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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Custers, L., Huybrechts, L., & Devisch, O. (2023). Experiential Evaluation to Create Risky Situations and Address Tensions in a Participatory Planning Process. *Urban Planning*, 8(2), 292-306. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v8i2.6370>

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Article

Experiential Evaluation to Create Risky Situations and Address Tensions in a Participatory Planning Process

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Submitted: 29 October 2022 | Accepted: 27 February 2023 | Published: 22 June 2023

Abstract

Planning processes often cause tensions between institutions and citizens because the local knowledge and values of the citizens are not included in the decision-making process, which can cause mistrust. This article builds on an ongoing PhD research that explores the potential of experiential evaluation as an alternative and experimental approach to “hybrid forums”: an approach to open the participatory planning process for diverse actors and values. In order to render tensions visible and constructive in the participatory planning process, experiential evaluation creates “risky situations” in these hybrid forums. To discuss this approach of experiential evaluation, we use a methodological and analytical framework based on the four steps of strategic navigation techniques: tracing, mapping, diagramming, and agencying. We use these techniques to analyse two risky situations that were created through experiential evaluation within the participatory planning process of the neighbourhood spatial plan (NSP) of Zwijnaarde (Ghent, Belgium). Based on the analysis of the case, we observed that experiential evaluation was able to render tensions visible, but did not yet make them constructive. However, as a framework for a dialogue between institutions and citizens, the NSP leaves room to continue the experiential evaluation process that was initiated and to take further care of tensions on a smaller scale.

Keywords

democratic decision-making; hybrid forums; more-than-human actors; participatory design; staging; values

Issue

This article is part of the issue “Planning Around Polarization: Learning With and From Controversy and Diversity” edited by Oswald Devisch (Hasselt University), Liesbeth Huybrechts (Hasselt University), Anna Seravalli (Malmö University), and Seppe De Blust (ETH Zürich).

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1. The Problem With Hybrid Forums

Participatory planning processes often cause tensions between institutions and citizens because it is difficult for all the involved actors to imagine the impact that these processes may have on their daily comings and goings. More often than not, these planning processes leave little room to include local knowledge and are not very transparent about whose values are considered, which can lead to mistrust between citizens and institutions (Custers et al., 2022).

In this article, we experiment with an alternative approach to participatory planning processes to better include local knowledge and values of engaged citizens

in the decision-making process. The approach is based on the concept of “hybrid forums” as defined by Callon et al. (2009) in their essay *Acting in an Uncertain World*. This approach is not about creating situations to discuss whether an urban plan is a good or a bad plan, but how to open up the decision-making process to diverse actors in order to integrate other values into the discussion. In these situations, institutions and citizens together can arrive at other, more situated and embedded plans. The approach enables tensions to be redirected by exploring alternative futures that articulate shared values, and which enable a mutual learning process (Callon et al., 2009). By making this learning process collective, citizens can enter the planning process and

can co-create alternative futures and thus new ways of thinking about, seeing, and acting in space (Callon et al., 2009). Such hybrid forums bring actors (city experts, politicians, designers, researchers, and concerned citizens) together and thus simultaneously address different spatial scales. Also, the political, ethical, technical, and scientific questions that are handled are diverse (Yaneva, 2022). The tensions that planning processes trigger are thus not handled as externalities, invisible forces that come from outside and that can be governed in a top-down way. The tensions are handled as “matters of concern,” as something we care for (Latour, 2004a, 2004b). They are uncertain because of the (human and more-than-human) actors that assemble around them, not because they agree with each other but because these matters of concern bring them together as much as they divide them (Latour, 2004a; Yaneva, 2022).

We thus investigate hybrid forums because they offer a way to develop a more democratic approach towards handling tensions in participatory planning processes (Callon et al., 2009). However, Metzger (2016) criticises this approach because it fails to acknowledge how these forums are also exclusive by only including human actors in a deliberative way. This critique is related to how Callon et al. (2009, p. 33) describe citizens entering the decision-making process within these hybrid forums: “Everyone is asked to listen to other people, to respond clearly to their arguments, and to formulate counter-proposals.” Metzger (2016) links this to communicative planning. This form of planning is related to the model of communicative action of Habermas, which conceived a notion of deliberative democracy based on the idea of domination-free discourses and of seeking to reach a consensus via rational argumentation (Kühn, 2021). Metzger (2016) agrees with Callon and colleagues that this approach can work under certain conditions; however, it is important to be reflective of how these conditions work and for whom they work. Therefore, he calls for approaches that are not about inviting everybody into one “forum,” but which “generate ‘risky situations’ that open up its participants to surprising insights and unpredicted collective becomings by staging events that offer a potential for learning in new ways” (Metzger, 2016, p. 591). As we have also underlined in previous work (Dreessen et al., 2014), these risky situations rely on experimental methods to invite actors to perform and experience together, rather than mere rational deliberation (Metzger, 2016).

“Experiential evaluation” is defined in this research process as a relational approach based on the actor-network theory (Latour, 2005). It looks at the specific context of tensions and, more specifically, the power relations of the actors that are involved in the planning and the decision-making process to focus on the experiences and performances of these tensions. The power and politics that drive tensions are contextual and become obscured when these tensions are handled as an externality. Thus, a participatory planning process can benefit from a more contextualised, relational and experi-

ential understanding of tensions (Latour, 2004b; Yaneva, 2022). The research that is the subject of this article was conducted as anthropological research in collaboration and joint activity with the actors embedded in their environment to get a grip on these relations and tensions (Ingold, 2008).

The next section introduces the approach of experiential evaluation. Section 3 introduces the case and how we engage in risky situations. Section 4 is the analysis of the case, specifically of two risky situations and the extent to which they helped, on the one hand, open up the participatory process to other actors and values, and, on the other hand, supported these other values become part of the decision-making process. Section 5 reflects on the process before concluding on how experiential evaluation can be an alternative and experimental approach to organising hybrid forums by creating risky situations that open up the participatory planning process for other actors and values to render tensions visible and constructive.

2. Experiential Evaluation

Experiential evaluation is a methodology developed within the PhD research of the main author (Custers et al., 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) as an alternative and experimental approach to the concept of hybrid forums in order to create “risky situations” within participatory planning processes. These risky situations are created by “staging” (see Section 2.1) the dialogue in the real-life context of the planning process (Metzger, 2014) and combining this staging with “democratic design experiments” (explained in Section 2.2; see also Binder et al., 2015). Combining staging and democratic design experiments makes experience and evaluation part of the same participatory planning process and renders the doubt and disagreement about the matters of concern visible. The design researcher takes up the role of a “stage director” (Pedersen, 2020) who strategically navigates (see Section 2.3) the participatory planning process by setting up new experiments in order to involve new actors on different scales, thus creating risky situations to deal with the complexity and diversity of the matters of concern that are inherent to planning processes.

2.1. The Staging of a Dialogue in a Place

The first element of the experiential evaluation is “staging” the dialogue in a place. The place is then defined as the context of the planning process and the everyday life of the citizens. The place of the staging defined in the relational-materialist position of Metzger (2014, p. 94) is neither subjective nor objective but is, as the author outlined:

The full gamut of spatially positioned interrelated subject/object becomings in which intra-acting elements are endowed with identity and integrity...becomes

joined together as an articulate place through the integrative, synthesising function of an instantiation of subjectivity-objectivity which senses the world in situated ways and generates specific images of the world.

When the dialogue is situated in a place, the place becomes part of the experiential evaluation and thus opens the dialogue for other values also related to the “more-than-human” actors present in the place, such as the water or the trees, because actors relate in different ways to the places they experience.

2.2. Democratic Design Experiments

Binder et al. (2015) translated the concept of Callon et al. (2009) of hybrid forums into what they call “democratic design experiments.” These democratic design experiments open a new role for design that is “about staging socio-material conditions for controversial issues in ways that facilitate contradictions, oppositions, and disagreement through direct engagement” (Binder et al., 2015, p. 153). A “socio-material condition” is an assemblage of human and more-than-human actors, which can change the space of interaction and performance and by doing so, open up the process for new ways of thinking and behaving (Binder et al., 2011). Applied to participatory planning, it is the assemblage of maps, prototypes, actors, and the place within which they interact that defines the room for action (Pedersen, 2020).

Binder et al. (2015) argue how democratic design experiments engage collectives in another kind of “decision-making,” a more “designerly” way beyond the mere discursive. It is about real-life experiments and engagements with possible worlds, and thus literally drawing (or building) things together (Binder et al., 2015). They define the essence of democracy as the ability to disagree and explore other options. Democratic design experiments do this in a “more-than-human” way by engaging humans and more-than-humans such as trees, buildings, etc., and make issues and tensions experientially available in a way that possible futures become tangible, formable, or within reach of engaged (diverse) citizens (Binder et al., 2011).

2.3. Experiential Evaluation as Strategic Navigation

Pedersen (2020) argues that the staging of a participatory process, a hybrid forum, requires a stage director. Staging does not require an objective facilitator, but someone who—instead of steering—navigates towards matters of concern. Staging thus implies political or strategic navigation (Devos, 2021; Hillier, 2011; Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann, 2017; Yoshinaka & Clausen, 2020) of moving through an uncertain, complex, and dynamic network of actors on multiple scales, which requires constant management of tensions and thus looking for room to negotiate about the matters of concerns in an experimental way. This navigation requires

skills to cope with a multitude of existing and emerging interests that do not enter the stage in an orderly fashion and are often competing or at least entwined, and shift across scales throughout the process (Yoshinaka & Clausen, 2020). These skills can be developed by engaging in diverse environments of ever-changing conditions of development and as such—by rehearsal—design experiments, and ongoing negotiations in diverse articulations (Yoshinaka & Clausen, 2020).

Hillier (2011) developed four strategic navigation techniques based on the multiplanar theory of Deleuze and Guattari (1987, as cited in Hillier, 2011): tracing, mapping, diagramming, and agencying.

1. Tracing entails the collaborative exploration of the potential of a particular planning challenge. The joint (re)definition of the research question. It is also about understanding how a certain issue came into being, by untangling and interpreting the processes and relations between actants.
2. Mapping builds on the insight of the tracing and is about matching the identified challenges with promising and affected actor networks. Therefore, mapping identifies new relational opportunities, values, and tensions.
3. Diagramming entails collective future-making, thus making alternative futures tangible and, by doing so, supporting new socio-material assemblages to be formed.
4. Agencying is aimed at strategically developing the necessary agencies to ensure the new dynamics that are formed around the planning issue are sustained, institutionalising these dynamics.

These navigation techniques can be applied as an analytical framework to analyse complex and dynamic participatory processes and as an alternative and experimental approach to participatory planning processes (Hillier, 2011). In a recent article, Devos (2021) uses Hillier’s techniques as an analytical framework to deconstruct the interplay of multiple tactics deployed in two complex participatory processes. We will deploy these techniques in a similar way; however, the interplay between the actors (institutions and planning practitioners versus institutions and citizens) and the research questions differs.

In this article, we will reflect on the potential of experiential evaluation as an approach to introducing risky situations in participatory planning processes to make room for other actors and values and render tensions visible and constructive.

3. Engaging in Risky Situations

In order to illustrate the potential of the experiential evaluation approach, we will use the four navigation techniques to deconstruct the participatory planning process in which the main author and the second author were involved. This process took place in Zwijnaarde, a

neighbourhood on the south side of Ghent, the second largest city of Flanders (Belgium), with around 263,000 inhabitants. Over two years, both authors set up a process of experiential evaluation by initiating situated experiments in close collaboration with key stakeholders. We use the framework to evaluate the impact of this approach of experiential evaluation by answering the following three questions, for each of the four stages put forward by the framework (see Table 1):

1. To which extent did the risky situations help open up the process to new actors?
2. To which extent did the risky situations help make tensions and dependencies between values visible?
3. To which extent did the risky situations help translate these other values into the decision-making process?

3.1. *The Case of Zwijnaarde*

Zwijnaarde was an autonomous municipality until it became a part of the city of Ghent in 1977. It is a large neighbourhood (1,206 hectares) with only around 8,000 inhabitants. The distance to the city centre of Ghent is approximately six to seven kilometres. It is feasible by bike, and there is a light rail connection to the main train station and the city centre. The morphology of Zwijnaarde is diverse: low-density residential subdivisions, villas—but also a higher density around the historical centre, former working-class houses, and several business parks in the north part. These living environments are surrounded and divided from each other by open space (nature but also agricultural land).

The neighbourhood is heavily impacted (air quality and sound nuisance) by the large infrastructure (highways) on the north and east side, and a busy regional state road divides the neighbourhood into two parts. The business parks function as islands within the neighbourhood, which causes tensions with the more residential character of the neighbourhood. The river Scheldt forms the east border, although it is cut off from the neighbourhood by one of the highways.

There is an active neighbourhood committee. They are well-informed about the urban planning of Zwijnaarde and create a place for citizens to discuss issues with the city policy or other institutions during their meetings. Additionally, they communicate and inform the citizens about their actions via their Facebook page *Toekomst van Zwijnaarde* (Dutch for Future of Zwijnaarde). This “concerned group” (Callon et al., 2009, p. 82) is an important partner in the participatory process to create a local network.

3.2. *The Neighbourhood Spatial Plan*

In 2018, the strategic policy *Ruimte voor Gent* (Dutch for “space for Ghent”) was implemented (Stad Gent,

2018). This vision defines the spatial ambitions of the city’s policy until 2030 and beyond. With this vision came also the engagement to develop neighborhood spatial plans (NSPs) for a number of neighbourhoods, including Zwijnaarde. The proximity to the city centre and connection with qualitative public transportation, together with the foreseen growth of citizens in the city, makes Zwijnaarde a strategic location for densification.

This NSP is a new spatial planning instrument that approaches the densification of the neighbourhood as an opportunity to define an alternative scenario for the sustainable transformation of the neighbourhood in the short, medium, and long term. The NSP contains sufficient degrees of flexibility towards changes in the future and focuses on the structural elements in the neighbourhood, which are spatial entities that are fundamental for future transformation. It is a new planning instrument with no predefined process and thus the assignment also explores what an NSP can or should be (Stad Gent, 2018).

3.3. *The Participatory Planning Process*

The case that is the subject of this article is part of the PhD research of the main author, engaging in an anthropological way with a commissioned assignment by the policy of the city of Ghent in Belgium. The main author became part of the design team that developed the NSP for Zwijnaarde. This also allowed her to emerge in the world of the institution and the everyday life of the citizen. The second author and the supervisor of the first author worked as project leader of the participatory process in Ghent. The PhD research was not funded by—nor dependent on—this assignment, which enabled the design researchers to take the liberty to add extra research activities to the participatory process, which were always made transparent to the city expert in charge of the project. We conducted the assignment in collaboration with a design office. This office was in charge of the design of the NSP and the organisation of the co-creation sessions. We—as design researchers—were in charge of the participatory process and the translation of the contribution of the citizens to the design process.

The participatory planning process started in February 2020, just before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This forced us to rethink the process and made us experiment with online tools and develop new tools. This resulted in a new process where we had an online and offline version ready for all the activities, in order to shift if the situation (and thus the health measures) changed.

3.4. *Creating Risky Situations*

The assignment stated specifically that the process had to include a “people-oriented approach to planning.” This meant that the process had to consider the everyday life of the citizens (the specific and everyday use of the

Table 1. Analytical framework based on the four strategic navigation techniques.

	Opening the process to actors and values	Making values visible	Translating values into decision-making process
Tracing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction tour together with design office to experience neighbourhood from outsiders' perspective. • Online neighbourhood market 1 with members of neighbourhood committee to map challenges. • Interview members of the project team to know their perspective on the assignment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction tour added on the website once it was launched. • Report of the interviews handed over the city expert in charge of the NSP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges reframed as nine ambitions which became the foundation of the NSP.
Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploratory walks to engage inhabitants in another way with their neighbourhood and include other values. • Home visits to expand the network of engaged inhabitants. • Workshop with pupils to include other values. • Neighbourhood committee made a collective online walk with their values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk-app and website to visualise the physical maps of the exploratory walks and the pupils workshop. • Audio fragments of pupils posted as stories on the website. • Neighbourhood committee used the walk-app to make their values visible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-creation sessions organised with engaged inhabitants on preliminary design of the NSP. • Collectively evaluate if the value were translated correctly in the ambitions and further in the preliminary design. • Include local knowledge and other values in the refinement of the design of the NSP.
Step 1: Include local knowledge			
Step 2: Evaluate alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the city experts with organising focus groups with different stakeholders to evaluate the NSP. • Future walks to walk to strategic locations from the NSP and collectively evaluate in the place. • Online future walks via the walk-app for inhabitants to explore the NSP at a convenient time. • At the second neighbourhood market, participants could add feedback to a large-scale model with the NSP presented on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from the participants of the future walks and neighbourhood market were added to the website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The feedback of the inhabitants was translated into the final design of the NSP.
Diagramming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise a Live Project on two strategic locations of the NSP in order to make alternative futures tangible and allowing new actors and values to enter the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the potential of the place for the larger area as a meeting place. • Redirect the dialogue from individual challenges towards collective values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of the Live Project were handed over to the design office to be included in the pilot project (related to the NSP). • Co-creation session organised related to the pilot project with invited inhabitants to discuss the preconditions of densification in the neighbourhood.
Agencying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to involve inhabitants in monitoring of the NSP via the action plan part of the NSP. • Support actions of inhabitants to give them agency in the realisation of the NSP. 		

Source: Adapted from Hillier (2011).

space) and give citizens an active role in the spatial policy (co-creation). The NSP process was designed to intertwine our participatory work with the work of the design office. We developed different types of walks to connect with other actors and collect other values, which we alternated with the co-creation sessions around a scale model to collect the findings and proposals and translate them into the design. By alternating the walks with the co-creation sessions, we would be able to bring the local knowledge of the citizens into the NSP and also bring the NSP into the everyday life of the citizens.

We developed four types of walks: the introduction tour to discover the neighbourhood from an outsider’s perspective; the exploratory walks invite the citizens to show us their neighbourhood from their perspective; the thematic walks let us experience the different themes of the spatial plan from another perspective; and the future walks bring the design of the spatial plan literally back to the neighbourhood. However, we were not able to organise the thematic walks because at that moment there was not enough room to introduce a risky situation due to tensions in a parallel mobility transition process which affected the NSP process. Also, there was a lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which made it impossible to physically meet people. In this article, we focus on two risky situations: the exploratory walks and the live project. We chose these situations because they were introduced in the process at moments when there was room to experiment (see Figure 1).

3.4.1. Exploratory Walks

The exploratory walks are part of the second strategic navigation technique, the mapping: the joint seeking for new relations and the mapping of values and tensions. We divided this technique into two parts. The first part is to include the local knowledge into the NSP and thus engage with the everyday life of the citizens, and the second part is to collectively evaluate the alternative spatial scenario. The exploratory walks are the first part of

the mapping technique to include the local knowledge in the NSP.

The exploratory walks supported the citizens to engage in an alternative way with their neighbourhood. We asked them to map different types of locations they felt a relation to in their neighbourhood and to organise them in a personal walk. We asked them to answer specific questions in relation to these places (see Figure 2). They had to answer the following questions: Which places were the start/end point of the walk? Which places do they visit often? Which places do they like to be and which are the places they do not like to be? Which are the places that they miss in their neighbourhood and which are the places where they meet others? A walk-bag (see Figure 3) was developed to support the citizens to design individual exploratory walks in their neighbourhood. Often, they chose a route—well-known to them—through the neighbourhood. However, the mapping assignment stimulated them to pay closer attention to the experience of their daily routine, by taking more conscious stops, taking a picture, making a note...

We also consciously addressed particular groups in the neighbourhood to organise a walk. For instance, we had the opportunity to do a workshop with pupils (10 to 11 years old) of an elementary school at the end of October 2020, right before the second lockdown (see Figure 4). At the start of the workshop, we handed over a walk-bag which the pupils used to draw their map of the neighbourhood. It was not feasible to do an actual walk because schools could not easily organise outdoor events, but we assisted them in making a map of their neighbourhood and asked several of the pupils to tell us how they saw the future of Zwijnaarde.

Additionally, we developed a walk-app, called De Andere Ruimte (“the other space”), designed to collect data while walking by making use of a mobile device with location services switched on. The basic development of the walk-app had already been started before the outbreak of the pandemic. The intention was to develop an online application to broaden the diversity of

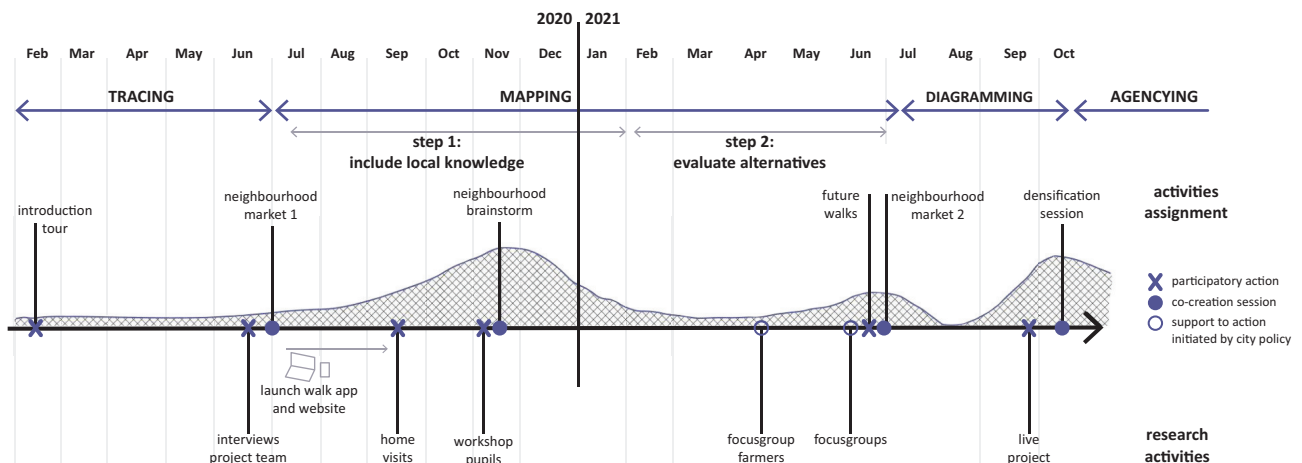


Figure 1. Overview of the process and the room to experiment.

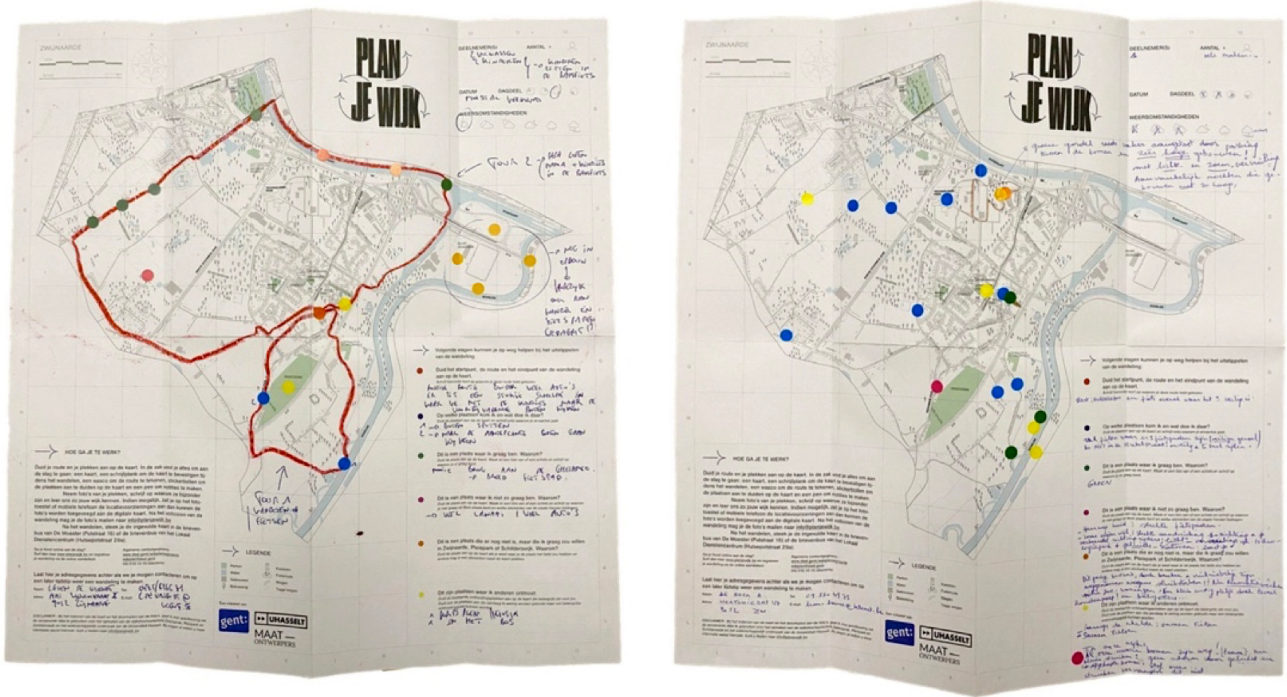


Figure 2. Example maps of the exploratory walks handed in by citizens. Picture by Maat Ontwerpers.

participants who could do the data input. However, with the outbreak of the pandemic, we decided to develop an application that goes beyond mere data input that could support us with ethnographic fieldwork during a time of social distancing (see Figure 5). The walk-app is linked to a website, which is called Plan Je Wijk (“map your neighbourhood”), which was used to visualise the collected data (see Figure 6). The online platform (and the walk-app) allowed people to share their spatial experience at any time, but also to discover the NSP at a moment convenient to them or make an autonomous choice in doing research into the places they were interested in.

3.4.2. Live Projects

The live project is part of the diagramming step, which is about making alternative futures tangible to support the formation of new socio-material assemblages. In the live project, students of the second master architecture and the first master interior architecture step into a design process together with citizens, policymakers, and local actors to think about the possible futures of a certain place or a certain spatial issue. A live project aims to support the dialogue about future developments using critical design research (Harriss & Widder, 2014).



Figure 3. The design of the walk-bag. Picture by Maat Ontwerpers.



Figure 4. Workshop with the pupils.

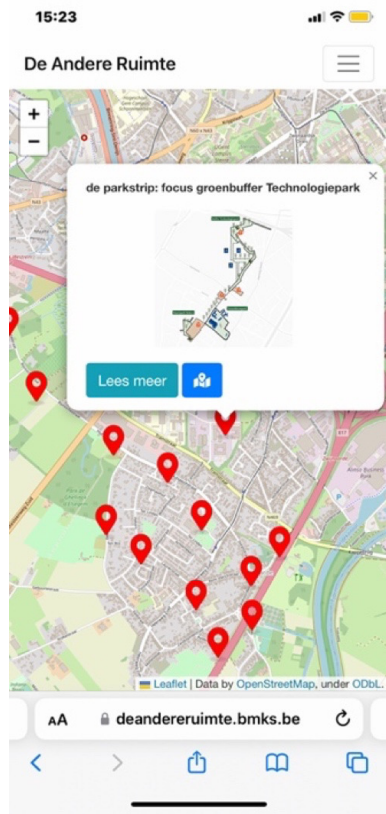


Figure 5. Screenshot of the walk-app on a mobile device.

The first group of students worked on an underused open space next to a care home for the elderly and separated from a bike path by a fence (see Figure 7). Their project resulted in partly removing the fence to show the potential of this underused open space. The other group of students developed two tools to engage citizens in a dialogue about densification and tested these on two different locations for two days in the second week (see Figure 8). On the third and final day, they showed the results and the tools at a neighbourhood park.

4. Case Analysis

In this part, we apply the analytical framework based on the four navigation techniques to the two risky situations: the exploratory walks and the live projects. For each risky situation, we analyse the extent to which the risky situation helped to open up the process to other actors; did it help make tensions and dependencies between values visible and did it support translating these other values into the decision-making process?

4.1. Exploratory Walks

We organised the exploratory walks to include the local knowledge of the citizens in the NSP process. The city experts had already mapped a part of this local

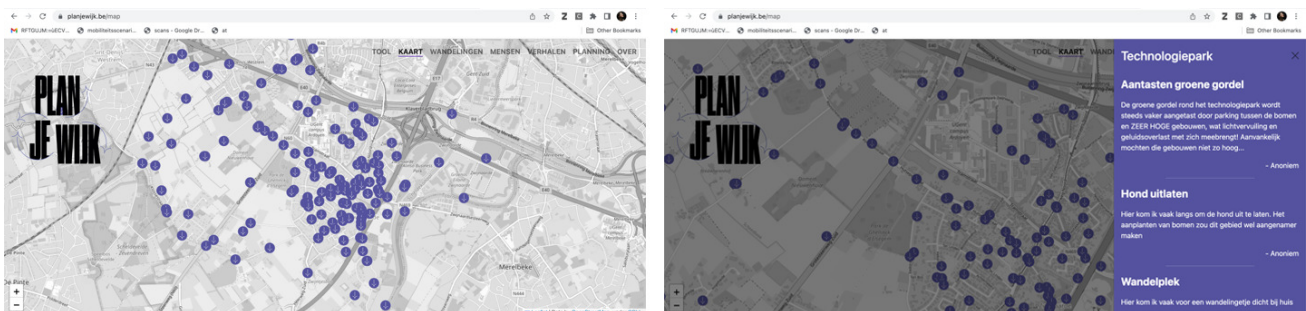


Figure 6. Screenshots of the website.



Figure 7. Live project 1: Underused open space at a care home for the elderly.



Figure 8. Live project 2: Dialogue about densification in the neighbourhood.

knowledge via focus groups with stakeholders before the start of the process and the neighbourhood committee. We wanted to extend this network with other engaged citizens via the exploratory walks because we believed that there were other actors that also cared about the neighbourhood but were not yet involved.

We communicated to the citizens via different means (digital newsletter, brochure via mail, and social media) that they could pick up a bag at two locations in the neighbourhood, but the citizens did not spontaneously respond to this call. Also, due to the pandemic and the redirecting of the process, we were unable to meet citizens physically. That is why the lead researcher proposed conducting home visits in different parts of the neighbourhood, and we engaged in the workshop with the pupils.

4.1.1. Opening the Process to Other Actors

The home visits aimed to engage citizens to make an exploratory walk (gather local knowledge) and meet the citizens in order to build their own network in the neighbourhood in addition to the already existing network built by the city experts. We would also be able to send reminders to the people to engage with their fieldwork assignment and invite them to future activities because we collected their contact details when we handed over the walk-bag. The lead researcher had completed five rounds of visits by mid-September 2020, each in a different part of the neighbourhood. The doorbells that she rang and thus the people that she talked to were randomly chosen. We observed, together with the city experts, that these home visits contributed to a more diverse network of participants in future activities and that these “other participants” bring in new values and tensions.

The workshop with the pupils gave us the opportunity to connect with a group of actors that are not easily reached in a participatory process.

4.1.2. Making Tensions and Dependencies Between Values Visible

The maps that were handed in by the participants showed that their relationship with the place shifted as they were asked to think about how they valued these places while they were in the place itself. The mapping assignment helped to collect richer data and thus allowed other values to enter the process. The places are the same, but the perspective and thus the relation to the place shifted as they were asked to think about how they value these places:

Wonderful silence! This path along the river near the business park is the only place where you can still walk without much noise. Now still unknown and undeveloped! [as a response to “a place where I like to be”]

This has the potential to be a public place? Perhaps there is an opportunity here to give more attention to this unused open space and to make it public as a park or resting place for the neighbourhood? [as a response to “a place I miss in my neighbourhood”]

At the same time, the participants used their walks to make their values explicit. For example, a participant that is a member of a youth movement indicated this on the map: “Green spaces like this are very important for youth and the youth movement.”

The interpretation of the exploratory walks as a workshop with pupils disconnected the group from the experience of being in space. During these “walks,” the children connected their values and local knowledge to spaces on a physical map via their imagination. There was thus an imaginary connection to the space which departed from the spaces the persons were familiar with. The pupils sometimes took this exercise a step further and expressed their values via imaginary places, like the transformation of the neighbourhood into a park for

dinosaurs, which expressed the pupils’ concern for more trees in the neighbourhood for their ecological value.

A few representatives of the neighbourhood committee used the walk-app just after it was launched to make a collective walk. In this walk, they added their knowledge about the spatial development of the neighbourhood, which includes opinions and information about larger urban developments, heritage buildings, and the history of certain places, and they thus directly made their values visible via the website.

We used the walk-app and the website to report and dynamically communicate about the process by digitalising and visualising the physical maps. This made the process more transparent and by doing so, it has the potential to open the process and invite others in (DiSalvo, 2022). For example, at the start of the focus group with the farmers (later in the process), they called upon their right to be heard in the process, because they saw the stories of the pupils: “Why were the pupils asked to participate and we were not?”

4.1.3. Translating Values to the Decision-Making Process

After the exploratory walks, the design office initiated co-creation sessions to discuss the preliminary design of the NSP with different stakeholders. Initially, there

were no sessions planned with citizens, but after a discussion with the project team, we decided to organise three online neighbourhood brainstorming sessions with engaged citizens (Figures 9 and 10). In preparation for the sessions, the design office did a first exercise to translate the collected values and concerns from the previous steps into nine ambitions and then translated these ambitions into the preliminary design of the NSP. The aim of the neighbourhood brainstorm was twofold: first, we wanted to check if we had translated the values correctly into the ambitions and the preliminary design and second, we wanted to include local knowledge and other values in the further development of the NSP. The engaged citizens had to sign up as a “neighbourhood planner,” which meant that they were interested to be more involved in the process of the NSP.

After the neighbourhood brainstorming session, the design team refined the design of the NSP based on the feedback from this session and the sessions with other stakeholders. During the session, there were also discussions about conflicting values between citizens. For example, about the implementation of a “school street.” A young parent found that it was a priority to add it to the preliminary design because she wanted to cycle to school with her young children in a safe way. For an older person, it was something he did not see the use of.



Figure 9. Overview online whiteboard neighbourhood brainstorm. Design by Maat Ontwerpers.

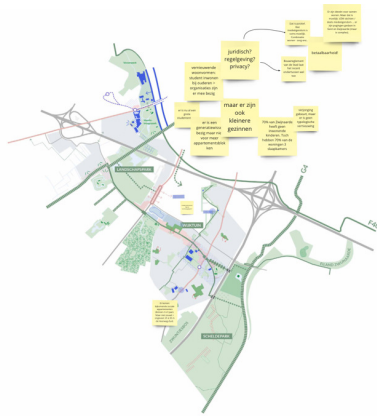
Ruimte voor nieuwe woontypologieën

- > wonen aan de wijktaai
- > wonen in het dorpscentrum
- > wonen aan de groene oost-west drager
- > ...

AMBITIE 05

"We versterken de identiteit van elke buurt met een gedifferentieerd woonaanbod dat is afgestemd op de (toekomstige) woonwensen."

- We zetten in op buurt specifieke woontypologieën afgestemd op de lokale eigenheden en opgaven.
- We ontwikkelen ook studenten en koppelen hun behoeftes aan woonwensen voor de wijk.



Rijvisse- en Hutsepotstraat als fietsverbinding

AMBITIE 04

"We zetten in op nabijheid via een veilig en kwalitatief fietsnetwerk van trage wegen en fietspaden."

- We zetten in op wonen op woonwiel- en fietswiel van lokale voorzieningen
- We bouwen aan een veilig en kwalitatief fietsnetwerk

AMBITIE 06

"We verachteren de barrières van de E17 en E40 en zoeken herboven voor een betere woonkwaliteit nabij deze zware verkeersaders."

- We verachteren de huidige verkeerswegen tussen de woonwijken en de uitgaande verkeersaders
- We verachteren de barrières van de E17 en de E40 op strategische plekken



Figure 10. Zooms of an online whiteboard with feedback from participants. Design by Maat Ontwerpers.

4.2. Live Project

After the mapping, the design of the NSP was finalised. However, the future transformation of the neighbourhood as it was defined in the NSP remained abstract for most of the citizens, specifically on the part of densification. This created mistrust around the intentions of the city policy about the NSP, and thus about the future of their neighbourhood. Also, the area of the NSP is large, which makes it difficult for the participants to translate the NSP to the scale of their everyday life. Therefore, we decided to organise a live project in two locations in order to make it more tangible.

4.2.1. Opening the Process to Other Actors

The live project invited new actors into the process. At the first location, the students engaged with the elderly people, the children of a nearby school, the owner of a vegetable garden on the other side of the path, and the users of the path (pedestrians, a lot of them with dogs, and cyclists). Also at the second location, the prototyping allowed new actors to enter the dialogue, like the homeowners, visitors, people passing by, or contractors working in the neighbourhood.

The members of the project team were also involved and they met with the students on a regular basis during the two weeks. New experts participated in the live project to guide the students. For example, the coordinator of the local service centre participated in the pitch at the end of the first week to give feedback on the proposals of the students.

4.2.2. Making Tensions and Dependencies Between Values Visible

The re-opening of the fence at the first location showed the potential for the underused space for the larger area. The citizens could experience the reconnection of the space with the elderly care home, but also the nearby park with the school, the local service centre, the sports

centre, and the library. The students installed a small bench along the bike path to emphasise the potential of a meeting place at a crossroads for future connections.

In the second location, the tools developed in the live project helped to redirect the dialogue with the citizens beyond pro or against densification. Specifically, the students started the discussion with the citizens from the perspective that the neighbourhood is already densifying and asked them under what preconditions a densification in Zwijnaarde would be acceptable, and also what the neighbourhood could “gain” from this densification, in a sense of what collective needs this densification should or could meet. This redirected the dialogue as a form of “meaningful bargaining” (Mäntysalo et al., 2011) from individual challenges towards collective values.

4.2.3. Translating Values to the Decision-Making Process

The live project was located in two strategic locations of the NSP, which means that multiple spatial concepts of the NSP came together in these locations. Also, the design office worked on one pilot project within the NSP and the live project was located within the area of this pilot project. Specifically, the pilot project focussed on a densification strategy for a certain part of the neighbourhood, the second location of the live project. The results of the second live project were handed over to the design office. Additionally, the design office initiated a co-creation session to define the preconditions for densification with city experts of different departments. They agreed to open up the session for three citizens of Zwijnaarde (members of the neighbourhood committee) and one citizen of another neighbourhood (as an external layman; see Figure 11). The design office developed two scale models of two densification scenarios to support a dialogue on the preconditions for densification (see Figure 12). It was not the intention to arrive at a design proposal for the pilot project but to map opportunities and challenges regarding densification at this location. The session was an interesting negotiation between the values of the different participants as they were for



Figure 11. Co-creation session initiated by the design office. Picture by Mike De Brie.

example discussing what “collectively” means, but also the different personal meanings of public green space.

5. Discussion

In the previous part, we analysed two risky situations created via experiential evaluation to open up the participatory planning process of Zwijnaarde. In this part, we will share some reflections and learnings based on this process. We formulate these findings as elaborations towards an alternative and experimental approach to hybrid forums (Callon et al., 2009).

5.1. Experiential Evaluation Supports Multiple Roles

Experiential evaluation in the process of the NSP in Zwijnaarde was able to open up the process for new actors and created not only new relationships between city experts and citizens but also new collaborations between the city experts of different departments. With

the live projects, new relationships were also created between citizens. The action plan that is part of the NSP has the potential to sustain these new dynamics and thus initiate agencying, the fourth strategic navigation technique, and by doing so, hand over the role of stage director to the city experts.

5.2. Experiential Evaluation Takes Place at Multiple Scales

Experiential evaluation renders tensions and dependencies between values visible but these tensions were not made constructive at some given point in time within this process. The NSP is rather an open-ended instrument that focuses on the large spatial structures of the neighbourhood. It defines a certain future scenario for the neighbourhood, but not everything is determined and there are blank spots that leave room for negotiation. Also, the scale of the NSP is large. In fact, Zwijnaarde is a collection of different neighbourhoods and there

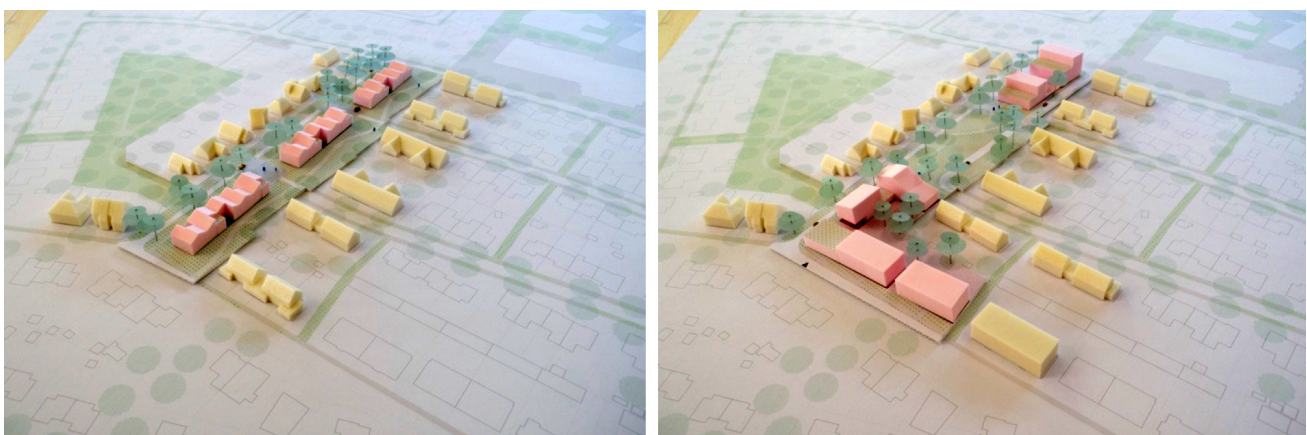


Figure 12. Scale models of two densification scenarios to support dialogue. Design and pictures by Maat Ontwerpers.

were two parts of another neighbourhood (Sint-Denijs-Westrem) added to the area. These parts all have their own tensions, which cannot be handled by the NSP but citizens want to have them taken into account and that is why, for them, the NSP is too abstract. The case made clear that, in order to take proper care of tensions between and among institutions and citizens, these need to be handled simultaneously at multiple scales. The experiential evaluation thus needed to create risky situations for multiple places on multiple scales to render tensions constructive. This requires a spatial plan to function as a platform for actions that contribute to the future transformation of the neighbourhood. This platform would sustain the new dynamics between the actors in which the city experts take upon the role of stage directors.

5.3. Experiential Evaluation Supports the Making of Territorial Stakeholders

The experiential evaluation and the creation of risky situations also give the designer as a stage director (Pedersen, 2020) a “designerly” mode of agency (Binder et al., 2015). The exploratory walks and the live projects were designed to extend the network of engaged citizens that were not involved yet. These risky situations were able to gather the participants that cared (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), which enhanced their “stakeholderliness” (Metzger, 2013, p. 787) in the sense that their “stake” is related to what they value or care for, and the risky situations rendered these values visible (Metzger, 2013). After the values were made visible, they were translated into the decision-making process, which was opened up to engaged citizens. They were able to participate in the translation process of their individual values to collective values on a neighbourhood scale and potentially connected their values to the values of other engaged citizens, which turned them into “territorial stakeholders” (Metzger, 2013, p. 788). This makes experiential evaluation a process of “making” territorial stakeholders and not of “mapping” stakeholders (Metzger, 2013).

5.4. Experiential Evaluation and More-Than-Humans

Experiential evaluation, as an earthly and situated approach, opened the process for other values and also more-than-human values. The exploratory walks made the citizens include their appreciation for nature, which trees they value, and where they like to sit on a bench to unwind. The nuisance (air pollution and noise hindrance) of the infrastructure became an important element in the NSP, because citizens were attentive to it, while water was less visible. The live project made them rethink the value of underused open space. There is thus potential within experiential evaluation to include more-than-humans in a more explicit way to give them a direct voice in the process. This would not only require a rethinking

of the experiential element but also the evaluation element in order to value the consequences for more-than-humans, because every decision in a planning process that defines a certain future scenario also excludes all the other options and thus allows more-than-humans to thrive (Metzger, 2016).

6. Conclusion

In this article, we explored the potential of experiential evaluation as an alternative and experimental approach to hybrid forums (Callon et al., 2009) in order to open the participatory planning process for other actors and values and thus create risky situations (Metzger, 2016). We used a methodological and analytical framework based on the four steps of strategic navigation techniques (tracing, mapping, diagramming, and agencying; Hillier, 2011) to analyse how the experimental evaluation enables the creation of these risky situations within the participatory planning process of the NSP of Zwijnaarde. This leads us to three final questions.

Experiential evaluation was able to include other engaged actors in the process and to hand over the role of stage director to the city experts. Would it be possible to hand this role to a collective of engaged citizens, a concerned group?

Experiential evaluation was able to make values visible and, at the same time, also rendered tensions visible. However, these tensions were not made constructive in one moment in time. Therefore, the experiential evaluation needs to be developed over time, at multiple places on multiple scales. This requires a spatial plan to function as a platform for actions that contribute to the future transformation of the neighbourhood. How can a more continuous work with experiential evaluation enable such a platform for the actions of the citizens and smaller processes to render tensions constructive?

Finally, experiential evaluation is a process of making territorial stakeholders and has the potential to include “more than humans” more explicitly. By doing so, it enhances the democratic character in a more-than-human way. How can experiential evaluation consciously address the tensions that exist between humans, and between humans and more-than-humans?

Acknowledgments

Our thanks to the reviewers for the critical comments which helped to improve the article substantially, to the experts of the city of Ghent, to Maat Ontwerpers, and the inhabitants of Zwijnaarde for their essential contribution and participation. We would also like to thank the students of the University of Hasselt for their engagement in the live project.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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