms of green gentrification and exclusion in neighbourhoods. Kronenberg et al. (2020) identified three levels of environmental justice. First, **availability** concerns the just distribution of urban green space in cities. Second, the **participatory** dimension concerns just decision-making process and ownership. Third, the **interactional** level concerns recognizing and respecting different uses of urban green. This perspective shows that although public and green space are important for well-being and care for residents, they are also places of exclusion and injustices for some individuals and groups. Not everyone has the same access, the same resources and in the subjective experience of spaces, not everyone feels welcome in a space (Peace & Yeh, 2022). Our results showed public and green space is an important space for caring, but not for everyone. When analyzing our results in the light of environmental justice, some new elements emerged. Green space can only suit a type of 'active' city-use/rs. One participant in the interviews with a visual impairment stated for example accessing green space was not his main concern : "*Now that I can't see, I need someone to drive me first. Who's going to drive me. And if he doesn't like it, why waste his time? I live in social centres. (…) I can change environments. It's all closeby, I can walk there.*"

Participants also mentioned 'unwanted' and 'unwelcome' users, like people experiencing homelessness, that were not included in their vision of an enjoyable space. At the same time, these individuals could be considered as the ones whose needs should be taken into account the most (Koprowska et al., 2020). In the vision of green as a label or policy, instrumentalized green could have negative effects on residents (ex. greenwashing, green gentrification, displacement, unqualitative spaces…). Furthermore, instead of recognizing urban green as part of a neighbourhood just as much as humans and buildings, green space can be instrumentalized, "*domesticated*" and treated as "*urban*

furniture". Using green as a policy strategy is insufficient and does not guarantee qualitative spaces for residents and users.

Considering care on the neighbourhood level from an environmental perspective thus allowed to introduce a justice-perspective in caring neighbourhoods, which are usually considered only on the interpersonal level, questioning established power relations and exclusionary mechanisms in the neighbourhood. We thus argue for the need to consider these power relations, mechanisms of exclusion and a justice-lens in caring neighbourhoods: being aware of power imbalances and exclusions that are present or even reinforced through well-meant caring neighbourhood initiatives.

3. Overarching conclusions

In this overarching conclusion I will present general critical reflections on the link between caring neighbourhoods and co-creative research.

3.1. Introduce a relational care perspective in co-creative processes and a political dimension in caring neighbourhoods

Principles and processes from the perspective of Participatory Action Research and care ethics are related to each other. On the level of key principles or basic assumptions, both Participatory Action Research and care ethics are based on reciprocity. In classic definitions of Participatory Action Research, we encountered the concept of care: "*To participate means to break up voluntarily and through experience the asymmetrical relationship of submission and dependence implicit in the subject/ object binomial. This is the essence of participation*" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p.5)*.* Conversely in literature on care ethics we encountered the concept of co-production: "*it [care]involves reciprocal dependence in which both recipients and providers are involved in the **coproduction** of care*" (Milligan & Wiles, 2010, p.737, my emphasis). In care itself lies a participatory dimension (Gabauer, Knierbein, et al., 2022): care is relational, includes human, non-humans and environments and is based on principles of non- harm, support, interdependency and reciprocity.

Also on the level of the different steps in the process there are similarities: both are an iterative process that depart from needs, and both require time and trust. Tronto (2015, p.5-7) identifies four dimensions or phases of caring that are very similar to the different cyclic steps in Participatory Action Research: (1) Caring about. Clarifying what the needs are. This dimension makes us *attentive* (2) Caring for. Taking responsibility, forming a group, a collective. This dimension makes us *responsible* (3) Caregiving. Taking action. This makes us *competent* and (4) Care receiving. Looking back, asking if the need was was need met, and reevaluating, recognizing new needs and repeating the process. This makes

us *responsive.* A fifth phase, caring *with* is sometimes added, referring to care as a democratic process, where care needs should be met in a way that is consistent with democratic values of justice, equality and freedom.

We argue it would be interesting to introduce more clearly the notion of care in participatory and co-creative processes. More specifically clarifying the principles of non-harm, support, interdependence and reciprocity. Also clarifying which care needs are answered or being met. This could lead to evaluating co-creative research or processes through questions like: How is your practice caring ? How is it not harmful and supportive? On the other hand, it would be useful to introduce a more political view in care debates. Caring practices in the neighbourhood promoted through the concept of caring neighbourhoods, are often de-politicized and idealized. A participatory vision would allow more attention to a political and emancipatory dimension and the need to question asymmetrical power relations.

3.2. Being aware of instrumentalization and reinforcing inequalities

Both caring neighbourhoods and co-creative research can be linked to a neoliberal context of budget cuts and austerity measures (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016; Raap et al., 2022).

In the case of co-creative research, although it might be presented as a way to decolonize academic knowledge production, co-creation can instead lead to instrumentalizing local and indigenous knowledge by calling it 'new' (Utter et al., 2021). In the context of higher education for example, "*there is a risk that, in the practice of ACCI in a context permeated by neoliberalism, 'dialogue' is co-opted by neoliberalism through the co-articulation of the discourse of dialogue and the neoliberal discourse of the knowledge economy*." (Phillips & Napan, 2016, p.831)

Caring neighbourhoods is a concept promoted by top-down political decision-making and in academia (Gabauer, Knierbein, et al., 2022). Although research has shown the relevance of local communities and neighbourhood networks in care (Buffel et al., 2013; Gardner, 2011; Pani-Harreman et al., 2021), policy strategies that over-romanticize care risk to instrumentalize neigbourhood communities. Reducing care to the 'private' domain can lead to reinforcing inequalities and risks a (re)domestication of care (Gabauer, Glaser, et al., 2022). Caring neighbourhoods should stay aware that 'activating' neighbourhoods does not become a cost-saving strategy to put the responsibility for care on individuals and their local networks (De Donder et al., 2021). Referring to Putnam's understanding of social capital presented in the introduction, social networks are promoted as a useful resource, but this conception does not take into account "*power* and *politics*" (Navarro, 2002, p.427), social and economic inequalities on a structural level.

3.3. Rather than aiming for results and innovation, making visible the invisible connections

As well in caring neighbourhoods as in co-creative research process, aiming for results and innovation can be damaging. In the case of caring neighbourhoods, instead of aiming to implement caring initiatives and proving results, caring neighbourhoods should aim to make visible the invisible, hidden (care) practices and needs and connect the caring practices that already exists in neighbourhoods(Wegleitner & Schuchter, 2018). In this sense, a caring neighbourhood is not something that has to be implemented, but becomes a way of analysing neighbourhood dynamics, its people and activities, and especially a means to make visible care practices and care needs of groups that are systematically excluded and marginalized. Also in MaN'Aige's co-creative research practice, it was important to connect the people, organisations and activities that already are present but that did not know each other. Rather than to 'innovate' the goal was thus to make visible the connections that were invisible.

3.4. Another perception of time : stepping outside of linear and efficiency-thinking

Policymaking, for example in health care, is often centered on the idea of crisis, applying short-term thinking aimed at formulating solutions to a defined problem (Taleb, 2023). Caring neighbourhoods and co-creative research processes aim to apply another temporality, a long-term vision building connections and networks. In Chapter 3 we discussed how project-funding logics are constructed in a linearity and short-term temporality that does not correspond to this long-term vision. This was also observed by co-researchers of MaN'Aige:

> *There is a certain logic to it. There is a project call. That is a certain choice of the policy to work through project calls, those projects are then asked for sustainability. There seems to be an idea of linearity behind. That you can start something and then that will be taken further and included. But maybe in reality it's a bit different, more interchangeable and through systems that touch each other.* (co-researcher, question of the month 14 October 2021)

In this discussion we wished to question the result-oriented idea of efficiency that emerges from linear thinking. Instead of measuring the impact of caring neighbourhoods or of co-creative research, we wanted to highlight the importance of reflexivity and the capacity to be open and critical about one's own practice. Although 'THE' project does not exist (anymore) for community members or local residents, it was a good learning opportunity for participants, organisations and residents in the neighbourhood to question 'usual' roles and places in the neighbourhood and build new connections. This refers to another understanding of reality through the notion of 'process' (Taleb, 2009). Drawing on Heraclitus' ideas, philosopher Nicolas Rescher explains:

> *.reality is not a constellation of things at all, but one of processes. The fundamental "stuff" of the world is not material substance, but volatile flux, namely "fire", and all things are versions thereof (puros tropai). Process*

is fundamental: the river is not an object, but a continuing flow; the sun is not a thing, but an enduring fire. Everything is a matter of process, of activity, of change (Rescher, 2006, p.5)

4. Limitations and critical reflections

In this section I wish to acknowledge some critical reflections and limitations of this doctoral research.

4.1. Tension between doing research *with* and *on*

Throughout the process I experienced tensions and incompatibilities between requirements and expectations of co-creative research and of academic doctoral research. The co-creative research of MaN'Aige was limited to three years of funding and in the last year I was funded by the university's department to write my doctoral thesis. It was difficult to blend these two experiences together. I experienced incompatibilities between the requirements and roles of a co-creative and a doctoral research, within a limited time frame. On one hand, a change-oriented research required long-term involvement and on the other, a planned doctoral research required the writing of a dissertation and the publication of academic articles. The informed consent was exemplary for this incompatibility: a precondition for academic research but an unsolved issue in our co-creative research experience. The document was signed by official co-researchers, but not by other neighbourhood actors, raising questions of anonymity, control and ownership of the research. As the doctoral research was not completely embedded in the co-creative research, I sometimes felt the risk of instrumentalizing participants for my doctoral research. For example in conducting walk-along interviews with neighbourhood residents and users that were sometimes also participating in MaN'Aige Living Labs. Although they signed an informed consent that explained the co-creative research project and guaranteed the anonymous use, it was not clear to what extent the data could be 'used'. Finally, the interviews were also, anonymously, used in the collective analysis among MaN'Aige co-researchers, but they mainly served as a base for a master's thesis and an academic article that stayed in academic hands.

Although I aimed to offer in this doctoral dissertation an extra dimension of reflection and understanding to the co-creative research process, including the perspective of co-researchers and what we had been discussing during these three years, it remained difficult to genuinely include different 'voices' in the doctoral thesis and I felt a discomfort writing *about* instead of *with*. I ended up after three years of co-creative research with an incredible amount of data, but I was the only one to decide on what was to be used or to be taken along in the further analysis of this dissertation. Furthermore, at the end of MaN'Aige being the only one 'left', I felt the discomfort of having initiated and supported networks, without it being taken up structurally by our partner organisations. Although, as mentioned before, we highlighted the need for a different view on sustainability that aimed less at 'preserving' and more at 'connecting',

it still created expectations from neighbourhood residents and users that remained unanswered. In short, as predicted by neighbourhood residents at the start, we came and left again. Within the limited timeframe set at the beginning, it remained difficult to bring about structural change and embed this PhD dissertation within the co-creative research. This, however, also taught me an interesting lesson: co-creation is something that must be included from the beginning, within the frame. Therefore, I aimed to offer in this doctoral research a view on real-life practices and an account on the challenges faced, but also some insights in the building blocks that would allow more genuine practices.

4.2. An intersectional perspective on caring neighbourhoods

In this dissertation, I could have paid more attention to an intersectional lens regarding exclusions and power relations in our process on different levels. Although it was discussed that the group of co-researchers was reduced and homogenous and that the voices of different types of users and residents, for example older people, were lacking, we did not thoroughly analyze different dimension of power and exclusion through an intersectional lens. For example, although widely discussed in literature on care, a gender perspective on our research questions, taking into account the structural barriers shaped by gender inequalities, was lacking. During our process, one of the co-researchers, a community worker, observed that only women were involved as co-researchers. I could have explored further how caring neighbourhoods are shaped by gender constructions at play in society. An ethics of care perspective for example would have allowed to question further how "*caring activities are devalued, underpaid, and disproportionately occupied by the relatively powerless in society.*" (Tronto, 1993, p.175)

More largely, it would be necessary to pay attention to an intersectional gaze on caring neighbourhoods in future research. This lens could help to consider how discrimination and exclusion is played out on different levels and how these caring neighbourhood practices shape and are shaped by structural inequalities. Different dimensions of power could be considered: language, age, socio-economic situation,... Furthermore, instead of only focusing on local practices, for example considering caring neighbourhoods as a learning process through and about practices in a lifeworld-perspective (Billett et al., 2010), future research on caring neighbourhoods should also focus more on a systemic view on the inequalities in health care systems and current neoliberal policy in health that reinforce these exclusions and inequalities. The work of Tronto (2010) on the institutionalization of care and processes of commodification and marketization is interesting in this regard.

4.3. The forces and pitfalls of broad concepts

In this dissertation we used the terms 'caring neighbourhood', 'neighbourhood users' and 'co-creative research' to name our practices and research aims. However, it is important to reflect on the use of vague and diffuse concepts, both in our practice as on a theoretical level.

In our practice, a broad scope of our initiatives to "all" neighbourhood actors, led to unclarity, even among co-researchers, on our research aim and whose needs we aimed to answer. As mentioned in the first section of the discussion, promoting an universal 'look' can also be damaging and reinforce inequalities. We therefore argue for the need for more research on mechanisms of exclusion in care and caring neighbourhoods

On a theoretical level, the vagueness and openness of the concepts of 'caring neighbourhood', 'neighbourhood users' and 'co-creative research', showed the need of including different theoretical concepts, frameworks and perspectives. In this dissertation, I drew upon different theoretical concepts: participatory research approaches like Participatory Action Research and Freire's Critical Pedagogy focusing on questions of power in academic knowledge building, care research and feminist philosophical perspectives, and urban research perspectives on spatial and environmental justice,… This conceptual diversity was an asset, but also a pitfall. As our initial research question was very broad, this required combining conceptual frames of different domains, but this also led to a diffuse frame and made it difficult to gain depth. Although interdisciplinary perspectives on care as a social, political and spatial practice exist, for example in research drawing upon urban studies and urban geographical perspectives (Gabauer, Knierbein, et al., 2022), transdisciplinary perspectives that allow to go beyond discipines, including local knowledge and experiences from within neighbourhoods could be enhanced.

5. General conclusion

In this dissertation I discussed how co-creative research and caring neighbourhood are experienced in real-life practices. I explored challenges experienced from within, which created a tension between principles and practices. Furthermore, I presented several building blocks that would allow more genuine practices in co-creative research and caring neighbourhoods. More specifically, I argue for a reflexive posture in caring neighbourhoods, that would allow to consider power relations in the process. I aimed to show how a relational care-perspective in caring neighbourhoods, emphasizing attentiveness and reciprocity, should be completed a participatory one, emphasizing the political and emancipatory role of processes. Finally, I argue for introducing more explicitly a caring attitude in participatory and co-creative research practices and a justice-perspective in caring neighbourhood practices.

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English Summary

This doctoral research explores how to build caring neighbourhoods in an urban context using a co-creative research approach. Caring neighbourhoods is an emerging model for a neighbourhood-oriented and integrated approach to health, care and well-being. The concept underlines the importance of neighbourhoods and local networks as physical and social spaces for care and well-being. Although it is currently promoted on a policy level in Brussels and Flanders, the same movements exist bottom-up and cover a wide range of practices.

The study is based on MaN'Aige (2019-2022**), a co-creative research** funded by the Innoviris (funding agency for research and innovation of the Brussels Capital Region) Co-Create program that aimed to build a caring neighbourhood in inner-city Brussels. Within the context of two 'mixed-use' neighbourhoods, MaN'Aige investigated how **building unexpected connections with users** – e.g. companies, schools, theatres, commuters - could contribute to a caring neighbourhood. The results draw on the experiences and multiple discussions among co-researchers and participants, which were professionals involved in community health, neighbourhood residents and users and academic partners.

In this dissertation I aimed to elaborate on two major aspects: (1) understand, experiment and evaluate **how to realise co-creative research in practice.** and (2) understand, experiment and evaluate **how to build a caring neighbourhood with unexpected neighbourhood users.** Participatory and co-creative approaches are key in caring neighbourhoods, but insights in the way these approaches realise the involvement they promise for are lacking. Furthermore, neighbourhood users are widely present in diverse and highly urbanized contexts, but they are rarely considered in caring neighbourhood practices. The insights in these questions are presented in four different studies and one introductory chapter on my own positionality.

Throughout these chapters, I explored the challenges that are experienced within co-creative processes and caring neighbourhoods, offering insights in real-life practices. I presented in this dissertation the elements that created a tension between principles and practices, but also building blocks that would allow more genuine practices in co-creative research and caring neighbourhoods.

In the first section I focused on a co-creative research approach and discussed issues of power and exclusion that can be encountered when implementing projects in real-life settings. Power imbalances are shaped within a 'project-funding' and 'academic research' logic, creating a tension with initial principles of societal transformation, collaboration, shared ownership and empowerment. Co-creative research processes question these 'project-funding' and 'academic research' logics requiring a different way of working than what academic and funding institutions are used to. Instead, they require

a non-linear process, introducing reflexivity as a transformative practice, and being aware of power dynamics. From the MaN'Aige experience, managing the tension between action-oriented goals and a research approach and dealing with discontinuity also showed the need for a different view on co-creative research. Doing co-creative research is about adopting a critical and inquiring attitude. Co-researchers passed from an individual perspective towards a collective one, and highlighted the importance of valuing and including different knowledge types. Being reflexive became in itself a transformative practice.

In the second part of this dissertation, I focused on building caring neighbourhoods with unexpected neighbourhood users and the way caring connections are shaped. Care should be understood more largely as a caring attitude towards the other and the environment, as a relational and a spatial practice. Furthermore, care relations are not linear and individual but shaped collectively in networks. Green and public space are important actors in care. Green space plays an important role in well-being in neighbourhoods and can serve as connectors. However, when regarding it from an environmental-justice perspective, issues of power and exclusion are also at play and should be taken into account.

In the discussion, I aimed to combining a relational care-perspective, emphasizing attentiveness and reciprocity, with a participatory one, emphasizing the political and emancipatory role of processes. Finally, I argue for introducing more explicitly a caring attitude in participatory and co-creative processes and introducing a justice-perspective in caring neighbourhoods.

List of Publications and Contributions

Publications

De Donder, L., Hoens, S., Stegen, H., **Kint, O**., & Smetcoren, A-S. (2022). Zorgzame buurten komen er niet vanzelf. *Geron*, *24*(3), 1-4. [4]. https://gerontijdschrift.nl/artikelen/zorgzame-buurten-komen-er-niet-vanzelf/

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Kint, O. (2021). *MaN'Aige onderzoeksrapport 2: Hoe bouwen aan een zorgzame buurt samen met buurtgebruikers?*

Kint, O. (2020). *MaN'Aige onderzoeksrapport 1: Hoe bouwen we aan een zorgzame buurt met buurtgebruikers? Comment construire un quartier d'entraide ensemble avec les utilisateurs du quartier?*

Kint, O., Degraeve, L., & Boussart, K. (2022). *Verborgen spelers in een zorgzame buurt.* Kenniscentrum WWZ - Woonzorg Brussel.

Contributions

"Care Shadow Work": Exploring the Role and Importance of Invisible and Hidden Carers
Kint, O. (Speaker), De Donder, L. (Speaker), Hoens, S. (Speaker) & Quintiens, B.(Speaker), Oral presentation as part of a symposium at conference 'Age and Care Graz 2023: Aging in a Caring Society? Theories in Conversation'. 22 Sep 2023. Graz: Austria.

Participatory research in caring communities: Practice what you preach?
Kint, O. (Speaker) & Bakelants, H.(Speaker), Workshop at International Conference on Integrated Care (ICIC) 2023. 23 May 2023. Antwerp: Belgium.

Lessons learned from the MaN'Aige project
Kint, O. (Speaker), 20 Oct 2022. Presentation at MaN'Aige Co-Create closing event, Brussels: Belgium.

Who is seen, listened to or included in (research) projects?
Kint, O. (Speaker) & Hoens, S. (Speaker), workshop at 'Open lab Brussels summerschool: Exploring in/between places', 16 Sep 2021. Brussels: Belgium.

Caring and Compassionate Communities in Belgium: a focus on their development and evaluation
Kint, O. (Speaker), Bakelants, H.(Speaker), Dury, S. (Speaker) & De Donder, L. (Speaker).Oral presentation as part of a symposium at British Society of Gerontology. 8 Jul 2021. Online

How to valorise what is learned in co-creative research?
Kint, O. (Speaker), workshop at Ecole thématique de la recherche en co-création, 2 Apr 2021. Online

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Appendix 1

<u>Formulier digitale terbeschikkingstelling doctoraatproefschrift[1]</u>

Voor het wereldwijd publiek beschikbaar stellen op niet-exclusieve wijze in digitale vorm van doctoraatproefschrift (in full tekst).

Met inachtneming van het Centraal Reglement voor de Toekenning van Academische Graad van Doctor van de VUB (hierna 'CDR'). Bij discrepantie tussen de standaardbepalingen opgenomen in dit formulier en het de regels opgenomen in het CDR, zullen de regels van het CDR voorrang hebben.

Waar in dit reglement verwezen wordt naar personen en functies, worden altijd gelijkelijk vrouwen en mannen bedoeld.

STANDAARDBEPALINGEN

De VUB
- Archiveert uw digitale doctoraatsproefschrift via de bibliotheek en stelt dit beschikbaar via de kanalen waarop de VUB haar wetenschappelijke resultaten publiceert en volgens de modaliteiten die de doctorandus hieronder aangeeft;
- Kan het doctoraatsproefschrift omzetten in andere bestandsformaten of naar andere media met het doel de toekomstige digitale toegankelijkheid te waarborgen, dit alles zonder de inhoud aan te tasten;
- Zal één of meer reservekopieën van dit doctoraatsproefschrift maken en deze bewaren met het oog op de veiligheid en het behoud van de bestanden.

De doctorandus
- Behoudt alle auteursrechten die op zijn doctoraatsproefschrift rusten, maar verschaft de VUB overeenkomstig het CDR het niet-exclusieve recht om het te reproduceren en aan het publiek mee te delen, in overeenstemming met de gekozen modaliteiten;
- Stelt minstens een digitale versie van het doctoraatsproefschrift ter beschikking aan de VUB volgens de regels door de faculteit bepaald;
- Verklaart de volledige regeling inzake de neerlegging van en intellectuele eigendomsrechten op het doctoraatsproefschrift in het CDR gelezen te hebben en te aanvaarden;
- Aanvaardt dat dit impliceert dat het doctoraatsproefschrift gereproduceerd kan worden op digitale dragers, in overeenstemming met de gekozen modaliteiten, zodat het kan gebruikt worden volgens de regels van de kunst. In functie van technologische evoluties mag het doctoraatsproefschrift op enigerlei wijze gereproduceerd en technisch bijgewerkt worden om het in dit punt toegestane gebruik met de meest geschikte technieken te verzekeren;
- Aanvaardt dat deze licentie niet-exclusief is en geldt voor de volledige beschermingstermijn van het auteursrecht en alle andere op het doctoraatsproefschrift rustende intellectuele en commerciële eigendomsrechten en geeft aan dat hij voor deze verleende gebruiksrechten geen vergoeding zal ontvangen;
- Garandeert dat hij de auteur is van het doctoraatsproefschrift en dat hij, waar nodig, de toestemming verkregen heeft om beschermd materiaal van derden (bijvoorbeeld teksten, grafieken, afbeeldingen, opnamen, enz.) in het doctoraatsproefschrift op te nemen en de VUB de hiervoor vermelde gebruiksrechten te verlenen;
- Garandeert dat zijn doctoraatsproefschrift geen inbreuk maakt op intellectuele eigendomsrechten van anderen;
- Garandeert dat hij bij overdracht of exploitatie van zijn intellectuele eigendomsrechten op het doctoraatsproefschrift aan derden zal bedingen dat deze dit formulier in stand zullen laten en deze overeenkomst zullen overnemen en geen exploitatierechten zullen verlenen of hebben verleend die onverenigbaar zijn met de gebruiksrechten die hij aan de VUB heeft verleend;

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[1] Gelieve dit ingevulde en ondertekende formulier op te nemen in het digitale doctoraatsproefschrift als laatste bijlage.

- Verklaart afstand te doen van het recht deze beschikbaarstelling middels opzegging of ontbinding te beëindigen;
- Verklaart dat hij, voor enige bijdrage gebaseerd op werk dat gesponsord of gesubsidieerd werd door een andere instelling of organisatie dan de VUB, voldaan heeft aan alle verplichtingen ten aanzien van openbaarmaking die door deze sponsor, instelling of organisatie zijn opgelegd;
- Vrijwaart de VUB zonder beperking tegen alle mogelijke aanspraken van derden (bijvoorbeeld voor inbreuken op intellectuele eigendomsrechten, persoonlijkheidsrechten, enz.);
- Aanvaardt dat de overige intellectuele eigendomsrechten op het doctoraatsproefschrift onderhevig zijn aan de bepalingen van het Valorisatiereglement van de VUB en garandeert dat deze nageleefd werden en zullen worden;
- Gaat akkoord dat, ongeacht de keuze die hieronder wordt aangegeven, de metadata van het doctoraatsproefschrift (zoals titel, auteur, jaar, de korte inhoud of abstract in het Nederlands en het Engels indien beschikbaar is, enz.) steeds onmiddellijk in open access zal worden opgenomen via de kanalen waarop de VUB haar wetenschappelijke resultaten publiceert, behoudens gegronde redenen die moeten aangetoond worden;
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   X OPTIE 1:

   Het doctoraatsproefschrift wordt twee (2) jaar onder embargo geplaatst door de VUB. Vanaf de publieke verdediging heeft de doctorandus twee (2) jaar om het doctoraatsproefschrift te exploiteren, al dan niet op commerciële wijze, en om het in al dan niet bewerkte of herwerkte vorm te reproduceren en mee te delen aan het publiek.

   Deze termijn van twee (2) jaar kan verlengd worden indien hier een **gegronde reden** kan voor worden aangevoerd en minimaal twee (2) maanden voor het aflopen van deze termijn wordt voorgelegd ter overweging aan het Legal & Ethics Office (LegalRD@vub.be). Het is aan de VUB om te beslissen of deze gegronde reden aanvaard wordt.

   ☐ **OPTIE 2:**
   De doctorandus geeft de toestemming om het volledige doctoraatsproefschrift **onmiddellijk** digitaal openbaar te maken.

   ☐ **OPTIE 3:**
   Het doctoraatproefschrift mag **nooit** publiek beschikbaar worden gemaakt indien hier een **gegronde reden** kan voor worden aangevoerd. Het is aan de VUB om te beslissen of deze gegronde reden aanvaard wordt.

      ☐ Ook de bibliografische beschrijving van het doctoraatsproefschrift mag niet publiek beschikbaar worden gemaakt via de kanalen waarop de VUB haar wetenschappelijke resultaten publiceert.

   ┌───┐
   │ Gegronde reden: │
   │   │
   │   │
   │   │
   └───┘

Gegevens openbare verdediging:

Datum (onder voorbehoud): nog niet gekend

Faculteit[2]: Psychologie en educatiewetenschappen

Titel doctoraatproefschrift: **Building Caring Neighbourhoods: Exploring Unexpected Connections Through Co-creative Research**

Contactgegevens:

VUB e-mailadres: octavia.kint@vub.be

Privé e-mailadres (voor eventueel contact na de verdediging): octaviakint@hotmail.com

☐ Ik geef hierbij de toestemming om dit e-mailadres in de toekomst te gebruiken voor mails i.v.m. *career tracking* van gedoctoreerden.

Ondertekening:

De doctorandus

Naam: Octavia Kint

Datum: 25/10/2023

Plaats: Brussel

Handtekening:

De promotoren bevestigen de erkenning van de intentie van de doctorandus met betrekking tot het beschikbaar maken van het doctoraatproefschrift via de kanalen waarop de VUB haar wetenschappelijke resultaten publiceert. De keuze van openbaarmaking is afgetoetst aan en in overeenstemming met het Valorisatiereglement.

De promotor

Naam: Liesbeth De Donder

Datum: 25/10/2023

Plaats: Brussel

Handtekening: (volgt)

De voorzitter bevestigt dat de digitale terbeschikkingstelling van het doctoraatproefschrift via de kanalen waarop de VUB haar wetenschappelijke resultaten publiceert besproken is tijdens de interne doctoraatsverdediging en dat de jury de modaliteiten gekozen door de doctorandus aanvaardt.

De voorzitter van de doctoraatsjury

Naam: Koen Lombaerts

Datum: 25/10/2023

Plaats: Brussel

Handtekening:

(volgt)

[2] Indien het hier gaat om een joint PhD, gelieve de faculteit van VUB te noteren