

Master thesis : "Migrant Voices Claiming the City: How are the Right to the City and Urban Citizenship Shaped in the Super Diverse Neighbourhood of Outremeuse, Liège?"

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Mémoire de fin d'études

**Migrant Voices Claiming the City: How are the Right
to the City and Urban Citizenship Shaped in the Super
Diverse Neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*, Liège?**

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Introduction

Migration studies have recognized that the dynamics of global migration cannot overlook the fact that cities have become the mediators of the social and cultural tensions associated with living with superdiversity. We cannot understand anymore migration without cities neither the other way round. The interplay between the urban-centred dynamics and migration studies have become a focal point in academy but also in policy making worldwide. Nevertheless, city-wide analyses have sometimes failed to spot some social dynamics that take place at the neighbourhood-level. That is why to study the relationships that migration establish with different elements - such as public space, inclusion or social networks - at this level can offer valuable information for both academic and policy making level.

Understanding what needs a nuanced approach that listens to migrant voices, as they provide critical insights into their needs, aspirations, and interpretations of urban environments. Migrants' perspectives are essential for understanding how public spaces are understood and inhabited, which is pivotal for urban planning. These migrants' voices have often been ignored, especially when it comes to migrant profiles that do not align with the needs of the neoliberal system established in Europe. This system has established through its policies the exclusion of migrants and has portrayed them as a threat (Harvey, 2005; Sassen, 2014; Glick Schiller, 2012). Consequently, today we are witnessing an alarming situation in Europe with excessive hostility towards migrants, which must be countered with rigorous and truthful information, such as that which this work aims to provide.

Although the study of cities is considered established within migration studies agendas, we can see how we still largely miss holistic approaches to urban research in industrial societies (Pardo & Prato, 2012). In order to spatially situate this interrelationship between migration studies and urban contexts, this paper offers the example of the city of Liège, whose demographics have been shaped for years by various waves of migration. This city, described as the "*cité ardente*" and a "post-migratory" city (Martiniello, 2011), has adopted various initiatives in recent years aimed at transforming the urban environment into a more welcoming and open place for migrants¹. Among its neighbourhoods, one that stands out for its blend of traditional folklore and a highly diverse population is *Outremeuse*. This neighbourhood, which its residents consider an "island"

¹ Among these initiatives, which are developed in detail in the first chapter of this paper, are: The European Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination since 2006, its designation as a "*Ville Hospitalière, responsable, accueillante et ouverte*" since 2017, and its adherence to the concept of being a "sanctuary city".

within the city, has a foreign population of more than one-third of its inhabitants², and its streets are a clear example of this diversity.

Within this neighbourhood, one of the most interesting aspects to study is that of public spaces and how they are inhabited by migrant residents. The study of these spaces is integral to urban sociology because they serve as arenas for social interaction, community building, and inclusion, which is, at the same time, one of the most debated issues of migration studies. In order to carry out this research, we understand public spaces as places that reflect and reproduce social hierarchies, power dynamics, and contested meanings; and which offer insights into the cultural, symbolic, and ritual dimensions of cities (Low; 2003, 2006).

To integrate the themes of migration with the study of urban dynamics, we have situated this work within a multidisciplinary framework that draws on migration studies, anthropology, and urban sociology. As we have already introduced, the main objective of this work is to give a voice to the migrants who live in this neighbourhood in order to find out what their understanding and way of inhabiting public spaces is. The aim is to provide a human-centred perspective by incorporating first-hand migrant voices alongside those of stakeholders at various levels. Consequently, the research has as main research question: How migrant people inhabit public spaces in the superdiverse neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*, Liège? And to add two theoretical debates to guide us in academic rigour, as well as to serve as a bridge between theory and its more practical application, we ask how these forms of inhabiting public space shape the "right to the city", as well as alternative conceptions of citizenship, among which we highlight that of "urban citizenship". To do this and responding to the multidisciplinary vision of this master's program, the aim is to carry out research that uses tools from anthropology, together with others more typical of sociological research, without neglecting how this work attempts to establish a relationship between studies of policy making at the local level. To do it, this work uses a qualitative methodology carrying on an urban ethnography of this neighbourhood that will merge more traditional qualitative methods with some visual methodology.

The scientific relevance of this research is enhanced by integrating perspectives from multiple fields, including migration studies, urban sociology, and anthropology. This thesis aims to provide a nuanced analysis of how migrants inhabit and interact with public spaces, thereby connecting two often-studied elements: migratory trajectories and the use of urban spaces, that

² Dashboard of the Liège Population (2015). *Ville de Liège*. <https://www.liege.be/fr/vie-communale/administration/liege-en-chiffres/tableaux-de-bord-population/tableau-de-bord-population-2015.pdf>

have rarely been examined together in the context of understanding contemporary urban dynamics. This thesis tries to offer a nuanced analysis of how migrants inhabit and interact with the public spaces, thus bringing together the migratory trajectories through these spaces, which are two elements that have received a great deal of attention in academia, but which have not often been confronted in understanding current urban dynamics. Moreover, this paper attempts to use a neighbourhood level of study, thereby adding another layer to the understanding of current multi governance. Furthermore, by incorporating extensive input from migrants in the design process of the fieldwork, this thesis engages with theoretical debates on the 'right to the city' and 'urban citizenship,' offering a comprehensive framework that can guide future research in similar contexts.

Regarding its social relevance, this research highlights the lived experiences of migrants in the *Outremeuse* neighbourhood, showcasing their perspectives and concerns on public spaces. By giving a voice to these often-marginalized individuals, the thesis fosters a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face in their daily lives.

And the political relevance can be found through the introduction of the urgent need for informed policy making that considers the realities of migrant populations in urban settings. The research finds that current practices are exclusionary, which respond to neoliberal policies (Walks, 2014) and advocates for a more inclusive approach to urban planning. By providing rigorous and truthful information about migrant experiences in public spaces, the work aims to counteract hostility and misconceptions about migrants. In addition, it aims at offering practical insights about every-day lives of migrants that can guide local governments and policymakers in developing initiatives that foster a welcoming and supportive environment for all residents.

Regarding the structure of this work, the thesis is divided in four main chapters. The first chapter introduces the context of this research, in particular, a brief overview of the history and demographics that characterise the spatial context of this research. First of all, this chapter situates us in a general way in the post-industrial city of Liège, and later, we see, through various graphs and images, the most characteristic public spaces of the Outremeuse neighbourhood. This chapter also presents the initiatives that make us consider the political relevance of this research. In the second chapter we situate the theoretical review of the existing literature relevant to this research. In this we establish three different thematic blocks that respond to the different parts of the research question that guides the work: Migration and superdiversity in the city; Public spaces and the “right to the city”; and Multi-level governance and urban citizenship. In addition, at the end of each these sub-chapters, we establish a hypothesis that will be tested. In the third chapter, it is presented the methodology by which I carried out my fieldwork and constructed my data analysis. This research is based on the analysis of a series of interviews with migrant residents of

the *Outremeuse* neighbourhood, as well as various stakeholders present in the area. These interviews took different forms due to the interest in combining a more traditional methodology with certain visual methods such as cognitive maps. To this end, "walking interviews" were conducted along with the creation of mental maps with the residents, and traditional interviews with the different stakeholders. These interviews were conducted during the months of May and June 2024 in this same neighbourhood, except for the one with the representative of the city of Liège, and were conducted in French, Portuguese, and Spanish. Moreover, in this chapter I highlight the process that led to the formulation of my research question, I give a description of the research participants, and I reflect on my positionality and the limits of my research. The next and fourth chapter is the core of this work, in which I analyse the materials produced through the interviews. In this chapter, testimonies extracted from these interviews are presented along with reflections from my own observations. Additionally, at the end of this chapter, the cognitive maps created by the residents of *Outremeuse* are analysed with the aim of exploring their ways of inhabiting public space. And, to end up with this chapter the hypotheses established in the work are tested. To conclude the work, a series of final conclusions are presented in which the main findings are summarized, possible lines of research to follow are proposed, and this work is invited to be considered as practical material for the development of local policies that take into account public space and migrant people.

CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT

1. Liège, *la cite ardente*, and its relationship with migration and public spaces over the last years

Liège, situated in the French-speaking region of Belgium, has a long history of migration dating back centuries. The city experienced significant industrialization during the 19th and 20th centuries which attracted migrant workers. Firstly, the labour migrants came from Flanders rural areas to the city. Then, during the post-World War I period, the makeup of migration was largely Eastern European countries, such as Poland (Kesteloot, 1998). After the II World War, migrants came specially from Italy, and to less extent from Spain and Greece, to fill Liege's need for labour in the mining sector (Martiniello, 2002). These early waves of migration played a crucial role in shaping the city's industrial landscape and cultural diversity, contributing to the emergence of vibrant ethnic neighbourhoods and multicultural communities.

In more recent decades, Liège has witnessed new waves of migration driven by globalization, European integration, and geopolitical events. Post-war migration flows from former colonies, such as Morocco, Turkey, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have contributed to the city's multicultural character and demographic diversity (Martiniello & Rea, 2009). Additionally, the city has attracted migrants from Eastern European countries following the enlargement of the European Union, further enriching its social fabric.

On January 1, 2023, the province of Liège had 1,115,518 inhabitants and the city 195,346. From the total of inhabitants, 11.41% were from non-Belgian origin in the province, and in the city the total of population from non-Belgian origin reached up to 20.03% (STATBEL, 2023). We can see that in 2023, the total number of people of foreign origin in the city of Liège was almost double the number of people of foreign origin in the Walloon region. The figures show how these numbers have followed an upward trend and justify the strong influence of migration in shaping the identity of this city, making Liège a "post-migratory city" (Martiniello, 2011). However, as other authors such as Bousetta, Lafleur or Stangherlin (2018) point out, Liège could also be considered a city in a current migratory situation, as well as a multicultural or transnational one. Definitely, we observe how in this city demography is constantly redefined today by human mobility (Bousetta et al., 2018). As a result of this increase in the number of migrants in the city in recent years, issues related to migration and cultural diversity are still the subject of debate (Bousetta et al., 2018) within the local environment (Mescoli, Clarebout & De Sousa, 2019)

Evolution of the non-Belgian population (%) at 01/01

	2023	2015	2007
Walloon Region	10.88	9.82	9.22
Province of Liège	11.41	10.56	19.35
District of Liège	13.39	12.63	12.44
City of Liège	20.03	18.83	16.60

Source(s): Data obtained from Statistics Belgium (STATBEL) and elaborated by the author.

The relationship between inhabitants of Belgium origin and migrant people in Liège has been complex and dynamic, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards immigration and cultural diversity. While the city has a history of social cohesion and intercultural exchange, it has also witnessed instances of tension and discrimination, particularly during periods of economic hardship and social change (Pécoud & de Guchteneire, 2005). Despite the official discourse on cultural diversity and anti-discrimination policies, not all residents of Liège have yet accepted the idea that migration partly shapes contemporary Liège identity (Marfouk, 2014). It exists a big share of the population who shows their opposition to migration because of strong fears about the cultural and economic impact that this phenomenon might have. Consequently, they show strong support for restrictive immigration policies and a rather unfavourable attitude to a superdiverse society (Bousetta, Lafleur & Stangherlin, 2018). However, this situation is somewhat atypical since, despite the anti-immigration attitudes in the region in recent years, we have seen several pro-immigration campaigns carried out by the institutions to present Liège as a city that welcomes migrants. In addition, civil society, grassroots initiatives and community organizations have played a crucial role in fostering dialogue, solidarity, and mutual understanding among diverse communities (Hassenteufel & Rea, 2010). They have shown strong support for improving the welcoming and consequent inclusion of migrants in society.

Migration management and its effects on the social fabric in Liège are closely linked to institutional and political discourse on the intercultural aspect of the city's post-industrial urban setting. Local political players have approached multicultural issues with an open mind, and it can be argued that Liège has a tradition of relative political openness to immigration, in the context of an open intercultural dialogue according to Bousetta, Lafleur, and Stangherlin (2018) and Mescoli (2021). In terms of institutional responses, the city of Liège has implemented various policies and programs to address the needs and challenges of its migrant population. Local authorities have invested in integration initiatives, language courses, and social support services

to facilitate the inclusion of migrants and promote social cohesion (Martiniello, 2010). The local government of Liège has developed a robust discourse on interculturality, recognizing the city's unique identity as a region at the crossroads of various cultures and the offspring of various migrant waves. Alongside this discursive posture, the city has implemented a number of public initiatives designed to acknowledge diversity. The city's adoption of a charter against racism in 1995, its support for intercultural organizations, Diversity Month, membership in the European Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination since 2006, its designation as a "*Ville Hospitalière, responsable, accueillante et ouverte*" since 2017, and its adherence to the concept of being a "sanctuary city" are all examples of how we can see it. These initiatives are examples of how the city is presenting itself as a welcoming space for cultural diversities.

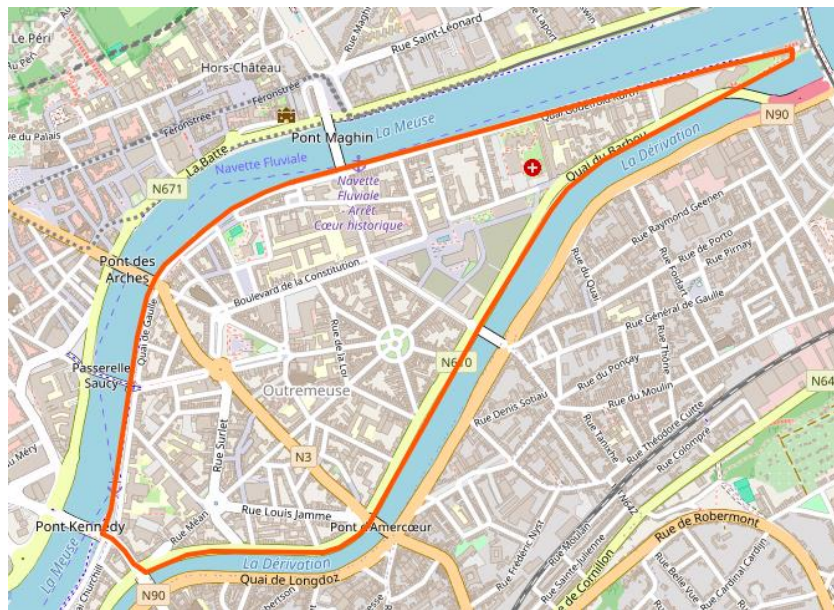
We can see how these initiatives on the part of the institutions have been actively participated in city branding efforts to promote itself as an inclusive, diverse, and cosmopolitan city. Strategies such as cultural festivals, heritage preservation, and urban regeneration projects have been utilized to showcase Liège's multicultural identity and attract investment, tourism, and talent (González-Gómez et al., 2016). However, the issue of immigration does not occupy a central and decisive place in the political debate in Liège, a sign that it does not generate significant mobilization among the population. This paradox can be seen, for example, in the few mentions of well-being in the everyday life of migrants in Liège. A clear example is that in the city's strategic program for 2025, more than 1600 ideas and projects submitted by the citizens of Liège are listed, in none of which migrants are mentioned, nor are there any references to the city as a multicultural and/or superdiverse space. Moreover, in the cases in which reference is made to people in the most vulnerable situations or to the total citizenry as a whole and their relationship with the city, it is done in a punitivist manner and focused on the safety of the inhabitants, without specifying what could be improved.

2. *Outremeuse*, the heart of the city's folklore

Within a city, studying the dynamics of different neighbourhoods, such as the case of *Outremeuse* in Liège, is crucial in social sciences research as it offers a microcosm of urban life with diverse social, cultural, and economic interactions (Kesteloot, 1998). The analysis of neighbourhood dynamics shed light on patterns of social cohesion, spatial inequality, and local governance strategies (Baudelle et al., 2020), contributing to a deeper understanding of urban development and community empowerment.

The neighbourhood of *Outremeuse* is located in the eastern part of the city of Liège. It is situated on an island formed by the Meuse River and the Derivation Canal, making it a

geographically unique area within the city. *Outremeuse* is characterized by its proximity to the water, with numerous bridges connecting it to other parts of Liège. The neighbourhood features a mix of residential, commercial, and cultural spaces. Demographically, *Outremeuse* is known for its diverse population with a significant presence of diverse migrant communities. This diversity is evident in the variety of shops and restaurants that represent different ethnic backgrounds. According to the latest data from Statbel, the neighbourhood has a population density that is relatively high, 12,575 hab./km, compared to other parts of Liège and the city itself, with 2,845.5 hab./km² (Statbel, 2023).



OpenStreetMap contributors. (2024). Map of Outremeuse neighbourhood in Liège

The neighbourhood of *Outremeuse* has a rich history of migration and multiculturalism, documented in works from researchers such as like Martiniello and Rea's "*Migrations et diversité culturelle à Liège*" (2009), or from reports from local associations, such as “*urbAgora*”. Through these works we can see which are the characteristics that make this district the heart of Liège's folklore. Among these examples of Liège folklore, we find the characters of Tchanches and Nanesse, from legends that say that the latter served Charlemagne in his campaigns. Today, this character appears in puppet theatres and there is a statue of him on the Yser Square. Another major manifestation of this folklore is the festivities of XV August, when diverse religious and secular events take place, with a variety of parades and concerts. This neighbourhood embodies the city's identity more than any other and has also become one of the symbols of the transformation of Liège's demography through immigration.

Nowadays, dozens of nationalities live in side by side, with many people from different origin countries. In population surveys conducted by the city in 2015, more than a third of its

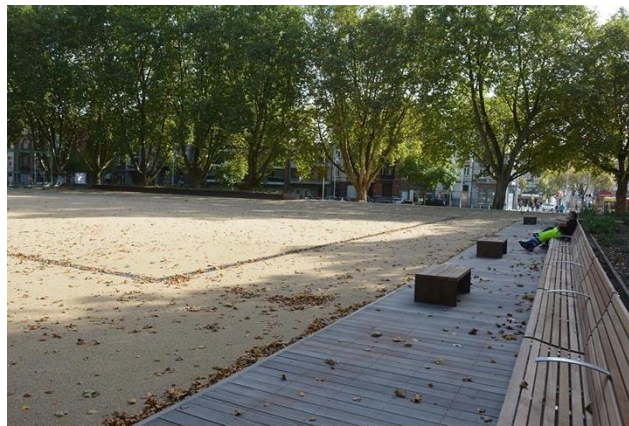
inhabitants were of foreign origin. However, it can be observed that many of these migrant communities remain isolated from each other. We can find a dense community fabric which suffers from a lack of social cohesion between the different groups living there (urbAgora, 2012).

The migratory character of this neighbourhood is not new, *Outremeuse* has been a receiving people of foreign origin the last centuries. In the inter-war period, after the arrival of Russian populations from the White Army, a large number of families from the Jewish community – mainly from Poland – arrived. After, when the II World War came to an end, a large number of Italians – mainly from the region of Sicily – settled in the neighbourhood, before giving way to a more recent wave from various African countries – mainly from the Maghreb region and from former colonies. Another of the characteristics that interest us in this neighbourhood at the time of carrying out this research is how public spaces are organized in a neighbourhood of these characteristics. Most of these spaces are the result of the economic boom during the 19th century and according to reports of various local initiatives are considered scarce and not focused on the community needs of the people living in this neighbourhood. *Outremeuse's* unique cultural heritage and collective identities, as discussed by Martiniello and Morelli (2009), highlight the significance of studying neighbourhoods in exploring the intersections of heritage preservation, urban regeneration, and community identity formation in contemporary urban contexts.

According to the work of *urbAgora* (2012), we can establish that in the *Outremeuse* neighbourhood there are three large public spaces, which are the following squares: *Place de l'Yser*, *Place du Congrès* and *Place Delcour*. In the course of this paper, we will refer to public spaces as more than just physical locations; they are arenas for social interaction, community building, and the expression of cultural identities. Drawing on the works of urban sociologists like Low (2003, 2006) and Lefebvre (1996), public spaces can be understood as sites where social hierarchies, power dynamics, and contested meanings are both reflected and reproduced. The physical embodiments of these ideas can be parks, playgrounds, squares or plazas, streets and sidewalks, community centres, public markets, libraries, or public transportation hubs.

These three plazas have undergone renovations in recent years and share the common characteristic of having been overrun by the cars and they have lost their urban qualities, such as being an open space, a place to stroll or a place to socialise. In the following images we can see current photos of the current urban planning of these three squares. In these pictures we can see one of the most popular and at the same time controversial public spaces in this neighbourhood, the Yser Square (*Place de l'Yser*). Its origins date back to the end of the 16th century, when it was the site of the first *Baviere* hospital and since 1973, it became home to the famous Popular Square Theatre (*Théâtre Populaire de la Place*), which was demolished in summer 2014 to allow for the redevelopment of the *Place de l'Yser*. These works have been the subject of much debate

among the residents of this neighbourhood, as the square has been built on several levels around a central street. This characteristic, in addition to the fact that it is not often used for public and communal events due to errors in the construction work, has been strongly criticised as it does not allow for a complete view of the public space. This square was not built at the same level as the current level of the streets and pavements in this area, so to access it, stairs must be built. This feature does not allow for a full view of the square when passing by it. The residents of this neighbourhood feel that the impossibility of having a clear view of the square and the interactions taking place has created a sense of insecurity and unfamiliarity with this public space. As we can see in one of these photos, as we walk along the side of the square, we cannot get a view of it.



Yser Square, Outremeuse. (2024). City of Liège Official Website. Retrieved from <https://www.liege.be/fr/decouvrir/plein-air/places/>

Another of the most important plazas in this neighbourhood is the Congress Square (*Place du Congrès*), which was built in 1880 and is made up of five tree-covered blocks with benches and a central roundabout occupied by a bust. Today, this square is almost unused as a meeting

place, as it is a large roundabout, very busy with transport, which does not have the characteristics to make it a public space dedicated to its neighbours.



Congress Square, Outremeuse. (2012). Retrieved from <https://www.fotocommunity.de/photo/liege-place-du-congres-thorsten-schwafferts/28267285>

Lastly, the third major public space in this neighbourhood is the Delcour Square (*Place Delcour*), which was created in the 19th century as part of the redevelopment of the district. This square is one of the most emblematic spaces during the most popular festivities in this neighbourhood, the 15th of August. However, during the rest of the year it is a square that constitutes a large roundabout whose spaces dedicated to the neighbours as community spaces are scarce and, in many cases, criticised as unsafe and dirty.



Delcour Square, Outremeuse. (2016). Jean Housen. Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved from https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Place_Delcour#/media/Fichier:20160320_outremeuse01_alt.jpg

However, these three squares are not the only public spaces relevant to this neighbourhood, which has had several works carried out in recent years by the local administration with the aim of creating public spaces dedicated to the neighbourhood and greenery. Among these works we can highlight those of the *Boulevard de la Constitution* carried out during the last year and which continues, so it is too early to assess their impact on the dynamics of public spaces in the area. In the following photos we can see other public spaces, as well as some pictures of the main streets in the neighbourhood. In these photos we can see how *Outremeuse* is home to shops, restaurants, bars and cafés of diverse origins, which is one of the main characteristics of it.



Boulevard Saucy (on the right) and arrival to the roundabout hosting the *Tchantchès* monument uniting *Boulevard Saucy* and *Henri de Dinat* Street (on the left). (2024). (Photographs taken by the author).

In the following pictures, we can see Puits-en-Sock Street, one of the most important streets in this neighbourhood, which has been and continues to be the commercial centre of the area. Along this street, there are restaurants from various origins, including Syrian, Vietnamese, and Thai establishments, among others. Additionally, within this same neighbourhood, there are other establishments of Bulgarian, Algerian, or Moroccan origin. One of the key characteristics of *Outremeuse* is the blend of traditional shops and establishments, which are icons of classic folklore, alongside a large number of businesses and other enterprises run by migrants that are highly popular in the area.



Puits-en-Sock Street, Outremeuse. (2024). Michel Tonneau. Retrieved from <https://www.dhnet.be/regions/liege/2024/04/02/a-la-decouverte-des-rues-de-liege-la-rue-puits-en-sock-FDANVJVGMBEY7DDVYZI3GYMC6E/>



Aux Saveurs de Damas, Le Soleil du Vietnam and Le Mechoui, chez Rabah (2024). (Photographs taken by the author)

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Migration and superdiversity in the city

In contemporary societies, the consideration of migration-related issues encompasses a broad spectrum of socio-economic, cultural, and political dimensions, reflecting the multifaceted nature of migration and its impacts on receiving and sending countries (Massey & Singer, 2010). Migration trajectories are influenced by a multitude of factors, including economic opportunities, political instability, environmental changes, and social networks. The experiences of migrants are diverse, and they are shaped by the social structures and institutions of receiving countries, (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Migrants navigate complex systems of labour markets, educational institutions, healthcare systems, and legal frameworks, which can either facilitate or hinder their pathways of incorporation in the local society and their social positioning and mobility within it. They live with and across borders and making daily life decisions with a network of people that includes both local and transnational actors, ‘simultaneity’ (Glick Schiller, 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). However, determining who falls into the category of migrants in contemporary societies, and consequently as object of study in this work, is not devoid of challenges and controversies.

The labelling of migrants into legal and illegal, regular or irregular, categories perpetuates power dynamics and reinforces inequalities within societies (De Genova, 2002). This categorization often leads to the marginalization, exploitation, and stigmatization of undocumented migrants, limiting their access to basic rights and resources. It also reinforces the notion of citizenship as a privilege reserved for those with legal status, thereby excluding undocumented migrants from full participation in society (De Genova, 2002). This is why this thesis aims to explore the public space trajectories of migrants beyond their categorization into those with a regularized status and those without such status. We will limit ourselves to considering their migratory past, i.e., the fact they have moved from another country to Belgium no matter the reason why, as a defining feature that makes them part of a specific group within the city. For this purpose, although we will recognize the differences that being assigned to one category or other entails when interacting in the public space of the city, they will not be considered as exclusive categories when defining the profiles of the subjects of this research, following the ideas of De Genova and other authors.

To consider the experiences of different profiles of migrants is paramount for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that unfold within cities. By examining the varied experiences of migrants in different social positionings, we can elucidate the intersecting factors of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and legal status that shape their lived realities within urban

contexts (Anthias, 2001). For instance, the experiences of undocumented migrants in urban contexts differ significantly from those of migrants holding a residence permit due to their precarious legal status, which affects their access to employment, housing, healthcare, social services and relation with the public space (De Genova, 2002). Understanding the diverse experiences of migrants also derived from these different legal statuses allows us to uncover the structural inequalities and power dynamics that perpetuate social exclusion and marginalization within urban spaces (Anthias, 2007).

Moreover, considering the experiences of different profiles of migrants enriches our understanding of urban diversity. Migrants bring with them a multitude of cultural backgrounds, languages, and traditions, contributing to the richness and vibrancy of urban life (Alba & Foner, 2015). However, the experiences of migrants vary depending on factors such as their country of origin, socio-economic status, and migration pathways. By acknowledging these differences, we can analyse how cultural diversity intersects with other dimensions of social identity to shape patterns of social interaction, community formation, and collective belonging within cities (Vertovec, 2007).

Throughout history, cities have represented important places of associated life. At times, they have been regarded as places bestowing identity that ideally transcend ethnic and cultural differences and social divisions. At other times, they have been conceptualized as fragmenting, rather than unifying places (Pardo & Prato, 2012). This is why studying the social relations and interactions that take place in cities helps us to better understand what role cities play today in our contemporary societies and in their own construction. Cities are not new in the field of social sciences studies, like socio-cultural anthropology or urban sociology. Nevertheless, the local turn in migration studies has changed the way in which research in these areas is applied to study migration in the urban contexts. This local focus has become established in some academic contexts, but it struggles to achieve such a status in others. With half of humanity already living in towns and cities, growing to 2/3 in the next 50 years, there is no denying that research in urban settings is increasingly topical and needed as western and non-western society is fast becoming urban or mega-urban (Prado & Prato, 2012). This is why research such as that developed in this paper helps us to understand the importance of the local turn and how it helps us to better understand the trajectories of migrants' incorporation into cities.

Cities have come to be seen as key mediators in global politics, the global economy and in the social and cultural tensions of living with diversity (Amin, 2006; Sassen, 2006). Cities encompass a complex ecosystem of social, cultural, economic, and political interactions among diverse agents such as residents, migrants, governments, businesses, and civil society organizations. The city is a nexus where the processes of migration, urbanization, and

globalization converge, shaping and being shaped by the everyday practices and lived experiences of its inhabitants (Castells, 1983). Understanding the city requires an interdisciplinary approach drawing from different areas of social sciences to unravel the intricate networks, power dynamics, and spatial arrangements that define urban life. A focus on the city has both a political and an analytic purpose. Politically, it may offer a path to contest the exclusions of the nation-state through presenting the urban as a contested yet fertile ground for sequences of critique, notably on? (Darling, 2017). Especially after national pronouncements of exclusion and discrimination against newcomers, which have been observed in various European countries in recent years.

Cities serve as a microcosm of broader societal processes, offering insights into the intersections of migration with other social phenomena such as globalization, urbanization, and social inequality (Sassen, 1991). Furthermore, research on cities allows for an examination of the spatial dimensions of migration, including patterns of residential segregation, spatial inequalities, and the formation of migrant enclaves (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Urban spaces are characterized by diverse neighbourhoods, each with its own social, cultural, and economic dynamics, which shape the experiences and trajectories of migrants (Vertovec, 2007). By analyzing the spatial distribution of migrant populations and the accessibility of resources and services within cities, researchers can uncover patterns of social stratification and identify barriers to social mobility and inclusion (Putnam, 2000).

European cities have developed in very different ways and have adopted diverse political positions on migrants, some very much in line with the national policies of their countries and others with greater independence and closeness to the most vulnerable groups. In these contexts, several European cities have developed alternative projects aimed at creating more sustainable or more welcoming cities. Among these we can find “sanctuary cities”. Sanctuary cities represent a form of resistance by local governments and communities against federal immigration enforcement policies perceived as punitive, discriminatory, or unjust (Chacón & Davis, 2011). These cities adopt sanctuary policies as a means of asserting their autonomy and defending the rights and dignity of immigrant populations within their jurisdictions. This initiative seeks to promote a culture of welcome towards asylum seekers and refugees more particularly, based around ideals of responsibility and hospitality (Darling, 2017; Squire, 2011). In the case of Liège, as some authors point out, the tolerance on the part of the local authorities with regard to the alternatives that are developed to welcome migrants, makes the city be considered as such (Mescoli, 2021). It is thus seen as a relatively safe space for these individuals and provides space to propose broader political claims in interest of these groups regarding their social and legal situations from the local civil society and the migrant individuals themselves.

In the migration trajectories, cities serve as focal points, attracting diverse populations from across the globe in search of economic opportunities, social networks, and cultural exchanges. Urban centres provide migrants with vital social networks and support systems that facilitate their incorporation and adaptation to new environments. But they also serve as vibrant hubs of cultural diversity, offering migrants opportunities for cultural exchange, expression, and identity formation. They offer migrants platforms for political participation, advocacy, and collective action to address issues of social justice, inequality, and discrimination (Castells & Chemla, 1999; Fabini, 2016). Cities represent the space in which many migrants forge their lives and identities, and studying these dynamics helps us to understand them in order to develop policies and programs that are better adapted to the needs of these populations. As Martiniello (2012) pointed out migrants are historical agents of city development and we need to better understand the reciprocal links between city change and migration.

As we can see migration and cities mutually benefit from each other's, fostering advancement and development in contemporary societies. Cities offer migrants opportunities for economic participation, social integration, and cultural exchange (Massey & Singer, 2010). Migrants contribute to urban economies through labour force participation, entrepreneurship, and innovation, driving economic growth and dynamism (Alba & Foner, 2015). Additionally, migrants enrich urban societies with their diverse perspectives, skills, and cultural practices, fostering creativity, tolerance, and social cohesion within urban spaces (Sassen, 1991). In turn, cities provide migrants with access to essential services, educational opportunities, and social networks, facilitating their integration and upward mobility (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This symbiotic relationship between migration and cities underscores their pivotal role in shaping the social, economic, and cultural fabric of contemporary societies.

The relationship between the city and migration has observed a paradigm shift as pointed out by Çaglar (2015), who establishes that we can speak of an “urban turn” in migration studies which analyses the migrants’ trajectories and practices in intersection with global dynamics and local policies, structures and institutions. It exists a growing interest in the local as a socio-spatial context where practices, social relations and power networks take place. In this context, cities have become the settings where migration in urban governance has developed, particularly different theoretical models and approaches to migration-related diversity. Among these models which we consider relevant for this research, are those of multiculturalism and superdiversity have played and continue to play an essential role.

Due to a growing disaffection with the term multiculturalism as a discourse in migratory contexts, we will henceforth use the concept of superdiversity developed by Vertovec (2007, 2022) to refer to the increasingly complex and diverse nature of contemporary migration patterns and migrant populations. Because multiculturalism comprises generally solid and identifiable ethnic or cultural groupings, we avoid it as one of the key characteristics that define urban environments; instead, we think the idea of superdiversity is more appropriate. The understanding used in this research presented by Vertovec highlights the proliferation of smaller, less recognizable, and more transient forms of diversity, that challenge conventional understandings of identity, integration, and social cohesion.

Superdiversity suggests that contemporary urban spaces are characterized by a multiplicity of intersecting identities, affiliations, and experiences, which shape and are shaped by complex social, economic, and political dynamics. It underscores the need for policymakers and researchers to adopt more nuanced and context-specific approaches to address the challenges and opportunities associated with diverse migration patterns and populations in contemporary societies, as we will develop throughout this work. Diversity is assumed as an internal feature of urban planning because it involves the level of its inhabitants' inter-subjective and negotiated relationships alongside questions of the recognition of their identities and justice in the occupation of public space (Sandercock, 2003; Fainstein, 2010; Fincher and Iverson, 2008).

In examining the relationship between migrants and urban spaces, this study posits several hypotheses that will be empirically tested in subsequent chapters. Firstly, it is hypothesized that the **socioeconomic characteristics of migrants significantly influence their engagement with public spaces in Outremeuse (H1)**. This broad hypothesis is further refined through two sub-hypotheses:

H1a: Migrants with regularized legal status are posited to feel a greater sense of legitimacy in occupying public spaces compared to those with irregular status.

H1b: It is also anticipated that migrant men perceive themselves as more legitimate occupants of public spaces than migrant women.

These hypotheses aim to unravel the nuanced ways in which legal status and gender intersect to shape migrants' interactions with urban environments.

2. Public spaces and the “right to the city”

The notion of public space has generated great interest in different fields inscribed in this research. Such as urban sociology, anthropology and migration studies, which bring a variety of

viewpoints on its characteristics, purposes, and interpretations in contemporary societies. Public space is frequently understood in urban sociology as a location of social interaction, communal identity, and urban life (Sennett, 1977). Authors such as Whyte (1980) emphasize on how human behaviour and design shape public spaces' vitality and vibrancy. It also highlights the significance of sidewalks, *plazas*, and benches in promoting social interactions and community cohesion.

Regarding the anthropological perspectives on public space which explain us our research, we consider the work of Low (2003, 2006) in particular because it offers insights into the cultural, symbolic, and ritual dimensions of public gatherings and performances. This understanding explores how public spaces reflect and reproduce social hierarchies, power dynamics, and contested meanings, particularly in diverse urban contexts. Low emphasizes the significance of public spaces as arenas for negotiation, contestation, and the expression of collective identities and cultural practices.

Migration studies further enrich our understanding of public space by foregrounding issues of mobility, diversity, and belonging. We consider urban spaces become sites of encounter, exchange, and contention for migrants, where they negotiate their presence and assert their rights to the city (Mitchell, 2003). As Ley (2007) illustrates, migrant communities transform public spaces into hubs of social support, cultural expression, and political mobilization, challenging dominant narratives of exclusion and marginalization. Moreover, migration scholars emphasize the importance of considering intersecting dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, and class in shaping migrants' experiences of public space and their access to resources and opportunities (Isin & Wood, 1999).

This research aims to delve into the interconnections existing between urban sociology, anthropology, and migration studies in the study of public space – and migrants' experiences in it –, in order to offer a holistic understanding of public space as a complex and dynamic social phenomenon. By integrating perspectives from these diverse fields, we can analyse the multifaceted dimensions of public space, its meanings, functions, and implications for social justice, urban governance and alternative ways of citizenship. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches within social sciences facilitate a more nuanced understanding of how migration processes intersect with urban transformations, cultural dynamics, and social inequalities, shaping the lived experiences of individuals and communities within contemporary cities, as it's analysed in this research in the city of Liège.

The "right to the city" and how immigrants shape and contribute to its evolution via their experiences and resistances in the city are among the most significant ideas we explore during our investigation. This concept introduced by Lefebvre (1991, 1996) presents the idea that the

"right to the city" as a call for the democratization of urban space, wherein inhabitants assert their collective rights to participate in the shaping and governance of the city's social, economic, and cultural life (Purcell, 2002). The "right to the city" by Lefebvre does not offer a unique and unequivocal definition of this right, nevertheless, it offers some insights which are key to articulate this concept in migrants' journeys in the city. One of the main ideas from this conception is that of the reappropriation of the urban space by citizens as a starting point for the democratic transformation of society, which is primary to legitimate migrants' journeys through the city.

This conceptualization challenges traditional notions of urban space as commodified and controlled by powerful interests, advocating instead for inclusive, equitable, and participatory approaches to urban planning and development (Harvey, 2008). This notion has continued to nourish research and scientific debates around the "urban question" (Castel, 1995), the various forms of socio-spatial inequalities and the process of marginalization and segmentation that characterize contemporary cities, along with movements and practices of resistance (Mitchell, 2003; Harvey, 2008). It is also especially paramount for the research because this understanding stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants, which will help us to understand the alternative ways of citizenship that migrant people develop.

When it comes to migration individuals, the concept takes on added significance as migrant people navigate the complexities of urban life and negotiate their access to urban space, resources, and opportunities (Mitchell, 2003) in specific ways. Diverse migration scholars have drawn upon Lefebvre's framework to analyse how migrants assert their rights to the city, despite facing barriers such as discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization (Isin & Wood, 1999). Migrant communities often mobilize around issues of housing, employment, education, and social services, advocating for more inclusive and responsive urban policies and practices (Ley, 2007). The "right to the city" thus becomes a powerful tool for understanding the ways in which migration intersects with urban transformations, social movements, and struggles for social justice within contemporary cities.

Moreover, ethnographic research in urban neighbourhoods inhabited by migrant populations offer insights into how the "right to the city" is enacted and contested in everyday life (Smith, 1996). By engaging with migrant communities through participatory research methods, we can uncover the ways in which migrants navigate and transform urban space, challenge dominant narratives of belonging and exclusion, and articulate their demands for a more inclusive and equitable city (Davidson & Milligan, 2004).

Regarding the academic debates around the “right to the city”, this work proposes a critical examination of how these discussions intersect with the lived experiences of migrants. Specifically, it is hypothesized that **debates in academia regarding the daily lives of migrants and their relationship with public space in urban contexts, such as the “right to the city”, tend to overlook or be oblivious to the concerns of migrant populations (H2)**. This hypothesis will be tested in the chapter dedicated to the analysis of the empirical material, aiming to reveal whether academic discourse sufficiently addresses the realities faced by migrants in urban settings

3. Multi-level governance and “urban citizenship”

Within this research, the focus lies on critically examining alternative conceptions of citizenship that have emerged in academia in recent years, particularly within the contexts of migration and urban contests. Drawing on insights from authors from urban sociology and migration studies, the aim is to unpack the complexities of citizenship beyond traditional, state-centric frameworks, with particular attention to the experiences of vulnerable groups, especially migrant populations in the city, and particularly in the specific neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*.

Adopting a neighbourhood-level perspective to understand migration trajectories in the urban context is key. In recent years, neighbourhoods have been more recognized by academics as sites where diverse social, cultural, and economic processes intersect, shaping residents' experiences and opportunities (Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009). Particularly in the European context, where cities often exhibit high levels of socioeconomic and cultural diversity, studying neighbourhoods allows us to unpack the complexities of urban life within a context of migration, superdiversity, and social inequality (Phillips, 2017).

Furthermore, the concept of multi governance has gained prominence in European urban studies, reflecting the complex governance structures that operate at multiple levels or scales within cities. This concept encompasses an understanding of governance at different levels, but also with the involvement of various actors, including not only administrations but also civil society and other stakeholders. European cities are characterized by decentralized governance systems, involving interactions between municipal, regional, national, and supranational actors (Gross, 2017). By focusing on specific neighbourhoods, we can analyse how these multilevel governance arrangements influence urban development, social cohesion, and policy implementation (Oosterlynck et al., 2013).

In this context, a neighbourhood-level perspective is indispensable for understanding the dynamics of migrant incorporation and neighbourhood dynamics and change in European cities,

such as Liège. Neighbourhoods of the receiving countries often serve as entry points for migrants, where they establish social networks, access services, and negotiate their place within the urban landscape (Crul & Doornik, 2003). Research focusing on neighbourhoods' sheds light on the spatial concentration of migrant populations, the formation of ethnic enclaves, and the processes of social interaction and boundary-making between migrants and native residents (Lancee & Dronkers, 2011).

Citizenship, traditionally understood as a legal status granted by the nation-state, is being redefined and renegotiated in urban contexts characterized by diversity, mobility, and multi governance structures. By examining how citizenship is practiced and experienced at the neighbourhood level, researchers can uncover alternative modes of belonging, participation, and social inclusion that challenge conventional understandings of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). In diverse neighbourhoods, residents often engage in grassroots initiatives, community organizing, and collective action to address local challenges and assert their rights, thereby forging alternative pathways to citizenship beyond formal legal frameworks (Picker & Lofts, 2018).

Within these alternative understandings of citizenship, the urban one is key for this research because it offers a lens through which to understand citizenship as enacted within urban spaces. There are alternative understandings to citizenship such as the transnational citizenship or the cosmopolitan citizenship that share the idea that citizenship transcends fixed territorial boundaries (Picker & Lofts, 2018). Particularly, urban citizenship challenges the narrow confines of national citizenship, recognizing the city as a site of political agency, identity, and belonging. Through an exploration of urban citizenship, the aim is to investigate how migrants navigate and negotiate their rights and responsibilities within urban contexts, regardless of their legal status or nationality.

This research adopts a critical perspective on classical citizenship, foregrounding its exclusionary nature and privileging of certain groups over others. By centring the experiences and voices of migrant individuals, the goal is to interrogate dominant narratives of citizenship and explore alternative forms of belonging and participation within urban spaces. Through this critical lens, this research aims to challenge systemic inequalities and injustices that affect vulnerable groups and advocate for more inclusive, equitable, and rights-based approaches to citizenship and governance in urban settings (Holston, 2008; Isin & Wood, 1999 & Marshall, 1950).

Through an ethnographic exploration of migrant experiences in the urban and superdiverse neighbourhood of *Outremeuse* in Liège, the aim is to illuminate the ways in which the concept of urban citizenship is enacted, contested, and transformed on the ground. By putting in the centre the voices and perspectives of migrant communities, the research aims to generate

insights that can inform more inclusive and equitable urban policies and practices, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of citizenship in diverse urban contexts.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will present in detail the research approach employed in this work. First of all, I want to explain how I became interested in this research and how this idea developed into a research question with its hypotheses and methodological design. In this first part I intend to present the challenges, dilemmas and problems that have arisen during this first stage of the research. After that, I will explain in detail my qualitative research design based on an urban ethnography that combines more classical methods of qualitative research, such as interviews and observation, as well as some methods of visual methodology, such as cognitive mapping. This methodological combination aims to achieve a research in which participants can be part of the design of the work, as well as having a strong presence in the elaboration of part of the results through these visual supports. Next, I will move on to the data collection phase in which I will focus on the interviewees and their profiles. I will then go on to discuss how I have analysed in detail the information collected through the fieldwork. And finally, I will reflect my positionality with regard to this research, as well as a discussion of the limitations of this research and how I have dealt with all of this.

2. Development of the research topic

This research, as well as its main research question, hypotheses and methodological design have been developed as part of a reflexive and evolving process, rooted in both my personal and academic experiences. The roots of this idea go back to my interest in the intersection between migration studies and urban sociology, as well as my desire to make these studies more accessible to the general public. From the outset, I set out to implement a somewhat innovative methodology that was unfamiliar to me and that included meaningful visual support in order to communicate my findings in a more effective and engaging way. The evolution of how to turn these ideas into a methodological design paralleled the development of the research question of the paper.

The idea of focusing my research on a local issue, specifically at the urban level and within my own neighbourhood, came from a need to explore issues that were relevant and close to my everyday surroundings. I wanted my research to be not only academically rigorous, but also relevant to the community in which I live. This local focus allowed me to develop a research question that resonated with both my personal interests and the needs of the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*. In this way I came to construct a question that had a general idea of how the residents of this neighbourhood inhabit public spaces. At the same time, I added a more academic part,

such as that of contributing practical results to debates about the “right to the city” and alternative conceptions of citizenship. However, the idea of combining these two aspects into a single main research question is due to the idea of bringing academic debates closer to the public at large, responding to one of the great challenges of communication in social sciences. Following this idea, to be able to rely on work such as that of Van de Ven (2007), on how to realize a research that involves stakeholders and participants in almost each step of the research process have helped me a lot.

As I developed my methodology, I was constantly concerned with the issue of my positionality as a researcher. However, after several conversations with my thesis advisor Elsa Mescoli, as well as with one of my thesis readers, Alice Clarebout, I understood that positionality is just another characteristic of ethnographies that should not hinder our process. Instead, we should view it as an aspect of ethical rigor that does not have to be negative in research but rather a way to acknowledge our privileged position in these processes. Consequently, I acknowledged that by choosing to investigate in my own neighbourhood, I was going to confront three essential problematics of ethnographies: familiarity, otherness and engagement (Campignotto, Dobbels & Mescoli, 2017). In this case, as it is an ethnography with mainly an emic perspective (with except of some questions during the interviews from an etic approach), in which the field studied is part of my daily life, the problem that arose most for me was that of familiarity. Specifically, the exercise of decentralising my gaze and distancing myself from all the prejudices and preconceptions that already existed in my head when I got to know the existing dynamics. Eventually, when I started conducting the interviews, I realised that this familiarity could be an advantage. Familiarity with the environment and the community made me question certain preconceptions I had and also made me realise that some of these ideas would end up compromising my methodology and results. At the same time, as I’ve mentioned, it facilitated access and trust and allowed me to problematize my own role and perspectives academically, which leads me to the problematic of otherness.

Regarding the issue of otherness, within this research, I consider myself as another member of this community, being a resident of this neighbourhood and a migrant myself. And in line with the idea of studying a community by one of its members, we can establish that this research adopts mainly an emic perspective (Pike, 1954), with some exceptions of questions related with academic concepts that were spoke during the conversations with the interviewees with the aim of knowing what the relationship between these academic concepts and the understanding of them in reality is. However, as much as I considered myself to be a member of this group, there is a boundary between "me" (researcher) and "them" (interviewees), which is also influenced by other identity characteristics such as being young, a white, heteronormative

woman, with access to higher education. All these characteristics of myself were present during the interactions with the interviewees, and at times constituted a problem. For example, as I also explain later in the last section of this chapter, there were times when as a young woman having a conversation with men older than me became uncomfortable for me.

Nevertheless, the fact that positionality, familiarity and otherness have been a recurring theme in ethnographies, pushed me prompted to understand and accept my position as a particular characteristic of this study and not as a barrier to the transparency and objectivity of the empirical results that will emerge from this work. Coming back to my interest in urban sociology and migration trajectories over these two years of my master's program has been driven by several factors. On one hand, having close friends studying urban sociology has guided me through this process of discovering the discipline, eventually leading me to undertake a thesis whose theoretical and practical aspect are deeply connected to this area, like the works of Lefebvre (1968), Mayer (2012) or Brenner (2019). Additionally, having spent these last two years reading the work of several of my professors, such as Marco Martiniello and Jean-Michel Lafleur, whose research on inclusion and superdiversity in Liège has sparked a particular interest in the existing dynamics of this city.

3. Research methods

3.1. Ethnography in (urban) public space

With the objective of offering a nuanced and contextually rich exploration of the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*, this research uses multiple qualitative research tools within an ethnographic framework. In order to understand the everyday practices and life of migrants in a neighbourhood, I considered ethnography to be the most appropriate qualitative method because of its possibilities for understanding reality, as well as the relationship that the researcher establishes with the research itself. As Van Zanten (2010) points out, ethnography is distinguished by six characteristic traits: 1) the extended stay in the studied community allowing for the collection of information through participant observation; 2) the focus on everyday activities; 3) the interest in the meaning attributed by the actors to their actions; 4) the production of accounts that give priority to the contextualisation and the internal coherence of the observed phenomena; 5) the tendency to conceive the research in terms of the contextualisation and the internal coherence of the observed phenomena; 5) the tendency to conceive the interpretative framework as a progressive construction rather than as the testing of a set of hypotheses defined in advance; 6) methods of presentation of the interpretations marking narrative, description and theoretical conceptualization. This definition of what an ethnography is fits with the main aim of this research, which is to understand how daily activities of migrant people in the neighbourhood shape the debates about various urban questions. Additionally, this definition highlights the meaning that

the actors give to their actions and the importance of contextualisation, which are two axes that this research pretends to establish, as we can see through the idea of putting the discourse of migrants at the centre of research.

In this case, an urban ethnography will take place in order to capture the unique social dynamics and cultural practices that characterize this neighbourhood and that helps us to understand the way people inhabit public space. Urban ethnographies drawing on Wirth (1938) and Anderson (1990) works explore how the residents of the urban areas through their everyday lives and practices influence patterns of socialization, community formation, or cultural expression. Moreover, urban ethnographies often focus on the spatial dimensions of urban life, exploring how people navigate, inhabit, and appropriate urban spaces. Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) concept of the production of space, I will analyse the ways in which social relations and power dynamics are inscribed into the built environment. Ethnographic studies shed light on the spatial practices and everyday routines of urban residents, revealing how they negotiate and contest urban space (Laurier & Philo, 2006).

Understanding the intricate dynamics of how migrant populations utilize public spaces within the vibrant neighbourhood of *Outremeuse* in Liège necessitates a multifaceted methodological approach that captures the nuanced experiences and perspectives of individuals within this context. In this case, I have decided to use the different qualitative tools within this urban ethnography in order to get as close as possible to the complex realities represented by the diverse trajectories of migrants in the new urban space in which they settle. This decision is due to several reasons, such as, apart from the complexities of migrant trajectories, the intersectionality of migrants' identities with the contexts in which they live, the spatial dimension of social life, and the specificities of urban and local contexts.

When trying to portray the experiences and trajectories of migrant individuals, the use of a combination of different qualitative tools allowed me for a more holistic exploration of the diverse ways in which migrants navigate and interact their daily lives within public spaces to explore the possibilities of it. This aligns with the notion of migration as a complex social phenomenon influenced by multiple factors such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and legal status (Castles et al., 2014). In other words, using a diverse methodology helps us to understand migration as a complex phenomenon, in which socio-economic and contextual factors have to be considered to the fullest extent possible. More classical methodological tools may be useful to capture certain dynamics and more visual ones may better respond to other aspects of the research.

This section delineates the methodological approach that will be employed, integrating qualitative techniques such as mobile interviews and visual methodologies including mental mapping, alongside direct observation of the neighbourhood and the utilization of photography. This approach is deeply rooted in the interdisciplinary nature of sociology of migration, drawing upon insights from urban sociology, anthropology, and policy making studies.

3.2. Walking interviews and the snowballing sampling

One of the most important parts of this research is to listen to the voices of our participants in order to understand their relationship with the public space they inhabit and how their claims are shaped by it. To this end, we use walking interviews as a fundamental methodological tool in the research for several reasons. First and foremost, interviews provide a platform for participants to share their personal experiences, perspectives, and narratives regarding their interactions with public spaces within the *Outremeuse* neighbourhood. Through open-ended questioning and probing, researchers can uncover rich, contextualized accounts of how migrants navigate and engage with their urban environment (Fontana & Frey, 2005). These first-hand accounts offer valuable insights into the lived realities of migrants, shedding light on the social, cultural, and spatial dimensions of their experiences.

Moreover, interviews allow us to explore the subjective meanings and interpretations that migrant individuals attribute to their spatial practices and encounters. By delving into participants' perceptions, emotions, and motivations, I can gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between individual agency and structural constraints within the urban landscape (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This qualitative approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the actors involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

In this research, as I intended to explore the rich insights into the lived realities of the neighbourhood, five walking interviews were conducted during the months of May and June 2024. These interviews offered a dynamic and immersive approach to qualitative research that aligned perfectly with the aims of conducting an ethnography in the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*. Walking interviews allow for a fluid interaction between the researcher and participants, fostering a relaxed and informal atmosphere conducive to open dialogue (Carpiano, 2009; Irving, 2010). As we traverse the streets, alleyways, and public spaces of *Outremeuse* together, participants can share their experiences, memories, and perspectives, offering rich insights into the lived realities of the neighbourhood (Pink, 2008; Pink, 2010). By embodying the physical environment and engaging in contextual exploration, walking interviews enable us to uncover the nuanced complexities of urban life in *Outremeuse*, capturing the spatial narratives and everyday practices

that shape the social fabric of the community (Wylie, 2002). The technique of talking while walking enables recording how place-based meaning, embodiment, spirituality and everyday practices come together. Moreover, the exploration of the flows and tensions that arise when moving between sites of the neighbourhood reveals the social and cultural politics of using the methodology of walking interviews for place-based knowledge production (Warren, 2017).

Furthermore, I decided to conduct interviews to migrants with different profiles, not considering as a prerequisite their legal status, age, gender, or other because of the commitment this work intend to show with alternative considerations of citizenship, such as urban citizenship, and the critique itself to these considerations as restrictive and exclusionary. By prioritizing individuals' lived experiences and voices over legal categorizations, I try to challenge traditional notions of citizenship based solely on legal membership in a nation-state (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). This approach recognizes the diverse ways in which individuals participate in and contribute to their communities, regardless of their status, thus promoting a more inclusive and equitable understanding of belonging and citizenship.

In addition, regarding the choice of participants to be interviewed, the intention is to incorporate them into the methodological design itself, through the use of the snowball sampling method. By empowering participants, also named as the key informants or seed participants, to nominate other individuals, also name as referrals, whom they believe can provide valuable insights for the research, a sense of ownership and collaboration is fostered within the research, moving beyond the traditional researcher-participant dichotomy (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This tool creates a chain of referrals which allow the research to access individuals who might be difficult to reach through traditional sampling methods, such as marginalized or hidden populations (Browne, 2005). This participatory approach not only strengthens the validity and relevance of the research but also fosters reciprocal relationship of trust between researchers and participants (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

3.3. Interviews with stakeholders

Conducting interviews with stakeholders such as diverse associations working with the migrant population in the neighbourhood, representatives of the local administration as well as the neighbourhood committee is a methodological choice that aims to add another layer to the understanding of the use of public space by migrant people within this ethnography. Interviews provide a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences and social dynamics within the district, capturing voices and perspectives of those directly engaged with the migrant population. This approach aligns with the ethnographic tradition of obtaining rich, detailed narratives that offer deep insights into the cultural and social contexts of the study population (Denzin & Lincoln,

2011). Classic interviews allow researchers to explore the complexities and subtleties of human behaviour and social interaction that are often missed by other methods, as they facilitate an in-depth exploration of personal experiences, motivations, and the meanings individuals attach to their actions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews with different stakeholders provide valuable contextual information that can illuminate the broader structural and institutional factors influencing how migrants navigate and inhabit public spaces and what is their role in implementing existing policies or in filling gaps due to the absence of policies regarding the lives of migrants in the neighbourhood. These stakeholders possess unique insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by migrants, the effectiveness of various support mechanisms, and the social and political dynamics at play in the neighbourhood. By engaging with these knowledgeable informants, I can gather data that enriches the investigation offering a multi-faceted understanding of the social fabric of the district (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

In this case, interviews were conducted with three different stakeholder profiles: a representative of the city administration, a worker of a cultural and social association of the neighbourhood, and the president of the neighbourhood committee. These interviews were easier to access than those with migrant neighbours because I used formal channels, such as writing an email or contacting them through their website. However, waiting times for a response were sometimes longer than for communication with migrants, which was usually done by whatsapp, other social networks or by people in common. In addition, I initially contacted more associations in the neighbourhood working with migrants and intercultural issues, but I did not always get a response. Sometimes I did get an answer, but as they themselves pointed out, due to their enormous workload they did not have time to be able to answer my questions.

3.4. Cognitive maps

This research aims to capture how migrants' experiences and trajectories unfold in public space, consequently, the use of visual methodology, such as cognitive maps, allowed us to understand how these spaces are imbued by social, cultural and political meanings, which influence the trajectories of these migrants. Visual methodology provides means to capture and convey complex and multifaceted aspects of the migration experience that may be challenging to fully express through verbal language alone, such as interviews (Banks, 2007). Through the use of this methodology such as cognitive mapping or other participation of migrants can be fostered in the research process, empowering them to share their stories and represent their environments in an authentic and meaningful manner (Rose, 2016). Moreover, visual methodology has the potential to challenge stereotyped and simplified representations of migrants in public and

political discourses, by allowing the expression of a broader and nuanced range of experiences and identities (Boccagni & Decimo, 2018)

At the same time, I wanted to explore how public space in the city participates in the social relations and identities of the people who inhabit it (Lefebvre, 1991). By empowering migrants to create their own visual representations of urban spaces, the research can gain insights that reflect the perspectives and agency of migrant individuals (Pink, 2015). Furthermore, understanding what dynamics exist within these spaces helps us to unfold what and how migrants' political claims are structured, such as the construction of a “right to the city” and alternative understandings of citizenship, such as urban citizenship.

Within visual methodology, we have seen how over the past years diverse methodological options are currently opening up new possibilities for field research (Pink, Kürti, Afonso & Jansbøl, 2004). In this case, we will use cognitive mapping which aim to help us understand migrant trajectories and perspectives in a complementary way to the use of more conventional qualitative tools such as interviews. With the elaboration of these maps, we intended to cross results that will help us understand the different trajectories and familiarities of the different participants in relation to the geography of this neighbourhood, with special attention to public spaces.

The so-called cognitive or mental maps serve as a valuable tool for eliciting participants' spatial perceptions, preferences, and navigational strategies within the urban landscape (Lynch, 1960). By asking participants to sketch their mental representations of the neighbourhood, I pretended to gain insights into the subjective meanings and associations attached to different locations and routes, providing a unique lens through which to explore migrant spatial practices (Kitchin & Blades, 2002). This methodological tool aims to ask participants to mark various points on a blank map of the neighbourhood that are significant to their relationship with public spaces. Additionally, during the interviews conducted in the research, participants' chosen routes will be mapped to identify points of convergence and divergence among the participants in this study that will be analysed afterwards. The use of this methodological tool facilitates a deeper understanding of how migrants conceptualize and interact with public spaces within the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*. By analysing the spatial patterns and configurations depicted in participants' maps, we can uncover underlying themes, tensions, and priorities shaping migrants' spatial experiences (Lynch, 1960; Downs & Stea, 1977). This approach enables us to go beyond verbal descriptions and tap into participants' subconscious perceptions and spatial cognition, offering a more holistic perspective on migrant spatial behaviours, beyond what they express in the interviews. Moreover, the use of this tool allows us to expose under-researched qualities of

migrants' relationships with urban territories while acknowledging their active role as urban inhabitants in mobilizing cities' resources (Buhr, 2021).

During the interviews conducted with various migrants, we walked through the neighbourhood together, thereby mapping out different routes that revealed their familiarities and relationships with various elements of the neighbourhood. By precisely identifying the streets they frequent, the bars where they meet their friends, and the plazas they avoid at night, we are able to understand their relationship with the public space in this neighbourhood. These maps have been created with varying degrees of precision based on the accounts and directions provided by the individuals interviewed in this study. The first image in the appendix shows the blank map I used during the interviews, on which we marked the places we were passing through and whether we had a particular relationship to them. The map also helped me to ask more specific questions about certain public spaces, as well as to open up deeper conversations through specific experiences located at one of the points. At the end of the interviews, the interviewees would look at the map and we would discuss together some of the points we had marked in case they wanted to add any more information about the various public spaces discussed. In the next sections we will analyse these maps in more depth.

3.5. Participant observation

Furthermore, each neighbourhood has its unique socio-cultural and spatial characteristics that influence how migrants engage with public spaces. As a resident of *Outremeuse* and a member of the migrant community, I am deeply embedded within the research context. My everyday experiences, interactions, and observations within the neighbourhood provide me with distinctive insights into its socio-spatial dynamics and the lived realities of its inhabitants. Participant observation allowed me to engage directly with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, gaining first-hand knowledge of their experiences, challenges, and perspectives. Participating with them in local events, such as markets or talks, attending committee meetings, or spending time together walking through the neighbourhood's public spaces are examples of activities I carried out during this research that provided me with first-hand insight into their experiences. Among the activities I participated in to gather information during this observation are the event shown in Image 2 of the Appendix, as well as cultural events such as the Mundo festival organized by *l'Aquilone* (Image 3 of the Appendix), and various markets and flea markets that took place in the neighbourhood from Mars to July 2024.

Participant observation is a qualitative research method that involves immersing oneself in the social setting under study and actively participating in the activities and interactions of the community (Becker, 1958). In the context of this research on migrant populations in the

neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*, participant observation holds significant relevance and value because it allows for the exploration of social dynamics, such as the formation of social networks, the negotiation of identities, and the navigation of power structures within public spaces (Burgess, 1925; De Genova, 2002). Through the engagement and first-hand observation, my research can uncover the tacit knowledge, routines, and spatial practices that characterize migrant lives, shedding light on issues of inclusion, exclusion, and belonging in the urban landscape (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

Furthermore, participant observation enables me to navigate the complexities of my positionality within the research. By doing a participant observation in this neighbourhood, I can reflect on my role and position as a researcher and as a resident, critically examining the ways in which my background and identity, as well as the way I inhabit the neighbourhood, shape the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This reflexive practice enhances the transparency, rigor, and validity of the study by acknowledging and addressing the researcher's subjectivity. Moreover, participant observation fosters a deeper understanding of the neighbourhood's social dynamics, cultural practices, and spatial configurations. By immersing myself in the daily life of the people living in the neighbourhood, I can uncover nuanced insights into how different migrant populations navigate and inhabit public spaces within it. This intimate engagement with the research context allows for a holistic and contextualized exploration of the topics under investigation.

4. Data collection

In this section of the research design, I present the profiles of the people that collaborated in the research, being a total of five neighbours of *Outremeuse*, three of them are the so-called seeds within the snowball sampling process, and then two other people that they themselves suggested to interview. Regarding this chain, due to time constraints it was impossible to continue with interviewing all the people suggested by the interviewers, however, as a possible continuation of this research and as important material when analysing the importance of the social fabric and the personal and community networks existing in this neighbourhood, they will also be mentioned. The names of the interviewees, as well as certain information that could put at risk the anonymity of these collaborators, have been modified or deleted. These collaborators were contacted through WhatsApp when they were people with whom I already had a prior relationship, or through other social networks, such as Instagram, when they were people whose phone numbers, I did not have but whose contact information was shared with me by mutual acquaintances.

Adriana: The first seed interviewee within the snowballing sample, interviewed on 24 May 2024. She identifies herself as a woman, 46 years old, migrated from Brazil to Europe almost ten years ago, first settled in Liège for a short period of time, then settled for two years in France and has been living in *Outremeuse* for more than six years now. Her legal situation in Belgium is not entirely regular, she has to monthly visit the communal administration to prove that she still lives in Liège and she cannot return to Brazil knowing for sure that she will be able to re-enter in Europe. She chose Liège because her circle of friends offered her a job opportunity here, in a catering establishment in the *Outremeuse* district. She expresses a great sense of familiarity with the neighbourhood due to living and working there, a great affection for its lively and diverse character, but also a strong criticism of what she calls the “abandonment” of the safety and cleanliness of the neighbourhood in recent years by the city administration of Liège. Adriana suggests interviewing Mariama, whom she knows as she works in an establishment close to hers.

Mariama: Interviewed on 3 June 2024. She identifies herself as a woman, 42 years old, migrated from Senegal 15 years ago and has been living in Liège for most of this time, with the exception of a few months spent in France before coming to Belgium. During most of this time in Liège, she has lived in *Outremeuse*, where she has been running a restaurant for the last five years. She obtained her permanent residence after nine years in Belgium and, as she herself comments, "it was a long process in which I felt that the administration was not interested in helping me to regularise my situation". She remarks that the *Outremeuse* neighbourhood is the heart of this city but that it is becoming increasingly deprived because of the closure of shops and businesses due to certain decisions of the communal administration regarding the management of the neighbourhood, in particular the parking and the elimination of a cash dispenser. Even so, she shows great appreciation in her testimony for this neighbourhood, to which she says she "owes everything".

Ahmed: The second seed interviewer, interviewed on the 7 June 2024. He identifies himself as male, 41 years old, emigrated from Algeria more than 20 years ago. He has lived in multiple countries and cities within and outside Belgium. He arrived at Liège more than ten years ago after having lived in Brussels and Antwerp. He doesn't have a residence permit in Belgium and, as he himself says, after having obtained a rejection by the Belgian administrations of his request for regularisation, which he considers unjustified, he has no interest for the moment in trying to obtain a residence permit that assure his stay in the country. He has lived for more than eight years in the *Outremeuse* district, which he knows perfectly well, the public spaces, their histories, the shopkeepers, the managers of bars and restaurants, etc. He expresses a deep appreciation for this district which he considers, in his words, “unique in Liège, like a small village within the city, whose multicultural and chaotic atmosphere makes him think of the cities

of the southern Mediterranean”. Not having a regular situation, Ahmed uses his contacts in the neighbourhood to do small informal jobs for different establishments to earn a living. Ahmed suggests interviewing Francesco, which he knows because they hang out in the same bars.

Francesco: He identifies himself as a male, 27 years old, emigrated from Libya two years ago. He lived in Italy for some months before arriving to Liège. His situation in Belgium is irregular and he is not working for the moment. Due to time management, it was impossible to interview Francesco.

Samia: She is the third seed interviewee, interviewed on 12 June 2024. She identifies herself as female, 23 years old, migrated from Morocco two years ago to pursue her university studies in Liège. Her older sister had already been living in Liège for more than ten years, when she also moved there for her studies and finally decided to settle in the city. At the moment she has a student residence permit for her studies and does not yet know whether she would like to continue living here when her studies are finished or whether she would like to move to another city and country. Since she emigrated from Morocco, she lives in the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse* with her sister and her sister's partner. As she says, she chose Liège for “obvious reasons” as a member of her family is already here. She says that this neighbourhood is like “home” for her, as she makes a large part of her life here, but that she feels a constant insecurity, especially at night in the public spaces of this area. Samia suggests interviewing Daniel, which she knows because they worked together.

Daniel: Interviewed on 18 June 2024. He identifies himself as male, 29 years old, emigrated from El Salvador seven years ago after his family applied for family reunification twelve years ago and was denied. Daniel arrived without a visa in Belgium, but after some time, he was able to obtain a residence permit a little over a year ago. Over the years, he has lived with his family in different neighbourhoods of Liège, but for a bit more than two years now he has been living in *Outremeuse*, where he also works. When he talks about the neighbourhood, he shows great sympathy for it, as he describes it as “a neighbourhood where you can do everything and with a lot of personality”.

In addition to these walking interviews with local people, a series of conventional interviews were conducted with different stakeholders. The first one is Gregor Stangherlin as a representative of the local level, who is the director of the Social Cohesion Plan of the city of Liege and also working in various initiatives and projects that study both vulnerable groups, which sometimes include migrants, and public spaces and the overall well-being of the inhabitants of this city.

Secondly, we have two representatives of the civil society at neighbourhood level. Laurent Baudels, the director of the Outremeuse Neighbourhood Committee, who is very knowledgeable about the dynamics of *Outremeuse* and work towards making public spaces in the area more accessible and safer for its residents. On the other hand, Elena Briale, a worker of the cultural and social association working in *Outremeuse* named *l'Aquilone*. This association has wide experience working on public spaces, multiculturalism and migrants in the area.

5. Data analysis

In conducting my data analysis, I embraced an iterative process of moving back and forth between theory and empiricism, continually adjusting my approach as new insights emerged. I recorded all interviews, but given that many were conducted as walking interviews, it was impractical to transcribe them word by word. Instead, I chose to re-listen to the recordings of those that were walking ones, to take extensive notes and preserving the audios without full transcription. This immediate post-interview note-taking allowed me to capture my impressions and observations about various neighbourhood spaces. I considered gestures and silences as significant as verbal responses in understanding the participants' relationships with their surroundings, as were certain looks or onomatopoeias of disdain towards a place, or certain ironic laughs in response to questions, such as those regarding the safety of some interviewed women at night in public spaces. I also recorded myself while walking around the neighbourhood, documenting noteworthy situations and describing public spaces to create detailed ethnographic vignettes. Consequently, I just transcribed my personal notes as part of my participant observation as well as the conventional interviews.

Afterwards for the coding process of my research, I chose to manually code each interview based on different themes crucial for the research, such as: references to public spaces, references to citizenship, daily-practices in urban spaces, etc. This was a decision grounded in both practical considerations and personal preference. Manual coding allowed me to engage deeply with the data, a method which is comparable to using dedicated software but offering a more intimate familiarity with the content (Fedyuk & Zentai, 2018). This approach was not only about convenience but also about the depth of understanding and connection to the data it facilitated, which is crucial in qualitative research.

Following the initial coding phase, I adopted the reflexive thematic analysis method as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). This method emphasizes the active role of the researcher when identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data, making it particularly suitable for my study's iterative character. Reflexive thematic analysis led me to undertake a next turn of coding in which I refined existing codes and developed new ones to capture more nuanced

insights. This iterative process of recoding allowed for a richer, more detailed understanding of the data.

I would like to mention that the themes identified did not simply emerge from the data in an inductive manner; rather, they were constructed in relation to my research questions and my hypotheses. Each theme was carefully considered for its relevance and ability to meaningfully encapsulate a core concept for the empirical result of my work. Once I was confident in the themes' significance, I began to build my empirical analysis around them. These themes formed the structure of the subsequent analytical chapters, ensuring a coherent and comprehensive exploration of the research findings. This method of theme construction and validation highlights the interplay between theory and data in qualitative research, where themes are not merely discovered but are analytically developed as Braun & Clarke pointed out (2022).

Regarding the maps elaborated in the walking interviews and their analysis, I decided to combine the trajectories followed by the different interviewees on the same map to see if they frequented the same public spaces or not. Additionally, I gathered various opinions and reflections regarding certain key public spaces within the neighbourhood, such as the main streets, the three large plazas that we presented in the first chapter of the work, as well as certain points suggested by the interviewees themselves, following the ideas of Lynch (1960) and of Guest & Lee (1984).

6. A Reflexive Revision of the Research Process

As I already mentioned at the beginning of this section, during this work, my positionality, and specially the aspects of familiarity and otherness were a parallel work to do to the one of my thesis and that is why I think it is important to give them a specific piece in which I talk about them. I want to highlight that these two works were dependent one from the other and that the process of acknowledge my position and limitations have widely shaped my final written work.

Firstly, I consider that reflexivity is a crucial aspect in qualitative research because it involves a continuous process of self-examination and critical reflection on one's own role and impact within the research context. It is important because it promotes transparency, enhances the credibility of the research, and helps in understanding the relational dynamics between the researcher and the researched. According to Bourdieu (2003) “reflexivity recognizes the dynamic relationship between the researcher and the research subject. It is about understanding the social conditions of knowledge production and the position of the researcher within the field of study. This involves acknowledging the power relations and biases that shape the research.” That is why during this work it was a challenge to acknowledge my own biases, values and experiences, and how they influence the research process and findings.

In ethnographic research, subjectivity plays a significant role. As researchers, our perceptions, interpretations, and interactions are shaped by our personal contexts and social positions. After many reflexions, I understood that this subjectivity is not a limitation to be avoided but rather a reality to be acknowledged and reflected upon. It is through this lens that I approached my fieldwork, recognizing that my own experiences as a migrant and a resident of the neighbourhood provided unique insights but also shaped my interactions and interpretations.

Regarding to this last idea, the concepts of insider and outsider in ethnographic research (Abu-Lughod, 1993), as well as those about the emic and etic perspective in ethnographies are particularly relevant to my study (Pike, 1954). I consider that being an insider, sharing a migrant status and living in the same neighbourhood as my participants, I had a level of access and understanding that might not have been possible for an outsider. This insider perspective has allowed me to build rapport and trust more easily, facilitating deeper and more meaningful interactions. However, accepting this position was not easy as it made me question my own legitimacy as well as the production of the empirical material for this work. It demanded a lot of vigilance against potential biases and assumptions.

As a woman conducting interviews, particularly with male participants, I encountered specific challenges. There were instances where the gender dynamics influenced the interactions, sometimes creating discomfort or barriers to open communication. This was particularly evident in situations where male participants exhibited attitudes or behaviours that made me uncomfortable. Consequently, finding male participants was more challenging, and I often relied on mutual acquaintances to facilitate introductions and interviews. This approach not only helped in establishing a sense of security but also in gaining the trust of the participants. Conversely, I felt much more comfortable working with female participants, even those I did not know personally. The shared gender experience seemed to facilitate interactions, foster a sense of mutual understanding and create a space of open and trustworthy communication. This comfort translated into more candid and detailed exchanges, enriching the data collected. When interviewing men, the presence of a common contact often helped mitigate feelings of insecurity, ensuring a safer and more productive research environment.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

1. Voices of *Outremeuse*: Migrant Experiences and Dynamics Inhabiting Public Spaces

Public spaces and how they are understood by definition, as well as the way each person uses them, differ depending on individual circumstances and contexts. Public spaces bring different experiences and behaviours to each person, however, there are some similarities among users we can find in theory as in practice. As Lynch's (1960) systematically explained in his classic work, the cities and their public spaces manage the experience of their residents. During my interviews with various residents of the Outremeuse neighbourhood, I observed that each of them carries inside a different image of the public spaces, nevertheless, some broad outlines are shared among most of them, following Lynch's line of thought regarding cities and the urban space. Moreover, when we talk about public spaces with them, we can see that what they understand by these spaces is drawn from their daily practices. Following the emic perspective of this research, the question of what they understand by these spaces is not posed, but through the walks through the neighbourhood we can see what spaces they use and how they use them.

"What I like about Outremeuse is that I can leave the house and go to the bar to have a drink with my friends (...) We spend a lot of time in the bar, ha, ha, ha (...) But that's where I finally see my friends after work (...) We have a good time, we relax (...)".³

In this case, we see how Daniel uses the public space that is in this case, the bars, to spend time with his friends and thus builds his social relationships. We see that for him it is a moment of disconnection, of enjoying a moment together after his work. On the other hand, through the following testimony of Mariama we see how she uses other public spaces, such as the children's playground next to the Yser Square with her children. The different profiles represented by these two interviewees, due to their different age and gender, shape a different use of these spaces and define their relationship with public space (Castles et al., 2014).

"This is where I normally play with my children (in reference to the Yser Square) (...) I try to come here on weekends and when the weather is nice for them to play for a while (...) I don't like the square in general, as I told you, it's not very safe (...) But this space for the kids is not bad (...)".⁴

³ Daniel, extracted from his interview on 18 June 2024 and translated from Spanish.

⁴ Mariama, extracted from her interview on 3 June 2024 and translated from French.

For instance, long-term residents of the neighbourhood, such as Adriana, Mariama or Ahmed, exhibit greater familiarity with these spaces, leading to more frequent use, and a sense of being a resident of the public space. These three interviewees tell us during the interviews various experiences or stories in relation to the squares and streets of this neighbourhood, as we can see through this testimony:

“Since I came to Belgium, I’ve been here, so I have a thousand stories to tell you (...) I remember when in summer, on the nights of the 13th, 14th and 15th of August and those days, we stayed until the sun came up in the street (...) An incredible atmosphere (...) Now it’s also good, but it’s not the same. Last year the police sent everyone home around two in the morning (...) Which I understand, in the end for the sake of the neighbours and so that they can sleep (...) But what a great time we all had in the street until a thousand talking and drinking, ha, ha (...)”⁵

This perception is in line with the work of Lofland (1985) who understands being a resident of these spaces as a culmination of cultivating a sense of place. She points out that “the resident, who, by dint of not only using the locale regularly but using it on most occasions for long period of time, acquires an intimate knowledge of all that there is to know and a set of privileges that goes with such mystery” (page of the book). In relation with this last idea of Lofland, having inhabited these public spaces for a longer period, they tend to have a more critical perspective on them, a consequence of these “privileges” that they have obtained because of the time they have passed in the neighbourhood. They have witnessed changes, improvements, as well as the deterioration of many of these spaces. One of the public spaces that interviewees emphasized is the Yser Square and its spoilage as a public space. In recent years, following the 2014 renovations aimed at demolishing the public theatre and establishing a multi-level area for various events, residents have expressed concerns about its misuse and the sense of insecurity they feel when passing through it.

(...) What they did with Place de l’Yser makes no sense. It used to be a square with a popular theatre, a nice spot that was interesting for us as a nearby restaurant, but also for everyone in general (...) now the square is just full of thefts and shady dealings (...) besides, they made a mistake during the construction, and according to the city council, they can’t organize events with heavy structures because there’s a risk of an accident (...) a disaster, no one is happy with that project (...).⁶

The construction of this square, as well as the community's desire to create a public space for the residents of the area, shows us how important public spaces and their management are in

⁵ Adriana, extracted from her walking interview on 24 May 2024 and translated from Portuguese.

⁶ Mariama, extracted from her interview on 3 June 2024 and translated from French.

uniting or separating the inhabitants of the same place. We can see from the testimony of the worker of the l'Aquilone association how important it was not to be able to build a green public space and a meeting place where we can continue to build *Outremeuse's* community networks.

*“Then there was the story of Yser Square. (...). There was a theater in the square that was squatted by various different collectives. Well, it doesn't matter, it was super nice too until it was completely demolished. (...) It's true that I think there's a need in the neighbourhood. (...) It's horrible, it's very sad. And in fact, it's true that the square, we had imagined it (...) I believe everyone wanted to have a place with trees, well, a green place to meet. (...) It's a gray square, and everyone complains about this square.”*⁷

However, the Yser Square is not the only place where residents share similar opinions and concerns. Contrary to their criticism of the management of this square, residents agree that public spaces, particularly the abundance of shops and establishments in the area, are among the great assets of this neighbourhood. During the walking interviews, the neighbours pointed out various bars, terraces and small squares they frequent, where they have built much of their friendships and community networks. When speaking about these places, they acknowledge the importance of being able to share moments of reunion in public spaces with other residents to feel more legitimate in occupying them and to foster a debate on their understanding and use afterward.

Interviewer: *My goodness, you don't go two metres without someone waving at you, what popularity.*

Ahmed: *Ha, ha, ha, ha the truth is that I spend every day here, from the moment I get up, I go to have my coffee, I'm all the time from here to there (...) but I don't come home very late, eh, around 6pm it's already time to go back to make dinner (...) but during the day, I love it, spending all the time helping one or the other, as there are so many restaurants, it's very easy to find something to do to help (...).) I do them favours, I help them to set up the terrace, to clean whatever they ask me to do (...) in exchange they give me food or some money, but I don't abuse them, eh (...) in the end we all help each other, that's how the neighbourhood works (...) but of course, it's been many years doing the same thing, in the end we know each other from one place or another, it's like a small town (...)*⁸

One of the main objectives of this ethnography was to examine how different profiles impact the use of public spaces. Among the interviewees are some with regular status, holding short or long-term residence permits, and others who do not yet have a regularized status in the

⁷ Elena Briale, extracted from her interview on 6 June 2021 and translated from French.

⁸ Ahmed, extracted from his walking interview on 7 June 2024 and translated from French.

country. In this case, we observe how this irregular status results in a constant sense of insecurity and a need to be alert, significantly impacting their daily activities and use of the city's public spaces. We see this idea in works such as that of De Genova (2002) or Low & Maguire (2019). During the interviews, we talked with Adriana, who has been in Belgium for over five years but whose status is not fully regularized, and she explains that when she lived in France, where her status was regularized, she felt more legitimate to walk alone on the street and occupy squares or other public spaces without concerns than nowadays in Outremeuse.

*“(...) when I was in France everything was easier, having a regularised situation makes you feel much safer (...) it's not just a question of having to queue every month to get a stamp, while they have proof through my taxes and my work that I've been here for years (...) it's about feeling welcome, feeling at ease in your daily life (...)”*⁹

Through the testimonies of these neighbours, we can see how public space a different importance has for each one in their daily lives, as well as the great influence that the personal and social characteristics of each one has on their relationship with it. Previously, we have seen that migratory status influences the security that neighbours feel when occupying these spaces, but this is not the only factor that influences this relationship. Through Samia's testimony, we can see how aspects such as knowing the language spoken can bring you closer to or distance you from the feeling of familiarity in the neighbourhood. In addition, factors such as the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender and class have a big impact in shaping their experiences and their access to resources and opportunities, as we pointed out in the theoretical framework following Isin & Wood's ideas (1999).

Interviewer: *How safe do you feel walking around the neighbourhood? Do you think there is some aspect of you that influences this?*

Samia: *Of course, it depends if it's at night, if I go alone or with someone else, I wouldn't know (...) What I have realised talking to friends of mine is that going alone as a young woman in the neighbourhood means accepting looks and very unpleasant comments (...) Sometimes I don't know if I prefer to understand them or not (...).*

Interviewer: *Do you think it's better to understand them or not?*

⁹ Adriana, extracted from her walking interview on 24 May 2024 and translated from Portuguese.

*Samia: That's what I was saying, I think that understanding the comments that men can make to me in the street makes me feel very helpless, but I can feel safer than if I didn't understand perfectly what they are saying to me. So, I don't know which is better.*¹⁰

As we can see from this analysis and the testimonies collected during the fieldwork of this thesis, our hypothesis two (**H1: The socioeconomic characteristics of migrant people have a big impact on the way they inhabit public spaces in Outremeuse**) is partly supported. We have been able to verify this especially through the two sub-hypotheses that we had formulated, referring to the gender factor (**H1a: Migrant men feel more legitimate to inhabit public spaces than migrant women**) as well as the fact of having a residence permit or not in the country (**H1b: Migrants with a residence permit feel more legitimate to inhabit public spaces than migrants who don't have it**). During this analysis, we have seen that, in the case of interviews with women, the issue of insecurity is recurrent and one of the main criticisms they present regarding public spaces. However, during interviews with men, it is not a topic that appears. Similarly, when we talk with interviewees about times when they did not have a residence permit or when their relationship with public administration regarding their migration status is more complicated, their relationship with public space weakens. They generally present feelings of insecurity and illegitimacy regarding public space when they are not in regular migration status. However, this hypothesis is proven but not absolutely, partly due to the limitations of this study and the variety of responses. For example, one of the interviewees, Ahmed, indicates that not having a residence permit is not something that prevents him from living his daily life in public spaces naturally and without fear. Therefore, we can conclude that hypothesis H2a regarding the influence of gender is fully supported, and hypothesis H2b is not significantly supported.

2. Negotiating Space: Migrant Encounters with the “Right to the City”

The concept of the “right to the city” has been widely discussed and developed by various authors and sociological schools over time. Already in the late 1960s, Lefebvre introduced the term and with it laid the foundations for later debates on social inclusion and the democratisation of urban space, as we understand it in this research. Other authors such as Harvey, Castells and Marcuse have contributed significantly to the understanding of this concept from different sociological perspectives by emphasizing the importance of spatial justice and urban equality. However, despite the rich academic literature on this right, my interviews and observations indicate that this idea is far from being known, understood or even practised by most ordinary citizens. The majority of *Outremeuse* residents interviewed are unfamiliar with the term and its

¹⁰ Samia, extracted from her walking interview on 12 June 2024 and translated from French.

implication for their daily lives and use of public spaces. This topic and the questioning them about an academic concept as such, which did not follow the emic perspective of this thesis, were part of the objective of this work to verify what is the relationship that these theoretical debates, which deal with aspects of the daily life of citizens, have with the citizens themselves, in this case, the migrant people of the *Outremeuse* neighbourhood.

Interviewer: *Have you ever heard of the concept “right to the city”?*

Samia: *Not at all, you know that these things are from your studies, ha, ha, ha, ha, I have never heard anything like that (...)*¹¹

Nevertheless, when we continued the conversation about what is understood by this right with one of our interviewees, we could see how the claims and demands included in its conception are embodied through them.

Interviewer: *What I mean is an idea of a right that brings together the idea that the city responds to the needs of its citizens, in which all those who live in the city occupy an equitable, fair space and seek urban equality.*

Samia: *It makes perfect sense, it is clear that here in Liège, but also in other cities around the world, we can see how cities are designed for those who have money and privileges (...) Look what they are doing now with the banks so that people cannot sleep in them (...).*¹²

However, through the conversations with the interviewees we can see how this familiarity with public spaces, which I have already discussed above, makes them feel a sense of legitimacy about the rights and duties they have with respect to the city. In particular, we can see this idea with migrant neighbours without a residence permit, who are aware of their lack of formal rights but who give importance to those informal rights that arise between inhabitants and the relationships they establish beyond what is established by laws or others. There is an idea that the city is made for those who inhabit it, and this is what we should aspire to when it comes to finding benefit in its public spaces. Moreover, as Lefebvre's work already points out, this “right to the city” is not just a right in itself, but a cry and a demand, a cry out of a necessity and a demand for something more. It is a demand of those directly excluded from the benefits of urban life as Marcuse (2009) points out.

When we talked to Ahmed during the walking interview, the topic of the moment he tried to regularize his situation does not take much prominence. As we moved from the bar he chose

¹¹ Samia, extracted from her walking interview on 12 June 2024 and translated from French.

¹² Samia, extracted from her walking interview on 12 June 2024 and translated from French.

to meet, in which he is a regular customer, he explains that he tried, and the administration's response was to make excuses and not give him a clear answer. However, as we walk through the streets of *Outremeuse*, where he greets various neighbours and shopkeepers every few meters, what remains the focus throughout this time is the fact of seeking an alternative and that there are more complicated situations than his. He mentions that in the end, one must find a solution to these situations, such as doing informal work to earn some money. At the same time, during the interview, he shows great gratitude and expresses that his situation does not have to be the same as others. He explains that he considers himself "blessed to come from a family with many values" that has allowed him to have a "good attitude" and some luck in his journey. He is grateful but critical of the existence of these situations, especially speaking of the rest, of all those acquaintances or friends in a similar situation who may not be as "lucky." In this way, we can observe how Ahmed, from a place of exclusion, has found a way to voice this cry of necessity, perhaps not for himself, but for all those others.

This idea of the "right to the city" which is not individualistic and goes beyond seeking equity in the city and is a collective demand for general justice, is reflected in his words. In relation, we can observe that the idea of an individual right, which potentially the interviewees in this paper could acquire by changing certain policies that would allow them to occupy this space more freely, is not enough. They think about the collectively, they look for "rights" that include the right to urban space, but also the right to access public services, among others. This is why this "right to the city" could even be understood as an alternative conception to citizenship, which we will analyse in the next section.

Through the conversations with the various interviewees, we have seen that academic terms, such as in this case the so-called "right to the city" first introduced by Lefebvre, are in most cases unfamiliar to them as a concept, although this does not always prevent them from embodying its content without naming it in the specific way it is established in academic debates. The second hypothesis of this work (**H2: Debates in academia regarding the daily lives of migrants and their relationship with public space in urban contexts (e.g. the "right to the city") tend to be oblivious to the concerns of migrant people**) is therefore partially supported because, as we have seen through the testimonies, when asking the interviewees about their knowledge of this term, they did not show great familiarity. However, in some cases, as the conversation continued and the concept was explained, they agreed with the idea and even embodied it through their daily activities

3. Negotiating belonging in *Outremeuse*: Migrant Everyday Practices of Urban Citizenship

As mentioned above, there has been much discussion in recent years of alternative concepts of citizens' rights and, consequently, of the traditional conception of citizenship. We can highlight that in recent decades there has been a tendency to re-imagine it beyond its legal and formal dimension. Authors such as Sassen (1998) and Isin (2002) have argued that citizenship should be understood not only in terms of legal rights and obligations, but also in relation to active participation and the “right to the city”.

During my interviews with Outremeuse residents, a consistent critique of the traditional notion of citizenship emerged. Many interviewees expressed that belonging to a common, urban space should not be determined solely by legal recognition, but rather by everyday experiences and contributions to community life. As we can see in this testimony:

*(...) I am no longer interested in trying to get the papers to be here, those are just written things (...) I am able to go about my life here without any problems, people respect me, the police know me, they know I do nothing wrong (...) I know I do not have all the rights I deserve but what interests me is that I am respected, it is something basic (...) those rights that exist on paper do not interest me, what is important is respect for what I do every day (...).*¹³

This is why we talk about this concept of urban citizenship, which is already established in theory, but which we can see how it exists in practice in the imaginary of the neighbours. It is an urban citizenship that is built through everyday practice and participation in public life. And we point out that this is an alternative conception with a focus on the urban, since citizens express that their needs and demands are situated in the spatial context of the neighbourhood and of the city. We can see how there is a detachment from those characteristics associated with a traditional conception of citizenship linked to the nation-state (Arendt, 1951; Sassen, 2006). We can see that the feeling of belonging is related to the urban level, to the feeling of being part of a community of neighbours, a district or a city. It is a feeling of belonging that is far removed from a national identity, often associated with a whiteness and colonial power structures (Said, 1978; Hall, 1992; Wekker, 2016), but rather a feeling of being part of a closer social fabric at the neighbourhood-level.

As we can see from the exchange, we had with the president of the neighbourhood committee, he expresses how in *Outremeuse* we can talk about a common and specific identity, far from the idea of what a "Belgian" is. Here people have their own traditions and dynamics,

¹³ Ahmed, extracted from his walking interview on 7 June 2024 and translated from French.

which in many cases do not exist among other people living in the city itself, let alone in their own province or country.

“Outremeuse is not just any neighbourhood, eh, here we have our own festivities, our committee is one of the most important in the city (...) For many years, more than all the years that I have been chairing the committee, we have always had a very strong committee, with a lot of communication with the mayor's office (...) This is not the city centre, here we are already 4020¹⁴ (...) You will have seen that there are no other fiestas like the ones here (...) Besides, we have everything, I don't leave the neighbourhood (...) We have supermarkets, bakeries, excellent restaurants, etc (...).”¹⁵

Moreover, the participants express widely the sense of belonging through everyday activities such as attending local businesses, participating in community events and using public spaces. Through the interviews conducted with the residents, there is a common discourse of feeling a sense of belonging to this neighbourhood, which is forged through their daily life there and which constitutes their bond with Outremeuse and Liège, beyond having a residence permit or Liège nationality. We can see how their relationship with the various characteristics of being a citizen depends on whether they deal with practical, tangible aspects that have an impact on their daily life or not. This is why they are the ones who perform the demands and needs of the conception of urban citizenship in an unconscious way but with an important awareness of the neighbourhood.

Also, we can see this alternative conception of citizenship among the associations working on the field, such as *l'Aquilone*. As we can see through the interview, we conducted with one of its workers, in recent years, this association has carried out various activities aimed at representing migrants in this neighbourhood and giving them recognition and a place in community life that promotes their inclusion and values their urban participation. As Elena explains to us, several activities have been created over these years:

“We started a project called "Words and Images," and in fact, it came from a photo workshop that took place at l'Aquilone. This project was done with people from the neighbourhood to show the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood. (...) In fact, they took pictures of residents and passers-by from different cultures to showcase the diversity in the neighbourhood. (...) Following this project, there was a project of a giant banner that was realized. So, with these photos, we hung giant banners all over the Outremeuse neighbourhood to highlight the multiculturalism. (...) After that, there was an exploratory walk project in the neighbourhood. So,

¹⁴ Ahmed here is referring to the postal code of the neighbourhood, which is not the same as the city centre, which is 4000.

¹⁵ Laurent Baudels, extracted from his interview on 1 July 2024 and translated from French.

we did walks in the neighbourhood where we analysed a bit, and we also surveyed people in public spaces with questionnaires to find out how they felt about the neighbourhood. What places, what spots they frequently use? Where they felt good, where they felt comfortable, what they thought of certain streets or other areas? (...) We did walks with people to also analyse the neighbourhood spaces. And it was a really multicultural group. We were all from different origins. In the group, there were Nepalis, Arabs, Turks, Russians. (...) And following the exploratory walk, there was a citizen map project of the neighbourhood (...)”¹⁶

We can conclude that, beyond understanding or not what alternative conceptions of citizenship exist, there is a widespread rejection of considering exclusively the traditional conception of citizenship. Moreover, in many cases, the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood, performed through participation in community events and having conversations about community dynamics with neighbours, serves as the link to this understanding of urban citizenship. We can establish that there is a practical application of this alternative citizenship performed by migrant people in this neighbourhood, even though it is often done without knowing how it translates into theory. This could indicate that there is a disconnect between theory and practice by leading to theoretical considerations that do not respond to the needs of the migrants concerned, but it could also be a way of performing the theory in a way that does not respond to the needs of the migrants concerned, but it could also be a way of performing the theory in a way that does not respond to the needs of the migrants concerned.

However, within these testimonies, we can also see that there is not always an interest in having this recognition and that perhaps this disconnection between theory and practice does not necessarily have to be a disadvantage for those affected by these situations. In most of the cases, the demand for formality is used when advantageous and defied when they found unjust. They take advantage of these formal channels whenever possible, but in many cases, they find these invited spaces of practicing citizenship, created from above by the state, ineffective at addressing the immediacy of their needs and concerns and enforcing just laws. When formality fails and they found themselves excluded from some rights, migrant neighbours use innovative strategies, create alternative channels and spaces to assert their rights to the city, negotiate their needs and wants, and actively practice their conceptions of citizenship (Holston, 2008).

We can especially see this idea when we talk with our interviewees about the periods of time when they did not have a residence permit and how they sought alternative channels to access those markets and services that were restricted due to their irregular migration status. A clear

¹⁶ Elena Briale, extracted from her interview on 6 June 2024 and translated from French.

example is Ahmed, who, despite not having a residence permit in Belgium and therefore not having access to the labour market, used his network of contacts to find work that allowed him to earn money to support his life. In these same cases, we can see how, once they obtained their residence permits, they took advantage of formal channels, to which they previously had no access, to obtain these services. This is the example of Daniel, who arrived without a residence permit and for several years did not have access to the labour market, but nevertheless, through acquaintances, managed to do various manual jobs to earn money. Once he obtained his residence permit, he decided to abandon these alternative channels and take advantage of his access to the market in a conventional way.

4. The Power of Social Capital: Migrant Networks and Community Relations Cohesion in *Outremeuse*

One of the most prominent aspects in all the interviews with the various residents of Outremeuse is the strong personality of the neighbourhood, the sense of community, and the importance of having a social network to cope with the challenges that arise from migrating within a neoliberal system (Harvey, 2005; Sassen, 2014; Glick Schiller, 2012). Thanks to these testimonies, we can reaffirm the ideas that Bourdieu (1986) presented about social capital and how it is built through these social and relational networks. Following these ideas, we can also observe how the social capital of the residents in this neighbourhood fosters community growth and creates "bridging" social capital among diverse groups (Putnam, 2000).

Through this research we can be aware how both close social networks, like kinship and friendship ones, and weak ties play a crucial role in building relationships within this neighbourhood, significantly aiding in accessing resources and navigating the urban dynamics created in this area. As Ryan (2011) points out, there has been a tendency to assume that migrants easily access networks of kinship and friendship that facilitate migration and settlement processes. However, the creation and maintenance of these relationships are diverse and require specific attention, considering the specificities of urban contexts. We have observed that the processes of arrival and settling of the migrants interviewed in this study vary significantly and that their processes of settling in the neighbourhood are not uniform. As mentioned, socioeconomic characteristics influence their interactions with public space as well as with other residents of the neighbourhood, both locals and fellow migrants. Through these two reports from the interviews with Adriana and Ahmed, we can see the differences in how their journeys ended up in *Outremeuse* and the diversities in their processes of settlement within the neighbourhood.

Interviewer: *Why did you choose to settle in Outremeuse?*

Adriana: *I already had some friends living here who were opening a bar, so they, knowing that I wanted to leave Brazil, helped me (...) Honestly, besides being a motivation, it made everything easier knowing that I would have a job in Liège (...)*

Interviewer: *Do you think that your life has changed since the moment you arrived in Outremeuse? (...) I mean, have you noticed any change in your habits? Or is it easier now than before? And why? (...)*

Adriana: *For me, it was relatively easy when I arrived; I had my friends here and a new motivation (...) Additionally, it was close to Brussels, where there are many Brazilians (...) The Brazilian community here is not very large, and over time, this has made me consider moving to Brussels, but I'm not sure yet (...)"¹⁷*

In this first testimony, we can see how, in Adriana's case, having part of her network already living in the city played a very important role in her decision to move to Outremeuse, thus reflecting the significant role of social relationships as social capital in migratory processes (Portes & Böröcz, 1989).

Interviewer: *Why did you choose to settle in Outremeuse?*

Ahmed: *I wouldn't say that I chose to come to Outremeuse; it was more like life led me here... I've lived in many places before arriving here, but never for such a long time. The only time I stayed in one place for that long was when I was still in Algeria (...)*

Interviewer: *Do you think that your life has changed since the moment you arrived in Outremeuse?*

Ahmed: *Of course, he, when I arrived here, I didn't know anyone, and now, as you've seen, I'm quite popular, ha, ha, ha. (...) Here, I've met more and more people through work, as I've mentioned before (...) By helping, I've made friends; not everyone is a close friend, but they are acquaintances. (...) Now, new people arrive, and I'm the one who helps them find a job or a place to stay (...) I help everyone, even French students living here (...) When their parents visit, they come to thank me and are surprised (...) They don't expect me to help their children, but that's how we operate here (...)"¹⁸*

On the other hand, following the testimony of Ahmed, we can see that in his case, arriving in the country was not predetermined, nor was it influenced by strong ties in his decision to

¹⁷ Adriana, extracted from her walking interview on 24 May 2024 and translated from Portuguese.

¹⁸ Ahmed, extracted from his walking interview on 7 June 2024 and translated from French.

migrate and where to do so. However, we can see how he has used his weak ties to gain broader and more varied access when seeking information or work in the neighbourhood. This idea aligns with what various authors have established regarding the significant power of weak ties in migratory and inclusion processes, particularly in facilitating economic and social mobility (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2001).

This variation in determining whether weak ties or stronger, closer ties are more beneficial for migrants in their trajectories and processes of inclusion in new societies is crucial. This idea reflects Ryan (2011) thought regarding the need to consider contextual characteristics and the specificities of each situation when analysing how kinship and friendship networks influence these processes, without assuming that there is a single way to carry out processes of settling and establishing relationships in new societies by migrant population.

In this work, we aim to focus specifically on how community networks among neighbours can play a fundamental role, similar to how kinship and friendship networks do. Previously, we observed this through weak ties and their essential role in Ahmed's case. Here, we emphasize that neighbourly bonds, along with the physical design of neighbourhoods and the management of public spaces, are crucial in creating a cohesive and inclusive urban society (Huang, Goh & Said, 2023). Therefore, it is important to conduct research focusing on the neighbourhood scale and the specific contexts of migrants.

5. Inclusion and social cohesion in the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*

During the interviews, besides the three main thematic blocks we had established and used for coding during the analysis of results, which were: the migrant experiences inhabiting public spaces in *Outremeuse*, their relationships with the so-called “right to the city”, and their relationships with the alternative conception of citizenship, urban citizenship; other themes emerged which I consider important to analyse. One of these is the processes of inclusion of these migrants in the neighbourhood and their relationship with social cohesion when building social networks, participating in cultural events in public spaces or establishing mutual respect. Previously, we have already discussed the importance of neighbourhood networks, as well as the creation of urban spaces that are inclusive and help communities and neighbourhoods to build a diverse and cohesive social fabric. However, I have observed that despite the notable diversity and general welcoming attitude observed in *Outremeuse*, that it is noted throughout my participant observation and my personal experience as a migrant myself living in the area, there are significant challenges to achieving true social cohesion (Amin, 2006). One of the most evident issues is the physical and social separation of migrant groups when carrying on cultural events in the neighbourhood.

In relation to this inclusion, one of the aspects that has most surprised me during my participant observations is the management of events where there is representation of migrants. During the interview with Elena from the association *l'Aquilone*, I observed that various festivals and activities have been organized with the aim of bringing the cultures of migrant communities closer to the general public, in her own words. However, during different events, it can be observed that the aspects presented often respond to stereotypes of these cultures and are limited to representing certain groups, gastronomy, or music that are often not truly representative of these migrant communities. This is evident in events like “*Festival Mundo*” (World Festival) or “*Reencuentros Latinos*” (Latin Reunions), where several of the stands and concerts were performed or managed by people without a migrant background. This is surprising given that Outremeuse has a broad representation of different migrant communities, making it a super diverse neighbourhood. In the following ethnographic vignette I explain this lack of participation of migrant neighbours in one of these events, which featured a music group called Favelas Brothers, indicates that they could be brothers from a favela, a typical densely populated urban settlement in Brazil.

Ethnographic Vignette - Saturday, 25 May 2024, 22:27

The DJ set by Favela Brothers begins. This is the last concert of the “Festival Mundo” held by l'Aquilone on the Boulevard Saucy, in Outremeuse. The duo, consisting of two young Belgian men, presents their music as a fusion of world rhythms. Their set features international hit songs in various languages, though the tracks are somewhat outdated. We can listen to some funk music from Brazil, mixed with amapiano rhythms from South Africa, along with pop songs in French or English. Among the audience, the representation of migrant population is minimal. About a hundred people are gathered around the stage. The average age is around 30 years old. We hardly see people who are outside the norm. We can't observe this superdiversity characteristic of the neighbourhood. We don't hear any language other than French, one of the characteristic aspects of walking around the neighbourhood on a normal day. The only words in another language that we can hear are those that the artists shout out from time to time, in Spanish or Portuguese.

This is not the only event where we observe a significant lack of participation and representation in cultural activities and how migrant communities and those of national origin occupy in a different way public space through events. In the main festivity celebrated in this neighbourhood, the XV of August, we can observe how during the most characteristic events of these festivities, such as the various parades and processions, participants are recognizable by their attire and grouping: they are mostly composed of men over fifty, non-racialized, representing

a relatively homogeneous group (Clarebout, 2022). In this case, we are not talking about separate representation; rather, the representation of the neighbourhood's diversity is non-existent.

This situation is a reflection of the lack of social cohesion because it shows unequal access to these spaces, disparities in the representation in public events, and a missed opportunity to share public spaces to foster interactions and urban justice. Moreover, the lack of representation of the neighbourhood's superdiversity means that urban festivities, which could otherwise foster informal practices of inclusion, do not activate the dynamics of belonging and peaceful coexistence among residents. This potential for community building remains unfulfilled in this case (Salzbrunn 2014a, 2014b).

The management of these events and the almost non-existent migrant participation and representation perpetuates the colonial power mindset, where the "local" or "traditional" neighbourhood events are seen as the norm, with minimal or inexistent representation or inclusion of migrant populations (Said, 1978). This division is not just physical but also cultural and social because this spatial isolation enhances stereotyping, misconceptions and reinforces the notion of "otherness" among migrant groups. The limited exchange of cultural practices in public events among migrants and nationals lead to the entrenchment of divisions, which consequently, make physical barriers become symbolic of the social and cultural barriers that define and reinforce social hierarchies and exclusions (Wacquant, 2008).

The moments in which the public space is allocated for migrant populations to organize their own events, these opportunities are often marred by the use of stereotypes. Such stereotypes can trivialize the rich and diverse cultures of migrant communities, reducing their identities to simplistic and often inaccurate portrayals. This not only hinders true integration but also fosters a sense of exclusion and marginalization among migrant residents. Through the interview with the president of the Neighbourhood Committee, we can see that the representation of migrant people within the organization of it is inexistent, as he mentioned:

*"There are common concerns among all these residents, regardless of where they come from(...) although organizing is more complicated (...) Here in the committee, we've tried to include people of migrant origin, but the truth is, they come to the first meeting and then we don't see them again, maybe a second time at most (...) We are aware that most of us on the committee do not represent the diversity of this neighbourhood."*¹⁹

¹⁹ Laurent Baudels extracted from his interview on 1 July 2024 and translated from French.

As I have contested despite *Outremeuse's* super diverse character regarding demography significant challenges to social cohesion persist. Festivals and activities have often reinforced stereotypes and fail to truly represent the neighbourhoods' diverse cultures, reflecting a colonial mindset where traditional local events and norms dominate. Examples include the organisation and representation of migrants at the "*Reencuentros Latinos*" event, where the musical activities are limited to performances of music styles popular in Europe, such as *reggaeton*, *salsa* or *bachata*. In these cases, introductions to these dance styles are performed by teachers of Belgian origin and with songs that are present in the national charts. There is no attempt to go beyond this in order to show the diversity of the cultures of the migrants living in this neighbourhood. Also, the efforts to include migrants in organizing bodies like the Neighbourhood Committee have been largely unsuccessful, highlighting broader issues of engagement. To foster a cohesive urban neighbourhood is essential to implement genuine inclusive practices in events, like cultural festivals, and bodies of representation, like the Quartier Committee.

6. Bridging the Gap: Examining the Disconnection Between Policy and Practice in Migrant Inclusion in *Outremeuse*

During the last years, Liège has implemented several urban and social policies designed to foster inclusion and combat racism. These initiatives include joining The European Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination in 2006, the designation as a "*Ville Hospitalière, responsable, accueillante et ouverte*" (a hospitable, responsible, welcoming and open city) in 2017, and its adherence to the concept of being a "sanctuary city". These actions aimed at creating a more inclusive urban environment for migrant population, but also for the general inhabitants of the city, aiming to create a strong social fabric. These ideas are not new in the European context, but rather respond to a trend of local government programs which have focused on improving public spaces to be more welcoming and accessible to diverse populations (Van Kempen & Murie, 2009).

However, one of the interesting aspects that has received less attention is the study of the impact of these policies and programmes on the daily lives of those to whom they are addressed. In this case, in order to take a holistic approach to this research, as well as to involve different stakeholders entailed in the issue of urban spatial management, we will now analyse how the initiatives implemented in Liège have impacted on the residents of *Outremeuse*. In doing so, we will take into account in particular how the measures and programmes presented in the interviews we had with the representatives of civil society, as well as the one with the representative of the Social Cohesion Plan of the City of Liège, as the city's representative, are translated into practice. In the following testimony we can see how Gregor Stangherlin explains that the institutions at the

local level are willing to translate these policies into practice and have an impact on neighbours' lives, making Liège an example of an inclusive city for all citizens.

*(...) Contributing to the pacification of public spaces and better social cohesion in the city (...) it's a question of actions that aim to promote inclusion, to make Liège a model of an inclusive, supportive and emancipating city for all. (...) Indeed, there is a desire to work a lot on the quality of public space (...)*²⁰

However, throughout the interview, we see how the city of Liege indicates that those responsible for implementing initiatives to make public space a safer and more socially responsible place for migrants and all inhabitants in general are the different actors of civil society, highlighting the work of the large network of associations that exists in this neighbourhood.

*(...) Local integration initiatives and, indeed, there are many associations in Liège. (...) . We're going to put a bit more on associations. (...) . The associative fabric is incredible and does very important work in Outremeuse.*²¹

We can easily observe that the associative fabric of this neighbourhood is very extensive, and in many cases, the associations are overloaded with work, as we experienced when trying to arrange meetings with them to discuss my thesis. In one such instance, I attempted to contact the civil association "Aide aux Personnes Déplacées" which works in welcoming and supporting people in situations of exile. However, after sending several emails and visiting their headquarters in person, I witnessed first-hand the large number of people seeking their services and could see how overwhelmed they were with work.

When we spoke with various residents of *Outremeuse* and asked them about their knowledge of initiatives aimed at improving their daily lives and inclusion in the neighbourhood, we found that some of them—specifically, those who arrived in the neighbourhood without having established close ties in the area—are aware of the work of some associations. Among the associations they highlighted is *La Maison Médicale la Passerelle*²², which is a community health clinic that offers a wide range of medical and social services to the local population, including people in vulnerable situations. One of the activities offered is free French classes for first-time residents, from which some of our interviewees have benefited, as they themselves indicated. But generally, we can see that they are not directly aware of many initiatives that have been implemented, from which they themselves could benefit. As Gleeson & Bada (2019) pointed out

²⁰ Gregor Stangherlin extracted from his interview on 10 June 2024 and translated from French.

²¹ Gregor Stangherlin, extracted from his interview on 10 June 2024 and translated from French.

²² Maison Médical la Passerelle <https://lapasserelle.be/la-passerelle/>

migrants often remain unaware of their rights and the policies that are meant to protect them, highlighting the disconnection between policy and practice, as we can see in this research.

This mismatch situation, in which we can observe that there is a loss of trust from neighbours regarding local authorities and some unused or wasted resources, can occur for various reasons but considering the overall analysis of the different thematic sections we have explored throughout this work, we suspect that in many cases, local initiatives do not take into account the daily lives of migrants from a context-sensitive perspective (Hollifield, 2004). which creates a disconnect between these two actors.

Moreover, in many cases we can explain this mismatch between the ways in which everyday rights are framed within planning and the direct experiences of marginalized urban dwellers, such as migrants, through the establishment of a language deliberately vague, discussing inclusivity, access, and safety in largely abstract terms (Beebeejaun, 2017). When we talk about this lack of connection, we can also observe an implementation gap in the series of initiatives, both at the local and neighbourhood levels (Hill & Hupe, 2014), which prevents these well-intentioned initiatives aimed at social and spatial justice in the neighbourhood's public spaces from being fully effective, since they do not reach the knowledge of the people they are intended for, as I have observed through interviews and my observations in the neighbourhood.

During these months of participatory observation, I was able to see how programs in which migrants from the neighbourhood participate are generally organized by civil society rather than by the local administration. Furthermore, in many of these cases, when these programs go beyond initiatives and activities with a pragmatic objective for these people, such as learning the language, participation is not very high. I observed this situation through the difference of participation by migrants in different activities of the association "*Aide Aux Personnes Deplacés*". When these activities were French courses, the participation of migrant people was overwhelming; in contrast, when they organized cultural activities such as film screenings about migration and exile, along with a discussion and convivial moment, participation was very low.

7. Invisible Barriers: Cognitive Maps to Highlight the Underutilization of Public Spaces

To develop this final section of the analysis of results in this work, I wanted to highlight the results gathered through the used the cognitive maps created during our walking interviews with migrant residents of the neighbourhood. By cross-referencing the routes travelled with these individuals on the map and the testimonies about the public spaces in this neighbourhood, we reached several conclusions. Many of these results were made possible through the use of these maps, which allowed us to ask specific questions about places or experiences. This tool allowed us to access issues that would not have been reached through interview questions alone.

Additionally, to present this in a more visual manner, I digitized these maps, which can be found in the appendices of the work, by editing a "community" and interactive map of this neighbourhood through the MyMaps portal (https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1EmafMzLznk_dDbCcpNe-CwhCX6pLg5A&usp=sharing). In these maps, we can find the markings and comments made by our interviewees when asked about specific places and also the routes we followed together along the streets of the neighbourhood, as well as subsequent notes made by me regarding those places they highlighted or reflected upon. The maps indicate which points were noted by the interviewees and which are my own annotations.

Within this analysis, we highlight two thematic blocks that will serve as subchapters of this section. First, we examine the common critiques regarding the major public spaces we established at the beginning of this work, such as the three main squares, focusing on issues of safety and cleanliness, which lead to their underutilization. Second, we analyse the common routes taken by women within the neighbourhood and the spaces they avoid, in contrast to men, in order to show how gender plays a significant role in shaping individuals' experiences and interactions within public spaces.

7.1. Challenges of Public Space and the Broken Windows Theory: The Impact of Safety and Cleanliness on Usage

Through interviews with the residents of *Outremeuse*, it has been gathered that in recent years they have regularly encountered significant cleanliness on the streets, leading to a perception that the neighbourhood is becoming more decayed. When we walk with them through the main streets, as we can see in the interactive map, there are certain streets that we passed through with all the interviewees. They point out the dirt and the amount of accumulated trash on the sidewalks. They themselves explain that this characteristic does not invite walking through the streets or using the benches and squares, where they do not feel safe or inclined to gather with their friends or family.

We can observe that this cleanliness and sense of abandonment align with Wilson and Kelling's (1982) Broken Windows Theory, which holds that visible signs of disorder, such as broken windows, accumulated trash, and other forms of urban decay, can lead to an increased perception of insecurity and crime in a community. This thesis argues that over time, this accumulation of disorder can lead to a cycle of progressive deterioration, where the quality of life in an area decreases, and residents feel that the local authorities have abandoned the public space. We can see in the interviews with residents how they indicate that this situation did not exist before and that the quality of life has worsened. This continued deterioration confirms that the

residents see an abandonment and a lack of action from the authorities in response to this situation. We can see how the accumulation of trash and the lack of attention from local authorities have made the inhabitants perceive the neighbourhood as less "valuable" or "important" to the city, as pointed out by these two testimonies:

“This, for example, wasn't like this before (referring to the trash we found on the sidewalk of Puits-En-Sock Street), I don't know if the people living here no longer have respect for what belongs to everyone or what (...)”²³

That's the word, decadent; the neighbourhood is getting dirtier and more run-down every day (...) People only come here to park their cars, but they no longer live their lives here (...) I'm not surprised, there's a lot of dealing going on, and at night people don't feel safe (...)”²⁴

Additionally, the visible disorder in *Outremeuse* seems to have generated a vicious cycle, where the lack of cleanliness and maintenance leads to a greater perception of insecurity, causing fewer people to use public spaces, thereby reducing the informal surveillance that occurs when there is more activity on the streets. I stand that this cycle reinforces the sense of abandonment and further fuels the area's decline, making social problems such as crime and the lack of social cohesion more pronounced. This can be seen following the interview with Gregor Stangherlin, who explains the problem of drug trafficking in several of *Outremeuse's* squares:

“There are many young people who are involved in drug trafficking of various kinds (...) And we mix this public with others who are vulnerable, children, households, single women, who are people who have come with a fairly classic background (...) This creates constant insecurity in the neighbourhood.”²⁵

If we analyse the situation in *Outremeuse*, through the lens of this theory, we can highlight the importance of early intervention and continuous maintenance in urban areas to prevent social and physical deterioration. Without an adequate response from local authorities, the neighbourhood's decline may continue, exacerbating the security and quality of life issues that already concern the residents.

7.2. Invisible Boundaries: Understanding Women's Avoidance of Public Space

Another aspect we cannot overlook in this analysis, which already emerged during the walking interviews but has been empirically highlighted through these cognitive maps, is the

²³ Mariama, extracted from her interview on 3 June 2024 and translated from French.

²⁴ Adriana, extracted from her walking interview on 24 May 2024 and translated from Portuguese.

²⁵ Gregor Stangherlin, extracted from his interview on 10 June 2024 and translated from French.

insecurity felt by people who identify as women in this research in public spaces. This lack of gender-sensitive perspectives in public space planning is part of the feminist critique of urban theory and planning developed in the 1970s. This feminist critique has demonstrated how urban planners have created gendered environments that predominantly cater to the needs of men. We have for example a lack of amenities that women need, such as safe and accessible bathrooms, places to sit with children, or pathways that feel safe after dark (Hayden, 1981).

Occasionally, I asked them questions about certain public spaces, and in all the interviews conducted with women, a recurring theme of insecurity emerged, not only due to being a woman but also due to being a migrant. This idea supports the intersectional feminist theory, which indicates that women from marginalized groups (e.g., racial minorities, migrants, women with disabilities) face compounded vulnerabilities in public spaces (Massey, 2005).

We can observe that during the routes taken by the women, there are certain small streets and squares that we did not pass through, as we did with men without concerns about their security and their presence on those spaces. On the interactive map, we can see that in no case did we cross Surlet street with the women neither the Yser Square; instead, we followed the route along the main streets where trusted public spaces for them are located. In the case of the women, we always started the interview where they specified, and it was always either their home or workplace. For the men, they also decided where to meet, and the locations were varied. In Ahmed's case, he met us at a café he frequents, where he noticed at the start of the interview that the presence of a young woman like me was atypical in that place. This dynamic reflects that the public spaces in cities are designed by and for men.

We can confirm that in many of our conversations, there is a fear of violence among the women interviewed, either from their own embodied experiences or from those that other women have suffered in public spaces. This fear is not an exceptional case among women, as public spaces have, in many cases, become places of concern and vigilance for groups such as women, minorities, and LGBTQ communities (Beebejaun, 2017). In this testimony, from which only certain parts have been extracted as it involved a violent experience suffered by someone outside this research, we can see how there is a concern about violence in public spaces in *Outremeuse* as a woman:

You already know, but when my friend worked at that bar and had to come back late at night, it was horrible (...) At that time, we were roommates, and I also worked late, but I usually didn't come home alone (...) She didn't have another option (...) She hadn't been in Liège for long, and work is work, even if it's late (...) One day, they tried to steal her phone and jewellery on her

way home (...) After that, I've been much more careful and never go home alone (...) Neither I nor any of my friends do; we've made it a rule for ourselves (...)

These situations of violence have created a generalized sense of insecurity among women and minority groups in how they inhabit urban spaces. And although these challenges are not fully within the power of urban planners and local administration to solve, they can still play a critical role as mediators within the urban agenda by emphasizing the spatial dimensions of rights. More particularly, they should consider integrating gendered perspectives within professional practice, as this remains limited.

It is true that civil society in Outremeuse, through associations and other organizations, is trying to establish a safer neighbourhood that takes into account the situation of migrant women and other vulnerable groups. However, we can see through the journeys of these women, reflected on the maps, that although significant contributions have been made to our understanding of the role and significance of gender in urban space, such as campaigns anti-harassment to confront violence against women in public spaces, there remain important questions that have only been partially addressed (Beebeejaun, 2017; McDowell, 2019).

Finally, throughout this work, Lefebvre's ideas regarding public space and the "right to the city" have been important axes of the research. However, these walking interviews with migrant women, which have revealed this lack of gender perspective in practice, invite us to reflect on how gender is articulated within this "right to the city" as well as the understanding of urban citizenship. These concepts have generally adopted a holistic approach to understanding these phenomena, avoiding reducing our understanding of experience to small fractions of life, such as class status, gender, race, income, consumer habits, as indicated by authors like Purcell (2014) and Beebeejaun (2017). Such perspectives reflect how many studies, when articulating this "right to the city", subsume gender within other characteristics within the urban citizenry rather than theorizing gender as a structuring dimension of people's identities.

Conclusion

The main objective of this work was to interweave two aspects that define our contemporary societies: the urban dimension and migration. This intention was based on going beyond merely studying the migratory phenomenon at the urban level; it aimed to investigate the social dynamics involving migrants that occur at the neighbourhood level. More specifically, this research focuses on the role of public spaces in shaping one of the most essential aspects of social relationships: community building and inclusion. To achieve this, the study sought to understand how migrants understand and inhabit these public spaces. In parallel, and in line with adopting a holistic approach that emphasizes the socioeconomic and contextual aspects of migrant populations, the study also aimed to identify the spaces allocated or permitted for these individuals by other actors and the barriers that hinder their use. These actors included members of civil society and representatives of the local public administration. All of this was articulated around the research question of this work, which addressed how migrants inhabit public spaces in the superdiverse neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*, Liège. Furthermore, with the objective of understanding how academia relates to the reality of migrants and how they embody different debates, this question had a second part aimed at exploring how the way these spaces are inhabited shapes the "right to the city" and the alternative conception of citizenship, "urban citizenship."

This research is set in the post-industrial city of Liège, Belgium, whose current demographics have been largely shaped by various waves of migration that have forged its multicultural character. And more specifically in the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse*, which is known as one of the most characteristic areas of the city due to its unique geography and its designation as a "little island" within this city, as well as for its rich folklore and diverse character. This neighbourhood is home to migrants from over 50 different nationalities, and this super-diverse character is reflected through its streets and inhabitants, as we have seen in the context of this work, as well as through fieldwork research.

As we can see, this research identified several major thematic blocks, equally defined by the theoretical framework of this thesis. First, we studied migration movements and how they are articulated within urban contexts, highlighting the work of Sassen (1991), Portes & Rumbaut (2001), and the idea of superdiversity introduced by Vertovec (2007). Secondly, attention was paid to what we understand by public spaces, how they are inhabited, and their importance in creating social relationships and contributing to spatial justice, following the pioneering work of Lefebvre (1968), as well as that of Low (2003; 2006) and others. In connection with this, we examined the "right to the city" and how it articulated the demands and needs of migrant population. We understood this right as a community claim of how the city should be and what rights it should emanate, based on the idea that cities should be built according to the claims and

needs of all citizens. Lastly, the third thematic block echoed the alternative concept of the so-called urban citizenship; simultaneously, it critiqued the traditional notion of citizenship, because it was considered oppressing, reductionist and excluding minorities, as well as, tied to the neoliberal thought and the colonialist idea of the nation-state (Picker & Lofts, 2018; Sassen, 2006; Holston, 2008; Isin & Wood, 1999; & Marshall, 1950). Furthermore, in this chapter, the importance of the urban character was highlighted once again, but in relation to multi governance and how this influences urban development, social cohesion, and policy implementation (Oosterlynck et al., 2013).

However, during the fieldwork conducted for this thesis, other themes emerged, apart from the three main ones mentioned above, which have added complexity to the work but also provided a greater understanding of the research question, and these have been reflected upon in the chapter dedicated to the results of this research. To carry out this work, it was decided to implement a qualitative methodology that combined more traditional tools, such as observations and interviews, with more innovative ones from anthropology and visual methodology, such as cognitive maps and walking interviews. All these tools were integrated to conduct an ethnography in an urban context, which, along with the theoretical framework mentioned earlier, allowed us to arrive at a series of results and to test a series of hypotheses. Also, the snowball sampling method was also used to allow the interviewees to be part of the design of this work and it contributed to implement a methodology which aimed to be as participatory as possible.

Therefore, after completing this work, several key findings have been established. Firstly, placing the voices of migrants at the centre of this analysis allowed us to discover how their diverse experiences define their use of public space in conjunction with their socioeconomic characteristics. We observed that factors such as the length of stay in the country, pre-established social networks, age, gender, having a residence permit, or being employed, among many other characteristics, shape the ways they understand and inhabit these spaces. This has allowed us to confirm that our hypothesis regarding the relationship between these characteristics and the ways of inhabiting public space was widely supported. Additionally, this analysis showed that women's use of public spaces is significantly shaped by concerns over safety, compounded by their migrant status. The combined methodology used in this work and in particular the use of maps illustrated that women often avoid certain streets and squares, reflecting a broader issue of urban spaces being designed with a male-centric perspective. This insight allowed us to explore the feminist critiques of urban planning, which argue that these environments often marginalize women and other vulnerable groups, further restricting their access and sense of belonging in the city. This research also highlighted the need for more inclusive and context-sensitive urban policies that acknowledge and address the diverse experiences of different groups. It emphasized the

importance of aligning the needs and demands of migrants and the broader community with the principles of the “right to the city”. In relation to this mismatch between theoretical debates and the daily activities of migrants in the neighbourhood, we were able to confirm that the second hypothesis of our work, which indicated that these debates tend to be oblivious to their concerns, was partially confirmed.

Coming back to the relevance of this research, through its nuanced examination of migrant experiences in public spaces, it aimed to contribute to the fields of migration studies, urban sociology, and anthropology by offering a contextual synthesis of these domains at the neighbourhood level. Academically, it has tried contributing to bridge gaps in the literature by integrating the lived realities of migrants with theoretical debates on the "right to the city" and urban citizenship. Regarding the social relevance of this work, it has aimed to amplify the often-marginalized voices of migrant communities, shedding light on their unique challenges and perspectives, thus fostering a deeper understanding of their daily struggles and contributions to urban life. Politically, with this thesis we have underscored the urgency for informed, inclusive urban policies that not only recognize but also effectively address the diverse needs of all residents, particularly migrants. We have highlighted the mismatch between theoretical frameworks and practical realities, advocating for policy making that is not only context-sensitive but also actively aligned with the principles of equity, intersectionality and justice in urban spaces.

However, although this thesis has provided important findings at various levels, it has also highlighted several limitations and opened new avenues for possible future research related to this study. Firstly, the study's sample size was relatively small, consisting of interviews with only five migrant individuals and one association. This limitation means that the findings are not representative of the broader migrant population in *Outremeuse*, but they have allowed us to look at the specific dynamics of this area. While the insights gained are valuable, they reflect the experiences and perspectives of a limited group, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences within the migrant community. Also, time constraints posed a significant challenge throughout the research process. Coordinating and conducting walking interviews required participants to be willing to spend extended periods exploring the neighbourhood, which was not always easy to arrange. Another limitation was the difficulty in establishing trust with male interviewees, particularly younger migrant men. This challenge was twofold: firstly, it occasionally led to situations where I felt uncomfortable, impacting the dynamics of the interview; secondly, there was a noticeable reluctance among young migrant men to participate in the research, likely due to a general mistrust of academic institutions.

However, these limitations, as well as the fruitful exchanges with the interviewees, have also helped us to establish various potential lines of future inquiry which offer promising avenues

for further exploration. First, there is the need to reinterpret Lefebvre's "right to the city" by integrating an intersectional approach that considers the rights and lived experiences of minorities who are often the most excluded and discriminated against in urban contexts, such as migrant women, religious minorities and queer people. By adopting a holistic yet nuanced approach, I was able to deepen our understanding of urban inclusivity. Secondly, it would be very interesting to carry on a comparative study utilizing cognitive maps across different neighbourhoods within the same city or similar neighbourhoods in different cities because it could reveal diverse urban dynamics, providing valuable insights for urban planning regarding fostering the use of public spaces by migrants, and policymaking regarding the inclusion of them. Finally, employing focus groups with various stakeholders in the neighbourhood could illuminate other social dynamics while fostering community building and strengthening local networks.

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Appendix 1: Visual material

Image 1: Blank map of *Outremeuse*

Blank map used for the sketching of the cognitive maps during the walking interviews.



Image 2: Sound Documentary « gens d'Outremeuse »

Poster of the collective listening of a sound documentary organized in the neighbourhood of *Outremeuse* on 25 Mars 2024.



Image 3: Mundo Festival

Poster to promote the “Mundo Festival” organized by the cultural and social association *l’Aquilone* on the 25 May 2024.



Image 4: Walking event organized by "La Maison Médicale La Passerelle"

Event organized by "La Maison Médicale La Passerelle" on the 9 Mars 2024 dedicated to a women's walk with the theme of exploring women's place in public spaces.

"Quelle place pour les femmes dans l'espace public ?"

BALADE 

LE 9 MARS 2023

Rendez-vous à 13h
aux Guillemins à la gare
des bus (quai D)



 **3 Km**

 **De 13h à 17h**

 **Je prends ma gourde**

 **Infos et inscriptions à l'accueil**

GOÛTER OFFERT ! 

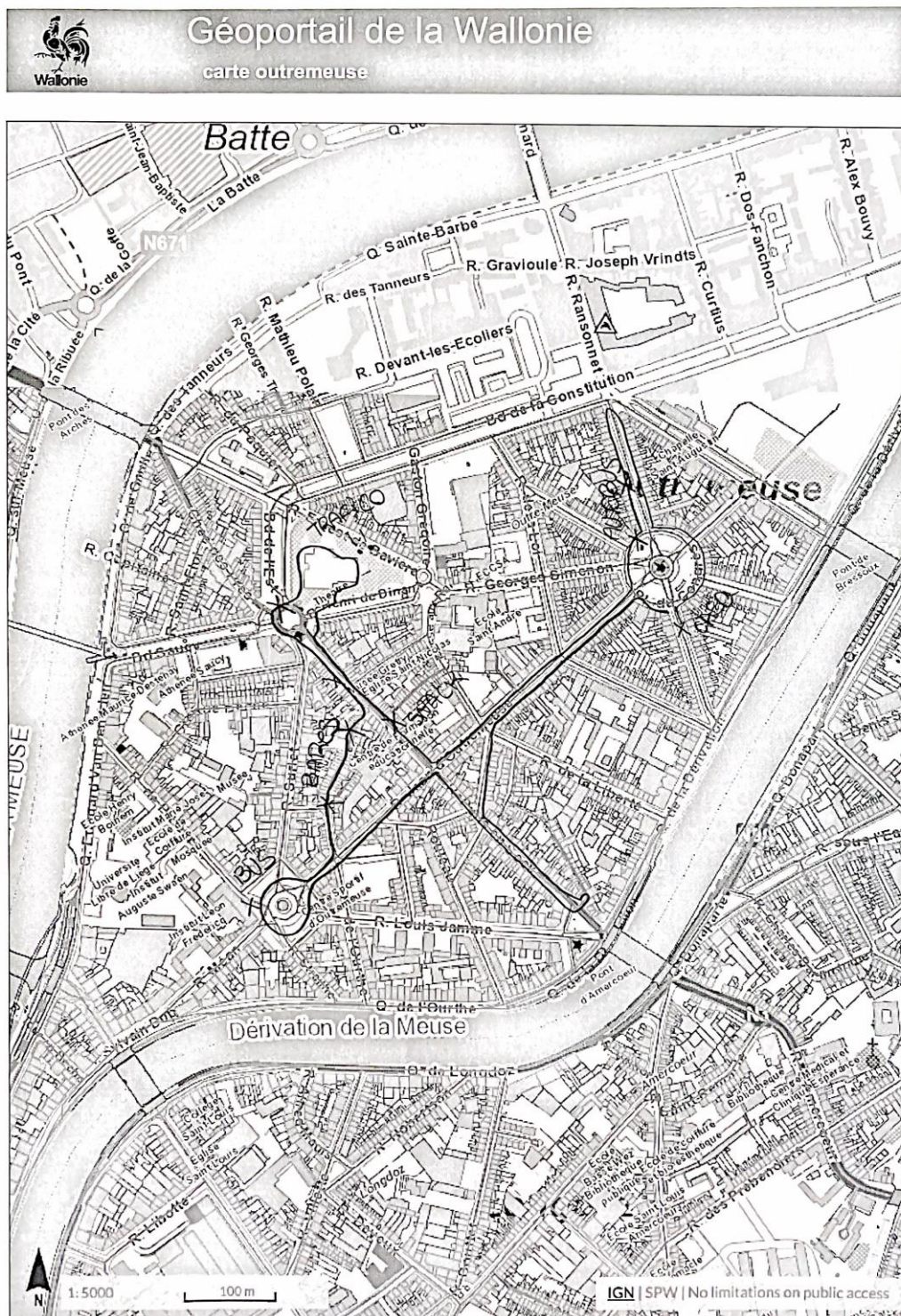
Cet évènement est organisé par les Maisons Médicales Liégeoises

Map n° 1: Ahmed

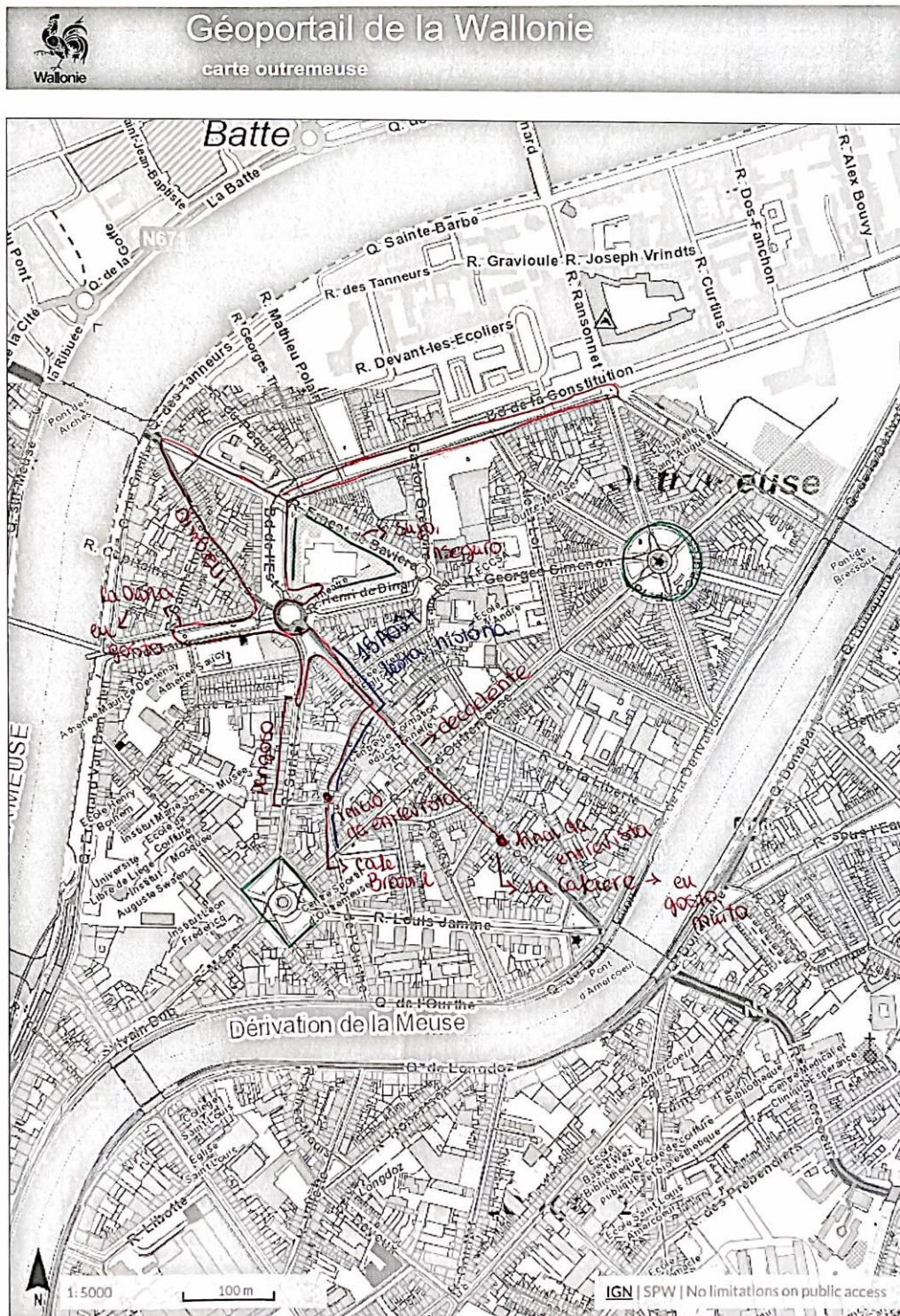


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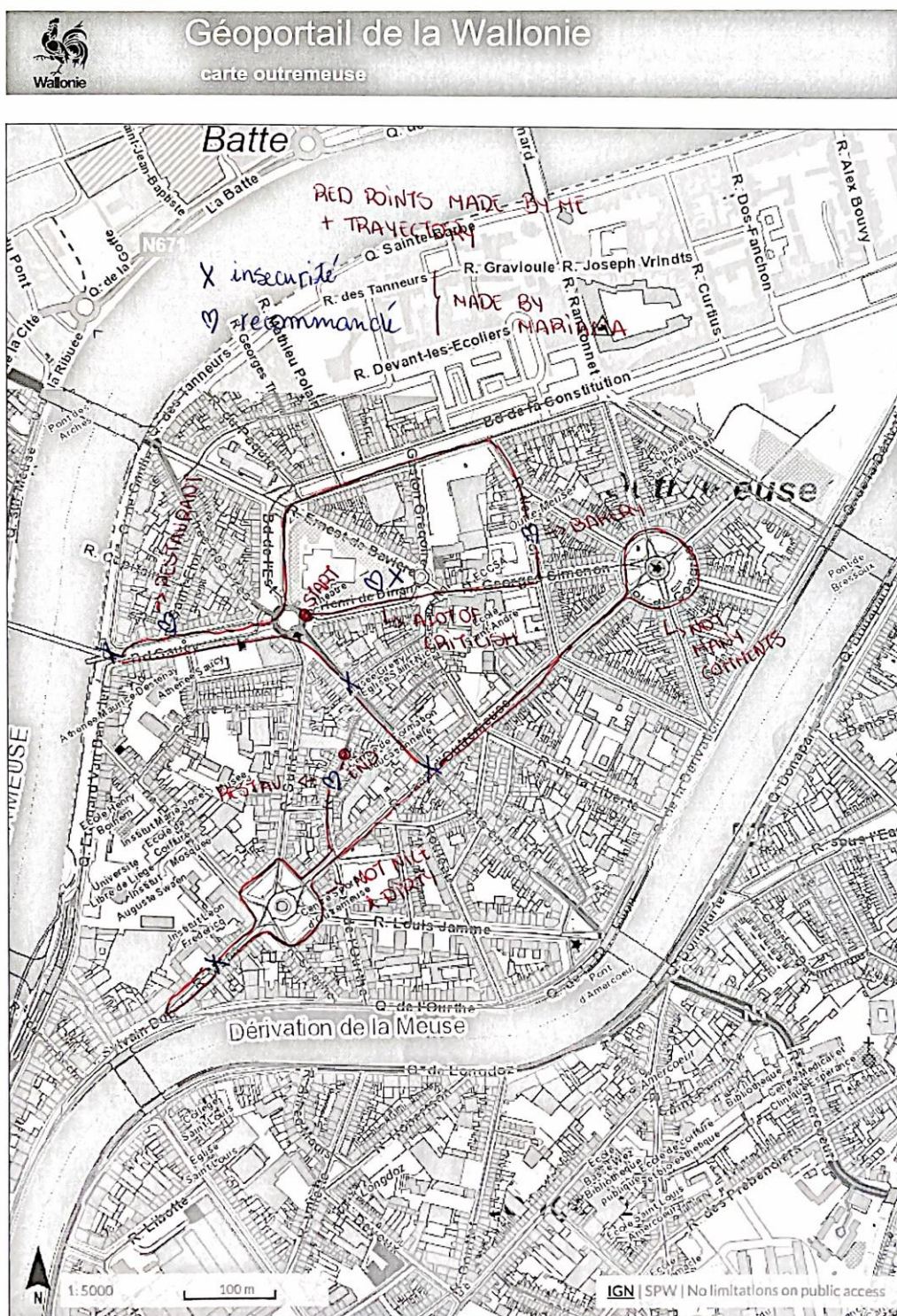


Map n° 3: Adriana

ADRIANA 24/15/ 2024



Mariama 3 Juin 2024



Map n° 5: Samia

